

Environmentalism, Sustainable Development and Cement Plants in Himachal Pradesh

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There has been a widespread and systematic concern for environmental issues all over the world particularly after 1960s. This is essentially because it is now well established that damage to environmental systems has assumed massive proportions and effects are manifesting themselves. Internationally efforts are on to find ways and means to manage and protect environment. All of a sudden the phrase, “Environmentalism” has finally become pervasive and dominant discourse and emerged as a major area of concern world-wide.

Environment may be defined as the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism. Our environment consists of four major elements Land, Water, Air and the living organisms such as plants and animals, Land, Water, air form the physical environment while plants and animals form the biological environment.

Both physical and biological environment assets provide three main types of essential services to humanity. First, the environment is a basic source of raw materials and inputs that support economic activities. Second, the environment is the sink which absorbs and recycles the wastes products of human society. Finally, the environment provides essential life support functions without which many living organism would cease to exist. But unfortunately of the two important functions of environment viz. Productive and Protective, the former has often been excessively emphasised. However the most crucial of its role in providing long term ecological security including conservation of our life support systems has often been ignored. This has resulted into the disturbance of environmental equilibrium and caused number of environmental problems such as degradation of agricultural land, air pollution, water pollution and threat to flora and fauna and biological diversity. When environmental harmony is destroyed in this way for short gains, nature revels leading large scale damage to ecology and society.

Unless large scale damage is inflicted on the environment, it too has a capacity to heal itself. It is possible to inflict damage upon the environment such that regeneration is no longer possible. This leads to either a local or global environmental change depending upon the extent of damage. All life on earth is interdependent and man is only a strand in the delicate web of relationships. Any disturbance creates a chain reaction which may not be visible for some time. If man and various forms of life do not find ways and means to live together ultimately there will be no life on earth. Thus, if any link in the interrelations between the elements which constitute the environment is damaged in such a way that nature is not able to renew itself continuously then this results in environmental crisis.

As soon as people rise above their survival to the fittest level, they will become environmentally more conscious and will be devoting resources too to save the environment. In addition, development is also expected to bring along technological innovations, substitutes and structural changes, which would not let environmental damage rise above the negative consequences expected from the expansion of overall economic growth. For increasing productivity level, we have to work out suitable alternatives beneficial to the ecology of the area and all strategies for development should have the basic theme of environmental stability and ecological balance.

However, Developing nations, 'Development Projects', Third World Development and 'development' are now viewed as a part of the global framework, a struggle to uplift the poor and deprived citizens of the world to the level of their industrial counter parts. The question is : when looking in the context of the present realities of shrinking resources and mounting debt, should this ideology of upliftment be the main focus of current development projects. And do the present development strategies in practice have any chance of providing realistic and positive changes for their intended beneficiaries.

The ideology of the dominant pattern of development derives its driving force from a linear theory of progress from a vision of historical evolution propounded in the 18th and 19th century Western Europe and universalised throughout the world especially in the post war development decades. The linearity of history, presupposed in this theory of progress created the ideology of development that equated development with economic growth, economic growth with expansion of the market economy, modernity, with consumerism and non-market economies with backwardness.

The concept of development is widely used but is least understood. In the last three decades development has been talked about more in terms of reduction of poverty, inequality, unemployment and illiteracy within the context of a growing economy. In the light of this, development has been perceived as a multidimensional process involving reorganisation and reorientation of national institutions, social structures and people's attitudes in the perspective of economic growth and the improvement in life chances and civil quality of life.

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It can also be viewed as a process of realising certain goals or values such as improved health, improved housing, better nutrition, more communication, improved transportation, increased command over resources and making accessible safe and clean water, healthy air, sanitation facilities etc. Thus, development is not only measured in terms of social justice and social cohesion but it seeks to improve the social quality of life and social quality of people.

Human Civilization requires both a standard of living and a standard of life simultaneously. While economics, endeavours to provide the former, the onus of providing a substantial part of the latter rests on environment. Though we live on one planet and yet in different worlds, no country can ever choose between environment and development. For asking a country to choose between environment and developments like asking someone to choose between left and right eye.

The term "Sustainable development" brings together two basic principles underpinning the management of human activities, one concentrating on development goals, the other on limiting the harmful impacts of human activity without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Sustainability centres around the concept of renewal and the importance of people in its practice of continued economic growth without destruction of natural world. Our survival depends upon a new kind of development where environment and economic objectives are placed within a common framework and where there is a firm commitment to equitable sharing of material and natural wealth both within and among countries as well as between generations.

Sustainable development determines the kind of earth our children will inherit from us. Sustainability is a holistic concept that can be on the global, national local and individual scale. Development is sustainable when it responds to current needs without jeopardising those of future generations.

Sustainability involves a responsible cutting down of excessive conveniences and luxuries that exhaust the Earth's resources. The concept of sustainable development is not only development which will conserve our resources and not destroy and damage them, as our present development modules are doing. Sustainable Development is equally important because it is development and not for a few in society.

The concept of sustainable development came into prominence in 1980's and evolved itself as one of the mainstream development paradigms by late 1980's. In the process, it has undergone numerous changes in its definition and objectives. However the most popular definition so far has been the one adopted by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). According to this definition, Sustainable development is the devel-

opment that needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). Such sustainable development is environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable.

While the WCED'S statement of the fundamental objectives of Sustainable Development is brief, the Commission is much more elaborate about the operational objectives of sustainable development. It states that "the critical objectives which follow from the concept of Sustainable Development" are: (I) reviving growth; (II) changing the quality of growth; (III) meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation; (IV) ensuring a sustainable level of population; (V) conserving and enhancing the resource base; (VI) reorienting technology and managing risk; (VII) merging environment and economics in decision making; (VIII) reorienting international economic relations. Most organizations and agencies actively promoting the concept of sustainable development subscribe to some or all of these objectives with, however, the notable addition of the ninth operational goal. (IX) making development more participatory.

