

Environment and Development : An Indian Approach

Abstract

The mad race among the nations over the globe for development in recent past has jeopardized man, his environment and natural surroundings. This craze resulted in unlimited exploitation of natural resources and seriously disturbed the delicate ecological balance between living and non-living beings. The unfavourable conditions created by men in large scale not only threatened his very existence but also other living organisms on this planet.

Keywords: Mad Race, Environment, Development, Unlimited Exploitation, Natural Resources, Ecological Balance etc.

Introduction

The present century is being characterized as a century of consumerism. The need of fulfilling unlimited wants and maintaining a sophisticated life led men to go ahead in the strategy and process of development; and finally, the mad race and the fierce competition among the nation-states for development over the globe in recent past have jeopardized men and their environment. Primarily progress in the fields of agriculture, industry, transport & communication, and science & technology are taken as criteria of development in any country. This craze resulted into unlimited exploitation of natural resources and seriously disturbed the delicate ecological balance between living and non-living beings of biosphere. The unfavourable conditions created by men in a large scale not only threatened their very existence but also other living organisms on this planet. Again the rapid growth of industrialization, urbanization, modernization, liberalization & globalization and even the remarkable development of science & technology have altogether made the problem more complex and complicated. The challenges are staggering in number, scale and dimensions. Time has reached when we are facing challenge to our intellect and wisdom for saving humanity from extinction. In this piece of paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the relationship between environment and development in both conflicting and cooperative context, and to examine India's response to this pertinent issue.

Aim of the Study

This paper intends to analyze the relationship between environment and development in conflicting as well as cooperative context in examining India's standpoint in this critical juncture.

Conflict between Environment and Development

In the age of industrialization and modernization the countries behaved as if natural resources were non-exhaustible. They pressed ahead with economic expansion without any consideration for environmental conservation. The exploitation of 'nature and labour' was even not recognized as such. In this context there was a considerable conflict between economic growth and environmental protection over a long period. In last two to three decades many countries have made remarkable progress at the cost of environment.

There is no doubt that beyond a certain point there is an unavoidable conflict between economic development and environmental protection both theoretically and empirically. The basic conflict between these two is generally understood among the ecologists and ecological economists. The phrase basic conflict refers to the conflict between economic growth and bio-diversity conservation in the absence of technological progress. In the late 1960s and early 1970s a powerful social movement emerged in affluent countries arguing that economic growth caused environmental decline and could not sustain forever. At the latest in 1972, the Club of Rome drew attention to the looming "Limits to Growth". It forecasted that the world's non-renewable resources would be exhausted



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in next 100 years at the latest, if economic development continues as before. As a result, industrial countries became aware of the significance of environmental protection. This change in thinking was sprouted with the fact that the 'oil crisis' made the industrial countries painfully conscious of their dependence on this major source of energy. One of the famous books written on this issue was "The Limits to Growth" by Meadows in 1972 which suggested that economic growth rate could not continue indefinitely on a Planet which have limited resources. However, it is generally assumed that those who argued for 'limits to growth' were accused of being elitist and of emphasizing the environment at the expense of quality of life.

Sustainable Development-A Reconciler between Environment and Development

The report by the Club of Rome was a blow to the growth euphoria that had prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s. The report implicitly, and for the first time, demanded "sustainable" economic development. The concept of sustainability aims to balance three targets with equal weighting, i.e., "ecologically sound", "economically viable" and "socially just". The "limits-to-growth" model has been replaced by the "sustainable development" model and the "gloom and doom" scenario has been replaced by the "win-win" solutions. The earlier environmentalists argued that exponential growth was not sustainable in the sense that it could not be continued for ever because the Planet was finite and there were limits to growth. In contrast, sustainable development seeks ways to make economic growth sustainable mainly through technological change.

The term 'sustainable' can be explained in two ways. From ecological point of view it means the maintenance of the integrity of the ecology, i.e., a harmonious relation between humanity and nature, the interaction between individual human beings and natural resources. The term 'sustainable' from non-ecological point of view means "how to continue to sustain the supply of raw materials when the existing sources of raw-materials run out".

But sustainable development seeks to make the competing goals of economic growth and environmental protection compatible. Is it possible and does it represent an eclipse of the ethical and political dimensions of environmental problems by economic interests and priorities? Sharon Beder argues that the market cannot resolve environmental problems and that there is a need to find a solution that embraces the ethical dimension of environmental protection in the sustainable development debate. In 1982 the British Government began using the term "sustainability" to refer to sustainable economic expansion rather than the sustainable use of resources. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Commission) popularized the term "sustainable development" and brought it into common use in its seminar report called "Our Common Future". The Commission defined sustainable development as that "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future

generations to meet their own needs". Sustainability was also the key word for environmental conferences in later years such as the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil from 3rd to 14th June, 1992 and has remained the primary goal till today. In September, 2002 the eighth World Summit took place in Johannesburg under the title "Rio+10". It suggested a number of measures which are compatible with the goal of sustainable development, i.e., how can mankind achieve sustainability? Mention should also be made of the international agreement to phase out CFC propellants which damage the ozone layer, progress in water quality and improved waste disposal through new technologies. For instance, in the 1990s German manufacturing industry steadily reduced its greenhouse gas emissions on the basis of voluntary commitments (an instrument that is common in Germany but largely unknown to other countries).

