

# Some Focus on Civilisation and Its Connection with Sustainability

## Abstract

People seem to agree on the notion of fair distribution of the earth's resources, on the vital need of environmentally-friendly practices, on the essential role of corporate responsibility and accountability for social and environmental costs and benefits beyond the monetary balance sheet, but agreements break down when we consider what "fair" and "environmentally-friendly" mean, not to mention such a controversial topic as "corporate responsibility and accountability for social and environmental costs".

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Himalayas, Kalidas, Murugan.

## Introduction

The ancient civilisation of India grew up in a sharply demarcated sub continent bounded on the north by the world's largest mountain range—the chain of Himalayas, which, with its extension to East and West, divides India from rest of Asia and the world. India's isolation has never been complete, and the effect of the mountain wall in developing her unique civilisation has often been overrated.

A.L. Basham has rightly pointed out the importance of Himalayas natural resources in his famous book, *The Wonder That Was India*. He states, "the importance of the mountains to India is not so much in the isolation which they give her, as in the fact that they are the source of her two great rivers. The cloud drifting northwards are west-wards in the rainy season discharge the last of their moisture on the high peaks, whence, fed by ever-melting snow, innumerable streams flow southward, to meet in the great river systems of Indus and the Ganges."<sup>1</sup>

## Aim of the Study

The aim of the study of this paper is very serious related to the sustainability and its connection with civilisation history. We should be very sensible about the sources the nature has provided to us.

## The History of Himalayas

The most famous legends in Himalayas is that of Shiva's marriage with Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya, the personified mountain.

The Himalayas were the foothills of the Mount Meru, the centre of the world, it has some degree of sanctity. Around Meru, or mountains which reached to the heavens, dwelt the gods. Vaikuntha, the home of Vishnu, was never satisfactorily identified, but Kailasha, the mountain of Shiva, was recognised as a certain peak in the central Himalayas which has long been a place of pilgrimage.

The beauty of Himalayas was well described by even Kalidas in his famous poem of "The Birth of the War-god" in *Kumarsambhava*. It begins with the fine description of Himalayas. He says;

"In the northern quarter is divine Himalayas,  
the lord of mountain, reaching from Eastern to Western ocean,  
firm as a rod to measure the earth...."(Kumarsambhava)<sup>2</sup>

## Meaning of Sustainability

The history of sustainability traces human-dominated ecological systems from the earliest civilizations to the present. This history is characterized by the increased regional success of a particular society, followed by crises that were either resolved, producing sustainability, or not, leading to decline.

In early human history, the use of fire and desire for specific foods may have altered the natural composition of plant and animal communities.<sup>3</sup> Between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago, agrarian communities emerged which depended largely on their environment and the creation of a "structure of permanence."<sup>4</sup>

Archeological evidence suggests that the first civilizations arose in Sumer, in southern Mesopotamia (now Iraq) and Egypt, both dating from around 3000 BCE. By 1000 BCE, civilizations were also established in India, China, Mexico, Peru and in parts of Europe.<sup>5</sup> Sumer illustrates issues central to the sustainability of human civilization.<sup>6</sup> Sumerian cities

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practised intensive, year-round agriculture from ca. 5300 BCE. The surplus of storable food created by this economy allowed the population to settle in one place instead of migrating in search of wild foods and grazing land. It also allowed for a much greater population density. The development of agriculture in Mesopotamia required many labourers to build and maintain its irrigation system. This, in turn, led to political hierarchy, bureaucracy, and religious sanction, along with standing armies to protect the emergent civilization. Intensified agriculture allowed for population increase, but also led to deforestation in upstream areas with resultant flooding and over-irrigation, which raised soil salinity. While there was a shift from the cultivation of wheat to the more salt-tolerant barley, yields still diminished. Eventually, decreasing agricultural production and other factors led to the decline of the civilization. From 2100 BC to 1700 BC, it is estimated that the population was reduced by nearly sixty percent.<sup>7</sup> Civilizations similarly thought to have eventually fallen because of poor management of resources include the Mayans,<sup>8</sup> Anasazi and Easter Islanders, among many others.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, stable communities of shifting cultivators and horticulturists existed in New Guinea<sup>9</sup> and South America, and large agrarian communities in China, India and elsewhere have farmed in the same localities for centuries. Some Polynesian cultures have maintained stable communities for between 1,000 and 3,000 years on small islands with minimal sources using rahu<sup>10</sup> and kaitiakitanga<sup>11</sup> to control human pressure on the environment. In Sri Lanka nature reserves established during the reign of king Devanampiyatissa and dating back to 307 BC were devoted to sustainability and harmonious living with the nature.

