

ENVIRONMENTAL DECLINE; IDENTIFYING DIMENSIONS AND REPERCUSSIONS

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Abstract

Quest for development has shifted man's focus and intentions from 'nature' to 'needs'. Need fulfillment has away with the obligation of protecting and maintaining the nature and its composites. In the race for development, communities and region have out rightly targeted the natural environment as a source of it. Either the environmental resources are destroyed and used for economic growth and development; or they are used for biotechnological intervention to create modified breeds of consumable goods/medicines/other products, the use of which is further a threat for human's wellbeing. Development and Globalization can be largely linked with each other in context of environmental degradation as well as its protection. Sustainable development is of the most desired form of development of today's time. In response to it, globalization process has forwarded multiple strategies for protecting environment on an international level. A global climate region is aimed at to be created for the purpose of environmental maintenance, management and protection. The world over spread quest and demand for sustainability in developmental process cannot be achieved until the environmental purposed are entailed and incorporated in the mindset of the common masses as well that of the administrators. The academia today holds this major onus of

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doing a rigorous ecological research and establishing the hidden and un-surfaced linkage between human life and environmental degradation. The present paper has been written with the same perspective.

Keywords: *Environmental Hazards, Consumption Syndrome, Environmental Biology, Sexuality, System Theory*

Introduction

The term environment reflects a global phenomenon and a global concern. All the parts of the world are equally dependent, connected, reliant and inquisitive about the environmental resources and the related issues. Environmental hazards and issues form a core part of the international concern today. Innumerable international as well as national organizations are striving at their best for understanding and addressing environmental changes occurring in different parts of the world. Attempts are consistently being made to emerge up with ideal models of cooperation between nations for environmental management and protection. Environment in almost all its forms and dimensions is deteriorating. Water, soil, forests, air, climate are all suffering from manageable as well as unmanageable risks and threats. Development being the main aim of the world has hit environment multifold. A very genuine and inevitable fact is that environment and its resources need to be used for development and growth, but this is not conducive for an amiable pattern of progress. Another connected factor is globalization. Globalization today is a condition for resource growth; which in fact tarnishes the sense of local regions or local communities and has also done an irreparable loss to the regional markets and handicraft, industries which are largely dependent upon the environment in its flora and fauna. This reduced level and income generation from household industries has staunchly brought a decline in the attachment of the people with the environment and natural resources. This phenomenon reflects weakening of the deep ecological essence of the society. Deep Ecological Perspective is an alternative emerged out of non-acceptance of the reformist perspective. Reformists believed that any process or procedure must not attack the fabric of the dominant social paradigm which expresses the mental image of that society and guides its expectations too. Whereas deep ecological perspective forwards and advocates strong rights of individuals to live in a clear environment. It links environmental crisis with the crisis of consciousness. Naess

(1989), EcKersley (1995), Castaneda (1971), Orustein (1996), Guha (1996) have all theoretically and conceptually established the notions of deep ecological movements, which reflect immense ideological connectedness of human beings to the nature. Chipko Movement was a reflection of deep ecological perspective under which the masses were even ready to compromise their lives even to save the trees to be cut for the purpose of development. Today civil society is working enthusiastically for protecting environment but the reaction towards the occurring environmental degradation is not as strong as it needs to be to attain the set aim. Deep ecology lays a stress to understand the cultural, religion and social values that related man to his environment and made a social binding on the individual to protect environment. Under such an understanding of the Deep Ecological perspective it seems to be getting weaker in application and reflection both. Many steps are being made to stop the happening degradation of environment. Globalization as a process has done two way transformation of the environment. It has progressed sharp in forwarding environmental solutions and also on the other hand has resulted into causing harm/threats/risks for the global environment (Davnergne, 2008). Contradicting groups of scholars opine differently in this context. One group says that globalization has come up with effective methods for environmental amelioration like North Zones environmental financing and global environmental regions. On the contrary, other groups say that the ecological meltdown is the result of global economic practices and processes; global processes decide global fate of economy, politics and also environment.