India in Context of Environment and Development: India is a multi-social, multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-racial country. There are 22 major languages and nearly 1800 dialects providing a varied spectrum of cultural and socio-economic strata of colourful mosaic of its diversity. In India environmental conservation is not at all a new concept. But it is seldom realized that the world's first recorded conservation measures for wild life were enacted in India during the third century B.C. The emperor Ashoka extended his benevolence to all living beings. He established hospitals and reserves for wild animals and birds, and even to many other species. Not only the rulers but also the common people of India were also involved in protection of this heritage. An example of this is the Bishnoi cult founded by a Rajput saint towards the end of 15th century. The Bishnois emphasized non-violence and respect for all life. They did not permit hunting or felling of trees in their areas. In 1730 the Bishnois of Khejdi village paid dearly for their faith when the Maharaja of Jodhpur ordered his men to fetch timber from their village. The villagers hugged the trees to save them from the axe men and 363 of them, mostly women and children were hacked to death. The Chipko Movement of 1972 and other similar movements were organized during the period for wild life protection by common people. Such movements gained momentum since the publication of "Our Common Future", the report of World Commission on Environment, and "Environmental Perspectives to the Year 2000 and beyond" by UNEP.

India since the early 1970s has taken an active part in global efforts to tackle environmental problems. Smt. Indira Gandhi, our the then Prime Minister, participating in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm in Sweden in 1972, emphasized that the removal of poverty should be the integral part of the goal of an environmental strategy for the world. But the problem of poverty remains as a serious problem even today as it was in the then period. In 1983, the UN General Assembly set up a Commission, i.e., World Commission on Environment, headed by Norway's

Prime Minister Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland to examine the state of world environment and development beyond 2000. The report of the commission "Our Common Future" noted that the human future was at a risk if we continue the current modes of unsustainable development. It stressed the need of integrating environment with development.

It was in the spirit of goal of planning for environmentally sustainable development that India not only participated but also largely contributed to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Our common future can only be achieved with a better understanding of our shared responsibility for the present and the past, and the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental standards to deal with environmental problems. More than 170 countries including India assembled at Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil from 3rd to 14th June, 1992 to ensure relationship between environment and development on a global partnership level and to save the earth planet for future generations. After this conference, popularly known as Earth Summit India prepared a document which includes protection of atmosphere, preservation of forestry, conservation of bio-diversity and eradication of poverty. The four crucial documents adopted at this summit are: (I) Rio Declaration or a Draft Earth Charter, (II) Conventions on Climate Change and Bio-diversity, (III) Convention on Forestry and (IV) Agenda- 21 or Action Plan.

It has been realized world over that the environmental issues like global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain, marine pollution and bio-diversity disturbance are not merely national issues but are global and must be tackled with international effort and cooperation. While we believe that the mistakes of past should be corrected at present, we should also believe that it is our responsibility to think of future needs. Khushwant Singh wrote in "The Hindustan Times" that like other developing countries, "India's greatest pollutant is its ever expanding population which has eaten our forests, degraded our land and polluted our water system". Indian Government has undertaken a number of schemes, policies and programmes since independence relating to environment and development among which the former Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi's bold slogan of "Eradicate Poverty and Save the Country" and the present Prime Minister Narendra Damodar Modi's popular propaganda of "Swachha Bharat Avijan" or "Clean India Programme" are crucial. It is really a difficult task for me to mention all the schemes and programmes implemented by the Government of India in this respect. Hence here only two concepts, viz., 'Eco-tourism' and 'Joint Forest Management' have been explained to highlight India's role in context of environment and development.

Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable Tourism Development in other words 'Eco-tourism' has become increasingly popular among people interested in both environmental conservation and sustainable development. It has been called a way to save the rainforest and a 'win-win' development strategy for under developed rural

areas. The present trend shows that the tourists are usually from both developed and developing countries and their destination is often the developing world. Eco-tourism serves as an incentive for nature conservation while supporting the well-being of natural areas and local people. It minimizes environmental impacts, incorporates ecologically sensitive architecture and land use design, and offers opportunities to local people for compatible economic development. The United Nations declared 2002 as the 'International Year of Ecotourism'.

India, a country situated in the sub-continent of South Asia with a population of over 1.2 billion people, has primarily an agricultural economy. The livelihood of over 60% of population continues to be based on agriculture. Of late there has been a growing trend of urbanization and diversification away from agriculture. The industrial sector is now playing a larger role in the country. After the economic liberalization in 1991, the industrial and services components of the economy have shown a high rate of growth, and today services contribute 46% of the Gross Domestic Product (hereafter G.D.P.). India is rated as the fourth largest economy in the world based on the "Purchasing Power Parity" method of calculating per capita G.D.P. Having said this, mention of the important socio-economic issues that face India is necessary.

