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Environmentally Sustainable World: Apprehensions and Actions

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Abstract:

Human beings in the present era are more concerned about the material consumption. The stride to development has resulted in over exploitation of the environmental resources and self centeredness with regard to the human comfort. The concept of comfort which has been taken as a new "god" is proving destructive for human race. Environmental concern is a crucial factor in the process of realizing the wish of environmentally sustainable planet earth. The fact is that more than 200 Laws has been enacted with regard to the protection and conservation of environment. The Constitutional Provisions, establishment of various boards, committees and National Policies on agriculture, pollution, population, and environment provides a safety valve between the nature and human desires. These measures, if well functional, would have helped the human beings to maintain the green attributes of the blue earth. However, the agencies working for the cause of protection and promotion of nature have an advisory role only. The present study will try to reflect actions for change. The change will focus upon the dispossession of greed and reconciliation with nature. The basic action is combination of heart and mind as well as of faith and science towards an environmentally sustainable world.

Key words: *Apprehensions, dream, environmental sustainability, participatory, value*

1. Introduction

The theme that has been undertaken for the purpose to discuss the points how to build an environmentally sustainable world is a significant effort by the lovers of the nature and the environment. However, there are apprehensions also bubbled in the mind that how it would be possible while seeing the gross failure of remarkable Laws related to the environment and its protection. Indeed, there is no dearth of national, international Laws and principles developed for achieving environmentally sustainable world at the national and international strata. On the other hand, it is visible enough to look at the uselessness of such laws in the absence of a just social and administrative structure. The non-implementation of provisions due to the re-defined values about the nature is the result of separation of mind and heart. Thus, the mind focuses positively over the re-defined value of overexploitation of nature and the accumulation of wealth even at the cost of destruction of nature. Such an over exploitative attitude develops and strengthens through building worldwide opinion in one's own favour by demonstrating that the use of raw material is required for the development of the whole. However, overexploitation in the name of development is a sheer propaganda which helps only a small section of the society. In such a scenario the paper also discusses the actions towards environmentally sustainable world.

2. Methodology

The study is based on the data collected from the secondary sources.

3. Developments at International Level

United Nations Organization (UNO) expressed its deep concern for environmental protection. The UN organized a conference on the human environment in Stockholm in June 1972. The conference laid down the principles and action plans for regulating and controlling the human environment and deliberated on the institutional and financial arrangements for the purpose.¹ The Conference further emphasized that the natural resources must be safeguarded. The safeguard should be through careful planning and management. The wildlife and its habitat must be protected and safeguarded. The economic and social development must ensure congenial living and working environment for human beings and create an environment on earth that is essential for the improvement of the quality of life. The declaration warned against the pollution of oceans and other water bodies. It emphasized the need to support the struggle against all types of pollution. The conference recommended that the education in environmental matters is essential to broaden the base for an enlightened opinion and responsible conduct by individuals and communities in protecting and improving environment in its full human dimensions. International efforts and co-operation must be geared up through mass media to protect and improve environment.

Stockholm Declaration is considered as the *Magna Carta* for international environment movement. The recommendations of the Stockholm Conference were finally enacted into the Act entitled 'Security and Co-operation in Europe' on 1st August 1975. It affirmed that the protection and improvement of the environment in the interest of present and future generations is essential to the well being of the people and the economic development of all countries. The foundation for environmentally sustainable world was laid down. Each state must ensure that its activities may not cause degradation of the environment in other states.

World Charter on nature adopted by U.N General Assembly on 28th October 1972 declared that nature shall be respected and its essentials shall not be impaired. It was emphasized that the principles of the Charter must be enacted into Law of each member state and put into practice at the state as well as international levels. The necessary infrastructure, funds, programmes and administrative structure may be provided to achieve the objectives of the Charter. It is further mandated that the co-operation of the states, public authorities, international organizations, individuals and groups must be sought to achieve the objectives and requirements of the Charter.