Socio-economic processes like urbanization have also contributed significantly to the regional ecological decay. Urban orientalism presents an over simplified picture of life in the metropolis and magnifies some problems opportunistically to maximize control over land the people (Angotti, 2012). In 2010, 152.1 million people – approximately 13 percent of India's population lived in cities with over one million populations (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) (Also see Nath, V. 2007 and Sivaramakrishna, 2005). Shift of people from rural to urban areas reflects deforestation, over use of natural resources like water, energy and the like. To construct roads, to construct colonies and residential areas, markets, social utility places the land is reused and at time misused. Industrial pressures further spoil the atmospheric capacity of the urban region. In all the environmental hazards multiply with their increasing pace of urbanization.

Urbanization is also believed to be an agency of development as the developmental projects can have a platform in urban settings only. Rural regions are also utilized but depending upon the factor of population thickness, the capitalistic project building is very negligible as compared to urban regions. Thirty Four Development Reports from 1978 to 2012 show that almost all aspects of development including equality, poverty and climate change have been covered in the agenda, but the underlying preference for a competitive capitalist world can be ignored and rather well observed in the reports (Vernon, 1977 and Oomen, 2008).

Discussion

All discussions held above reflex environmental biology and its observation about environmental changes and the management thereon. Relationship between environment and society has been understood in different ways by different scholars. Realists believe that the threats posed to environment by the way of our living and the way we have organized our social order dominates our understanding of environmental problems. They believe that we can ill afford to ignore the material truths of environmental problems and their ecological consequences. On the other hand constructionists emphasize that the social life influences how we conceptualize the problems. They focus on the ideological origin of environmental problems and the definition of problems as well as non-problems. The realist-constructionist debate is over materialist and idealist exploration of social life and environmental issues also.

Many of the environmental problems can be traced back to fossil fuels, global warming, smog, particulates, acid rain and social inequalities in who bears the brunt of pollution (Bell pp.4-9). Threats to land and water are on the surface of these issues which are devastating for the socio-economic status of human life. Rural as well as urban population is affected with these threats to land the water. India along with almost all the nations of the world is affected by soil erosion's increasing rates, irrigation issues and the like. In United States, soil erodes from farmland at least 10 times faster than it can be replaced by ecological processes according to a 2006 study (UNHSP,2011). Elsewhere, situation is equally grim. Soil erosion exceeds replacement later on a third of the world's agricultural land (Miller, 2005). World wide, almost a greater 23 percent of cropland. Pasture lands, forests, and woodlands have become degraded (World Bank, 2007). This

creates vicious circle of issues. The loss of the soil productivity has to be coped up with excessive use of fertilizers and energy. It likely results into increased water pollution, adulterated food products and the like. However, it will not be unjust if farmers' suicides are linked to the same phenomenon in many cases. The gravity of the issue reaches threat of suicides in communities resulting out of environmental degradation related to decline in agricultural productivity which is in fact an irreparable agricultural deficit.

Further over extraction lead to degradation of the quality of the remaining ground water. The effects of environmental degradation are very unevenly distributed; which makes the scenario even more unacceptable. People living in urban regions get developmental benefits out of environmental decline and also have resources to cope with the deprivation occurred thereon. For example temperature change, availability of flora and fauna, non-agrarian economy opting for a diverse range of 'class' choices and the like. But the rural India faces more devastating results. Their large dependence on the nature and natural resources make them pecker sufferers. On one hand they suffer from health related loss due to decrease in forest covers, less agricultural productivity due to soil erosion and temperature alterations; spread of diseases related to environmental changes and the like. On the other hand, they don't have enough income (with drastic decrease in agriculture productivity) to afford alternate arrangements or compensatory mechanisms. Many households don't even have money to pay the electricity bills which have increased after hike in temperature resulting into recently adhered use of the electric gadgets like fans and coolers. Study conducted by Kewlani (2010) also state that the rural girls have suffered due to deforestation in the region. The household work needs a female to be present at home now, but the mother in the home take more than 6-8 hours per day to collect fuel, food and podder for household purpose (with forests becoming distant). In such a situation the girl child is withdrawn from the school to manage the household. This phenomenon has a clear reflection in literacy rate of the nation 'consistently' showing differential rates of literacy of males and females in India. Bell (2012) has very well explained the social contribution of environmental problems by saying 'Everything we do has environmental implications, as responsible citizens recognize today' (p.37). But the paradox is the human becomes the most traumatized with the environmental changes occurring thereon.

