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Well-Off Men & The 'Unfortunate' Environment

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Introduction

Man has detached himself from the environment since the advent of 'The industrial revolution'. The "revolution" was fundamentally based on the fleecing and victimization of the Environment and human surroundings. Industries flourished and the human population and settlements grew without having a thought for the precious environment; it is evident from the loss of natural forests. The early industrialists and tycoons were blinded by the glitter coming from the currency coins they minted. They were not able to see that by cutting down the forests to make way for industries and their establishments they were undoing the work of nature. Nature through the medium of trees sequestered or fixed carbons through the decades in the form of starch. The industrialists cut down trees to make papers and packaging materials, though biodegradable but still amounted to clearing of trees. The industrial age brought with it the 'Plastic Age' where plastic was the preferred material for packing and making consumer durables and for making carry bags. The plastic age changed our life completely as it was more durable, lightweight, and waterproof than anything before but went on to become a dreaded poison for humanity in times to come. This is because plastic decomposes at an extremely slow rate and it's getting converted to micro or nano plastics and getting dissolved in water and as a consequence getting indirectly into our food chain. The effect of plastics is very evident these days and one of the great examples of the danger from plastic is the 'great pacific patch' which is 1.6 million square kilometers of debris that ends up in the ocean from the beaches and rivers or by the ships and boats. In all, it can be said that humans are the sole individuals to be responsible for damaging and degrading the environment. Today we live in atomic age where the environment is contaminated by nuclear radiation. The number of nuclear tests and nuclear disasters so far have polluted Earth's atmosphere.

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Indexed at **Manupatra**

Definition of Environment

The term 'environment' is derived from the French word 'Environner' which means to encircle something. Thomas Carlyle a Scottish philosopher and historian 1828 coined the term environment. Section 2(a) of the Environment Protection Act,1986 deals with the term 'environment' which is as follows "Environment includes water, air and land and the relationship which exists amongst and between water, air and land, and human beings, other living creatures, plants, micro-organisms, and property". Another definition given by Britannica is 'the conditions that surround someone or something: the conditions and influences that affect the growth, health, progress, etc., of someone or something.

The term Environment has different meanings as persons from different fields have approached the environment in their way. Such definitions can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The sum of all external conditions affecting the life, development, and survival of an organism.
- 2) All the external factors, conditions, and influences affect an organism or a biological community.
- 3) Surroundings in which an organization operates include air, water land, natural resources, flora, fauna, humans, and their interrelations.
- 4) The non-genetic conditions and circumstances that affect a person's conduct and health

From the above discussion, we can say that Environment contains various components which we can classify as -

- a) Atmosphere
- b) Organisms
- c) Mineral rocks
- d) Water
- e) Light

Indexed at **Manupatra**

All these factors interact with each other and an organism is continuously subjected to the effect of one factor modified by the other factors. Humans being an organism occupy a central position as the main organisms. After the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment also widely known as the Stockholm conference² focus is now on the impact of man on the environment. Scientists have begun to describe the current epoch as 'Anthropocene' rather than 'Eocene' or we can say that the Eocene epoch is over and the footprint of human activity has been in existence for so long that it is better to call the current epoch as Anthropocene³ but in Anthropocene not enough laws were and or are made for addressing environmental concerns. Even if laws are made, they are not followed strictly.

The western world had and is making laws for environmental concerns, and has stopped smoke emitting factories and even recently Germany shifted to cleaner energy and closed down its last coal mine. But the problem is that with the Asians and particularly in South Asia having a very large population and innumerable mouths to feed, there are innumerable problems to solve. South Asia is not the "third world" in fact it's the "new world" where everything needs to be done differently as compared to the western world. What the western nations have done is that they have shifted their industries and manufacturing plants to Asia to keep their environment clean and in the process make us sick so that their big pharma companies can sell us the cures for disease and sickness. Asian countries in the need for money and fast growth or simpler words "photocopy growth" accepted their industries by reducing or removing the duties. For this, the West devised the concept of the ease of doing index (it means which nation has fewer regulations that affect the doing of business there) in the early 2000s to lure the Asians to open up their markets for their manufacturing industries so that they can easily make their products and sale it worldwide. A nation that has a higher rank among the other nations in Ease of doing business is more conducive to doing business which means fewer regulations and easy to relocate or set up a new branch of big companies and industries offshore and in the process the West earns money and better environment and the host country gets polluted.