Consequently, the General Assembly of United Nations passed a resolution on 15th December 1974 emphasizing the need of co-operation among the States to conserve and protect the environment. 5th June is designated as the *World Environment Day*. The Member States of UNO are desired to undertake world-wide activities for the preservation and enhancement of the environment. *The 113 participating states in Stockholm conference resolved and affirmed that preservation and improvement of human environment was their moral duty.*²

The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States too emphasized the need for the preservation and protection of environment. Declaration of Stockholm, 1972 and Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of the States, 1974 are the important and significant documents which reflect the concern of the International organization to protect and preserve the environment for human living.

4. Provisions in Indian Constitution

The Preamble of the Constitution of India declares that social, economic and political justice is to be secured and protected to every citizen of India. The Fundamental Rights, under Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life, a life of dignity to be lived in a proper environment, free of danger of disease and infection.³ Article 48 (A) incorporated by the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution provides that "*the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard forests and wildlife of the country*"⁴. The 42nd Amendment Act of the Constitution added certain fundamental duties of the citizens in Part IV-A. Under these fundamental duties, Article (51 A) specifically provides as such – "*it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures*"⁵

5. Legislations, Boards, Committees to Protect and Improve the Environment in India

5.1. Old Laws on Environment

Some of the old laws such as the Motor Vehicles Act, 1939, the Factories Act, 1948 and the Insecticides Act, 1958 had been enacted which deal with the maintenance of the environment against pollution.

5.2. Newly Enacted Laws

The newly enacted laws like as the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 1986. Under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, the Central Government can exercise comprehensive powers for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of environment and preventing, controlling and abating pollution⁶. India is a signatory to all international conference and conventions on environment. The Union Government has exclusive power to legislate on matters to give effect to international agreements relating to environment. The Union Government can also legislate under Article 252 with the consent of the State Governments on matters which are not within its purview. Looking at the different legislative matters it is found that the environment laws are scattered over different statute books.

5.3. National Committees

A National Committee on Environment Planning and Co-ordination was constituted in 1972. The Committee has been designed to act as the highest advisory body to the government and also to work for environment planning. The National Committee on Environment Planning has constituted Environment Boards in every State and Union Territory.

5.4. N.D. Tiwari Committee

In 1980, N.D. Tiwari Committee made several recommendations. One of the recommendations was for the creation of Department of Environment (DoE). The Department of Environment was established at the Central level in 1980. The main role of the Department is to act as a "Nodal Agency" for environment protection and development of balanced eco-system in the country. *The Department also issues annual "State of Environment Report", recommending actions, policies and plans to Central and State Governments and their agencies in their endeavor to protect, conserve and improve the environment. The Department of Environment is also supporting research on environmental problems and is giving high priority to environment education. It is proposed to introduce environment education as a subject at school, college and university level. The Department of Environment functions under the control and supervision of the Prime Minister. It is assisted and advised by the National Committee on Environmental Planning (NCEP) and National Development Board (NDB). Other sub-agencies which help and assist the department to increase its efficiency on technical issues include Botanical Survey of India, Geological Survey of India, and*

National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) which helps the department for generating awareness about environmental education⁷.

5.5. National Environment Advisory Committee (NEAC)

The National Environment Advisory Committee was constituted in 1983. The objective behind the establishment of NEAC was *to identify and highlight the environmental issues*, to advice on actions for the implementation of environment policy, to organize public discussion on national issues of environmental importance, to promote public commitment and participation in the implementation of environmental programmes and to get feedback on national environmental priorities and plans for the people.

5.6. National Policies

Environment protection and sustainable development was sought through formulation of policies at national level. The present national policies for environmental management are contained in the National Forest Policy, 1988; National Agriculture Policy 2000; National Population Policy 2000; National Water Policy 2002; which contributed towards environmental management. All of these policies have recognized the need for sustainable development in their specific contexts and formulated necessary strategies to give effect to such recognition. The National Environment Policy 2006 seeks to extend the coverage, *and fill in gaps that still exist*, in light of present knowledge and accumulated experience⁸.