The primary issue is one of poverty, with 320 million people estimated to be living below the poverty line. There are related problems of social and gender inequalities, illiteracy, lack of adequate health facilities, unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation and underdevelopment of some areas. There are gigantic problems which are receiving the attention of the Indian Government and civil society, with some sort of help from the international community.

Since the foreign exchange crisis of 1991, a more liberal approach towards globalization of the economy has been adopted by the government. India is a member of the World Trade Organization (hereafter W.T.O.) and opening its economy to the international market in phases. In keeping with the commitments to the W.T.O., exports have been increasing over the years and were reported to have grown by 30% in April, 2000. Special efforts are being made to attract foreign direct investment by providing attractive incentives to investors.

In India, tourism is emerging as a key sector in the economy. It is presently India's third largest foreign exchange earner after garments, and gems and jewellery. The foreign exchange earnings from tourism during 1997-98 have been estimated to be about Rs. 11264 crores. The most significant feature of the tourism industry is its capacity to generate large-scale employment opportunities for women and young people, particularly in remote and under developed areas. Eco-tourism offers enormous potential for utilizing natural resources like landscapes, mountains, beaches, rivers etc. for the economic benefit of the population. It also adds value to a multitude of human-made attractions such as

monuments, palaces, forts and the unique rural and city environments.

Sustainable Forest Policies

Over the years forest-related interests, benefits and values have evolved and expanded. As a result new knowledge and technologies, responsibilities and partnerships have emerged that constantly increase our understanding of India's forest and how we, as citizens of a forest nation, relate to it. To keep pace with this change, we continue to deepen our knowledge about the forest. Today, everyone in the Indian forest community has a role to play in ensuring our forest heritage. This community has grown to include governments, forest dwellers, timber-based industry, academia, research institutes, the recreation and tourism industry, private woodlot owners, environmentalists and an increasing number of women and youth in these groups. With increasing knowledge, even more organizations and individuals are participating in forest-related decisions.

Forest management has become more challenging as forest managers attempt to balance many different concerns, policies and practices. For example, forest-related objectives and commitments now encompass matters such as the conservation of biological diversity, forest dwellers' rights, rural community well being, employment, private land ownership, international trade and environmental protection. As well, newly discovered uses of non-timber products such as medicinal plants and bioplastics from forest products, have been added to the traditional, industrial uses of the forest. At the centre of this continually changing arena of forest policies, practices and interests is sustainability-widely seen today as the foremost goal of forest management. An ideal National Forest Policy was framed in 1988 for creating a stable foundation for sustainable forest management in India and it changed the focus of forest management from a highly "timber and revenue orientation" to ensure "environmental stability, maintenance of ecological balance and meet the subsistence requirements of the local people" by strengthening the people-forest link. The Policy states, "The life of tribals and other poor living within and near forest revolves around forests. The rights and concessions enjoyed by them should be fully protected. Their domestic requirements of fuel wood, fodder, minor forest products and construction timber should be the first charge on the forest product".

Thus the 1988 National Forest Policy proposed the creation of a people's movement to protect forest resources of the country. Following its footsteps in June 1990 the Central Government issued a circular on Joint Forest Management (hereafter JFM) to operationalize participatory forest management and addressing the community forest protection activities in India. The preamble of the JFM circular states: "The National Forest Policy, 1988 envisages people's involvement in the development of forests. The requirements of fuel wood, fodder and small timber such as house-building material, of the tribals and other villagers living in and near the forests, are to be treated as first charge on forest produce. The policy document envisages it as one of

the essentials of forest management that the forest communities should be motivated to identify themselves with the development and protection of forests from which they derive benefits".

Concluding Observation

In the end it may be concluded that both the "Limits to Growth" and the "Sustainable Development" approaches have neglected the ethical and political dimensions. The advocates of the 'limits to growth' in the 1960s and 1970s tended to avoid the social implications and made the nations responsible for the most resource use. Similarly, the advocates of the 'sustainable development' want to avoid the ethical issues by falling back on economic calculus.

Thus it is apparent that there is a need to go beyond of these two failed approaches and find a third one which embraces the ethical dimension. Our endeavours need to be focussed on new ways of achieving a reasonable level of comfort in all nations without an environmental damage. This is certainly a big challenge for the community of states. But it can be mastered if the rich industrial countries get prepared to share some of their achieved wealth with the developing countries, not ecological and economic grounds but for geo-political reasons. No one can today rule out the possibility that in next twenty or thirty years a type of energy may be discovered which will be largely emission-free and can be generated economically in adequate quantities. So we need new forms of social decision-making that integrate the ethical dimension- neither limits to growth nor does sustainable development offer the answers. Thus it is the urgent need of the hour to develop and modernize ourselves in less wasteful manner unlike the current western pattern so that we could preserve our natural resources, and traditional values and practices relating to environment.

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