
INTEGRATION OF SOCIETY AND STATE ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: A clean environment is a prerequisite for healthy living. In the recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on the protection of the environment and conservation of the resources for sustainable development. Over the years the government has taken various efforts in this regard. Each of the Five Year Plans emphasised on various environmental issues and the National Environmental Policy gives guidelines for sustainable development.

Man has lived with nature ever since his existence on this earth and nature has taken care of all his needs. In this process he has both used and misused nature. Due to various reasons, there has been a degradation of the environment and its causes and consequences are varied. It has been recognised nationally and internationally that protecting the environment and reducing health hazards are very important. The rural and urban areas have different environmental problems. Various initiatives have been taken to handle them. Issues of environmental pollution, waste management, over population and urbanization are some of the major concerns with regard to environment. Equally important is their effect on human health and human life in the years to come. The paper focusses on these environmental concerns and highlights on the role of the citizens, society and the State in handling the challenge of protecting and preserving the environment.

Keywords: Environmental Protection, Sustainable Development, Waste Management, Urbanization.

Introduction: A clean environment is a prerequisite to healthy living. Man has lived with nature ever since his existence in this planet. In the process, he has both used and misused the environment. The increase in population and the development of science and technology has necessitated man to indulge in activities which have had an effect on his surroundings. The changing lifestyle of people has led to an increase in different kinds of pollutions which have an adverse effect on the environment. The threats to the environment come in the form of air pollution, water pollution, and degradation of the soil due to increased use of pesticides and insecticides and climatic changes.

The environment affects human health to a large extent. The life of man depends much on his living conditions. The air, the water, the food, the climatic conditions and the surroundings have a direct impact on the health of people. In this context it becomes very important that man lives his life in a good environment and uses the resources of nature in a more sustainable manner.

Constitutional Provisions: The Indian Constitution guarantees the Right to life and personal liberty to the citizens. The Directive Principles of State Policy incorporated in Part IV of the Indian constitution aims at socio-economic justice to the people emphasising on the principle of a welfare state. Article 48 A included in Directive Principles of State Policy says "the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country". Part IV A of the Constitution which includes the Fundamental duties specifies the duty of the citizens to protect and

preserve the environment. Though the Directive Principles are non-justiciable rights, it is the duty of the State to keep these noble principles in mind while making policies.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendment Acts added the XI and XII Schedules to the Indian constitution. It specifies the functions of the rural local governments and urban local governments with regard to managing the environment. The functions of the rural local government include agriculture, land improvement, land consolidation and soil conservation, water management, animal husbandry, dairying, poultry and fisheries, social forestry, minor forest produce, drinking water, fuel and fodder, non-conventional energy sources and health and sanitation among others. The Urban local governments have the responsibility of urban planning, regulation of land use, water supply for domestic, industrial and commercial purposes, public health, sanitation, conservancy and solid waste management, urban forestry, protection of the environment and promotion of ecological aspects, slum improvement and up gradation and prevention of cruelty to animals among other functions.

Various policies of the government show the environmental concern of the state to manage the environment for a sustainable development. The National Forest Policy, National Water Policy, The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, The Environmental (Protection) Act, Hazardous Waste(Management and Handling) Rules, The Forest (Conservation) Act, Wildlife Protection Act are some

of the significant steps of the government to protect our environment.

Environmental Problems of Rural and Urban Areas:

The environmental problems of the rural areas are different from that of the urban areas. Access to safe drinking water is one of the main concerns in the rural areas. Contamination of lakes and rivers is a major threat to the health of the rural people. Air pollution is also an issue because of the cooking methods used in rural areas. Proper sanitation is another major challenge especially when people do not use proper toilets or sometimes the houses do not have toilets at all. Added to these factors are the illiteracy, ignorance and poverty of the rural people.

The urban areas on the other hand have other kind of problems caused mainly due to over population and overcrowding. Migration of people to the cities leads to the increase in urban population and the low income people settle down in slums. The living conditions in the slums is very poor. Major challenge of the urban areas is air pollution and noise pollution also due to the increase in motor vehicles and industries. Access to safe drinking water and adequate supply of water are few other challenges. Proper maintenance of sewage and sanitation are areas which require a lot of planning. Places of tourist attraction have even more increased environmental issues.

The climate changes in the recent years have become a major issue of concern for the world as it affects the everyday life of the people. The effects of these climatic changes has a lasting effect on the social and economic activities of the people and their overall development. It has an impact on the water, food, health, livelihood and access to resources . It has also led to extreme weather conditions ranging from heat waves in some places to floods in some others. People also witness extreme weathers at the same place at different times.

Over population is one major challenge with respect to environment management. The increase in population and the changing lifestyle of people poses concerns to the environment as it leads to the challenge of providing adequate resources for all the people. People try to get maximum benefit out of the available resources which sometimes also leads to misuse of the available resources. Equally important is the management of the waste of this huge population which needs proper planning and appropriate strategy. Home, offices, shops, industries and institutions contribute equally in generating solid waste. Solid waste management is an important area of concern with regard to environmental protection.

The environmental problems are not due to any one factor but a number of factors work together in degrading the environment. Handling these

environmental problems requires a multi dimensional approach.

Sustainable Development: Sustainable development is considered to be important so that the environment can meet the needs of not only the present but also the future generations. The United Nations has reiterated that all the countries of the world should focus on sustainable development so that the environment will benefit the future generations.

As the environment is changing day by day, working towards sustainable development is a challenging task. The changes in the environment are caused both by nature itself and also by man. If we aim only at conserving the environment it is one aspect where we can take measures to preserve the environment for the future. But the fact that environment has to cater to the natural and economic needs of the present generation and also has to be preserved for the future generation is the real issue of concern with regard to sustainable development.

Role of the Individuals, Society and the State: The citizens should act with responsibility so that we reduce the further degradation of our environment and save the earth for the future generations. This requires awareness and knowledge of the environmental facts. Problems of pollution and waste management are dealt with people every day. It is necessary to create awareness among the rural people with regard to environmental issues and to sensitise the urban population to prevent misuse of resources and preserve the environment. As a society the environmental resources have to be judiciously used and that has to be practiced right from home. The students can take up the awareness creating effort. They can reach out to the masses as part of the extension activity of their educational course. The non - governmental organizations also have the advantage of working closely with the local population and so they can address the environmental problems more effectively. Some voluntary organizations are involved in this process.

As the State integrates environmental concerns into policies and programmes there will be positive results. All social and economic development projects and activities should give priority to environmental concerns. The media can play a very important and effective role with regard to creating environmental awareness. As the people are with the media everyday, it can reach them most efficiently. The consequences of environmental degradation and the health hazards of poor environmental conditions can be portrayed.

Thus protecting the environment is not the duty of one individual or one group. It has to be an integrated effort of the society and the state so that we evolve a multi dimensional strategy to protect our

environment and enable a sustainable development. Our effort in this regard can only ensure that as citizens of the nation we fulfil our fundamental duty in the appropriate way.

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