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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**ECOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN AFRICANA INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS (AIRS):
AN APPRAISAL**

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Abstract

This study examines the complex interplay between ecology and spirituality in Africana Indigenous Religions (AIRs), emphasising the influence of sacred worldview on environmental ethics and practices. The main aim is to investigate how AIRs perceive nature as a living, sacred entity, and how this worldview influences ecological stewardship, biodiversity preservation, and sustainable practices. This research explores the influence of spiritual beliefs, rituals and cosmological narratives on human connections with land, water, animals and plant life in indigenous African and African diasporic groups. A qualitative research methodology is utilised, incorporating ethnographic fieldwork, comprehensive interviews with traditional custodians and practitioners, and an examination of oral traditions and ritual practices. Selected case studies from various Africana contexts offer comparative insights into the integration of spirituality into environmental engagement. The research is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Deep Ecology and Indigenous Epistemology. Deep Ecology offers a conceptual basis for recognising nature as inherently important, whereas Indigenous epistemology validates indigenous knowledge systems. And their comprehensive approaches to human nature relationships. Collectively, these frameworks enable a decolonised interpretation of ecological consciousness inside AIRs. The research enhances global environmental discourse by emphasising indigenous spiritual perspectives on ecology as viable alternatives to extractive development strategies. It emphasises the necessity of incorporating spiritual and cultural values into modern environmental policy and sustainability initiatives.

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Introduction:-

The recent overwhelming ecological crisis in the world has posed serious questions on the attitude of humanity towards the natural environment. Many authors have raised concerns about the perceived notion of the place of man in the universe and his responsibilities to the natural environment. This concern emanates from the submission that the manner humanity views their position in the universe determines their mode of relating with the natural

environment (John and Enang, 2022). Prominent among the many authors who hold this argument is the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess; the first to raise issues on deep ecology. Throughout humanity's existence on earth, his actions and attitude to the natural environment are based on the philosophical view that humanity occupies a higher and superior position which makes them more valuable than other sentient and non-sentient beings in the universe. The misconception that other beings possess instrumental values as opposed to an intrinsic value has propelled humanity to misuse and overexploit the natural environment without a deep consideration of the long-run effects on the universe which humanity's survival depend on.

Man has significantly interfered with nature since he adopted sedentary lifestyle (Odey, 2021:525). The consensus among authors about the factor responsible for the ecological crisis in the world is the extreme anthropocentric view of human-nature. Many African authors have accused and attributed this anthropocentric problem solely to the Western view, presupposing that other worldviews are free of this anthropocentric approach. However, some African authors have found that the African view on human-nature relation is purely anthropocentric, and this is deeply rooted in the African ontology (John and Enang, 2022). Nevertheless, to distinguish between Western and African anthropocentric view of human-nature relations, Ifeakor (2017) explains that African anthropocentric view assigns the obligation and responsibility of environmental stewardship to man which makes him a caretaker and not to lord over nature. Contemporary African anthropocentric view of human-nature relations does not have much to do with Western influence but the excessive quest or drive for a better life and a total disregard of the adverse effect on human-nature relations (John, Ekeke and Enang, 2025). Generally, the advocacy for a paradigm shift, from ethical theories which promotes man as the only being with an intrinsic value forms the central discussion of environmental ethics whether African or non-African. Environmental ethicists hold vehemently that the panacea to the world environmental degradation and climate change is the inclusion of and consideration of other sentient and non-sentient beings in ethical discourse as beings with not only instrumental but also intrinsic values. This wakeup call, beyond reasonable doubt birthed the celebration of International World Environment Day, and has opened doors for enlightenment programmes on environmental protection, preservation and conservation, and the importance of the need to understand the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. It is on this score, that the Pope Francis' Encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'* advocacy for the care and protection of our common home (the environment), is instructive.