Consumption has now been trapped into a consumption syndrome" leading to consumption crisis". Under the severe influence of modernization, globalization, westernization and also urbanization, masses have started blindly and blatantly 'following' consumption pattern instead of 'adopting'. Adoption of a pattern of consumption involves thought over the pocket, affordability, and impact but following the consumption pattern reflects an abrupt decision rendering to a good or service without a thought over its future implications. This blind consumerism results into environmentally lavish producer process. The quest for animals skinned bags, fur coats, and shawls, are such very commonly seen examples depicting extreme misuse of environmental resources i.e. flora and fauna. Karl Marx observed, "The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labour is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces (Marx, 1844). Malthus Environmental Determination has a great relevance in discussion at this point of time. Serving to Malthus human population has increased to unprecedented levels despite environmental limits. Population needs food to exist. Technological advancements have severely facilitated society to increase production of food; but access to food not only depends on the systems of entitlement but also upon the environmental availability of food. Some resources seem hard to substitute with something else, even with height of technologies (Malthus, 1993). In apposition, Cottrel (1955) said that environment limits what we can do and influences what we will do. Bell (2012) put it in forth in a very beautiful way by saying that all human activities are a part of ecological dialogue. The consumption and production in which the human population engages is an integral aspect of the environment. They are not external forces that may or may not impact the environment. It can hence not be denied that population growth is a real concern rather an issue in the conservation related to environmental degradation.

Health and body of human beings are facing a very ocular threat. Environmental degradation in its multiple forms is affecting human wellbeing largely. Not only did the big happenings like Bhopal Gas Leakage of December 2, 1984 kill people, small environmental alteration taking place here around are also resulting into slow poisoning of human life. Many studies show adverse impact of environmental changes on health of human beings resulting into death and also

irreparable losses in body or organs (Morehouse and Subramaniam, 1986; Kewlani, 2012; Erickson, 1994; Steingraber, 2001; A Lejandro et al, 2001; Swan et al, 2003; Abell, Ernet and Bonde, 1994; Green Lee et al, 2003; Dick et al, 2007; and others). Majority of these stands refer to the drastic ill effects of the pesticides on human health. Use of pesticide and their production also reflects a vicious circle of mismanagement of environment and an infringement in natural productivity of the land.

Infertility in females is another very crude consequence of environmental degradation, which is perhaps visible in the region which have experienced sharp rise in temperature. Not only health of females, but present well-being of females has also been affected with phenomenal alteration in the natural cover. Morally believed to be close to environment amongst all human communities, women suffer irreparable and vicious losses due to environmental changes. It shows a deep paradox in relation to the environmental sociology's branch of eco-feminism. The eco-feminists claim triumph over relationship and bonding between women and environment. Eco-feminism reflects this bonding through discourse on female's qualities like reproduction, nurturing, closeness to nature, patience to atrocities, regeneration and the like. These views in fact attempt to do away with the stereotypes saying that women are irrational (Seager, 1993; Plumwood, 1994; Slicer, 1994). Lately intellectual suggestions provided alternate terminology to understand this branch of environmental sociology, i.e. "Environmental Feminism" (Goldman and Schurman, 2000); "Eco-gender Studies" (Banerjee and Bell, 2007); and others too. After crossing through innumerable debates, social scientists have reached the conclusion that studying 'gender' as a factor influencing environmental relations is not unscientific or irrational or even irrelevant. Recent years have even seen such diverse works as studies of the anti-environmental breast cancer movement, gender differences in environmental knowledge, rural masculinity, women's participation in forestry, and men's lower overall cancer for environmental risks, the significance of gender in watershed management, and so much more (Aggarwal, 2001; Campbell, 2006; Finney, 2006; Fortmann, 1966; Harris, 2006; Kalof, 2002; Zaves Toski, 2004).

