



Environmental Protection and Economic Growth

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Abstract: *The present paper is an attempt to search the moral ways to maintain the balance between the two through the guidelines on environmental ethics. For the above purpose, this paper has been divided into three parts. The first part will try to answer the question of whether economic growth is detrimental to the environmental cause, I will also try to present a brief description of environmental deterioration, attempts to check it, obstruction seems to be grasped at the fronts of economic growth and the connections and relations between the two could be underlined. In the second part, we shall try to see the consequences of economic values preference with reference to the environmental cause and in the third part of the present paper, we shall try to discuss the Indian and Western ways of sustainable development to maintain a balance between the two. In the concluding remarks, we shall try to examine the moral strategies meant for maintaining a balance between economic growth and environmental protection that are suitable for the present scenario.*

Key Words: guidelines, environmental, ethics, whether economic growth, detrimental, protection.

Whenever we think or talk about environmental issues in terms of danger and deterioration, it is generally felt that excessive use of harmful technology and scientific ventures made for rapid development and economic growth are one of the most important factors responsible for the catastrophe we are bound to face today. Rapid economic growth at the regional level has also invited activities like rapid forest cutting leading towards deforestation, construction of small and big dams leading to vulnerability and fragility of areas, and tempering the natural waterways resulting in some devastating results of floods. It appears that environmental protection and economic growth are contradictory to each other and the attempt for one has to meet the challenges of the other one. But at the same time, we require both in the present scenario for economic growth is necessary to meet the challenges projected by the global competitive market and we cannot afford to risk the life and livelihood of ourselves and future generations so we have to protect the environment. Thus, the fundamental requirement of the era is to maintain a balance between conducive and least polluted

environment- air and water and efforts made for economic growth.

Is Economic Growth Detrimental to Environmental Concerns?

The economic growth and concern for the environment seem to be having ethically opposite values rather than contradicting each other. Peter Singer has explained it through examples implied in the favour of building a dam that tempers and blocks the natural flow of water. The benefits listed for favoring dams' construction enlist mainly economic growth and energy use of unutilized water resources for more economic growth in terms of directly providing employment for three to five years for thousands, longer-term employment for twenty to thirty, the establishment of energy needs for more than a decade and consequently it would encourage the establishment of energy-intensive industry thus further contributing to the employment and economic growth.

But the cost of the anticipated economic growth is more than it has anticipated. The natural flow of the river itself attracts the more daring white-water rafters, deep in the shelter valleys, there is a



home of rare species and vegetation, it is the home of many endangered species that has seldom been found outside the valley, there may be other plants and animals as well but no one knows, for scientist are yet to investigate the region fully. The views of Peter Singer have been reflected by Baskhtanovsky, William James, and Erich Fromm.

The rapid economic growth is considered to hammer the concern for environmental protection and many have accused that human beings' greed to acquire more and more material comfort has put a threat to the entire humanity. This particular feeling about the practical uses and implications of scientific inventions otherwise inspired by purely intellectual motives invites the moral attention, has been clearly expressed by William James in the following words; "...the scientific tendency in critical thought, though inspired at first purely intellectual motives, has opened an entirely unexpected range of practical utilities to our astonishing view. Galileo gave us accurate clocks and accurate artillery practice" he further says, "...the scope of practical control of nature newly put into our hand by scientific ways of thinking vastly exceed the scope of old control grounded in common sense. The rate of increase accelerates so that no one can trace the limit: one may even fear that the being of man may be crushed by his own power that his fixed nature as an organism may not prove to stand the strain of the ever increasingly tremendous function. He may draw in his wealth like a child in a bathtub who has turned on the water and who cannot turn it off.

The above two philosophers have projected their views that human beings while attempting the economic growth which maybe designated as improving financial conditions and material comforts have taken the help of fast-growing technology and science to mold and control nature and its entities, but undue interference with nature has invited several disasters in its existence. A human being as an ambitious and rational unit of this cosmos has been in the pursuit of unlimited

desires, which continued to increase in the shadow of the techno-scientific and industrial world. But he is hardly aware of his own wishes. Erich Fromm narrates this position and its consequences in beautiful words, "...yet, modern man feels uneasy and more and more bewildered. He works and strives, but he is dimly aware of a sense of futility with regard to his activities. While his power over matter grows, he feels powerless in his individual life and in society." A He further said, "While becoming the master of the nature, he has become the slave of the machine which his own hands built."

Erich Fromm is absolutely right in his assertion but the consequences have been reflected in a more serious and distorted form. This is so because, in his pursuit of uncontrolled desires, the human being had concentrated on his self-interest and overlooked his moral responsibilities towards the non-human world or nature and the environment as a whole. As a result, his self-centered attitude has dragged him to exploit nature up to the prohibited level and the outcome has been the environmental crisis of the present era and it has been intensified to the extent of creating a threat to human being themselves. The mad persuasion of a human being after unbridled desires is now being proved to be a threat to his own existence. Although apparently, self-interest leading towards threats to self-existence seems to be paradoxical if one attempts to understand the intricate connection of man, nature, and the whole cosmos, its mystical channelized circle and cycle, then only the factual truth could be realized.