While much have been achieved through the discussions of environmental ethicists, the need to understand the spiritual view and connection between humans and nature as the driving force for the conservation of the natural environment cannot be overemphasized. The notion of the natural environment being a sacred and living entity is endemic among traditional religions in and beyond Africa. From antiquity through contemporary epoch indigenous religions have held tenaciously the belief that all sentient and non-sentient beings are sacred entities on the premise that they are from the same source of life. African indigenous Religions perceive nature as a sacred entity on the grounds that it serves as the abode of suprasensible beings and as channels by which humanity can connect with the creator (the Almighty) (Nana, 2016). This belief is also enshrined in the Hindu and Buddhist views of the natural environment. The perception of nature as a sacred entity is central to the thrust of Eco-spirituality. Eco-spirituality is a contemporary concept originating in Europe that has undergone multiple developmental stages. However, historically, the view about the spiritual connection between humanity and the natural environment has been in existence in some indigenous traditions around the world" (Onebunne and Okechukwu, 2021). Thus, the recourse to green spirituality (Kelly, 2015).

The failure of the panacea initiated by scientists to combat the environmental crisis reveals the limits of science in this context. This has necessitated the review of the spiritual and moral response to our environmental crisis (Etuk and Anweting, 2021).

Indigenous Epistemology:-

Though the question of the existence of the indigenous African epistemology has been laid to rest, the emphasis has been shifted to its nature and scope. The question of the nature and scope of indigenous African epistemology is not one initiated by Western authors to validate its authenticity, but a concern also raised by African authors who seek a clear understanding beyond ethnocentrism. In an attempt to proffer an answer to this question, some authors defined African epistemology by making reference to the tenet of African philosophy. However, referring to African philosophy appears to reduce African epistemology to African philosophy. The point is that there is no consensus among authors concerning the meaning of indigenous African epistemology. Nevertheless, this does not imply that it cannot be defined.

The idea of African epistemology is based on the acceptance that such concepts as knowledge, truth, validity and rationality can be interpreted using African categories and concepts as provided by the African cultural and traditional experiences without recourse to the Western conceptual framework (Sylvester et al., 2020).

The implication of the above definition is that African epistemology emphasises the use of the indigenous African paradigm for validating knowledge claims, which is fundamentally different from the paradigm laid down by the Western worldview. Since the search for knowledge is not peculiar to the West, it presupposes that each people and culture has a unique method of grasping reality, ascertaining the truth about an existential problem, and preserving and transmitting knowledge. Therefore, African indigenous epistemology entails “the African conception of nature of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge could be gained, the ways in which one can justify an epistemic claim, and the role that knowledge plays in human existence” (Ajayi and Egbeolowo, 2024).

The nature of African epistemology has been subjected to critical evaluation this is occasioned by the communal principle enshrined in the African worldview. It has also been criticised for its excessive concern with metaphysical issues beyond human comprehension. These issues have been resolved by different authors. John (2009) argued that the nature of knowledge among indigenous Africans is both empirical and metaphysical. The empirical and metaphysical knowledge are both experiential. Though close to the truth, his assertion leaves out or rules out the fact that the indigenous Africans are rational beings. The point is that this paper holds that indigenous Africans relied on experience, critical thinking, intuition, and revelation as sources of knowledge, and that it does not promote any as superior to the others. Generally, authors have identified the sources of knowledge in African epistemology as: sensory perception, rationalism, premonition, common-sense knowledge, oral tradition, extrasensory knowledge, and ontological knowledge. It is imperative to state that knowledge among indigenous Africans is communal in the sense that an individual’s awareness of a particular piece of information is not knowledge until it is collectively verified by the community, and then it becomes knowledge. This is consistent with the Western scientific paradigm and the principles of knowledge claims. This African communal knowledge claim is categorised under ethno-epistemology. “Ethno-epistemology is the study of knowledge from the perspective of particular African communities as revealed in their cultural heritage, proverbs, folklores, traditions, and practices” (Irikefe, 2020).

