

Anthropocentric Thought and Environmental Education: Need for Public Awareness

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Abstract: *Environmental education is not a new thought. Since the origin of humankind, all knowledge has been derived from the interaction with the nature. Environmental education or ecological education involves natural sciences, social sciences and technical sciences etc. as human society evolved and progressed, human beings tried to devise ways to make their lives more and more comfortable. This rising need for comfort has led to various detrimental effects on the environment. However, since human beings cannot cut off themselves from the environment, the imbalance that they have created is now slowly interfering with their survival and maintenance on the planet. Environmental pollution is a wreaking devastation on plant, animal and human life. The soil, minerals, water, fuel, plant and animal resources are being depleted and climate changes, desertification and floods are becoming severe. Moreover, the human population is growing faster than ever and creating more pressure on the environment than it can take. This research paper is basically an attempt to analyze the public's local and global environmental awareness.*

Keywords: environment, values, awareness, changes, policies.

We are at one of the most decisive moments in the life of mankind. At no other period of human history there were so many people bearing such impossible burdens or suffering such as agonising persecution and anguish of heart. We are living in a world in which tragedy is universal. There is a startling relaxation of traditions, restraints and of established law and order. The term environment implies all the external factors of living and non - living, material and non - material which surround man. In its modern concept, environment includes not only the water, air and soil that form our environment but also the social and economic conditions under which we live.

Therefore, environment is a complex system that includes physical, chemical, biological, social and cultural elements; all these elements are interlinked to each other in a complicated manner similar to a spider web and the disturbance of any of these elements will threaten its structure. Thus, for the stability and subsistence of the environment, it is important that all these elements are preserved and left undisturbed.

Scientists tell us of the various ways in which the earth may perish. It may be destroyed by the approaching moon at some remote time or by the cooling of sun. A comet may strike the earth or a poisonous gas exudes from the earth itself. Now we have been facing another threat from human activities; it is destruction of civilization. But all these are remote possibilities, while the probabilities are that the human race may perish by its own deliberate acts, by the stupidity and selfishness which are strongly enthroned in human nature. The witness of a few noble souls to a finer world is our hope for the future. In recent decades, we have had not only material development which is striking and visible to the eye, but also a definite growth in ethical sense and social passion. There is an increased desire to apply the results of science and invention to the improvement of the general conditions of life. In our ideas of the relations and obligations of man to man and man to environment there is a real advancement.

For these things I am obliged to others, not at all to anyone. One of my aims in this research will be to suggest that if the world is today in a perilous condition, it is because it knows all about 'urbanization' or 'selfishness' or 'selling of dams' or 'rehabilitation' and 'degradation of moral values of man' and little about the central questions of the values of life, philosophy and religion, which it brushes aside as 'empty notions and mere fancies'. What we need today is a profound change in man's way of life. We help to secure the future only to the extent to which we are ourselves changed.

The term Standard of living refers to the expenditure we incur, the goods we consume and services we enjoy. It includes food, dress, house, amusements; and in short, the mode of life. In a community, there are both individual and social problems. When individual problems affect a large number of people, they become social problems. The present day's social problem is degradation of environment by human activities.

There is may be two contrasting views about environment-natural or ecological environment and anthropocentric environment. They are totally different from each other because natural environment created naturally and anthropocentric environment is man - made. Any view magnifying the importance of human beings in the cosmos by seeing it as creation for our benefit. An account of a property such as that of a colour is anthropocentric if it incorporates an element relating possession of the property to the state of some observer in some conditions.

Earth's natural environment includes components such as air, water, soil, land, forest, wildlife, flora, fauna, etc.. This environment operates through a self - regulating mechanism; therefore, any change brought about by one of the components of the environment is counterbalanced by some other changes in another component of the environment. The natural environment is never static; the changes may sometimes be insignificant, while at other times, they may be severe. These changes may be either helpful or hurtful to the living organisms in the environment.

Man has made the entire geography of the earth his own, ignoring boundaries of climate; for unlike the lion and reindeer, he has the power to create his special skin and temperature including his unscrupulous power of borrowing the skin of the indigenous inhabitants and misappropriating their facts. Human beings are the most powerful environmental agents and are capable of modifying the environment to great extent according to their needs by the application of modern technology. They have thus created an anthropocentric environment in the biosphere. An anthropocentric environment includes components that have been introduced by human beings depending on their needs and requirements. These may prefer to alterations of surroundings for industrial, commercial, agricultural or housing purposes. It is man - made environment on Earth.

Aristotle taught us long ago that we must live before we can live well. We must eat, shelter and cloth ourselves before we can draw, paint or speculate. The relation between nature and man is one of reciprocal modifications. The interplay between the geographic factors and the human efforts is an eternal and universal process. The enormous variety of natural resources on this planet provides everything for the survival of all forms of life including man. Even the pre - historic man led a life of hunter and gatherer, procuring each and everything for his survival from the forests. Nature has been so kind to man since ancient times. Ever since, it's appearance on the earth's surface man needed from natural edible plants and animals for his livelihood. In the initial stage of the history of economic development man identified these natural gifts available around him and learnt to use them. Everything that comes from nature has some utility for man but its consumption is possible on the availability of suitable technology. Although natural products existed over the earth's surface even during pre - historic time, man had neither the tools nor the technology to use them. Land, sunshine, wind, forest and wildlife were present much before the appearance of man on the earth. With time he has learned to cultivate the land, grow crops by protecting different plants and run the wind and water mills by using the wind and water energy. In the same way for centuries, Coal and mineral oil were present below the earth's surface but man had no technology to utilise them. Hence these natural materials turned into resources only when they could be used.