#### **Introduction: The Appeal of Sustainability**

The concept of sustainable development dates back to the early 1970s, and the Club of Rome report "Limits of Growth" was probably the cornerstone piece of literature that got the whole freight train rolling. In 1987, the authors of the United Nations Brundtland report "Our Common Future" (prepared to examine how human activity impacted the world's natural resources) gave a definition of sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Today, the range of groups who have adopted the slogan has become incredibly wide - universities, local communities, nonprofit organizations, states, even some industrial companies. Generally, groups who say they are working toward sustainability aim to mix values of social equity, environmental responsibility and economic viability. As sustainability moves into the mainstream, the largely amorphous concept gets bent into many different shapes.

The typical words used to characterize sustainability are quite very positive and charismatic: sustainable programs should be democratic, equitable, environmentally benign and holistic - while allowing for a healthy economy. Many advocates say true sustainability will require a systemic shift in how society addresses issues ranging from resource allocation to urban planning. Other more radical need

for sustainability appeal for immediate changes in thinking, in societal values and beliefs, even in human nature.

Academics consider sustainable development as an interdisciplinary science, the subject of which is composed of contribution from ecology, economics, anthropology, sociology and psychology, and computer science. Its repertoire is bolstered by other crossdisciplinary work such as system science and nonlinear dynamics; chaos, catastrophe, and complexity theory and showing up regularly in the literature.

So far sustainable development does not have a core theory from which everything else proceeds. Rather, it lives in an open-textured definition, and is defined by the topics researchers have an opportunity to delve into. Neither has it a transparent set of principles to which scientists and social activist organizations agree.

People seem to agree on the notion of fair distribution of the earth's resources, on the vital need of environmentally-friendly practices, on the essential role of corporate responsibility and accountability for social and environmental costs and benefits beyond the monetary balance sheet, but agreements break down when we consider what "fair" and "environmental-friendly" mean, not to mention such a controversial topic as "corporate responsibility and accountability for social and environmental costs".

#### **History and Civilisation**

##### **Is Sustainable Development Possible?**

Does sustainability exist or are we kidding ourselves? Is it not simply an oxymoron? "Development" implies instability and change - typical state of matter, both animated and unanimated; "sustainable" implies a notion of equilibrium - only as a momentary and transient state in the process dynamics.

Development can not be stopped - science and technology will continue to self-propel. Sustainability sounds like a paradox: to have society and nature co-evolving in the one-directional arrow of time, simultaneously maintaining their relationships and not depleting their potential resources. In other words, to change while not changing. "*Na ca so, na ca anyo*" say the enigmatic Sanskrit scriptures written more than 5000 years ago: "neither the same nor a different one".

To impose radical changes in human nature in order to resolve the paradox of sustainability is unrealistic. Communist regimes in Europe intensively tried to eradicate competition, private initiative and individual spiritual drive, and to impose everlasting comradeship and social equity, cooperation and collective norms of life. The results were (and still are) disastrous.

If sustainability is understood mainly as:

1. Holding companies liable for environmental damages,
2. Implementing charges on unsustainable practices,
3. Putting the burden of proof on potential polluters to prove that their activity will do not harm,
4. Enforcing laws requiring regular company reports on their pollution releases,

5. Asking for independently verified reports from all companies involved in production processes regarding their progress towards environmental friendly goals,
6. Providing mechanisms for public input and participation in company decisions that may have negative environmental or social impacts,

Then we are miles away from understanding the paradox of sustainability. To oblige people to act in a sustainable way is to try to find a simplistic, linear and, therefore, wrong solution to the complex puzzle of sustainability.

