

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION – EMERGENCE, PRINCIPLES AND THRUST AREAS

Sumana Mallick (Ghosh)*

Amal Kumar Ghosh**

Abstract

Environment is our intimate, de rigueur and immediate beyond which provides the basics of life. Clean and fresh environment is extremely fundamental for promoting healthy life style for living being. As Environmental Education deals with the proper understanding of safeguarding and nurturing the environment, it is almost essential for protecting the environment with its biological habitat. Environmental Education equips with proper knowledge about awareness generation, standardization of quality of human lives, combating the evils of disorder factors in the environment and thereby to formulate the policy and plan of action for better environmental settings for the benefit of the humankind. The present study asserts on the origin, principles and thrust areas of Environmental Education, the ultimate education through organized efforts and its implementation for the sake of the survival of the whole biotic kingdom.

Keywords:

Environment;
Education;
Programme;
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Sustainability.

*** Sumana Mallick (Ghosh), Doctoral Student, Education.**

**** Dr. Amal Kumar Ghosh, Associate Professor in Geography, Fakir Chand College, Diamond Harbour, University of Calcutta.**

1. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The present study aims at

1. To know the importance and content of Environmental Education
2. To spread the Environmental Education among the individuals or groups
3. To expand the environmental awareness among the human being

2. Introduction

Environmental Education is the curriculum of environment related education to develop consciousness about environmental issues and make everybody's awareness leading to the programme of action is it in the individual or community level.

Environment, the basics of one's survival input is in erosive mode since the proliferation of the past great civilizations in the remote past and gains momentum in manifold of decaying particularly from the last half of the 18th century. There is hardly any alternative of maintaining the environmental quality excepting the spreading and implementation of Environmental Education at all levels.

Rachel Carson aptly uttered "The more clearly we focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction". Tree grows, bears flowers and fruits, provide oxygen, spread fragrance, arrange micro-climate and present shade from the scorching effect of sunshine. Beautiful butterflies, lush green grass, lofty mountain chains, and other endowments of nature seek attention to maintain its purity, sanctity, inviolability and spirituality. To meet the needs of the hour and to maintain the quality of natural elements of the environment, Environmental Education is a prerequisite means of maintenance. Rich and real world authentic design of the curriculum, good educators and effective interactive hands-on instances from the nature may be a boon to save this beautiful planet.

Stockholm Conference (1972) proclaimed that, "The protection and improvement of the human environment is a major issue which affects the well beings of people and economic development...." and 'To defend and to improve the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind....'

“Environmental Education aims to develop an individual’s understanding, skills and the feelings of empowerment that are necessary for both positive behavior towards the biophysical and social environment in everyday living, and for active participation in group efforts to find the optimal solutions for environmental problems” (Sing, K. 2013).

3. Environmental Education - Aims

Environmental Education is a responsive educating endeavour in the wake of rapidly changing Earthly phenomena in the last and the contemporary millennia. It involves the awareness development and attainment of skills and capacity to lessen and counter the scorching effect of major challenges against hazardous and disastrous effects. While protecting the environment it helps to improve life and maintain ethical values (UNESCO with UNEP, 1977). Environmental Education aims at the

- Development of consciousness with our all sensory systems to eradicate evil impact against the deterioration of environment both qualitatively and quantitatively.
- Improvement of problem solving and decision making skills and development of newer environment friendly technology for environmental sustainability attainment.
- Participation in venture in resolving environmental challenges.
- Gathering of knowledge and understanding about the past, present and positive anticipation of upcoming situations.
- Strengthening the positive attitude towards environmental protection for clean, healthy and everlasting environment for the benefit of the biotic world.

The UNESCO-UNEP Congress on Environmental Education and Training, Mockba (Moscow), 1987 clarifies Environmental Education as “an excellent means of enhancing the relevance and functionability of general education, but persistent difficulties of a conceptual and structural nature within education systems still prevent it from being implemented in truly interdisciplinary ways.” For this reason “The Moscow Congress agreed that environmental education, should simultaneously attempt to create awareness, transmit information, teach knowledge, develop habits and skills, promote values, provide criteria and standards and present guidelines for problem solving and decision making. It therefore aims at both cognitive and affective behavior modification. The latter necessitates both classroom and field activities, thus an action-oriented,

project centered and participatory process leading to self confidence, positive attitudes and personal commitment to environmental protection.”

It is worthwhile to mention that the monumental task of worldwide spreading up of Environmental Education might be geared up with the initiation and declaration endeavour of 1990-2000 as “World Decade for Environmental Education.”

“A basic aim of environmental education is to succeed in making individuals and communities understand the complex nature of the natural and the built environments resulting from the interaction of their biological, physical, social, economic and cultural aspects, and acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes and practical skills to participate in a responsible and effective way in anticipating and solving environmental problems, and the management of the quality of the environment”(Final Report, Tbilisi Conference,1977).