The forests too have played a great part in the evolution of Indian Culture. Every resource has some utility. For example, some are used as food, some as raw materials and others as resource of energy. Expanding human population resulted into expanding needs of man. With scientific progress and technological development man started utilising natural resources at a much larger scale. Continuous increase in population caused an increasing demand for resources. This created a situation when the non - renewable resources may come to an end after some time. In order to have maximum production, we have started even talking overdrafts from the resources meant for future that cannot be paid back. As a result we would be using all those resources which are in fact the property of future generation. It is a matter of much concern. There must be some sort of balance between the population growth and the utilisation of natural resources.

The non - availability of resources and their price rise are having an adverse effect on the economics of countries world over. There are number of other examples of the problems created by over utilisation of resources. In some areas, there is not enough water for agriculture and industry, whereas in other areas there are problems of water - logging due to over - irrigation. In some other countries and also in India much of underground water is being utilised for food grain production. This resulted in lowering of water table in north - eastern region of India and also in the large parts of our country. There is thus need Govt. Policy and Planning for water conservation for future generation. Everyone run after more and extra gain of wealth for prosperity. Industrialisation, over population, selfish desire of man, poverty etc. and environment are interrelated. The vast majority of our people are directly dependent on the natural resource of the country for their basic needs of food, fuel, shelter and fodder. Poverty and needs are the greatest polluters. The relation between human needs, poverty and population growth is natural and universal. Reckless use of earth resources for improving the general conditions of personal life causes irreparable damage of natural environment.

The Biblical story of creation, in Genesis, makes clear the Hebrew view of the special place of human beings in the divine plan. Thomas Aquinas in his major work, the Summa Theological regarded the view of Aristotle in his own taste. In his analysis of sins, he regarded only crime against God by us. Our interactions with the creatures or natural world which does not occur as any sin.

In respect of Western traditional thought about nature, the natural world exist for the benefit of human beings. God gave human beings domination over the natural world and God does not care how we treat it. Human beings are the only moral important members of this world. Nature itself is of no intrinsic value and the destruction of its creatures cannot be sinful. This view is generally called anthropocentric.

From the standpoint of Indian traditional thought about environment is that the main features of Indian culture heritage are to equal respect of all creatures and reverence for life on earth. All the creatures are integral parts of almighty God. So, Indian Philosophy recognizes the importance, priceless and timeless value of wilderness. Before 2000 B. C. of Jesus birth, Lord Buddha was born in India. Buddha declares that to hurt any creature in this world is sin; it is because every living being is the creations of same God. We are exploring the same view in Jainism, Vaisnavism etc. In this regard we remember the evergreen great Gandhian view of non-Violence.

Anthropocentrism teaches us that man is the centre of all things. Resources like land, water, minerals, forests and wildlife are provided for human beings by the auto mechanism of nature because human is the highest creature of nature. These types of thinking slowly steps down towards the ultimate destruction of civilisation. For this we should clear the internal corruptions of our mind. To acquaint the students about their immediate social and

geographical environment and contribute to its development said our father of nation greatest Indian soul Mahatma Gandhi.

The success or failure in applying the principles of ecology for the benefit of man, at least for the next decade, may depend not so much on technology and environmental science as such, but on economics, law, politics, planning and other areas in the humanities that have up to now had very little ecological input.

Anthropologists, Socialists, etc. first developed an interest in the ecological approach to the study of human society. Ecology or environmental education and awareness are essential for all men, women and children and of all ages from the cradle to the grave. A consensus has emerged regarding the objectives and strategy to be adopted. The following objectives we may be undertaken:

- 1) The masses, including children and women with the objectives of increased awareness and understanding the environmental problem.
- 2) The occupational groups including all working people with the objectives of application of skill to war ecological problems.
- 3) A researcher to contribute the research and development base in the field of environment.
- 4) The constitutional bodies including pressure groups, political leaders, NGO's, media etc. who influence the policy, planning mechanism.
- 5) From the primary school to university students and teaches at all levels.
- 6) The peoples and rulers to be guided by universal love.
- 7) The sense of a divine vocation must be restored to man's daily work.

Environment education thus includes wide ranging topics relevant to training, workshop, seminar, orientation, refresher, awareness, teaching and research etc.

The Supreme Court of India on 22nd April, 200 gave its approval to the model syllabus drawn up by the NCERT for environmental studies which has made a compulsory subject by the court up to senior secondary level in schools. The court had also directed the University Grants Commission to explore the possibility of introducing environmental studies as an independent subject at graduate and post graduate level.