² 1972

³ Science.17 jul 2015. Vol 349, issue 6245

Indexed at **Manupatra**

Environmental Laws in India

Following are a few main environmental laws in India:

- 1) **India Forest Act, 1927**
- 2) **The Water (prevention and control of pollution), Act, 1974**
- 3) **The Air (prevention and control of pollution), Act 1981**
- 4) **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**

The abovementioned laws are the main laws relating to environmental concerns in India which were enacted to regulate and control environmental pollution in India but as we know so far, our environment has degraded even more than it was two decades ago. The reasons for the failure of environmental laws can be summarized as follows:

- 1) A large population is one of the prime reasons for pressure on the environment in the form of food requirements, an extension of agricultural lands, and the setting up of housing societies. All these require and press the need for drawing out more water from the ground water table without making a way for its replenishment.
- 2) **Lack of education.** It leads to unawareness that our environment is dying a slow death and how it “will” affect us in the long run. It also makes a person incapable to understand how he affects the environment and what he must not do to hurt it.
- 3) **Lack of concern for the environment and our coming new generations** (*the new generations who took birth and are taking birth are will and are facing diseases caused by air pollution*). Some people knowingly destroy the environment and think of themselves only that their life will anyway pass happily and have disregarded the life and their surroundings.
- 4) **Lackadaisical way of enforcing the laws.** The environmental law enforcement agencies have to face many hurdles if they go on to enforce the laws that may be from the large populace of an area or due to lack of funds.
- 5) **Corruption.** Corrupt environmental law enforcement agencies add up to the plight of the already dying environment.
- 6) **Economic growth at the cost of the environment.** The indiscriminate use of nature and natural resources for economic growth is like “digging our own grave”. Ultimately, we have to live in our

Indexed at **Manupatra**

surroundings and if it's all the aspects are destroyed in the name of growth where we will live, what we will eat and drink.

- 7) **Disregard for nature and wildlife.** This aspect calls for moral education in the way of respecting or venerating our environment.

The New Environmental Problems

Academic institutions have been teaching the environmental concerns right from our primary classes like air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, and noise pollution. But to these, there are a few new additional types of pollution directly and more severely affecting our lives which are:

- 1) **Oceanic acidification.** The ocean is a very vast area and takes up carbon dioxide in a much larger amount than a landmass due to its size. With the increase in carbon dioxide in the environment, oceans are absorbing more carbon than before leading to a decrease in their pH and as a consequence increase in their acidity. Increased acidity is harmful to the corals which are getting bleached. Coral is made up of calcium carbonate and inside corals, algae live in a symbiotic form which is of green color but increased acidification of water in oceans eats up the coral skeleton and as result, the algae are expelled leading to white-colored bleached corals. If coral reefs are getting bleached the life forms have nowhere to go and die ultimately. Coral reefs are called the “rainforest of the ocean” which means that they have the most biologically diverse life forms in the ocean that depend on coral reefs for food and habitat. Coral reefs are also protected from Tsunamis by acting as bulwarks. Once the coral reefs are gone, they cannot be replenished.
- 2) **Dead zones in ocean and seas.** Dead zones in oceans and seas are very large areas of water where there are no or reduced levels of oxygen and as a result, no life can thrive there thus called dead zones. Dead zones are a result of natural as well as anthropogenic causes.

[A] **Natural cause:** Upwelling or moving upward of nutrient-rich water in oceans to the surface leads to an increase in phytoplankton which depletes the oxygen level in the water.

[B] **Man-made cause:** Increase in the use of fertilizers in agricultural activities, increase in domestic sewage, and chemical-rich waters from industries all end up in rivers and finally in the ocean. This stimulates the viral growth of phytoplankton and the process is called

Indexed at **Manupatra**

Eutrophication. When the phytoplankton die their decomposition used more and more oxygen depletion of the portion of the water body of its oxygen.