6. Apprehensions

It is interesting that the resolution at the Stockholm Conference voices for preservation and improvement of the human environment but only as a 'moral duty'. The Part IV of the Indian Constitution has its concern reflected for environmental issues. At the same time, it is not enforceable by any court of law. There are more than 200 Central and State enactments which have direct or indirect relations with environmental protection. Still, there is evidence of poor implementation and weak accountability mechanisms. The DoE as an administrative agency has an advisory role only. It cannot legally prosecute the defaulters. It does not have legal sanctions to enforce even its own policies. The success or failure of the DoE depends on Boards which have the powers to prosecute but cannot punish or prevent the polluters from polluting the environment.

6.1. M.B. Shah Commission

In this context, the findings of the Justice M.B. Shah Commission are notable. The Government of India set up Shri Justice M. B. Shah Commission of Inquiry for Illegal Mining of Iron Ore and Manganese vide Notification dated 22nd November, 2010. The term of the Shah Commission ended on October 16, 2013 and it has been denied further extension. In a plea before Supreme Court, it was alleged that government has "malafidely" wound up the panel after its reports had exposed "illegal mining" and that led to banning of extractions of minerals in Goa. The petitioners said that the extension has been denied to the panel beyond October 16 when it was examining the illegal mining in Chhattisgarh. (http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-10-27/news/43432681_1_iron-ore-shah-commission-mines-ministry)⁹. It is an open secret in South Chhattisgarh that the National Mineral Development Corporation's Bailadila mine is illegally dumping thousands of tonnes of iron ore fines into the Indrāvati, Shankhini and Dankhini rivers¹⁰.

7. Discussion

Robert A. White quoted, Devall and Sessions who argue that the dominant worldview of modern industrial society is environmentally destructive because the earth is seen primarily as a "collection of natural resources" with no value other than being used for human exploitation. Earth's resources are being exploited as technology grows. The promise of unending economic growth has been used to divert attention from the inequality of prevailing social orders. In the process, irresponsible consumption and ever-expanding expectations of material benefits have been fostered. As the world's major industrial nations have pursued this path, they have come to consume as much as 80 percent of the world's resources for 20 percent of the world's population. What is needed, deep ecologists suggest, is the development of an "ecological consciousness"—an inward transformation that alters our perception of being separate from and above the rest of Nature. For Naess, who coined the term "deep ecology," its essence is to ask deeper questions—"We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole" (quoted in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology* 74). Norms for deep ecological thinking include valuing Nature as having intrinsic worth; tolerance for diversity; decentralized, nonhierarchical, self-regulating social structures; small-scale, community-based technologies and economies; simplicity of wants; and appreciation for religious-spiritual dimensions¹¹.

8. Actions: The Balance and Cohesion of Material and Spiritual Realities

Environmental legislation, particularly in industrialized countries, has helped to ameliorate some of the worst forms of air and water pollution, while research has focused on developing better methods of monitoring environmental change. Environmental groups have focused largely on protecting endangered species and wild areas. They have also been effective in sounding the alarm on the ideology of consumerism and unbridled industrial growth. The developed world seems to be more cautious about the destruction of environment and takes honest measures at least for the sustenance of their own society. However, the struggling and competing developing nations in varied spheres of development seems to be lacking in commitment on the aspects which are beyond their daily life concern. The following measures may be taken under consideration for building an environmentally sustainable world. The following are the actions thought out towards the creation of an environmentally sustainable world.