The rationale for including indigenous epistemology in this discussion, and as the substructure, is to gain a comprehensive understanding of Africans’ understanding of their place in the universe and the importance of nature to them. While it has been established that for indigenous Africans all sources of knowledge are important, as far as the issue of the spiritual understanding of the human-nature relationship is concerned, in the worldview and ontology, the claim to this knowledge is metaphysical and communal. Although the spirit and physical worlds are separate in the African worldview, beings in the spirit realm and living beings in the physical realm communicate, sharing extrasensory knowledge. Through this knowledge, the living came to understand that some plants, animals and non-sentient beings are special. They serve as the abode of divinities, and they are totems. In most cases, this type of knowledge is revealed to sacred personages within the community, who then communicate it to the people.

A Critical Evaluation of the Thrust of Eco-Spirituality:-

Anthropogenic environmental problems in the universe have been attributed to the spiritual decline of modern humanity (Etuk and Anweting, 2021). This assertion contradicts the popular submission of Lynn White in her essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* that it is caused by the anthropocentric view of Judeo-Christian religion; it teaches that God has endowed humanity with the power to dominate and rule over the natural environment, and this is the cause of humans’ overexploitation of nature. This position has been challenged by numerous authors in theology and religious and cultural studies, who present scriptural evidence demonstrating that the Judeo-Christian tradition holds that humans are stewards responsible for caring for nature. History has it that from antiquity, traditional religions across the world hold a pantheistic view of nature; traditional religions have an arcane veneration and regard for nature (sentient and non-sentient) and see nature as possessing spiritual powers and serving as a medium through which humanity can connect with the Divine. This notion and attitude towards the natural environment created a spiritual bond between adherents of traditional religions and the natural environment, which helps to prevent environmental degradation and abuse. Nevertheless, some authors maintain that certain religious teachings can obscure adherents’ awareness of religious activities that threaten the ecosystem.

The discussions on the feeling of spiritual connection with nature gave rise to two prominent thought systems: Eco-Spirituality and Deep Ecology. However, over the years, there has been a misconception regarding the differences between these thought systems. In this segment of the paper, we shall critically espouse the kernel of Eco-Spirituality. The meaning of Eco-spirituality is subject to many interpretations, but its thrust remains the same. "Eco-Spirituality is the essential belief in the sacredness of the natural environment" (Janet al., 2008). Eco-Spirituality involves acknowledging nature as a living entity and an interconnected system that must be revered and preserved. It combines environmentalism with spiritual practices, encouraging individuals to be actively involved in efforts to sustain nature as a spiritual obligation. Eco-spirituality is grounded on religious cum ethical principles and guidelines. (Asmantoet al., 2016). Eco-spirituality attempts to proffer answer to these questions; Does faith play a role in shaping environmental attitude? If yes, in what way does religious faith influence an individual's attitude towards the natural environment? Without religious faith, can the environmental crisis be ameliorated? Environmentalism a different form of religion? (Jan et al., 2008).

Traditional and world religions have attempted to proffer possible answers to these questions. Hinduism and Buddhism have demonstrated how religious faith can influence an individual's attitude toward nature. These Asian religions emphasised that all living beings are from one source and possess the same element called Brahman Atman. Traditional religions have provided ethical principles and existential guidelines for understanding and responding to environmental crises, such as attributing these problems to the gods' anger and calling for respect for nature as the gods' abode. While world religions like Christianity and Islam hold humanity accountable for practices and actions that lead to environmental degradation. These religions assigned humanity the role of a steward of nature, charged with caring for and nurturing it. Eco-spirituality is an intellectual exercise that emerged in recent times. The rationale is that many authors assumed that incorporating religious faith into the discourse would hinder "objectivity, scientific investigation, professionalism, or democratic values" (Dwivedi, 1993). Religions have played significant roles in fostering attitudes of environmental preservation and protection throughout world history. Although it was largely ignored for many years, proponents of eco-spirituality have awakened awareness of the need to return to religious faith if a plausible and permanent panacea for environmental issues is to be achieved. Many authors today who are advocates or proponents of eco-spirituality maintain that religion has the power to influence or reveal a distinct form of consciousness in people, which is distinct from scientific thinking and reflection. Religion enables people to become conscious of the extent to which they can dominate other beings deemed inferior, reminding them that actions can have negative effects on them in the long run (Dwivedi, 1993). In sum, Eco-spirituality emphasises the influence of religious beliefs on attitudes toward and perceptions of the natural environment as a sacred entity.

