



# Shallow and Deep Ecologism

## Why in News?

As India continues to grapple with the unrelenting heat waves, it becomes relevant to unpack two strands of environmental philosophy that reinvent the relationship between nature and humans — **Shallow and Deep Ecologism**.

## What is Ecology?

- Ecology is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment.
- It seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them.
- It also provides information about the benefits of ecosystems and how we can use Earth's resources in ways that leave the environment healthy for future generations.

## What are Shallow and Deep Ecologism?

- **Background:**
  - The concepts emerged in the 1970s, when Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss sought to look beyond the popular pollution and conservation movements of his milieu to address environmental degradation.
  - In his study of ecological concerns, Næss is more preoccupied with the role of the individual in nature. He believes that owing to increased anthropocentrism, humans have cut themselves off from nature, viewing nature and themselves as competing entities and establishing a master-slave dynamic.
  - By placing humans at the heart of the environmental crisis, Næss outlines the difference between the two styles of ecologism.
- **Shallow Ecologism:**
  - Shallow ecology refers to **the philosophical or political position that environmental preservation should only be practiced to the extent that it meets human interests.**
  - It is **more like a powerful and fashionable fight against pollution** and resource depletion rather than a radical change.
  - Exponents of this **philosophy believe in continuing our present lifestyle, but with specific tweaks aimed at minimising the damage to the environment.**
  - Also referred to as **weak ecologism**, it may **include the use of vehicles that cause less pollution or air conditioners that do not release [chlorofluorocarbons \(CFCs\)](#).**
  - This branch of ecologism primarily serves to maintain the lifestyle of those dwelling in developed countries.
- **Deep Ecologism:**
  - Deep ecologism believes that **humans should radically change their relationship with nature.**
  - Its proponents **reject shallow ecologism for prioritizing humans above other forms**

**of life**, and subsequently preserving the environmentally destructive way of life in modern societies.

- It maintains that by **sustaining this lifestyle, shallow ecologism further widens the inequalities between countries**.
  - For instance, despite constituting only 5% of the world's population, the U.S. accounts for 17% of the world's energy consumption and **is the second largest consumer of electricity after China**.
  - Similarly, while low and middle-income countries have recorded lower cumulative and per capita carbon dioxide emissions over the past two centuries, it is the wealthier countries which are most responsible for a majority of carbon emissions.

## What are the Objectives of Deep Ecologism?

- It **aspires to sustain nature by making large-scale changes** to our lifestyle.
  - These may include limiting the commercial farming of meat to preserve forest areas and reduce the artificial fattening of animals,
  - The **reshaping of transport systems which involves the use of internal combustion engines**.
- Besides advocating these lifestyle changes, deep ecologism shifts the attention from pollution and conservation narratives to robust policy formulation and implementation.
  - According to Næss, **policy-making must be aided by the reorientation of technical skills and inventions in new directions that are ecologically responsible**.
- Næss recommends that ecologists should reject work that is supervised by authorities with limited ecological perspectives. As irreplaceable informants, ecologists should not submit to power which does not recognize critical ecological priorities.
- Additionally, to recognize the complex richness of different lifeforms, **deep ecologism calls for a re-evaluation of the 'survival of the fittest' doctrine**.
  - Survival of the fittest should be **understood through the human ability to cooperate and coexist with nature**, as opposed to exploiting or dominating it.
- Deep ecologism thus prioritizes a 'live and let live' attitude over an 'either you or me' approach.

## How can Deep Ecologism be Promoted?

- **Socialism:**
  - Deep ecologism **in particular belongs to socialism**.
  - In his writings on deep ecologism, Næss argues that **a narrow focus on pollution and conservation movements is counterproductive**. He believes that when projects are only implemented to solve pollution, it generates evils of a different kind.
    - For instance, the installation of pollution control devices may increase the cost of living, **leading to an increase in class difference**.
  - An ethically responsible ecologism is one which operates in the interest of all economic classes.
- **Decentralization of Decision Making:**
  - The environment may also become more **vulnerable when decisions are strongly influenced by majority rule**, without taking local interests into consideration.
  - According to Næss, a **solution to this can be found in decentralizing the decision-making process and strengthening local autonomy**.
  - A chain consisting of a local board, a municipal council, a state-wide institution, a national government institution, a coalition of nations, and a global institution can be reduced to one made up of a local board, a nation-wide institution, and a global institution.
  - **A lengthy decision-making chain is unfavourable** as it is prone to excluding local interests.
- **Acknowledging Regional Differences:**
  - Næss cautions humans against adopting a 'vague, global' approach to the environmental crisis.
  - A holistic perspective to the crisis is one which acknowledges regional differences and the disparities between developed and underdeveloped nations.
  - Næss stresses that the political potential of the movement be realised, and that those in positions of power be held accountable. The responsibility of solving the climate crisis falls

on policy-makers as much as it does on scientists and ecologists.

[Source: TH](#)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/shallow-and-deep-ecologism>

