

SECURING HUMANS BY CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Securing Humans by conserving the environment is the need of the hours because there is a direct effect of environmental degradation and problems on the human life. All the living beings including the human beings are dependent upon the environment for their different types of needs. Thus, in order to secure the human beings, it is necessary to conserve our environment. Previously security of human being was considered to be a part of national security, but since the 1990s human security has become more important than the national security because now we have successfully chalked out the differences between national and human security. We cannot equate national security with human security and we cannot give an excuse that human security will be taken care of automatically if we secure our nations. Therefore, this research paper deals with the relation between environmental conservation and human security and focuses on the ways through which we can secure human lives by conserving our environment.

KEY WORDS: Human Security, Environmental Conservation, Environmental Security, Climate Change, Global Warming, Pollution, Ecological Imbalance, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Modernisation, and large scale industrialisation and urbanisation have led to different types of environmental crisis which is making our lives tougher. We are in an age where we are witnessing some of the major environmental crisis such as climate change, global warming, ecological imbalances, etc. We as a living being definitely know that without nature we cannot think of our lives. So, when we discuss about human being and their security, which is now generally known as 'human security' we find that the environment

plays a very significant role in securing our lives. In other words, we can say that environmental conservation is a precondition for establishing human security.

Secure in the lap of the environment, human being have started considering themselves the master of the whole universe and forgetting that they are only a minute part of this infinite creation. This attitude of human being has been responsible for the environmental crises which are now threatening our existence. Human being must realize that without securing our environment we cannot think of securing ourselves and the mankind. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to depict the ways in which environmental conservation can help establish the concept of human security.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN SECURITY

As per the United Nations Development Programme the concept of Human Security means, 'first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression and second, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.'¹ As the concept is concerned with human wellbeing therefore, it becomes so broad to include not only the fulfilment of basic needs of the individuals but also security from violence and diseases as well.

Earlier the concept of security was basically understood in terms of security of the nation-state, not the individuals. It was considered that security of the nation-state will ensure security of the individuals residing in it. It was only the military aggression which was seen as the real threat and the chief concern of the state was to secure its national interest. Although national interest also includes the interest of the people living in that state, but it is not correct to equate national interest with individual interest. Finally with the end of cold war the territorial security shifted to the periphery and human being occupied the centre which focussed primarily on the individuals and their economic, social, political, cultural, medical, and basic needs, and interests. 'For many of them, security symbolized protection

¹ UNDP (1994) "Human Development Report", Oxford University Press, New York, p. 23

from the threat of disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards.²

The UNDP Human Development Report has defined the scope of human security to include seven areas – first, **Economic Security** means security of earning one's livelihood by means of pursuing any economic activity or profession; second, **Food Security** which means that people should have at least that much of food so that they can survive; four, **Environmental Security** means protection from natural and man-made disasters; five, **Personal Security** means protection from physical, mental or psychological violence from the state or non-state actors, from external threats or from internal/ domestic threats; six, **Community Security** means protection from ethnic and communal violence and protection of traditions and values; and last but not the least, seven, **Political Security** which means ensuring different rights and freedoms for the individuals so that they can exercise control over governance whether directly or indirectly.³

After having considered the meaning, nature and scope of the concept of human security, we can now move to the major environmental problems which are proving to be a real threat for human kind and also to the concept of human security.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Just like other living beings, human being has been fully dependent upon the nature for the fulfilment of all his needs and desires as well. But it is not only the dependence of man over the nature which is creating problems rather it is the undue and unrestricted intervention of man in the nature which has pushed the mankind into different types of problems and crises. But unfortunately, due to the false conception of modernity and modernism people have been unduly and unrestrictedly intervening in the natural processes of the environment in the form of modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, etc.

In spite of merits we find in the processes of modernisation, industrialisation and urbanisation, we cannot deny the fact that we are paying a lot as a cost for these processes in

² UNDP, 1994, *Ibid*, op. cit., p. 22

³ *Ibid*, op. cit. pp. 24-25

terms of different environmental problems such as pollution (air, water, soil, noise), climate change and global warming, ozone layer depletion, ecological imbalances and diminishing Bio-diversity, Natural Disasters and Diseases and Epidemics.

“Climate change is not only the most prominent global environmental issue, but it is also, some argue, the most urgent and important challenge currently confronting the international community.”⁴ Over the past century and particularly during the last few decades, a new period of rapid climate change has been initiated, with temperatures climbing quickly from normal interglacial levels. As a result of pollution and climate change global warming is taking place and has become so important that the term ‘climate change’ has gradually been replaced by ‘global warming’ in official discussion about the phenomenon, at national and international levels. For instance, whereas UN reports had previously used both terms, by the establishment of the 1992 FCCC, only one reference was made to the idea of ‘warming’ and none to ‘global warming’.⁵

Forest is an important ecological resource having effects of air purification, adjusting climate, water conservation, resisting wind and stabilizing sand, biological diversity protection and promoting ecological stability. The forest cover on the earth is diminishing at a very fast rate which is not only affecting the quality of air we breathe but also adversely affecting the biological diversity. All these changes have threatened the global human security.

Natural disasters are also the result of environmental degradation which can be seen in the forms of flood, drought, desertification of land, acid rain, etc. Previously, natural disasters were considered to be caused by natural factors but in recent times these natural disasters have also been provoked by human beings due to which mankind have been facing many problems. These natural disasters have irreversible effects not only on the mankind but also on the earth. Thousands of people lose their lives to these disasters.