Deep Ecology: A Phenomenological Examination:-

The discussion of deep ecology has its historical origins in the work of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1972. Influenced by Rachel Carson's argument enshrined in the treatise *Silent Spring* about the damaging impacts of pesticides on nature and other anthropogenic problems, Naess developed a keen interest in the need to preserve the natural environment. Following his love of nature, he relocated to the countryside near a mountain. Naess was greatly influenced by the works of Mahatma Gandhi and Baruch Spinoza on nature. After careful study of the environmental problems and discovering what he believed to be the root of the problem, he deviated from the common notion that "a change in our way of doing things will solve the environmental problems". An idea commonly referred to as Shallow Ecology. The term Deep Ecology was coined by Arne Naess as a new philosophical approach to human-nature relations and proposed a panacea to the world environmental crisis. Naess puts forward two arguments: that solving the present environmental crisis requires a paradigm shift from the anthropocentric view of nature to ecocentrism. Ecocentrism holds that all sentient beings possess intrinsic value. Again, Naess argued that ontologically and morally, humans are not superior to other beings in the universe; rather, they are an integral part of the complex whole of nature.

Although deep ecology is a new approach to human-nature relations, its thought pattern is a merger of environmentalism and religious beliefs, aimed at achieving some benefits from our moral duty through caring for the natural environment (Ambrosius, 2005). The crux of deep ecology, in simple terms, is the argument that nature has an intrinsic value independent of humans' evaluation of its instrumental values (Nelson, 2008). Phenomenologically, deep ecologists advocate for a biocentric egalitarian view of human-nature relations. This implies that all sentient beings, humans, animals and plants possess equal intrinsic values.

The thrust of deep ecology has been summarised and paraphrased into eight points, namely;

1. All sentient beings possess equal intrinsic values; these values are separate from the instrumental values of plants and animals to human beings.
2. These intrinsic values are actualised by the quality and manifoldness of life forms and are values in themselves; and
3. Only on the grounds of satisfying important needs, humans have no right to reduce the quality and manifoldness of life forms; and
4. A significant reduction in the human population in the world is tantamount to a progressive human life and culture. This population reduction is also a prerequisite for a progressive nonhuman life, and
5. The natural environment has been overexploited by human beings, and the scenario is incessantly aggravated; and
6. To ameliorate this situation, a new policy is required, distinct from the former. This will affect basic economic and technological structures, and
7. The change in terms of ideology centres on acknowledging the intrinsic value of life, and not about the drive for a higher standard of living; and
8. As many who assent to the aforementioned points are directly or indirectly duty-bound to be actively involved in these changes.

Prabhat (2024) posits that to distinguish his philosophical position from the former, Naess “argued that ecologically responsible policies are apprehensive only in part with pollution and resource depletion. There are deeper concerns grounded in principles of diversity, complexity, symbiosis, autonomy, decentralisation, egalitarianism, and classlessness. The factor that makes deep ecology enthralling is essentially the same as that which makes the nature of intrinsic values in non-sentient beings fascinating: it provides a sound basis for protecting all forms of life and the general well-being of the natural environment, compared with the human-centred view. Deep ecology entails respect for nature and morally binds humans to relate to nature in a manner consistent with that respect (Sarkar, 2005). Although, numerous authors have outlined the pitfalls of deep ecology, we adhere to the central thesis of the school of thought and its relation to eco-spirituality. In sum, deep ecology can also be referred to as biocentrism.

