Environment Degradation and Sustainable Development Strategies for Intervention and Protection

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Abstract

Human Environment provides everyone with a conducive atmosphere for life and growth. Most of our problems have roots in the distruction of environment. We have to resist this destruction in the guise of development.

Pollution is causing a great danger to the human existence. It is affecting not only human beings but even plants and animals. There is growing concern by the economists, sociologists, environmental scientists and administrators about the degradation and destruction of the environment.

Threats to human security are becoming global with AIDS, Terrorism, Pollution, Nuclear Proliferation, global poverty and environmental degradation. The kind of development taking place now is not sustainable in view of the above problems of human insecurity. The Constitution makes provision for protection of environment. The parliament has passed series of Laws to control pollution and to protect environment. We have goals towards sustainable development. We have to ensure that every person enjoys the benefit of a clean Air, Clean Water and Healthy Environment; Education and awareness are increasingly important from a global perspective of resource management in view of environment degradation. If the objective of development is to improve the quality of life then development and environment protection cannot be mutually exclusive.

(Key Words - Environment, Pollution, Degradation, Sustainable Development, Ozone Depletion, Social Activist)

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Introduction

The human environment endows every individual with a conducive atmosphere for life and growth. Most of our problems have roots in the destruction of environment. The destruction is the result of development pattern. In the name of development projects, the government is allowing clearance of forests and massacre of wildlife. We have to resist this destruction in the guise of development. Nature no longer poses a danger to the modern man. But man is becoming threat to himself and nature. Development led to deterioration and destruction of natural resources.

Environmental Degradation:

In the 21st century excessive technological growth created an unhealthy environment. Air pollution, noise pollution, traffic congestion, chemical contaminants radiation hazards, overcrowding have become pesticides of our life. Indians eat food with highest toxic pesticides.

Pollution is causing a great danger to the human existence. It is affecting not only human beings but even plants, trees and animals.

The land in which we live, the air we inhale, the water we drink and the sound we hear are all polluted. There is growing concern by the economists, sociologists, environmental scientists and administrators about the degradation and destruction of the environment.

Threat to Human Survival

Awareness is growing to deter the kind of development which destroys the green belt and depletes ground water reserves. Development is meaningless, unless it is sustainable. This sort of development leads people to become butchers of nature and destroyers of the forest.

Illiterate people cannot understand cause-effect relationship between pollution and ill health, deforestation, and flooding, excessive noise levels and hearing impairments. The common man has more pressing problems to attend to than environmental issues. Environmental issues are beyond his sphere of reckoning. Even middle class educated people who are more knowledgeable will not understand the contribution of their refrigerator to the depletion of the ozone layer

It is imperative that we use our renewable resources of water, soil and vegetation to sustain our economic development. Over exploitation of these is visible in soil erosion, floods, deforestation, siltation, destruction of floral and wildlife resources, extinction of animal and plant species, depletion of ozone layer, air, water and soil pollution, loss of marine life which pose threat to survival of life in general and to the very existence of human race in particular.

Global problems vitiating Development

Growing percent of unemployment in almost all countries of the world, gender discrimination, feminization of poverty, alarming spread of terrorist violence, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and regional tensions and conflicts are some of the outstanding problems in addition to the earlier chronic problems of ill health ignorance and squalor which directly affect the quality and pace of social development. Other broader problems of environmental degradation, dangers of nuclear radiations, global warming, and terrorism across national boundaries vitiate social development and make fulfillment of human rights an impracticable objective.

Threat to Human Security

We experience threats to human security and live in a world of disturbing contrasts. While so many people are starving, so much food is wasted. Most of the children do not enjoy their childhood. They suffer from ill health and malnutrition

Both poor and rich nations are afflicted by human distress - weakening of human relationships, increasing rates of crime and threats to personal security and wide spread drug addiction. Threats to human security are becoming global with AIDS, terrorism, pollution, Nuclear proliferation, global poverty and environment degradation.