No doubt the primacy of the individual and his desires has continued to encroach exponentially, in the shadow of the scientific and industrial world. In this reference, two questions need to be answered, one how one can deny people their rights to self-fulfillment? Yet, how can one survive on the planet of ten billion points of infinite greed?

The above views project that human desire for material comforts and things has been a real challenge for the protection of the virgin form of



natural entities. This may be explained in the other words that nature has its definite resources, but the human being population is increasing at an unprecedented rate. In order to meet the needs of the growing population nature has to be exploited and in such a scenario the very standards of economic growth that per capita income of the individual is bound to project a threat to the environment. A slightly advanced view also has been presented in the following world in India regarding environmental degradation and pollution is either due to overexploitation or unscientific exploitation of natural resources in order to accelerate the pace of development.

It may be emphasized that both the aspects of human society viz. quality and quantity of human population are equally important in degrading the natural environment world over. The high-quality population with greater skill and advanced technology of the industrialized western world has used more than 80 percent of the world's natural resources and has caused more than 80 percent of damage to the environment. On the other hand, the high quantity population i.e., more than 70 percent of the world population with lesser skill and inferior technology in the developing countries has also stressed the environment by their greater demands of natural resources mainly for food and fuel.

Questions of Value Preference- A human being needs both existences as well as prosperity, thus he needs to aspire for more economic gain and at the same time care and concern for environmental entities, even if not for valuing their intrinsic worth of it, it is a must for survival and appropriate holistic development which involves security, survival and social security at the same time. But the blind race for the economic growth of human beings has invited only short-term gains as Peter Singer writes; "The gains made from cutting the forest employment, profits for business, export earnings and cheaper cardboard and paper for packaging- are short term benefits. Even if the forest is not cut, but drowned to build a dam to create electricity, it

is likely that the benefits will last for only a generation or two; after that new technology will render such methods of generating power obsolete. Once the forest is cut or drowned, however, the link with the past has gone forever."

Apart from the long-term benefits of preserving nature and a healthy environment, the cost of short-term benefits is going to harm and will be borne by every generation that will follow later on. It is the reason why environmentalist has designated virginity and wilderness as the World-heritage. It is something that we have inherited from our forefathers and that we must preserve for our coming generations. But is true that our modern political and cultural ethos has great difficulty in recognizing long-term value. This is so because they value income growth from the short-term perspective like the economist who, ... have been taught to apply a discount rate to all future goods. In other words, a million dollars in twenty years is not worth a million-dollar today, even when we go for inflation. Economists will discount the value of million dollars by a certain percentage, usually corresponding to the real long term interest rates"

Is it possible to apply the economic pattern of counting benefits to environmental and natural treasures we have today as has been pointed out in the following words; This makes economic sense because if I had thousand dollars today, I could invest it so that it would be worth more, in real terms, in twenty years. But the use of a discount rate means that values gained one hundred years hence rank very low, in comparison with values gained today; and values gained one thousand years in the future scarcely count at all. But from this standpoint of the priceless and timeless values of wilderness, however, applying a discount rate gives us the wrong answer."

Apart from counting the economic growth, one must take into account that if at the cost of environmental destruction, we are bound to invite several other disasters like ever-increasing air pollution, contamination of drinking water, greenhouse effect, specific species extinction, the



disappearance of the rain forest and so forth as it has been explained; '...by depleting the ozone layers and increasing the amount of Carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere, we have already brought about the change... Thereby we have deprived nature of its dependence and that is fatal to the meaning. Nature's dependence in its meaning, without it there is nothing but us."

Thus, the economic growth as predicted by the economic value preference is going to be adversely affected by the crisis of daily needs like food, water, fuel, and shelter. The beautiful predicted dictum is that the next world war is going to be for water. If the agricultural lands are converted into buildings the agro-items are bound to be a matter of conflict and the price of cost of these items are going to be high. If a person is planning to high income at the cost of creating the deteriorating conditions for physical and mental health the basic purpose of acquiring a high income is lost. Anybody wants more money and more income for the material comforts and enjoyment, but if he is not mentally and physically fit to enjoy the comforts it would be better to improve the surrounding conditions so that the earned money could be enjoyed at least. In the same way, if a nation is planning to increase per capita income at the cost of creating a wider and unbridgeable gap between rich and poor. And, in the long run, this attitude will be creating crises on the even economic fronts by increasing the cost of food, water, fodder and consequently deteriorating the health conditions of the mass. As it has been pointed out in the following words; "Since in the past hundred years many plants and animal species have begun to disappear and our planet's genetic resources are being exhausted with growing rapidity, the need has arisen to protect flora and fauna."

The above analysis shows a kind of value conflict of short-term and long-term benefits. The acceptance of intrinsic value is the behavior of high moral standards. But even if one goes for economic concern the misuse and exploitation of natural resources are bound to create a disaster on the

economic front and health hazards. Keeping the above picture in mind that mad persuasion for economic growth at the cost of environmental disaster will lead to more destruction of human beings. At the same time looking at the cutthroat global competition on the economic fronts, it would not be a practical option to remain as we are in the name of environmental protection and go on worshipping nature as it has been taught by the Indian tradition.