Civilisation is a way of life, a movement of the human spirit. Its essence lies not in any biological unit of race or in political and economic arrangements but in the values that create and sustain them. Human life is affected directly or indirectly by changes that occur in the environment. Therefore, it is essential to be well - known with different environmental problems. Moreover, environmental protection and conservation is beyond the capacity of one individual, one institution and government alone. Many of the environmental problems are global in nature; therefore, every citizen of the world needs to be aware and actively participate in protecting global environment. For active participation and public awareness is essential. Regard for public awareness we should discover some targets to increasing awareness and understanding of the masses. In

accordance to the age-old day to day life routine of people, we may undertake the following:

- 1) To identify various plants and animals and other components of the environment that are endangered.
- 2) To take appropriate decisions regarding the use of natural resources.
- 3) To conserve nature and natural resources for the betterment of the society from the point of view of social, cultural and economic development.
- 4) To adopt appropriate ways and means to solve existing environmental problems.
- 5) We must step down from the view that God gave human beings domination over the natural world for the benefit of the future generations.
- 6) To aware the values of two important components of environment i. e. living and non - living.
- 7) To this immensely important aspect of environmental values, we shall now turn.
- 8) Finally, we should clear internal pollution of our mind.

We need not confound the familiar with the eternal process of environment. Our preference for the present order need not be confused with an inescapable law of the universe. The impulse for the truth and compassion which is ingrained in human nature requires us to live as free individuals in a friendly world. The problem of living as neighbours on earth, controlling our powers of self-destruction and using the resources of nature for the health and happiness of all, requires the will for peace, the renunciation of many claims by the privileged classes and national states. If we are true patriots, our attachment will not be local, racial or national, but human. It will be a love of liberty for all, of independence, of peace and social happiness. We will fight not for our country but for civilisation, and secure by co-operative organisation for the future development of the world resources for the greatest benefit of mankind. For this we need a re-education of the mind, an improvement in faith and imagination. The reason and will of the universe work through the human individual, who can understand the forces of the environment, foresee their operation and regulate them.

What are the chief causes of the present distress? When we refer to the causes of the war or we may find the causes in evil geniuses or we may trace it to the breakdown of the disarmament conference of the League of Nations or the clash of national ambitions in the overcrowded field of colonial expansion. But no one of these can be responsible for a catastrophe of this size. Each of them is an effect, a consequence, not a cause. What has wrecked the world so full of hope is the dominance of a false philosophy with its misleading assumptions, beliefs and values. The end may be long in coming. It may take many years or decades or even centuries. It may be a birth of the new world but any permanent breakdown of human values is unthinkable. Any divergence in thought or belief from the authorised system is a crime.

The aim of education is not to send forth knowledge into the resisting brain and impose a fixed metal typed rule of conduct on his struggling forces; it is to help the child to develop his nature, to change him from within rather than crush him from without. The education imparted not only

fits man for his role in life but gives him a general idea of the conditions of ecological life. By education and social discipline, the individual is helped to develop the inner conviction essential for social and environmental stability. The character of a civilisation is derived from its conception of the nature of man and his destiny. The injured pride and romanticism of a great people are moulding the future of the environmental history. To creating moral sense in the human thought and living by the education of great seers and epics, it is, how we maintaining our relationship to the natural surroundings, which are the qualities which will save our civilisation. Sin against property, may be forgiven; but sin against the God should not be forgiven, as we do violence to ourselves. The aim of environmental ethics is not reflection and ecstasy, but identification with the current of life and therefore participation in its creative advance. The moral man transcends the limitations imposed on him by his material nature or social conditions and enlarges the creative purpose. This is the result of the remaking of man.

Environmental ethics is a dynamic process, a renewed effort of the creative impulse working through humans and seeking to uplift mankind to a new level. By liberating the human values, we make the world better in the only way in which it can be made, the interior way. If human society is to function as live reality, it is an organism, not an organisation. It is a living growing thing. The breath of spirit must be breathed into it. The human community must become the organic expression of the faith in the oneness of the creative Spirit of the Universe and in a sense of fellowship. There is an immortal aspiration inhabiting every human frame, a universal conscious expressing itself in human minds and the mind is free from selfishness. It is found in Upanishads and in the thoughts of Indian noble Souls. This self-change is not automatic. It is the response to the meaningful pattern we discern in history. It is a submission of the self to reality. It is a practice of morality which will draw men to a common centre even across the national frontiers. Regarding all with an equal eye he must be friendly to all living beings. All men desire sustainable development of environment, but very few desire those things which make for sustainable development of environment.

After all, civilization is based on a vision. The fundamental desire of life is the desire to exist. It claims from us a vast amount of training and experience about the necessities of livelihood. Many of the environment problems are global in nature; therefore, every citizen of the world needs to be aware and actively participate in protecting the global environment. For this public awareness plays a significant role. Man, hungers and thirsts not only for bread but for the bread of life, for truth, beauty and goodness and holiness. To achieve harmony is the aim of his existence. Human is the future of human. A society can be re - made only by changing men's hearts and minds. But what is the remedy for this? In our ideas give good education and reverently aware of the values of natural products, those who are backward of this now would come into their own.

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