4. Environmental Education - Emergence

“On every front – land, air and water – human activities have consequences, many of them negative. Earth faces environmental stresses, some urgent and all needing. No part of the world remains untouched, no natural system untainted. Our forests regulate water flow, retain carbon, distribute nutrients, and produce soil – yet they are disappearing” (National Geographic Answer Book: 10,001 Fast Facts About Our World, 2016).

In the Vedic Ages (1500 BCE – 500 BCE), Ashrams were generally located away from the human habitation in the refreshing natural environment which not only provide the congenial environment of meditation practices but also help to make a concrete bonding with nature and natural elements.

Environmental Education might be rooted in 18th century philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau’s endeavour when he emphasized on the environment in *Emile: or, On Education*, a treatise on nature of man and education. Louis Agassiz echoed Rousseau’s philosophy by encouraging the pupils to “Study nature, not books.” They laid the foundation stone of Environmental Education in the banner of nature study. This popular education movement in America paved the way of

linking scientific investigations with personal spiritual experiences from nature where fables and moral lessons using nature and natural world were used.

The origin of Environmental Education might be linked with the emergence of environmental determinism where there was a belief of the supremacy of nature and natural forces and environment often shape or control the nature and character of human activities. Topography and climatic conditions, the two major determining factors of settlement or establishment of kingdom along the edge of the water sources and thereby ease of agrarian practices, animal husbandry might be constituted as the impetus of the emergence of Environmental Education.

In the 19th century, Anna Botsford Comstock (1854-1930), an American conservationist and the editor of the *Nature-Study Review* and the Head of the Department of Nature Study of Cornell University was one of the pioneer figures of nature study movement.

E.C. Semple (1863-1932) contributed in field of environmentalism. She asserted that the ‘Man is the product of earth’s surface’ and advocated about the dominance of the physical environment on human activity. Her works were the influential outcome of famous evolutionist Charles Darwin and her mentor Freidrich Ratzel. She attempted to divide the world into key environmental types considering man and the associated landscapes as

- direct physical effects - climate, altitude
- psychical effects - culture, art, religion
- economic and social development - resources and livelihoods
- movement or people – natural barriers and routes such as rivers and mountains

Semple believed the dominating influence of the climate in the growth and development of human race. She opined that mankind was originated in the tropics but gained full maturity in the temperate regions.

In the Indian context, growth of consciousness about the indispensability of environment may be highly recognized with the pioneering Bishnoi Movement in Khejarli village of the Western Thar Desert Region of Rajasthan. “The Bishnois are the legendary one in this subcontinent and

probably in the entire planet for their supreme sacrifice of more than 363 lives against the felling of trees by the order of Maharaja Abhay Sing in 1730 C E” (Ghosh, A.K.,2016). This movement was the outcome of the influential teachings of Guru Maharaj Jambegi, the founder of Bishnoi faith of not harming plants and animals in 1485 CE.

Chipko Movement of 1973 in Chamoli district of now Uttarakhand; Silent Valley Movement of 1973- '76 in Kerala; Jungle Bachao Andolan in 1982 in Singhbhum district of Bihar; Appiko Movement in 1983 of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka; Narmada Bachao Andolan of 1985-'88 in Madhya Pradesh; Tehri Project Conflict in 1990 in Uttarakhand are the notable movements to save the environment and might be appealed to extend the importance of Environmental Education.

Again, the reality of perception that ‘Environmental changes have made life possible but changing Environment may wipe out the humans from this Regressing Universe,’ has mooted the study of Environmental Education (Ghosh, A.K. 2017). Moreover, the alarming 2017 declaration of world renowned theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen William Hawking about the ‘supporting ability of the Mother Earth for a maximum period of 100 years’ may have pushed all the seven billions with requisite living and nonliving things in alternative locations or have to clean it up properly in the tune of late Bengali poet Sukanta Bhattacharjee to make the Earth habitable for both the new born and the existing one for years to come.

5. Environmental Education – Guiding Principles and Thrust Areas

Nature and natural environment is the open air theatre of learning. The bonding endeavour between the environment and men of all ages helps to preserve the environmental quality with utmost affection. The incorporation of Environmental Education not only helps in harnessing the full potentiality of resources with sustainability but also prove beneficial to save the endangered and decaying Earth.

Environmental consciousness among the global people was manifested with the initiation of UN Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm, Sweden in June 5-16 in 1972. This platform proclaimed the necessity of improving and restoring the environment. After the

ECOSOC clearance in 1969 under the entrepreneurship of Sweden, Environmental Education gained momentum and achieves international recognition in Stockholm Declaration and flourished with the arrangement of International Environmental Workshop in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1975, where a global framework for Environmental Education was proposed. This Belgrade Charter (1975) asserted to develop world communities who are environmentally conscious having environmental knowledge, skill, attitude, motivations and commitment to combat contemporary problems and prevent the upcoming scourges against the environmental stability.

