

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Environment is that set of surroundings which influences the life and activities of an animate object, human or animals. It consists of the totality of all those external conditions and influences which affect the life and development of a living being. As P. Gisbert says, "environment is anything immediately surrounding an object and exerting a direct influence on it". It is of two types: (1) natural and physical or geographical environment, and (2) man-made (social or technological) environment otherwise called as material culture. In so far as natural environment is concerned, "generally speaking, the agro-pastoral civilization respects the landscape and strives to adopt itself to it while industrialization demolishes it and transforms it into a threat to life completely.

Keywords: *Environment, Industrialization, Geographical Environment, Technological Environment.*

Introduction

If environmental destruction increases at the same rate as GDP, the damage will be appalling. As far as the human species is concerned, it could prove terminal. Hence, the call to make growth environmentally "sustainable". This leads us to the question of environment in its various aspects- from its pollution to its conservation involving various measures needed for. In this paper we discuss briefly the dangers to environment and environment protection with particular reference to environmental education especially in the context of India.

Modern Economic Development and Environment

The celebrated American sociologist E. W. Burgess emphasizes that as the need for land for various purposes in urban areas increases, serious ecological changes do take place. Increasing urbanization in itself creates a number of problems and crises. Actually, urban society is constituted by socially heterogeneous, culturally plural and physically non-stable population. Excessively dependent on inanimate energy, it tends to exploit nature for short-term gains ignoring long-term dangers. The greatest harm to environment comes through inverted science and technology in form of Industrial Revolution. In the blind race for economic development that began thereafter everyone wanted to overtake each other. The resources were indiscriminately used. The result was a cruel destruction of plants and herbs which has disturbed the ecological balance and has resulted in expansion of deserts, erosion of fertile soil, flood, extinction of many species of flora and fauna, etc.

Need for Environmental Awareness

The most important cause of the shift of population to urban areas in India is not the glamour of the better life as such but the better availability of education, health care, employment and security of life and property. If these facilities are provided in rural areas, the shift of population to a large extent will be checked. But under the present conditions in India we have to accept that the trend towards urbanization in the country cannot be arrested, nor it is even desirable to check it. We have, therefore, to take better care of environment which must be kept livable for the human race. The ecological balance has to be maintained and this issue needs an urgent and adequate attention.

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Environmental Awareness in Ancient India

In India even Hindu literature shows that environmental awareness was realized even by the pre-vedic man. John Marshall in his monumental work 'Mohanjodaro and the Indus Civilization' refers to the tree worship while discussing the religion of the people and interprets some of seals as portraying tree goddesses. The underground drainage system in Harrapan civilization is a clear proof of our awareness to hygienic and sanitary conditions for protection of human health against possible hazards. Ecological awareness became more manifest among humans in Vedic Period. It must be noted that ancient Indians looked to the universe as an integrated whole. Man, animal, plant life and all other materials were seen as an interlinked phenomenon. Every activity of human beings whether it be inter-human relationship or its contacts with animals and plants, has seen as indivisible and interrelated. The following Sloka vividly explains the complete harmony between the nature and the human being: Animals and nature were revered along with Gods. *Hanuman* and *Ganapathi* are most powerful deities. *Peepal*, *Ganga* and *Himavan*, *Tulsi* and *Banyan* trees are considered holy even today.

Charak Samhita, the classical literature of Ayurvedic medicines is surcharged with environmental set up of sylvan culture of Himalayas. *Charak Samhita* has dealt with the ecological aspects in characterising treatment in *Svasthanavarta*, i.e., general personal hygiene and botanical kingdom. The group of devine herbs have been referred to in *Ayurveda* with deep insight in preserving environmental balance for the benefit of personal health and pollution-free atmosphere. The planting of trees has been proclaimed as conducive to great merit in *Puranas*. *Agnipurana* and *Varahpurana* mention the benefits derived from trees. *Durga Shaptasati* prescribes-“So long as the mother Earth is full of trees and forests with hills, this would continue to nurse and rear the human race”. Our old Sanskrit literature abounds in reference to forests, 'Naimisharanya', 'Asokavana', 'Champaranya', 'Dandakarayan', etc. figure prominently in the epics-*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Even in medieval India, national parks and gardens were common features particularly during Mughal period. The planting of saplings of shady fruit trees along public roads was emphasized in the reforms of Shershah. Trees and flowering plants were looked at not only as the objects of beauty, enjoyment and relaxation, but as the patrons of human welfare as apart from food and shelter, the plants were used for medicines, furniture, clothing, etc.

Why Environmental Education?

It is during the last three centuries and particularly since the Industrial Revolution in which man has made galloping progress, and this exploitation of nature has led us to a crisis. In this period man has plundered the natural treasures with the help of modern technology. But this exploitation of nature has threatened the very existence of human being on this planet Earth. In the recent past industrial (Bhopal gas tragedy, India), nuclear (Chernobyl radiation catastrophe, U.S.S.R) and maritime disaster (oil leakage on coast of France and Alaska) have forced the scientist, sociologist and independent research workers to realize the seriousness of the impending catastrophe. The revelation of hole in the ozone layer over Antarctica, Green-house effect, destruction of rain-forest, poverty and population are the problems of greater magnitude for *Homo sapiens*. In fact, since time immemorial environment has been man's permanent teacher and is so even today. Mankind would never have got anywhere without the vital knowledge about environmental phenomenon. Thus, an understanding of the environment is indispensable for its rational management. This could enable us to predict better the interrelated efforts of some of the challenges facing the world today, which may include demographic changes, availability of food, fodder, energy and raw materials, economic development and utilization of new technology, etc. Better understanding of environment can only be achieved through environmental education. That is why environmental education is so important and essential at present. So, the global need of environmental education as a measure for conservation and pollution-free environment for sustenance of life and healthy living is felt.

Nature and Objectives of Environmental Education

Though no single precise and universally acceptable definition has emerged as yet, environmental education is broadly a programme dealing with the dissemination of knowledge about environment and the impact of human beings upon it. The environment here includes animals and plants and their ecological systems which are closely bound to the livelihood of people. It enables people to enjoy good health and high quality of life. “A further basic aim of environmental education is clearly to show the economic, political and ecological interdependence of the modern world, in which the decisions and actions by different countries can have international repercussions. Environmental education, in this regard, helps to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity among countries and regions as the foundation for new international order which will guarantee the conservation and improvement of environment.”

Goals of Environmental Education in India

A deeper analysis shows poor response of major population of the country to environmental education. There are certain problems which are faced by the people such as: (i) Deficiency of environmental education knowledge among enforcing authorities, (ii) Lack of responsibility due to ecological illiteracy on part of community, (iii) Lack of provision for training of professional manpower in the field of environmental education, (iv) Non-availability of information on environmental issues, (v) Lack of coordination among the administrative institutions and educational institutions on environmental activities.

In the light of the above problems importance of non-formal education, i.e., environmental education for general public planners and administrators is imperative. Unless the public in general and decision makers and planners become aware of problems and consequences of their actions, little success would be achieved in attaining the ultimate goal of environmental education—the improvement of quality of life, since it is a theory of education which recognizes value clarification through self-awareness, knowledge through environmental awareness and synthesis through life experiences.

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