Most people suffer from a feeling of insecurity from worries about daily life, job security, income security, health security, environmental security, security from crime. The United Nations organization had always shown concern for people's security and territorial security. The Security Council cannot make the world secure from war if men and women have no security in their homes and their jobs. By human security we mean safety

from the constant threats, diseases, crime and repression. It also means security from sudden disruption in our daily lives. The kind of development taking place now is not sustainable in view of the above problems of human insecurity.

Development leading to Deprivation

The world cannot survive with one-fourth rich and three-fourths poor, half democratic and half authoritarian with cases of human development surrounded by deserts of deprivation, with the present trend of widening disparities within and between nations.

It is paradoxical to state that development is leading to deprivation. The more the development, the more the deprivation. The kind of development that is taking place in Indian society is functional for few and dysfunctional for large masses. There is imbalance in the development. There are discrepencies in the social system. The development benefiting a few is lopsided. By development we mean not development of material resources but development of poverty groups. There are two options open to mankind; (a) either the third world opts for affluence of a few and poverty for the rest; (b) or it must divert total resources for removal of poverty.

The UNDP reports on human development and firmly established that there is no direct or positive correlation between economic prosperity and social development. In this sense no country in the world can be said to be socially developed. All are groping, some in poverty and others in prosperity.

Environment movements in India

Movements have been undertaken to protect and save the environment. Under the leadership of Gowra Devi, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandiprasad Bhat , people of Mandal Village of Chameli district U.P. started their struggle against deforestation in 1973. Silent valley movement was launched against hydro-electric project on Kuthipuza a tributary of Periyar River to protect the dense evergreen forest region of Western Ghats. Baba Amte and Medha Patkar led the Movement of Narmada BachaoAndolan for the rehabilitation of the people who were to be evicted for building the project over Narmada river. The Supreme Court allowed The Gujarat

government to proceed with the project. Still the movement is simmering Baliyard Movement was against taking over Baliyard village's fertile land for testing missiles. There was successful protest by students and villagers against establishing Thermal Power Project by an American company namely "Cogantrix Company" in Nandikur Village near Mangalore, Karnataka. National level campaigns or movements to "Save Environment" could be launched with the active participation of political leaders, peasant leaders student leaders and leaders of various religious and cultural organizations.

Legislative measures for environment protection

The constitution of India makes provision for protection of environment. Article 48A states "The state shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest and wildlife of the country". The fundamental duties under article 51A(g) has also imposed a duty on every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife. Our constitution provides necessary safeguards for framing and enforcing environmental legislation.

The parliament has passed series of laws to control pollution and to protect environment. Man's fundamental right to life includes the right to a wholesome environment. There are many statutes to prevent and control pollution such as The water (Prevention and Control of Pollution Act)1974, The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution Act) 1981 The Indian Forest Act 1927 provides for protection and conservation of forests. The Environment Protection Act 1986 empowers Government of India to take all measures for protecting and improving the quality of environment and preventing and controlling environmental pollution.

Other major legislative measures undertaken by the government since 1972 are the following enactments for protecting the environment. The Indian Forest Act(1972), The Wildlife (protection) Act 1972, The Forests (conservation) Act (1980), The public liability insurance act (1991), The National Environmental Tribunal Act (1995) The National Environment Appellate Authority Act Policies (1997), National Forest Policy (1968), National Conservation Strategy And environmental development, Policy Statement on abetment of Pollution (1992), The Bio-diversity Act (2002), etc.

Goals towards sustainable development

(1)   To ensure that every person enjoys the benefit of a clean air, clean water and healthy environment.

(2)   To sustain a healthy economy which provides meaningful jobs high quality of life and reduce poverty

(3)   To use, conserve, protect and restore natural resources which provide environmental benefits for the present and future generations.

(4)   To create healthy communities which provide for education, health and opportunities to improve quality of life .

(5)   To move towards stabilization of population.