⁴ Heywood, A. (2011), “Global Politics”, Palgrave, Macmillan, UK, p. 391

⁵ Ibid, p. 395

Pollution in simple terms includes the pollution of air, water (including marine water pollution), soil, noise, etc. Air pollution means “an excessive concentration of unwanted matters in the air environment. Most of the air pollutants are related with burning of fossil fuels such as coal, petroleum products in power plants, factories, motor vehicles, etc.”⁶ This pollution has resulted in respiratory problems such as asthma and is also responsible for global warming, acid rain and such other natural calamities which is not only affecting human beings but also all other living beings on the earth. Similarly, water pollution is also a result of industrial wastes which are disposed in the rivers and besides this, the domestic waste water and agricultural wastewater which flow with the rain water into the rivers carrying pesticides and insecticides used in the fields. This toxic water leads to many water-borne diseases and directly affects the human beings and other creatures. Due to soil pollution, the agricultural products we consume also get the same poison people use in the agricultural land. This also affects the birds, frogs and other creatures. Similarly ‘noise pollution causes insomnia, fatigue, headache, digestive disorders, hypertension, ulcers, cardiac ailments and deafness.’⁷

From the above it becomes clear that most of the causes of pollution of all types are related to the human beings whether directly or indirectly but unfortunately the cost is incurred by all the living beings on the planet as they are not capable enough to protect themselves like we can do. The same is true regarding the people of the poor countries as well. But the people of developing countries are ill-equipped due to which they suffer the most.

Keeping these problems in mind the concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ was adopted which refers to ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs’.⁸ ‘It embodies two concepts: first, the concept of need, particularly the essential needs of the world’s poor; and second, the concept of limitations, especially related to the environment’s ability to meet

⁶ Mishra, S. & Mishra, S. Issue of Industrial Pollution, Global Warming, Threats to Biodiversity in Biswal, T. (2006), “Human Rights, Gender and Environment”, Viva Books, New Delhi, p. 405

⁷ Ibid, p. 414

⁸ “Our common future”, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Brundtland Report, United Nations, New York, 1987, p. 24

future as well as present needs. So-called weak sustainability takes economic growth to be desirable but simply insists that growth must be limited to ensure that ecological costs do not threaten its long-term sustainability.⁹ Now it becomes necessary to reveal the ways in which we can actualize the concept of human security by ensuring the protection and conservation of the environment.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: SECURING HUMANS BY CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental problems discussed in the above section of this article has given us an idea about the forms of environmental problems, the extent of damage they can cause and are causing, not only to the mankind, but also to all the living being on this planet. The best way to secure human beings and other living beings on this planet is to conserve the environment. For this we must accept the fact that most of the environmental problems are consequence of human actions and their false conception of unlimited growth. The false ego of being rational to the extent of moulding and muddling with the nature as per one's desires has resulted in such environmental crisis.

Although the environmental threat knows no boundaries and never do any distinctions between rich or poor, developed or developing, but still its impact is more devastating upon the developing countries in comparison to the developed countries due to the lack of proper technological advancement, health facilities, infrastructural facilities, and unresolved problems of fulfilment of basic needs. Even in these developing countries the condition of the poor, the children, the old age persons, the disabled and the women is worst. The weaker and deprived sections of the society are sidelined and pushed to the periphery.

People in the rural areas are most vulnerable to such environmental threats as they live much closer to the nature and are much more dependent upon the environment in comparison to others. Most of the developing countries still have agricultural economy and agriculture is their main source of income. Thus, again it is the developing countries and to add on to this pathetic situation, the people residing in the rural areas of the developing countries are the worst affected.

⁹ Heywood, A. (2012), "Political Ideologies: An Introduction", Palgrave Macmillan, UK, p.263

In addition to the above point, even the people living in the coastal regions are also much more vulnerable and defenceless in comparison to the people living in the plains, plateaus, mountains or forests. We can see the devastating effects of Tsunami and other cyclones over the coastal regions. The conditions of the tribes are not so different. Even they are also most affected by the climate change, global warming, deforestation, ecological imbalances, etc. as they live their lives in close affinity to the forests and the environment. They are inseparable part of it; they live and die there. So any effect on the forests can directly affect them as well.

Poor are poor, weaker are weaker irrespective of their country. The poor and weaker sections of the society even in the developed countries are similarly exposed to the environmental threats due to the lack of access to health facilities and technological advancements made by their own country. The environmental problems are both cause and effect of poverty. "Poor nations obviously are less equipped to cope with natural disasters. Disasters in developing countries are an integral part of their poverty cycle. Poverty causes disasters. And disasters exacerbate poverty"¹⁰

The major areas or dimensions of human security as mentioned by the UNDP Human Development Report (1994) are 'Economic Security, Food Security, Health Security, Environmental Security, Personal Security, Community Security, and Political Security'¹¹ amongst which the environmental security i.e. environmental conservation is such a determining and all-encompassing dimension of human security which has the potential to provide overall security to the individuals from all the security threats covered under the concept of human security. It can not only secure the mankind from the environmental threats and challenges, rather it can directly or indirectly save the humanity from all of the above threats and simultaneously capable enough of providing a complete security to not only the mankind but to the mother earth. Everything is a 'part' of the environment and the environment is the 'whole'. The 'whole' will always remain above the 'parts'. It can create the 'parts', it can nurture the 'parts' and it can destroy it as well.

¹⁰ UNDP, 1994, *Ibid*, op. cit. p. 29

¹¹ UNDP, 1994, *Ibid*, op. cit. pp. 24-25

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