### **Ancient Wisdom for Development with Sustainability**

The ancient wisdom provides powerful hints for dealing with enigmas and paradoxes of human existence. In "The Origins of Ancient Egypt" Michael Rice writes: "There was a time when, in a small strip of the world's land surface, man achieved an almost total equilibrium with his environment and created a society as near perfect as he has so far been able even to dream about..." Greatest philosophers of Ancient Greece like Pythagoras, Plato, Hippocrates, Thales of Milet, Galen and Homer visited Egypt in search of Wisdom.

The life and work of Pythagoras - perhaps the most famous ancient philosopher at all, who spent more than 20 years in the sanctuaries of Egypt, provides an important clue if we wish to get insight from the Egyptian Wisdom. Pythagoras established a doctrine of unity, which encompassed the physical and the spiritual. He shows us an holistic philosophy - an essentially Egyptian perspective.

The variety, complexity and multiplicity which we see never implied separation; unity was ever present. Life in the heavens and life on earth were considered to be one, an indivisible unity. Human beings considered themselves indistinguishable from their environment, products of the same forces of nature responsible for creation of the heavens and the earth.

To learn and acquire knowledge was to observe these forces at work. In the great Egyptian temples all branches of learning were housed under the same roof, regarded as aspects of the single Wisdom. All diverse branches were encapsulated within this sacred Wisdom. It is in it where people looked for insights to deal with enigmas and paradoxes of their lives. The essential preoccupation of the Egyptian thought was to know the origin and matter of existence.

### **How to be Citizens?**

In our fragmented world, knowledge has become also fragmented. Our society has become insulated from nature. When discussing sustainability, we speak about environment as something separated from us, something overthere with which we need to establish friendly relationship. We say that the cars pollute the air outside of us, forgetting that it is the same air inside of us without which we simply cannot survive.

We speak about waters somewhere there around us, totally neglecting the fact that water is essential ingredient of our cells. So far from us is the idea of unity - a central idea of all ancient Wisdom, that even such a simple and transparent truth that the

same forces which work at the Universe work in us seem strange for us. Can we use this truth to make money out of it? No? Then forget it! Think about something more serious - for instance, think about sustainability: how to continue to exploit the environment, and at the same time live healthy and happily? Or how to continue current predatory processes led by us in nature and society and at the same time to preach about governmental and citizen-based mechanisms designed to ensure greater accountability of business and industry?

Before organizing citizen-based mechanisms we must have those citizens. Does somebody teach us how to be citizen? Without understanding the concept of unity and living with it, we can not be citizens. Do we have governments, which are honest stewards of the public interest related to contemporary environmental issues? One of the pathologies of our fragmented social reality is that in their efforts to hold on to power, politicians and political parties rely on crucial financial support from wealthy corporations which are not always environment-friendly when making money.

We can talk a lot about precautionary principles, preventative approaches, extended producer responsibilities, clean production, corporate accountability, national public hearings, community participation and many other issues related to sustainability, but the effect of all these talks will be insignificant unless we are able to grasp to idea of unity and work with it in our every day life. The society needs education in this regard at schools and Universities, in local communities and global corporation. The simple message from the ancient wisdom - the message of unity can save us from self-destruction. Or at least make it not so painful.

### **Conclusion the Picture Whole**

So in this way Himalayas can be glorify with its legendary history and importance throughout all the ages. In present time we are a developing nation and getting development in all the spheres of life. The most important region of India, The Himalayas, are not being taken as the holy place of gods or the place which has covered the history of myths, legends, culture, and heritage of India. The development process must be done in the region with scholarly capacity and in a very sustainable manner with well planning for thousands of years of future.

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## ***Remarking***

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