
THE CONUNDRUM OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

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ABSTRACT

As humankind has developed in the last few years, environmental degradation has emerged as a "shared concern." India is an emerging economy that has struggled to find the right balance between economic development and environment conservation. The country's accelerated economic growth has resulted in unfavourable and hazardous environmental circumstances that are impacting the Indigenous people along with the world's population. In this context, India's economic development has been hindered by the deterioration of the environment. We've grown so preoccupied with ourselves that we no longer consider the effects of climate change. Due to the general embrace of one stubborn and single-minded vision of European modernity, climate change has been largely neglected by current society. As a result, the country has been unable to maintain its economic development potential. This is due to the inability of the government to pay to clean up for previously caused environmental damages, and the ineffectiveness of progressive environmental legislation, along with severe pollution levels, can be linked to the absence of execution, insufficiency of resources, and technological problems experienced by a huge majority of Indian firms. The Indian government cannot risk any further tragedies like COVID-19, if they are caused by the next pandemic or increasing environmental degradation and global warming. In the current scenario, the government must take certain long-term steps to address the numerous challenges it faces, particularly degradation of the environmental environment, to keep its economic growth potential. The United Nations Common Understanding of a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation indicates that human rights can be integrated into climate change actions by applying a rights-based approach to policy and development. International collaboration is critical to accomplish low-carbon, climate resilience, and ecological sustainability while concurrently lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Granting substantive remedy predicated on the interpretation and implementation of fundamental rights legislation as well as Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties is in fact a novel approach. There are several concerns that need to be tackled as we begin a new millennium and given the situation that globalisation is affecting every element of human life.

Within the last few years, environmental degradation seems to have emerged to become a "shared worry" for humankind. The current environmental challenges are different as they are mostly triggered by mankind rather than natural events.

Present communities, cultures, and economies encourage consumer growth, but the fundamental drive towards growth within competitive market economies stifles essential societal transformation. Environmental policies have been influenced by the economy. The significance of science and innovation as a stimulant combining environment and economics has been acknowledged. Sustainable development has become a catchphrase as a result of this process.

Anthropogenic activities leading to deteriorating environmental conditions have long been recognised as a hazard to not just the environment but ultimately the human living standard as well. Texts from Mesopotamia and South Asia from 4500 years ago demonstrated knowledge of diversification, naturalistic worldview amongst living creatures, and the repercussions of disturbing the environment¹. All across time, authors, intellectuals, activists, and individuals from all walks of life have maintained to perceive and praise the virtues of the environment to humans' life quality, even though society grew progressively detached from its natural roots.

In the Indian context, the country's accelerated economic growth has resulted in unfavourable and hazardous environmental circumstances that are impacting the Indigenous people along with the world's population. Infant mortality rates are greater, and life expectancies are shorter. The challenge of endangering the wellbeing of common residents in India is exacerbated by poor hygiene and sewage concerns. The ineffectiveness of progressive environmental legislation and severe pollution levels can be linked to the absence of execution, insufficiency of resources, and technological problems experienced by a huge majority of Indian firms. In these circumstances, India must take certain long-term steps to address the numerous challenges it faces, particularly degradation of the environment, to maintain its economic development potential. The idea of a green economy is the consequence of a perception that's largely motivated by financial goals.

¹ Environmental degradation and extreme alterations and changes to the natural environment can be found everywhere, and are part of the challenges of sustainable development. *Comprehensive Biotechnology* (Second Edition), 2011, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/agricultural-and-biological-sciences/environmental-degradation>

Despite the fact that we are in a Climate Emergency, our collective decisions and actions still do not constitute a complete knowledge of the issue. We are not behaving as though a life-threatening situation is impending at this time. What exactly does the term "Climate Emergency" imply to us? Would it be too late or do we still have room for delay, considering that people have been given one Planet to engage upon and that if the environment gets irreversibly harmed, it may spell the demise of humankind?

Humans have already triggered huge climatic changes, and we are on the verge of causing far more. The environmental repercussions of one's own choices and actions are tough to grasp, especially because our everyday thought processes coalesce around our daily chores while glossing over environmental concerns such as global warming. This viewpoint is based upon the notion that environmental sustainability can only be achieved after fundamental necessities such as food and shelter have been satisfied.

Due to the general embrace of one stubborn and single-minded vision of European modernity, climate change has been largely neglected by current society. The sole benchmark for progress in the modern world is now this ideology.

Individuals who feel guilty about their environmentally problematic conduct often seek out what they believe are sustainable practices to restore moral equilibrium. They buy 'organic vegetables as they're more 'environmentally friendly and help 'support the poor,' but they also travel thirty kilometres in their private vehicle to go to the fields in which the 'organic vegetables are sold. In reality, many rationalise driving alone to work because they are uncomfortable taking public transportation and seek to compensate by purchasing "organic vegetables."

Society cannot risk any further tragedies like COVID-19, Regardless of that, if they are caused by the next pandemic or increasing environmental degradation and global warming. During the nationwide lockdown, the "clean air and bright skies" served as a reminder of our misuse of the planet. However, as the country's Environment 2021 points out, this was only a hiccup. It was most likely nature's way to inform us of what life may be like without pollution caused by humans.

The outbreak's scenario initially improved air quality in many countries across the globe, decreased GHG emissions, along with water pollution and noise pollution, which contribute to the environment's recovery. COVID-19 however also has several serious ramifications, like

the exponential rise in medical waste, careless usage and dumping of disinfectants, masks, and gloves, accompanied by a constant load of unprocessed trash harming the environment.

