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Prof. J. P. Naik and Dr. Chitra Naik

Founder of the Institute

Education and Society

(Special Issue on the theme of 'Sustainable Development through Social Science and Commerce Perspective' for one day International Conference Organized by LBS College Satara)

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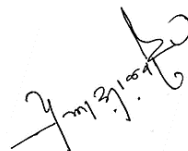
Editorial

We are very happy to release here our another one special Issue on the theme of “Special Issue on the theme of ‘Sustainable Development through Social Science and Commerce Perspective’ for one day International Conference Organized by LBS College Satara”.

Dr. Rajendra Shejval, Dr. Pratibha Chikmath, Dr. Dipak Jadhav, Dr. Pravin Jadhav and Dr. Satish Vyavahare have taken lots of efforts into success the said national conference very sincerely.

This conference covered different important subthemes i.e., Social Values in stimulating organic production involvement in farming, Micro-finance for sustainable development, Agriculture and new Techniques, Sustainable Development for inclusive Growth, The role of Social Sciences and Sustainable Development, Evolution and Sustainable Development, Social Psychology and Sustainable Future, Impact of Gender Discrimination on the institution of Marriage, Entrepreneurial Skill for Rural entrepreneurship etc. This conference expressed the comments on the current issues in social science and commerce management.

All the themes chosen by the college expressed different views on contemporary issues and their solutions. So it is very grateful that the college organized the International conference and contributed in to promotion of the research scholars and academicians. It was very great academic activity. All the best for the future educational activities of the college.



Prof. (Dr.) Prakash B. Salavi
Executive Editor,
‘Education and Society’,
Indian Institute of Education, Pune

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Concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ and Delineation of Environment in Indian History: A Holistic Approach

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Abstract:

Environment and ecology play prominent and pivotal roles in the evolutionary phases of mankind since existence on the earth. It has appeared as one of the most determining elements into the full-fledged growth or key factors in disintegration and downfall of human civilizations. The phenomenon of the environment has acquired an important role and relevance during contemporary times. It was primarily due to the ecological imbalances that are predominantly generated by human actions. Human being's adaptations with the natural environment are explicit indicators of socio-economic, cultural, art, architecture and literary discourse and development. For the study of food traditions, habits, complexion, dress, environmental and ecological influences have seemed to be the key determining factors of any communities, provinces and nations around the globe. Environmental and ecological footprints which are popularly known as ecological heritage elaborated by a large number of environmental scientists, anthropologists and archaeologists. Human being's linkages with nature and indispensable relationships are the broad area of studies in natural sciences but being man as a social animal its comprehensive study has been incorporated in anthropology, sociology, ecology, philosophy, economics and history etc. Due to scientific and technological advancements in the last two decades it is becoming a multidisciplinary research area attracting young scholars emphasizing societal dimensions of environment and ecology with anticipation of elementary understandings of natural sciences. There is enormous historical literature including religious and non-religious that have elaborated, emphasized on the preservation and protection of environment and ecology. The present research article is a sincere endeavor to briefly explore the depiction of the environment and ecology from historical perspective and holistic approach. It would further boost scholarly research in the emerging field of environmental and ecological history in India.

Keywords: Human Civilizations, Ecological Imbalance, Natural Environment, Environmental and Ecological Footprints, Ecological Heritage, Environmental and Ecological History, Holistic Approach

Introduction:

‘Sustainable Development’ is becoming a popular term in almost all

academic disciplines. The UN Commission's report popularly known as 'Our Common Future' (Brundtland Report, 1987) defines the term as thus "Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987:44). However, its roots can be embedded in the India historical literature. The context of 'sustainable development' has been referred to several times in the planning and policies in the context of nature in India. The aspect of environmental conservation has been reflected in indigenous traditional knowledge of India (Deshpande, 2021:55). Indian historical literature since ancient times has delineated on the human being's harmonious relationships with nature. India is a vast country having a continental dimension. It is represented by different eco-zones (Mirsa, 2007:01) Although environmental history is a recent trend, depiction and delineation of nature (now often termed as an 'environment' as a separate field) in Indian history goes back to the proto-historic period during the Indus Valley Civilization. Earlier environmental issues have been depicted in the forms of nature and its role in the shaping of historical phenomena. The interaction of human beings with natural resources, without which life is impossible. In earlier days, many historians have expressed a strong environmental determinism to elaborate man's indispensable interaction with nature. Too much emphasis has been given on climate, soil and geographical specifications in shaping human civilizations and societies (Sarkar, 2008:45). This article explores briefly the delineation of environment and ecology in Indian history since ancient to modern times as follows:

Ancient Period:

The Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3rd millennium BCE), originated in the north-western part of the Indian sub-continent which is considered the first civilization of India. From the excavated sites and explored materials it is evident that it was an 'urban' civilization and flourished mostly around cities and towns. The people of the Indus valley civilization had given emphasis on large scale sanitation and environment (Patra, 2016:43). The archaeological evidence of Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Lothal and the recent excavations around the Ganga valley proved about the fundamental ritual importance accorded to water and its fertility (Vatsyayan, 1992: 156-180). However, regarding its disintegration there are several theories put forth by scholars recently. It is generally accepted fact, that ecological or environmental unconsciousness of the Indus Valley peoples seems to be one of the crucial reasons attributed to disintegration or downfall of the Indus Valley Civilization as argued by scholars like B. K. Thaper, Koyner and Jawaharlal Nehru University Professor Shereen Ratnagar etc. in a 'Environmental History Reader' (2015) published recently by Delhi based 'Centre for Science and Environment' (CSE) (Narain, 2015: 120-24). Ancient Indian traditions and customs had a great reverence for the environment and worshiped different objects, manifestations of nature with great devotion and dedication. Ancient Indian literature is enriched with

enormous references to different elements of the environment, its management, preservation and protection. The Vedic, Puranic, Jain and Buddhist traditions established harmonious relationships centuries ago with ecology. The foreign travelers like Megasthenes, Pliny, the unknown author of 'Periplus of the Erythraean Sea', Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-Tsing etc., who visited India at different times refers to different aspects of the environment in their eye witness traveling experiences (Patra, 2016:39-40). J. Donald Hughes, one of the distinguished environmental historians mentioned thus, 'the accounts of India preserved by historians of Alexander including general descriptions of environment' (Hughes, 1998: 72). He further stated, 'Ancient Greek and Latin writings on India ecology shows that after the 4th Century BC there was a decline in critical scientific investigation of the available evidence' (Ibid: 82-83).

The epics like the 'Ramayana' (c.1000/900 BCE) and the 'Mahabharata' (c.900/800 BCE) at several places refer to the environment. The Garhwal Himalaya is often described as 'Devbhumi' and 'Tapobhumi' in the Hindu scriptures and epics (Sharma, 2014:98). The 'Rigveda' is supposed to be considered as an oldest manuscript dealing with the relationship of environment and human beings, but the 'Atharvaveda' has dealt magnificently concerned with various elements of environment and showed more concern for ecology. Even the Aryans of the Vedic period were aware of the plants (flora) and animals (fauna) (Goel, 2003: 46). In the Hindu philosophy and metaphysics, it is believed that the human body is composed of five elements (Panchabhutas) namely air (Marut), water (Apah), ether/space Vyoma), earth (Kshit) and fire/light/heat/energy (Tej). Of the five Mahayajnas or sacrifices to be performed by a Hindu householder, the 'Bhuta Yajna' was the most significant innovation that involved daily offering of food to animals, birds, and other creatures for the purpose of maintaining an ecological balance. Several literary documents and scriptures have explored sustainable linkages with man and nature. The 'Rig-Veda' describes several elements of the 'eco-system' which were later discovered by modern scientists. Cutting or uprooting the green, lush trees have been described as a sinful deed; as it can be harmful to the food chain and ultimately leads to instability in the ambience. Some of the Vedic deities representing the phenomenon of nature are: Indra, Maruts (the storm deities), Vayu (the god of wind), Parjanya (the god of rain and water), Jal (the god of water), Prithvi (the earth), Agni (the fire god), Surya (the Sun) etc. Many rivers have been praised in the 'Nadistuti' (prayer of river) hymns of the 'Rigveda'. The river Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati are found as the holiest places in Indian socio-cultural and religious customs, traditions and ethos. The 'Yajurveda' primarily contains information about rituals. It focuses on the protection of animals as they are extremely important and helpful to the environment. The 'Atharvaveda' states the relationship between green plants and the sun in maintaining the pleasant atmospheric conditions required for eternal life on this planet.

The teachings and doctrines of Jainism and Buddhism propagated by their respective founders namely Vardhamana Mahavira and Gautama Buddha respectively during the 6th Century BCE are closely related to environmental concerns. Both Jainism and Buddhism propagated a gentle and non-aggressive attitude towards nature and sensible use of natural resources. The principle of 'ahimsa' (non-violence) of Jainism was practiced not only for human beings, but all living creatures including animals and plants. In other words, without killing or destroying plants or animals one can help in maintaining the ecological balance. The early Buddhist text too mentions three different kinds of agricultural fields such as superior, middling and inferior quality along with reference to the knowledge of irrigation (Patra,2016:41-48). Buddha regarded the environment as interrelated to man so much he compared the growth of trees and plants similar to the growth of man. (Satyapala, 2011:126) Several Buddhist literary works explore Buddhism as an ecocentric religion. The King Ashoka, who believed in Buddhism, placed several species of wild animals under protection. It is worth mentioning in Indian history that its first recorded historic phenomenon of a government policy in written form for conservation and protection of forest and wild animals (Gautam, 2014:93). Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' explores the ancient polity; comprising a compendium of 14 books. Among 14 the 02 books dedicated to the portrayal of the environmental provisions (Deshpande, 2021: 57). Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', (3rd Century BC) manual on polity mentions princely hunting reserves and elephant preserves are for capturing elephants for the army (Gadgil, 2016:151). The proper and clean maintenance of public sanitation was considered to be the duty of everyone and any defaulter would be punished for an offense. Hindu society did not even consider it proper to throw dust on public paths and places. Kautilya wrote the nature of punishment thus;

“The punishment of one eight Pana should be awarded to those who throw dust on roads. If latrine is thrown or caused near a temple, well or pond, sacred place or government building, then the punishment should increase gradually by one Pana in each case”. (Dwivedi, 216:179-80).