A Discourse on Nature as a Living and Sacred Entity in Traditional Religion:-

One factor that distinguishes the views of monotheistic religions from those of traditional religions, with respect to the natural environment, is the notion of nature as a living, sacred being. Though Christianity and Islam, both monotheistic world religions, assign the obligation of a steward over nature to humanity and encourage humanity to protect the natural environment, these religions do not view nature as a sacred and living being. A phenomenological study of diverse traditional religions in and beyond Africa reveals an endemic feature of their view of the natural environment. Each of the traditional religions across the globe views nature as a sacred, living entity, a view amplified by their pantheistic notions of nature. This is made possible by their belief in the pantheon of gods. The idea of pantheism, common in many traditional religions, contradicts the religious view of an Absolute Being enshrined in monotheistic religions, such as Christianity and Islam (Takamizawa, 2003). However, the Judeo-Christian religion holds the belief of the presence of God (the Absolute Being) in nature, and some people seem to misconstrue it for pantheism. To clear this misconception, Youvan (2024) distinguished between Divine immanence and pantheism, stating that “Divine immanence indicates the belief that the divine [person] is present within and permeates all aspects of the world, blurring the lines between Creator and creation”. A view found in the Christian scripture. He explained the meaning of pantheism by making reference to Hinduism. He avers that “through the concept of Brahman, Hinduism vehemently holds a pantheistic view of nature, teaching that the divine (force not being, Brahman) underlies all of existence and that the individual self (Atman) is ultimately one with the universal reality of Brahman” (Youvan, 2024).

The belief in nature as a living and sacred entity among traditional religions is aptly captured in concepts such as totems, animism, and pantheism. Totems can be described as objects or animals that hold spiritual significance. In many cultures, totems are believed to possess spiritual power and are often used to identify with a group, connect with nature, and provide protection. “They act as symbols of kinship, lineage, or tribal affiliation, embodying shared values, beliefs, and ancestral connections. They are venerated as spiritual guardians or sources of guidance, with rituals and ceremonies dedicated to their honour” (Sahimi et al, 2024). Totems can take many forms, such as animals, plants, or natural elements. There is not much difference between totem and animism. Animism is the belief system that nonhuman entities, such as animals, plants, and natural objects, possess spiritual souls. The belief in and practice of animism and totems in indigenous religions are closely linked to the nearest outstanding natural entity,

the natural environment in general, and the region's circumstances and historical events. Nweke (2025) avers that among Africa's indigenous peoples, the veneration of certain animals and natural objects centres on the fact that these entities have played historical, ecological, and religious roles in the lives of the people. The people of Abeokuta in south-west Nigeria revered Olumo Rock and believed it to be the abode of a deity because of a historical event in which the rock served as a protective refuge during an intertribal war with a neighbouring village. Indigenous people of India considered cows and bullocks to be totems and venerated them because the Veda forbade them from killing, harming and eating any animal that is useful to them (Renugadevi, 2011). The Urhobo indigenous religion is described as animistic. The veneration of nature among the Urhobo people is anchored in the belief in the unity of all life forms, in that every being shares the same source of life (Isiorhovojaet al., 2011).

Many traditional or indigenous religions worship and consider natural phenomena such as rivers, trees and mountains as possessing the spirit of deities. The five elements of nature are referred to as gods, and are revered in Hinduism, the indigenous religion of India. Long before the advocacy for environmental protection, the veneration of nature has been a common practice among Hindus, serving as a means of conserving the natural environment (Gairola, 2020). Among the Vedic people in India, trees are considered divine; trees such as "Ficus racemosa, Butea frondosa, Aegle, and Marmelos" are regarded as sacred plants and are venerated (Chandra, 2016). The belief in sacred groves is common in India; they are said to be the dwelling places of mother goddesses. Among Buddhists, Ficus is highly revered because it is believed that Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, had his encounter (enlightenment) under the tree while meditating. In Africa, the indigenous people of Ghana, like the Ewes residing within Hohoe in the Volta Region, regard Mount Afajato as the abode of a deity and is venerated (Benson, 2021). Taoism, often described as one of China's indigenous religions, holds a pantheistic and animistic view of nature. It teaches and acknowledges that nature has an intrinsic value which must be protected to maintain harmony and ecological balance. Taoism, like Hinduism, holds that all sentient beings possess a vital force (Qi) which flows through them, creating the picture of a biocentric egalitarian.