National governments' decisions to contribute billions upon billions of rupees in a matter of a few weeks to retain and ultimately resuscitate economic activity through the upcoming weeks could either “lock-in” economic growth structures which will lead to lasting and intensifying harm to the environmental system such as the complete disregard for major environmental issues such as deforestation, while making excuses for the same by encouraging afforestation, which lacks biodiversity as well as the intricate and distant ecosystem needed for species to survive in India that further, maintains and sustains all humans and their health and livelihood opportunities, or otherwise, if responsibly carried, can develop a healthy, equitable, and a more green future for the coming years.

As an emerging economy, India has long struggled to find the right balance between economic development and environment conservation. Numerous government-led initiatives wind up breaking a variety of environmental legislation. As a result, it seems that there is indeed a compromise between economic growth and the environment. Environmental issues must not be ignored for the sake of economic progress, and neither should the effective execution of environmental preservation be hampered, both of them need to go hand-in-hand.

In the current scenario, as nations get wealthier, the governments are becoming capable of paying to clean up for previously caused environmental damages, and so as the public desire for a cleaner environment grows, governments will be able to adopt and implement tough environmental protection legislations. There have been a variety of concepts created in international environmental policies, which include "environmental sustainability," "polluter pays principle," or "precautionary principle," which imply that a balance can after all be achieved.

Notwithstanding the rampaging Coronavirus and the lockdown, tropical forests throughout the country were being affected at an astounding level. Natural forests are progressively vanishing throughout the country, with severe declines in key forestland including vast preserved forest areas. From 2019 to 2020, India lost about 38.5 thousand hectares of tropical forests, accounting for roughly 14% of its total tree cover².

² India lost 14% tree cover amid Covid, rainforest destruction up 12% in 2020, Shibu Tripathi, April 2, 2021

The issue stems from the government's interpretation of the term "forest cover." Forests are defined as "all patches of land with a tree canopy density of more than 10% and an area of more than one hectare, independent of land use, ownership, or tree species" by the Forest Survey of India, which relies heavily upon satellites monitoring. Satellite imaging is incompetent to distinguish between forests and plantations. The natural thick woods of India have disappeared at a rate never seen before. The government, on the other hand, argues that forests can be readily replaced and regenerated, facilitating both the fast diversion of forest area into industrial uses. To cover up the loss of "forest areas," India's afforestation effort focuses upon large scale single type tree plantings of non-indigenous, monoculture, commercial species like rosewood and eucalyptus on non-forest lands. Plantations in contrast to forests lack's bio-diversity, high-quality species, high survival rates, and involves a complex, unique environment that wildlife requires to survive.

A new framework should be adopted at a larger scale for rigorous analysis of spatial, legal and socio-economic data to plan best interventions for forest restoration.

Climate change is "the mystery of our own hands which would be back to haunt us in endless forms and patterns," but we have failed to stand up and accept responsibility for it. We've grown so preoccupied with ourselves that we no longer consider the effects of climate change. The general population must start acting "realistically" regarding climate change, which necessitates acknowledging that irreparable harm has been done as a result of emissions that will persist in the atmosphere for a very long time.

The issue is not that we are unable to create technological solutions to cut emissions, but rather that we have lost the motivation to do so. The current industrial model prioritises short-term gains at the price of future generations. Given the impending tragedy of climate change, many people do not prioritise climate justice. As climate change impacts become more evident, the masses' main concern will be survival.

However, several issues make it extremely difficult for individuals to become motivated about environmental problems. Environmental policies necessitate barter among immediate and long-term gains, this becomes the most difficult barter for individuals to make. Extensive research has shown that humans tend to overestimate short-term advantages in comparison to long-term gains.

Individuals as well as organisations profit from denying global warming in the near run. Individuals who disregard their carbon footprint's impact on the planet do not require making adjustments in the automobiles they drive, the items they buy, or the dwellings they live in. In a similar vein, this necessitates that people avoid continually performing activities that have little overall repercussions but can have disastrous collective consequences.

Furthermore, everybody concerned about environmental degradation must be wary of the hostility that passes for public discourse on this subject. The future seems invariably riskier than the current time. This is one of the reasons why people place such a great emphasis on the present time.

An effective environmental initiative will require the establishment of stringent institutional structures for the effective execution, use, and management of money. With the conviction that we can and will make a positive impact on the lives of those who are most vulnerable, it is about understanding science and using it to shape our future. Owning our actions has to do with taking responsibility for the consequences those actions will have on the environment, on future generations, and on each other. As a consequence, we are always seeing new "cornerstones of optimism," taking inspiration from them and learning from them.

The United Nations Common Understanding of a Human Rights-Based Approach³ to Development Cooperation indicates that human rights can be integrated into climate change actions by applying a rights-based approach to policy and development. For India, the law has developed in a fashion that strives to enhance the person's quality of life. Granting substantive remedy predicated on the interpretation and implementation of fundamental rights legislation as well as Directive Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties is in fact a novel approach. Puritans would view this strategy as going against accepted legal precedent, but the situation calls for it just now. There are several concerns that need to be tackled as we begin a new millennium and given the situation that globalisation is affecting every element of human life.

Environmental evolution is inevitable, and it is already taking place. This is the most pressing issue confronting our whole planet, and we must act quickly to address it. We need to back leaders and organisations across the planet who takes a stand for all of mankind, not just the

³ See <https://hrbportal.org/the-human-rights-based-approach-to-development-cooperation-towards-a-common-understanding-among-un-agencies/>, last accessed on 6th July 2022.

major environmental offenders. As a response, international collaboration is critical to accomplish low-carbon, climate resilience, and ecological sustainability while concurrently lowering greenhouse gas emissions. This involves economic and technical aid, as well as assistance with infrastructure building on part of the state. States must incorporate human rights within climate policy and regulations, as well as enable people to participate in policy creation, to guarantee sustainability and responsibility of all duty bearers. As a result, all human rights will be achieved, as will uniformity, policy coherence, and accuracy in climate policies.