(6)   To take leadership in the development and implementation of global sustainable development policies.

(7)   To conserve natural resources

(8)   To develop nature friendly technology

(9)   Environmental education programme

(10)   Reduction in waste

(11)   Protecting soil from pollution

(12)   Reduce disparity in life style

(13)   By recycled goods

(14)   Reduce resource consumption

(15)   Reduce, recycle, reuse

(16)   Repeal or modify existing laws that hinder sustainability

(17)   Use environment friendly technology.

Strategies of intervention

Education and awareness is increasingly important from a global perspective of resource management in view of the unprecedented scale and speed of environment pollution and degradation ,and the depletion of natural resources . local, regional and global, air pollution , accumulation and distribution of toxic wastes , distruction and depletion of forests, soil and

water , depletion of the ozone layer and emission of ' green house' gases threaten the survival of humans and thousands of other living species ,the integrity of the earth and its bio-diversity,the security of nations and the heritage of the future generations.

If the objective of development is to improve the quality of life, then development and environment protection cannot be mutually exclusive. There is growing congestion due to unplanned development taking place in urban areas. Urban centres account for one fourth of the country's population. Mega cities like Bombay and Calcutta have been growing haphazard without planning. There is rampant growth of slums. Awareness is growing to deter the development which destroy's the green belt and deplete's ground water reserves. Development is meaningless unless it is sustainable.

Social activists and social workers play a crucial role in educating the illiterate masses and the public about the evil effects of environment pollution. Our basic task is to educate ourselves in order to be able to educate others. We have to take the lead in involving ourselves in issues that concern people and be the catalysts of a movement to protest against the forces of destruction of nature.

People's participation is the most important aspect for success in one's work. Work with client system would transform into an action system. The action system would involve the process of conscientization. Change from within is stronger than change from without. In working on issues of environment, social advocacy is an invaluable method of intervention. Publicizing public issues is a sure and effective way of drawing mass attention and sympathy to one's cause. Social advocacy would also involve lobbying at various levels in order to strengthen one's base of work. Lobbying has become an integral part of social action in gaining support.

The social activist will have to undertake awareness programmes which include discussions, talks, audio–visuals on environment degradation, problems and methods. The effort is to help the school and college students to identify their responsibility in preserving and protecting our common environment. Many school children have been motivated to hold exhibitions on environment pollution and degradation. Some schools managed to get

the declaration of their schools   as silent zones. Others have managed to get the garbage dumps cleared around their school. There is need for regular training workshops or environmental education and waste management for school teachers.

The role of college is to be aware of and assess the factors and values that shape the society. Much of   this is done through research, spelling out strategies of intervention and utilization of media, informing people that their crucial concern is not only their right but also their duty. There is pressing need for social workers and social activists to work as a team. They have to work with other professionals. Inter disciplinary functioning is the need of the hour.

Gandhian ideology is more relevant today than ever before. We have to choose between ahimsa and atom, non- violence and non-existence and between sarvodaya and sarvanasa (total annihilation) .

If we opt for no poverty society, we have to give up mass production in favour of production by masses. We have to build less violent, no poverty, no misery society. There should be shift of emphasis from poor relief to the empowerment of poverty groups. We want systemic change and not system maintenance. Robert Heil pronder, an eminent American sociologist suggests that, "socialism can still serve as the vision of society. Such a society might have the level of social welfare of Sweden, civil liberties of Holland, income distribution of Norway, the health care of Germany, the public culture of France and security of employment of Japan." Our social vision will foster a progressive movement from co-existence to cooperation, from anthyodaya to sarvodaya and from global over lordship to world citizenship.

Social development and any development for that matter cannot be achieved through populism, slogans or demands before a world body and through political economic or social manipulation. It needs to be evolved and re-evolved, cultured and re-cultured and worked and re-worked on a continuing basis. It needs to be consciously harnessed and pursued rather than casually assumed.

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