

ENGLISH



THE AILING PLANET : THE GREEN MOVEMENT'S ROLE

~Summary~

-by Nani Palkhivala

The Green Movement

The Green Movement, which started in 1972, is one of the most important movements that captivated the imagination of the entire human race. At that time, the world's first nationwide Green party was founded in New Zealand.

The movement has been a great success since then. A revolutionary change has come in the perception of human beings, bringing in a holistic and ecological view of the world. There has been a shift from the understanding developed by Copernicus.

Copernicus stated in the sixteenth century that the earth and the other planets revolved round the sun. For the first time, there is a growing worldwide realisation that the earth itself is a living organism. It has its own metabolic needs and fundamental processes which need to be respected and preserved. The earth's vital signs reveal a patient in declining health. Humans have realised their ethical obligations to protect and preserve the needs of the planet.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development was popularised in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development. It defined the idea as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It means that we should pursue development for our present needs but we should be careful about the needs of the future generations as well.

Man and the Other Living Species

Man has been considered as the most dangerous being on the planet. In the zoo at Lusaka, Zambia, there is a cage where the notice reads, 'The world's most dangerous animal. Inside the cage, there is no animal but a mirror in which we see our reflection. With continuous and sustained efforts of a number of agencies in different countries, human beings are realising that they should not dominate Earth but respect it as a partner.

Man is thus learning to live in harmony with the other living species on the planet. Man's existence is shifting from the system of domination to that of partnership.

There are about 1.4 million living species on Earth that have been listed. Biologists think that there are about three million to a hundred million other living species that are still unknown.

Earth's Principal Biological Systems

The Brandt Commission was one of the first international commissions which dealt with the question of ecology and environment. An Indian, Mr LK Jha, was a member of this commission. The First Brandt Report raised the question that whether we want to leave behind a scorched and a sick environment for our coming generations?

Mr Lester R Brown, in his book, 'The Global Economic Prospect', points out Earth's four major biological systems, that are fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands. These four are the foundation of the global economic system. Besides providing us food, they provide nearly all the raw materials for industries except minerals and petroleum derived synthetics. The demand of human beings on these systems is increasing to such an unsustainable extent that the productivity of these systems is being hampered.

The excessive demand has resulted in deterioration and depletion of resources leading to the breakdown of fisheries, disappearance of forests, deterioration of croplands and turning of grasslands into barren lands. In a proteinconscious and protein-hungry world, over-fishing is common. In poor countries, local forests are destroyed to obtain fuel for cooking.

Mankind Destroys Forests

The ancient inheritance of tropical forests is now eroding at the rate of 40 to 50 million acres per year. The growing use of dung for combustion deprives the soil of an important natural fertiliser. The World Bank estimates that a five-fold increase in the rate of forest planting is needed to cope with the expected fuelwood demand in the year 2000.

James Speth, the President of the World Resources Institute, revealed the very alarming statistic that we are losing the forests at an acre-and-a-half a second.

Article 48A of the Indian Constitution states that it is the duty of the states to make efforts to improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country. Unfortunately, laws are neither respected nor enforced in India. Over the last four decades 'India's forests have reached disastrous exhaustion'. India is losing its forests at the rate of 3.7 million acres a year. Large areas, officially designated as forest land, are virtually treeless.

The Menace of Overpopulation

The growth of world population is one of the strongest factors distorting the future of human society. Mankind reached the first billion mark in more than a million years of its existence. That was the world population in the year 1800. By the year 1900, a second billion was added. The twentieth century has added another 3.7 billion. Every four days, the world population increases by one million.

Fertility falls as income rises, education spreads and health improves. Development is the best method to limit the population. However, development may not be possible if population goes on increasing at this rate. The population of India was estimated to be 920 million in 1994. The population of India is more than the entire population of Africa and South America together. More children do not mean more workers; it merely means more people without work. The only solution to this is voluntary family planning. Population and poverty are directly proportional to each other. Thus, control of the population should be our topmost priority.

Era of Responsibility

Slowly but steadily, people are understanding the concept that the entire world should be treated as an integrated whole rather than a collection of separate parts.

For sustainable development of the world, everyone has to play one's role, even the industries. Margaret Thatcher and Lester Brown suggested that Earth is not our property. It passes on from one generation to another with the hope that each generation will take care of it so as to pass it on to the next with its resources intact.

The chapter concludes with the beautiful lines of Mr Lester R Brown, "We have not inherited this Earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children."

Conclusion of The Ailing Planet: the Green Movement's Role

To conclude, the ailing planet: the green movement's role summary, it tells us about the situation of this planet is in a crucial condition and how we must do our best to save it.