Studies of sexuality and environmental relation are also now taking relevant space in ecological studies now. Ecological studies are the need of the time while referring to the ongoing environmental crisis being faced by communities and

nature at large. The impact of environmental degradation in one or the other form is multi-dimensional affecting the roots of human life too. Health, economy, growth, development, equity are all interlinked when discussed under ecological studies. Social inequalities are common consequence of ecological disorders in society. East has its own experience of environmental damages and repercussions, resulting into deep understanding of ecology and also the development of a distinct environmentalism. In other words a sole dependence on the 'west-generated' environmental theories does not need to be appreciated. Intellectual as well as ideological capabilities of the East can be well seen in the contributions being made by Indian social scientists to environmentalism. In fact, it is well visible that the change in environmental scenario does reflect the ideology and theory building by science. Theory is such an example which depicts the movement of environmentalism from shallow ecological perspective to deep ecological perspective and finding to consensus regarding the concept of 'system'. System theory presents holistic approach to analysis, and is of great importance to environmental studies. The recently evolved conceptualization of 'development' incorporates various fields of life. In fact, this is what this paper has already opined that the System theory renders a common framework and language for biology, psychology, medicine, economics, law, ecology and many other sciences; a framework in which the so urgently needed ecological perspective is explicitly manifest (Merchant, 1996). This theory assumes that all the aspects of life together formulate a system which is to be regularized in order to attain an all over development. This theory well addresses the question of sustainability surfacing the research, academics and administration in contemporarily times. Ecological alteration and the related issues change the natural cover as well as resources affect/effect almost all angle of human life. At times the impact is devastating; hence the phenomenon needs a thorough concern and emphasis. Thomas Kuhn (1970) also finds system theory of unchallenged relevance and states in his theory of scientific revolution that the changes of paradigm occur in discontinuous, revolutionary breaks, called 'paradigm shifts'. It can be said that modern world recognizes, paradigm shift in physics as an integral part of a much larger cultural transformation. In context of human social development, system theory becomes the cardinal principle for attaining the aim.

'Material' as an aspect of human life widely determines the fate of the nature. In the race of material/ economic growth and development, the nature is suffering as 'soil' is one of the most powerful and cardinal sources of majority of raw material needed for development. It is not that human beings and their rights are always threatened by the external factors, but they have themselves put their lives at risk with an uncontrolled exploitation of the natural wealth done by them for their economic good. The modern materialism is a threat to the "principle of austerity" which used to be a base of social cultural stability in the past. The development has to be achieved at any cost, is the present claim. Environmental decline and economic contractions cannot be delinked, especially in case of those societies which have developed deep roots in their soil which provides life protecting medicine and dictum, demons and totem to construct a religion of their own (Chandar, 1998; Iyer, 1996; Aggarwal, 2001; Shiva, 1991; Smith, 1996; Sunita, 1996; Singh, 2003; Punalikar, 2000; Brown, et al 2002). The above quoted studies prove the internal relevance of environment in human's social, cultural, religion life and also endorse that an attack on the natural wealth is a risk for human's overall wellbeing.

Conclusion

Sustainability is well propagated for on regional, national as well as inter-national levels today but at times the random and unplanned policy of development results into irreparable environmental losses. Cutting and commercialization of green lands for colonizing at the outskirts of towns and cities is an example of this phenomenon. Colonies are built, houses remain unsold for years and then reuse of the land repeats vicious circle of environmental decline. On the whole, human activities are affecting the nature and its components in such an irreparable way that losses happening thereon are far more threatening and consistently devastating than any other disaster. The recent examples of flood in Uttranchal and many such more instances prove the fact that humans are contributing to environmental degradation, rather making their own life miserable and perhaps non-livable in the near future. Global warming, land sliding, soil erosion, deforestation, water scarcity, land misuse, resource scarcity, decreased agricultural productivity are all such examples which reflect a sure nexus between 'needs' and 'ends' and also depict the insensitivity in management skills. On the side development is aimed at, on the other hand through the same process social

human development is being hindered on a large scale. This phenomenon of continuous environmental loss need a large scale individual cum state thought and pondering over, in the absence of which the threat to the natural environment is increasing incessantly and is surely posing unmanageable risks for the welfare of the future generations.

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