- 3) **Microplastics pollution.** Microplastics are 5mm in diameter and are the most serious and modern form of pollution that we are facing today. It's so serious that microplastics have found their way into our food system and make their way into our bloodstream. They are produced by the clothes industry, personal care products, synthetic clothes, washing of clothes due to abrasion, physical natural abrasion, temperature, UV rays, the action of waves in water bodies, etc.
- 4) **Light pollution.** It is not possible to see stars in some of the megacities at night and that is because of light pollution. It also affects the insects and birds which depend so much on light for their reproductive and daily activities; it affects the circadian rhythms of humans also. At times there are places and areas which do not require lighting when no one is around like highways and expressways but the start lights are turned on, this can be solved by using sensors for moving objects like cars i.e., to say when the car moves on the road the sensors may detect their presence and are automatically lit on and off, this will save the electricity bill of the government too.
- 5) **Loss of oxygen from water bodies like lakes due to global warming.** Warm oceanic water is more buoyant than cold water and holds less oxygen. Warm water also raises oxygen demand for living organisms consequently less oxygen is available to marine life, oceanic oxygen level fell around 2% in mid 20th century and is expected to fall by 3-4% by 2100 (iucn.org). The effect will be mass loss of marine biodiversity and disruption of the food system. Many coastal communities of the human population depend on seafood for their protein requirements.
- 6) **Water clogging.** The last five years have shown us the increasing problem of water clogging in Indian cities which paralyzes the cities and brings diseases. The reason for water clogging is:
 - a) **Loss of wetlands.** Wetlands are marshy areas like littorals and mangroves which store water and help in flood control, groundwater recharge, and water filtration and are a source of diverse aquatic plants. With the growth of habitable societies and the real estate sector, lands are corruptly and indiscriminately sold for construction purposes. The wetlands are filled with landfills to convert them into sellable pieces of land. Moreover, city garbage is being thrown into marshy areas destroying them

Indexed at **Manupatra**

- b) **Construction of concrete jungles.** Today whole of the land we see is just plastered with cement to make way for roads houses, offices, malls, etc. In doing so we are undoing the process by which rainfall leaches into the soil and giving rise to manmade water clogging problems.
- c) **Lack of proper draining in cities, especially unavailability of drains at the sides of roads.** Unplanned development in many of the tier2 and tier 3 cities have led to the construction of roads without any drainage facilities. The government is careless about water clogging and when the roads are clogged with water, they wake up to the cause of the lack of drainage system and start making drains leading to traffic jams visible on roads.

Constitutional Provisions of the Environment in India

The Constitution of India makes the following provisions to protect the environment-

- a. By directing the government
- b. By prescribing fundamental rights to people
- c. By making citizens duty-bound for environmental protection and improvement
- d. By adding articles by way of amendments, these can be explained in the following points:
 - 1) **Article 47** of the Indian constitution says that the state must improve public health.
 - 2) **Article 48A** added after the **42nd amendment** made in 1976 directs the state to protect and improve forests, wildlife, and the environment of the nation.
 - 3) Under the Union list, our parliament is empowered to participate in international efforts for the environmental cause.
 - 4) **Article 51A** added by the **42nd amendment** enjoins a duty on every citizen to protect and improve the environment and wildlife.
 - 5) **Article 21** provides for the right to life which also includes the right to a clean environment.
 - 6) Environmental protection was added to the constitution by the **42nd amendment act 1976**.

Indexed at **Manupatra**

- 7) Writs are such a power that concerned citizens can approach law courts to file petitions to protect forests, wildlife, and the environment.

Relationship between Human Rights and Environment

Human rights cannot be realized in an unsafe and polluted environment. Right to a healthy environment is increasingly gaining importance in the current scenario. Where the upcoming generations are diseased and unhealthy how can there be human rights? The paramount condition for the realization of human rights must be good health as there is a well-known old saying 'health is wealth'. It means without health there cannot be the enjoyment of wealth and happiness drawn from wealth. Few of the human rights under the UN declaration of human rights have been compared to environmental problems and how humans may be affected by them: **Shelter** is a great requirement for a human to sustain his or her life, in the coming world where the islands will drown in ocean and the coastal areas will be submerged or get flooded frequently there cannot be shelter. **Food** comes under article 25 of the united declaration of human rights, with increased use of pesticides and the use of genetically modified foods have no doubt increased the food production but in doing so have raised a question on their safety for consumption from time to time. **Right to life** is the key to human rights without it there cannot be human rights, it includes good health but with the increased frequency of floods, cyclones have put health and medical treatment under pressure. **Right to movement and residence** is also a human right, this is also affected by environmental problems for example the sinking islands have snatched this right from the people living there.

Indexed at **Manupatra**

Conclusion

Much work has already been done and many laws enacted and implemented since independence related to environment and environmental concerns; but with time our challenges concerning the environment have changed and increased. Presently we are at mild risk of being wiped out due to the “*sixth mass extinction*” which is still preventable but if we do not act now and do not realize the potential threat and seriousness of the problem, we are facing now the in the upcoming decades it will be next to impossible to tackle the threat coming from mass migrations, diseases, regional conflicts for resources, scarcity of water. It is time to make new laws with stricter provisions.