“Environmental Education should not be just one more subject to add to existing programmes but should be incorporated into programmes intended for all learners, whatever their age. A new joint pattern of work must be drawn up, involving home, community and school, to introduce young people to environmental issues. Environmental education should serve as a catalyst or common denominator in the renewal of contemporary education. Clear and functional relations must be established and maintained between needs, goals, objectives, the curriculum proper and evaluation methods” (Final Report, Tbilisi Conference, 1977).

The Tbilisi Declaration, 1977, the world’s First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education underlines us about the positive aspects of sound and all round developmental activities. This conference on Environmental Education under the aegis of the UNESCO with UNEP sets up certain criteria of guiding the subject matter of Environmental Education in regional, national and global levels. These are as follows

- Environment should be considered holistically by covering all types of environmental settings of natural, manmade, technological and social types including ecological, social, legislative, historical, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, economic and political.
- It should be considered as lifelong continuous process starting from pre-school level through any mode of formal and non formal education.
- It may be inter disciplinary in approach having content of holistic and balanced nature.

- Major environmental issues of local, regional, national and international point of view may be examined to insight into the environmental conditions of other geographic areas among the students.
- To be focused on current and potential environmental situations by considering historical perspectives.
- To prevent and make a way out to cater environmental problems, the necessity and values of local, national and international cooperation must be recognized.
- In any plans of developmental activities environmental aspects must be considered.
- To enable learners with learning experiences, decision making opportunities and acceptance of consequences.
- To make a relationship with any ages of people to environmental sensitivity, knowledge, problem solving skills and values with special emphasis on the mentioned sensitivity to the learners' own sphere in earlier days.
- It should help learners to discover the symptoms and reasons behind the environmental problems.
- To emphasis on the complex nature on the environmental problem to develop critical thinking and problem solving abilities.
- To make aware and utilize different environmental approaches on teaching and learning and get a practical experience thereby.

In India, The National Policy on Education, 1986 (NPE) states that the “protection of the environment is a value which must form an integral part of the curriculum at all stages of education” (Singh, K. 2013).

Educational institutions are yet to formulate a welcome curriculum. Environmental Education has not yet flourished as desired. Government and nongovernmental organizations, agencies and officials are facing the lack of coherence to cater environmental problems. Link failure between the scientists, planners, executioners and politicians has limited the scope of harvesting the sustainability.

Moreover, the apathy to sign the Environmental Treaties as was in the case of U.S. in the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 is a serious blow for the sake of high economic return. Mirror image of this is again reflected when U.S. deserted Paris Agreement of Climate Change in June 2017.

6. Environmental Education - Benefits

Environmental Education helps us to enable to stay connected with the real world. The more we close to the nature the less scope we will achieve to make harm to the environment. The nature and the exposure in natural world are congenial to attain the physical, intellectual, spiritual, socio-economic and moral development. Nearness tends to grow the propensity of sympathetic treatment to the nature and natural elements. In olden days, hundreds of birds and animals were in close proximity to the Ashrams and were highly affectionate. *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* by Kalidasa and *Ramcharitmanas* by Goswami Tulsidas remind us the affectionate bonding of man and nature.

The vastness, splendid beauty and the wonders of the nature may enlarge the power of imagination, critical thinking aptitude, creativity and problem solving ability. Outdoor recreation and wandering habits of the nature helps to tally with the real world by erasing mere bookishness.

Environmental Education helps in strengthening of the bonding with the open environment and thereby enhances endurance power from the inherent aggression or avoidance from the wild animals. Nurturing the wild helps to drive out the fearfulness and enhance courage and affection and also generates responsibility and adoption strategy for the betterment of the biotic community. The ways of harvesting the essence of Environmental Education by procedure, may be categorized as follows

Generation: Awareness about Environment related Issues

Observation: Discrepancy Symptoms

Measurement: Census / Environmental Audit

Findings: Availability Status

Investigation: Causes



Sharing: Among the Scientists, Planners, Administrators and Executioners
↓
Proposal: Invitation of Opinion
↓
Step: Synthesis / Coherence
↓
Strategy: Plan of Action
↓
Formulation: Implementation
↓
Findings: Result at Interval

7. Conclusion

Environmental Education, as in general, deserves to draw attention to the commoners about a mere social and political outcry rather than established itself as a tool of challenging problem. Restoration, management, wise use and preservation policies and their effective execution endeavour through the Environmental literates may only a boon to the Environmental Education. Environmental Education seeks to unveil the challenges related to waning of environment by means of deterioration or degradation. It helps to formulate abatement measures to be adopted thereby. It invites effective means to ease the everlasting flow of goods and services both from natural and artificial sources. Unending desire, extreme allurements have pushed the millions into the ruthless destruction procedure. Imbalance, scarcity, societal as well as economic destitute are the immediate returns. Fulfilment of prime requisites and co-operation and also critical thinking in the line of *Deep Ecology* for sustainability attainment may only able to maintain a balancing state in the nature. Nurturing of nature with all its living and non-living essentials in its own states and protection from being forced erosion should be the ultimate agenda of us to present a free and Welcome Earth for the retainers and the new comers for years to come.

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