Africana Indigenous Religious Perception of the Sacred view of the Natural Environment: in the Light of Eco-Spirituality and Deep Ecology:-

The thrust of this paper is to examine from the phenomenological standpoint how Africana indigenous religious spiritual views of nature serve as a mechanism for environmental preservation and conservation. The African sacred view of the natural environment is dynamic, complex but easy to comprehend. The presentation of the African sacred notion of nature as purely pantheistic is an aberration that has been lingering for decades. This erroneous perception is occasioned by the misconception that African traditional religions are based on the belief in pantheistic gods without recognition of an Absolute Being. In African ontology, God is recognised as the Sovereign Being; therefore, characterising the African sacred view of nature as essentially pantheistic is tantamount to denying their belief in the Absolute Being. Metuhin Nnoruga (2025) described sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion as an essential custom that entails giving "material items, symbolic acts, or prayers to spiritual entities, including the Supreme Being (Chukwu), deities (alusi), and ancestors (ndichie)". The African sacred view of nature is both pantheistic and divine immanent, in the sense that Indigenous Africans perceived the spiritual presence of the Absolute Being immanent in natural objects and further held that these natural phenomena were the abodes of deities believed to exist; hence, these objects are referred to as deities or totems. African indigenous religions recognised the spiritual richness of nature, on the grounds that it serves as the hearthstone of divinities, deities, and spirits and as a means by which they communicate with the Supreme Being (Aniekan, 2016).

While the practice of eco-spirituality is relatively new within the Western worldview, it has long been a spiritual practice and belief among adherents of Africana Indigenous Religions (Onebunne and Okechukwu, 2021). The awareness of, or consciousness of, the spiritual connection and relationship with the supernatural believed to exist in nature serves as the foundation for African eco-spirituality and as a means of conserving the natural environment (Kanu, 2021). Africana indigenous religions, both from the ontological and spiritual perspectives, consider humanity as an integral part of nature; these religions view nature generally as a complex whole made up of component units, and to maintain an ecological balance, it is believed that there must be a peaceful, harmonious coexistence among all the entities that make up the natural environment. Though the feature of the African worldview, as far as the human-nature relationship is concerned, is anthropocentric (John and Enang, 2022), it is not in the sense of according a superior place of authority to humanity, but a sense of superior responsibility as stewards over nature. This implies that, in the Africana indigenous religious view of nature, humanity is accountable for both the harm and the disruption of the harmonious relationship among sentient and non-sentient beings in the region. Eneke, as captured in Okeke (2021), speaking about the Igbos and their sacred relationship with nature, stated that "the human and non-

human beings like animals and trees interact and communicate in a lively way. Igbo metaphysical view of life is consistent with the concept of natural religion. Everything and everything is connected: The secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural, are a continuum”(Okeke, 2021). This indicates that the Igbo religious view of nature is biocentric egalitarianism.

The Luhya people of Kenya's spiritual perception of nature as sacred has played a significant role in the conservation of the Kakamega Forest (Gumoet al., 2012). The concepts of animism, totemism, and pantheism in African Indigenous religions, as enshrined in their sacred view of nature, have naturally led people to venerate the natural environment, including forests, rocks, mountains, and rivers. This spiritual relationship is further strengthened by the enactment of religious taboos and sacrilegious acts. Although some animals, mountains, rivers, rocks, and trees are regarded as totems in African traditional religions, this does not permit the misuse of those not considered sacred. The religious belief in metempsychosis propels Africans to treat all animals with care and a sense of respect. This is supported by the notion of an intrinsic value in all beings. Soko in Benson (2021) avers that the African worldview holds that living things have spirits in them that continue to live even after death. These spirits sometimes inhabit animal bodies, giving rise to the concept of metempsychosis and to the veneration of animals and sacred groves. Africans generally acknowledge the mutual dependence between humans and the natural environment. This implies that every being, sentient and non-sentient, has a significant and inevitable role to play in the order of the universe (Gumoet al., 2012). Therefore, all beings in the African sacred view of nature are important in their diverse mode of existence.