Balancing Strategies of Sustainable Development- The core concepts and objectives used in environmental ethics are sustainable development, planning, and growth, and management of environmental disaster is basically action oriented and again, requires technoscientific knowledge to move in the ventures. But this again overlooks the fundamental moral insights for taking decisions on what to do and what not to do. And more or less sustainability of development could be ensured only through the way suggested by the ethics in general and environmental ethics in particular, as it has been given in the following words: "Today most of the people agree that one must establish good strategies for securing sustainable development. The teaching of ethics can play a decisive role in the work for sustainability. Ethical values are the principal factor in social cohesion and, at the same time, the most effective agent of change and transformation. In considering the ethics of sustainability, our moral responsibility toward future generations is of prime importance. In living up to this responsibility, we must strive to achieve balance and continuity between meeting the needs of today and the challenges of the future."

It is for the above reason the need for ethical studies is intensified now. The increasing impact on the environment and its adverse consequences has compelled the study of environmental ethics as the discipline which could not be fulfilled by pure ethics or ecology, as it was expressed; "As the magnitude of man's impact on the environment is increasing, mainly through over-



exploitation of resources and through pollution, our environment is deteriorating fast and there is growing concern that something must be done, that development must be sustainable and the precautionary principals must be applied wherever one deals with complex systems whose behavior is difficult to predict."

Not only for dealing with complex behavior of human beings but also for determining the approach in the conceptual analysis of development, hazards management, economic use of resources, and explaining the very concept of sustainability could be taken up rationally by philosophical analysis through its branch of environmental ethics and it decides the nature of sustainability to have opted, as the self-interest-oriented notion of sustainability would not be useful for long term as it has been expressed in the following words; "The root of the idea of sustainability seem to be in something like Hobbes' notion that we begin moral philosophy by thinking of individual interest, and only arrive at any more generous notions than that by extension and analogy from the individual case." He calls it the reductive notion of sustainability as just the continued meeting of our present needs grows out of egoist tradition which leads to another kind of chaos and danger to disturb the sense implied here. The analysis of vital concepts useful for environmental issues could be provided only by environmental ethics.

The Indian way of sustainable development could be traced from the Vedic period agro culture in general and the concept of Rita particularly as it has been described by Radhakrishnan when he says; "Rita literally means the course of things. "It stands for law in general and the immanence of justice.; Rita denotes the order of the things." Everything that is ordered in the universe has Rita for its principles." The early Indian way of looking at the relationship between man and nature is that of mutual respect, exchanging culture, equal concerns for, preservation and conservation of traditional ritual. Another peculiar feature of early

Indian attitude towards nature is far from any controversy and contradiction persisting in the modern ethical theories in the field of environmental ethics i.e., Anthropocentric and eco-centric approaches. The contrary to Indian tradition, the western tradition goes for the option that each and every entity of the nature is meant for the use of human beings as picking the views of Aristotle, Peter Singer writes; Plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man's domestic animals for his use and food, wild ones (or at any rate most of them) for food and other accessories of life, such as clothing and other various tools"

The above quotation implies three points; first, the natural world exists for human beings. Secondly, the creator of this world has allowed human beings dominion over the natural world without any concern about how the treatment is going to be. Thirdly human beings are the only morally important numbers in the world. Nature, itself is of intrinsic value and the destruction of plants and animals cannot be sinful unless by the destruction we harm human beings. While talking about the moral strategies of sustainable development, we have to keep in the mind the present resources, requirements, and future impacts as well as needs. And, a balance needs to be maintained between the above. The Indian tradition makes us God in terms of being caring, giver, and good to all creatures on the earth while western tradition prompts us theoretically to go for the demon approach which is etymologically demanding and destroying in its temperament. None of the approaches is acceptable for Indian tradition is too idealistic and the western one is too insensitive to not only nature but even future generations of human being themselves. So again, we need a balance between the two approaches and that is going to contribute to our concluding remarks.

Concluding Remarks- Human beings having temptations and emotions apart from rationality cannot follow the path of Divinity i.e.,



goodness for goodness sake. At the same time, he cannot be categorized to be following the path of a demon absolutely for he has feelings of care and concern for natural entities as we feel for badly hurt people and birds, we feel the emptiness in the absence of trees and vegetation which has been in our habit to be with them. Of course, human beings are the creature in between the Deity and Demon and for pragmatic strategies for the sustainable development, he should bethinking about his needs and interests and decide judicially up to what extent the interference, use, and modification of the nature is required to meet the need but not the greed of any particular person.

At the same time, for rest of the natural entities and environment should be following the divine care and concern. This will ensure the objective of sustainable development in a pragmatic way for taking care of the needs, resources, and environmental protection though in name of the taking care of the future generation. And this is what has been reflected in the following words; "What is needed is creating environmental awareness or consciousness and inculcation of the spirit of responsibility and accountability in our relationship with nature. A sustainable development leading to more and more perfection stands in need of the environmental stewardship implies a sense of mutual care to be spearheaded by the human beings only. If we care for nature and nature will care for us."

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