8.1. Value and Cooperation with Environment

The need of the hour is completely a new deliberation. The new fundamental consideration may support a more fundamental reunion between humanity and environment. The idea of developing positive attitudes of value for and cooperation with environment requires a vision of totality in our relationship with environment. Such a perspective will be helpful in unifying the material and spiritual realities. Indeed, human beings in the present era are more concerned about the material consumption rather than the spiritual aspect of the environment. The concept of comfort which has been taken as a new "god" is proving itself destructive for human being. Thus, the nature under the influence of this concept will always be a means of consumption and over exploitation for keeping happy this "comfort god". Thus, self-centeredness of the human race is reflected in the present generation of the world. The separation of human fortune from the reality of corporal life on earth now requires reunion. Our national motto, *satyam eva jayate*, depicts our core value. And the tricolor national flag radiates the triple message of sacrifice, purity and environmental care¹².

8.2. Values, Attitudes, and Structure

Understanding the role of human beings to be compassionate and creative participants in the development are the fundamental conceptual requirements for achieving an environmental sustainable world. Developing such a world, however, requires not only a transformation in our individual attitudes and values but also a complete reformulation of our social structures. Most of the socioeconomic institutions of modern industrial societies are based on the pursuit of material progress through separation from Nature. The limits of this materialistic viewpoint are now clearly demarcated in the accelerating destruction of planetary environmental systems. Hence, human beings need to develop an attitude of appreciation that the creation is sacred.

8.3. Truthfulness- A Core Action

Our prevailing political, social, and economic institutions appear powerless to halt the environmental destruction because they are implicitly based on the values of separation from and subjugation of natural world. This loss of meaning and the ensuing worthlessness in turn fuel the search for fulfillment through consumption, competition, and other addictive behaviors. The separation from Nature underlying modernism corresponds to a division between the human mind and heart. Hence, with an honest view to build an environmentally sustainable world, the concept of this separation needs to be corrected. Honesty is a key word for the maturity of the dream.

8.4. Integrated National Efforts

The call for an integrated global ethic and policy of sustainable development was raised in Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. This paved the way for a tacit acceptance of the need for global effort in solving global environmental problems. With this acceptance, there is a growing search for ways to bring about the changes. Such a global effort, however, needs commitment from the side of developed and developing nations with monitoring global machinery. The very objective of building the environmentally sustainable world would be impossible in the absence of any nation's unwillingness towards this effort of sustenance. It is because the nations are interconnected in this era of globalization.

8.5. Participatory Approach

Aside from the structural arrangements for coordinating global and local concerns, there are other aspects for safeguarding and protecting environment through community participation. The agriculture with its associated activities will reassert itself as the first industry of society. This expectation supports the idea that, in future, societies will be more decentralized and harmonized with nature. Our country, where the money is generated, is proving helpless in tracing and restoring it with a stern national hand! This clearly points to the emergent need to revamp our laws and administration, to arrest the disastrous trends and institute a healthy and people-based governance to safeguard the nation's resources as well as ensuring their prudent utilization, eschewing stealth¹³.

8.6. Faith And Science

The humanity, through the balanced combination and cooperation of science and religion, can be allowed to acquire a genuine humility and respect for environmental sustainability. The human relationship with nature was so present in the Prophet's life from his earliest childhood that one can easily come to the conclusion that living close to nature, observing, understanding and respecting it, is an imperative of deep faith¹⁴. The proper combination of both our spiritual growth and our common dependence on the ecosphere is most required. In case of any imbalance between the appropriate technology and spirituality to adopt the development process, we would be missing the right and balanced approach in the process of environmentally sustainable world.

9. Conclusion

The vision of building an environmentally sustainable world has been undertaken at various platforms. The representation of different heads of the governments as well as voices from civil society organizations reinstated the need for serious introspection time and again. At this juncture, the humanity needs to re-think and try curtailing its greed of comfort in the name of development. Father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said that the earth is enough to fulfill one's need but not enough to fulfill everyone's greed. The situation is that of rather fulfilling the need, everyone is engaged in the impossible gratification of greed. Concern and care for the future generations is compromised. What could be the reason behind it and gross disobedience of the principles and commitments that had been made time and again? The point to contemplate is the reunification of mind and heart with a just

social structure. However, such a restructuring needs honesty which is the key for building an environmentally sustainable world.

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