It has been established that religion is a powerful mechanism by which the worldviews of a people is formed and their attitude towards life and reality in general is shaped (Deopa and Rinaldo 2024). This is evidence in African indigenous religions, especially their sacred view of nature. The belief in animism and totems has played a significant role in forest and wildlife conservation, thereby increasing biodiversity in the region. It is unarguably true that most forests that are conserved in Africa today are those regarded as evil and those with specimens or trees considered sacred. Empirical evidence indicates that regions in Africa where a particular animal or tree is considered a totem tend to have more of these animals and plants compared to other regions where there is a sacred notion attached to the same animals and plants. In the Idemili area of Anambra State, the number of Pythons in the region is relatively high. The justification for this, as recorded by Ndubisi in Nweke (2025), is that the Python is deified and considered a totem. The benefits of attributing sacredness to natural entities and places among indigenous Africans are numerous. One of the numerous benefits is that it significantly increases biodiversity in the region. It also helps conserve this biodiversity for future reference. It is imperative to note that the natural environment has a great influence on the religious worship of indigenous African people. The religious practice and belief in the marine spirit is endemic among indigenous people living in the riverine areas. In most cases the animals regarded as totems in these areas are mostly associated with water. Among the Calabar people of Cross River State, the Crocodile (Effiom) is a totem and highly revered; some fishermen carve its image on their canoe to indicate their religious affiliation with the crocodile. Phenomenologically, there are historical records of events in which animals and trees considered totems provided protection to these indigenous peoples.

Conclusion:-

The discourse on African indigenous religious sacred view of nature is as old as the historical origin of the people. Though the indigenous people of Africa could be said to be naive of the significance of their religious practices and beliefs, and were criticised for being uncivilised, fetishistic, and superstitious, a phenomenological study of the results of their religious beliefs about nature shows that it is a veritable mechanism for the conservation of the natural environment. For centuries, the sacred view of nature in indigenous religions has stood the test of time, in contrast to the scientific methods articulated by Western authors in recent times. Naess' call for a paradigm shift, from the anthropocentric view of nature to a more inclusive and biocentric egalitarian notion of human-nature relationship, is unarguably patterned after the sacred view of nature endemic among indigenous Africans. A critical reflection on Naess's deep ecology reveals nothing new in his view, but rather a modernisation of the religious practices and beliefs of African traditional religions. The thrust of eco-spirituality and deep ecology is nothing short of the African indigenous religious view of the natural environment. While the views of these aforementioned schools may be new to the Western world, they are a recap of the spiritual beliefs and practices of indigenous people of Africa and Asia.

African indigenous sacred notion of nature, though anthropocentric in its feature, is egalitarian in its approach. The religious cum sacred view of nature places humanity in the position of a steward responsible for ensuring the

peaceful and harmonious coexistence of all beings (human and non-human). It holds that nature, in general, has intrinsic value, and that humanity's denial of this value is tantamount to a serious environmental crisis. The recognition of nature's intrinsic value and the avoidance of any action that jeopardises this value will result in an ecological balance with no concern for ecological crisis. It is pertinent to state categorically that the sacred view of nature as held by African indigenous religions is not purely pantheistic; it has a touch of divine immanence. This is because a pure pantheistic view would amount to negating the existence of an Absolute Being (God). While nature is often regarded as the abode of divinities and deities, it is also believed to have the immanent presence of the Absolute Being. The respect for nature among traditional Africans is not due to fear of the gods' wrath, but to an internal consciousness of the importance of the symbiotic relations between humanity and nature. From antiquity, the sacred view of the human-nature relationship enshrined in the indigenous African belief system has been an effective medium of conserving rivers, forests and mountains. Why discard it on the premise that it does not conform to the principle of scientific knowledge?

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