This ethical concern itself proves how during ancient times India was environmentally conscious. Environmental pollution was identified in the Hindu scriptures many centuries ago. 'Charak', author of the 'Charaka Samhita', a classical text on Indian medicine wrote about 'vikriti' (pollution) mentions air pollution particularly as a cause of many diseases and warned people about side effects of it. In brief, environmental and ecological concerns references are widely available and it is elaborated in historical literature (Ibid:181).

Medieval Period:

During the medieval period there were a number of descriptions by court historians and rulers that showed close relationships with environment and ecology. In fact, the Sultanate and Mughal rulers' in their memoirs had depicted

geographical conditions of India. Therefore, we can guess the situations of the natural environment. Dr. Shirin Moosavi in his work 'Man and Nature in Mughal India' has illustrated numerous examples of how the natural environment determined the economic and commercial lifestyles during the Mughal period (Kothekar, 2014: 290). The Mughal ruling class did not have a privilege and monopoly over geographical landscape and natural resources. Ecological diversity was ensured and enjoyed by almost all social organizations. Hence, it can be argued that environmental elements influenced greatly in the nature of socio-economic and cultural developments in the empire) (Sigh, 2008: 31-48). Mughal emperors were generally fond of hunting wild animals. From Akbar to Aurangzeb there were a number of instances of royal hunting described by court historian Abul Fazl in his 'Akbarnama'. One can guess the wildlife and contemporary passions of ruling dynasties in India (Divyabhanusinh, 2014:269-91).

Modern Period:

Indian historians had been initiated to give importance to the environment in their writings due to two major reasons namely impact of 'Annals School' on the several historians and subsequently an emergence of environmental movements in India. Dr. M. K. Dhavlikar, a leading archaeologist had attempted in his several works which confined only influences of man on environment rather than explorations of nature-based conflicts. Hence, these writings could not bring in the paradigms of environmental history. However, the movements like the 'Chipko' (1973-74) in the Himalaya region paved the way and encouraged largely towards writings on the environment by Indian scholars. Due to impacts of environmental movements, historians often focused on 'forests and water'. Secondly, they had given huge importance to 'British Imperialism' in their interpretations. In fact, it is crystal clear that colonial policies have had a deep influence on environmental aspects and historical research on environment and ecology. There is a difference of opinions regarding the Pre-British Period as an environmentally 'golden age' in Indian history. Dr. Ramchadra Guha and Dr. Madhav Gadgil, pioneering environmental historians and scholars respectively in their masterpiece 'This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India' (1992) was written as an environmentally golden age. However, Richard Grove, a leading historian of Cambridge University in his 'Green Imperialism' (1995) had strongly opposed the above notion and made counter conclusions. He opined that like Indian Rulers British rulers had interfered in the environment and ecology of the Indian subcontinent as well. Indigenous ruler's policies towards natural resources were continued by the British administrators. As far as the colonial forest management is concerned again Guha and Gadgil summarized as it was based on commercially exploitative policy. To meet their growing needs a separate forest department was set up, framed 'forest laws' for easy access and legitimate rights over community forest resources by them (Patil, 2010: 168-75). During British Colonialism India

changed from being a textile exporter to a textile importer, and at the same time, started exporting agricultural goods like opium, indigo, cotton and tea to Britain and Company's sphere of influence in China (Roy, 2018:40). It is regarded as one kind of 'Ecological Imperialism'. To understand above colonial policies, one should promote the holistic approach by demarcating academic disciplinary boundaries. It further facilitates the study of global climate change, culture, values, environmental awareness, eco-friendly lifestyles from elementary level of school education to higher education (Rai, 2022:60).

Conclusion:

The depiction and glimpses of the environment and ecology (in the form of nature) in the historical discipline is very old since prehistory. It is diverse and one of the broader areas of study in environmental humanities. It is a need of time to inculcate sustainable use of natural resources through understanding man-environment harmonious relationships in earlier days. One can identify and explore emerging research areas in a holistic way in almost all academic disciplines in accordance with NEP (National Education Policy)-2020. Environmental and ecological issues should be brought under historical explorations and discourses for making society conscious regarding environmental conservation and restoration. The crisis of the present environment would be understood by the perceptions of what explored, narrated, depicted in the past. There should be a constant dialogue between the past and present in environmental studies. It would bridge the gap between environmental studies and history. Thus, the study of the environment in recent times is not only confined to the scientists engaged in various branches of biology and ecology, rather calls for an active and independent role of historians to develop a new paradigm for the future.

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