The formulation can therefore represent the mainstream of Sustainable Development thinking. This "mainstream" includes international environment agencies such as UNEP, IUCN, WWF, developmental agencies including the World Bank, the US Agency for International Development, the Canadian and Swedish international development agencies, research and dissemination organisations such as the World Resources Institute the International Institute for Environment and Development, the World Watch Institute and activist organizations and groups such as Global Tomorrow Coalition. Although sustainable development takes on different meanings in different contexts, it usually implies a growth in productive activities which does not result in the irreversible depletion of natural resources. Because it specifically takes conservation and economic development, sustainable development could be a useful paradigm of development planners and environmental activists.

Environment and Development are inexorably inter-linked. Development can not subsist upon deteriorating environmental resources and environment, it turn, can not be protected if development does not take into account the environmental problems. Failure to manage the environment and to sustain development threaten the very basis of our existence. Therefore, Himachal Pradesh Govt. decision to go ahead of with cement plants has generated lot of social, political and environmental controversy. It may be argued that the exploitation of limestone deposits is necessary for the development of the State but necessity has to be weighed against its unwanted consequences. Be it coal for the generation of energy, iron ore for export and the growth of the steel industry, bauxite for feeding the aluminium plants or limestone for the cement industry. But behind the facade of development, mining operations destroy the material basis of the survival of large number of local people. The ecological disaster caused by the limestone mining for the cement industry is much more higher than the cement industry itself. If for various geological reasons, the mountains in India are repositories of the

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richest minerals, they are also the central features of our life support systems. From the ecological viewpoint, limestone in its fractured form provides the best and the largest aquifer that can sustain the supply of water. The most efficient and economic use of the mineral in this perspective which views limestone in its relationship with other resources is its conservation's for the sustainable supply of water on which all economic activities depend. For one interest group the most productive use of the likest one deposits lies in their extraction for commercial and industrial use. For the other and much larger interest group consisting of the local communities the most productive use of the same limestone deposits lies in their in situ function in conferring the large volumes of rain water. There is destructive impact of the limestone industry on the hydrological balance as it is reflected in the fact that the spring fed streams disappear underground while the high porosity of the fractured limestone belt permits the storage of water for year around discharge.

The extraction of mineral resulted into deforestation slope failure and land slides which raise the beds of streams and rivers by pilling up debris in these drainage channels. The combination of heavy monsoons, bare slopes and silted river beds leads to flood that was endowed by nature with excellent drainage. Debris carried by the heavy rainfall raises the river beds, changes the course of river leads to soil erosion in the adjoining agricultural land and forests, so it disturbs the land soil vegetation and the top soil of the region. Irrigation channels are destroyed by the flow of silt and other debris from mines or from mining roads. Quarrying operations destroy food and fodder and the area below the limestone belt can no longer be used for grazing and large area used to have practically no vegetation as these areas are covered by debris from the mines. The dust particles which settle on green leaves choke the respiratory system of plants thus effect their growth and output. An important economic activity based on animal husbandry is therefore being eroded. The decline in livestock affects the production of milk, the production of energy for farm operations and the production of animal dung that provides soil fertility for sustainable agriculture. Irresponsible quarrying kills cattle as well as humans residing nearby area as. Quarrying operations have negative effects not only the villages in the vicinity of the quarries but also the villages in other parts. The pollution caused by cement plant is far less than the ecological disaster caused by mining. While dust pollution at plant site could be controlled with modern devices, pollution caused by mining and the movement of thousands of trucks could not be controlled effectively. Himachal which is known for high incidence of lung diseases. The increase in concentration of dust particles in the air would further aggravate the situation. Besides dust, pollution caused by mining and the movement of thousands of trucks could not be controlled effectively. Himachal which is known for high incidence of lung diseases. The increase in concentration of dust particles in the air would further aggravate the situation. Besides dust and smoke, the vehicular traffic also adds to air and noise pollution and cause traffic obstructions and damage to existing roads.

The decision of the Govt. to allow mining in interior areas would spoil and pollute virgin areas have a vast potential for the development of tourism. Thus, cement industry would destroy the tourism industry in the State and eliminate wildlife and plants. The Champions of industrial growth who are in the favour of cement plants on a plea that limestone industry would generate employment are living in fools paradise as highly mechanised plants have cut short all man power requirements. Therefore, locals expect a bleak chance of getting jobs. The only avenue left is the indirect employment opportunities with transport operations and other related business. But company's plants to keep a big share of transport operation in its own hand has further diluted this indirect employment avenue too.

The ecological crisis clearly affects the poor more drastically than the rich, despite, the prevalent myth that concern for a stable ecology is a luxury which only the latter can afford. The natural endowment of these mountain ranges is an essential part of the resources base for the survival and economic activity of the people in the region. Limestone quarrying and the cement industry come into direct conflict with other important economic activities on which the majority of the residents depend for their livelihood. Some of the important economic activities- agro-horticulture, tourism, education, such as schools and research institutions and knowledge-intensive manufacturing are based on a favourable climate and clean environment. However, limestone quarrying and its allied processing units will destroy the resources base on which other activities survive and prosper. Cement plants, therefore, could affect not only the natural beauty and ecology of the Himachal but create avoidable hazards to people and their cattle, homes and agricultural land and undue affection of air, water and environment. Thus, the growth recorded by the limestone industry, has to be seen against the background of the decay of the other economic activities and not independently of it.

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