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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM EGO-CENTRISM TO ECO- CENTRISM.

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Abstract

Post world war global scenario witnessed derivation of new world views on various spheres of human life viz. polity, economy, development and even the existence of humanity. Hence environmental issues as a movement took shape according to their popular concern about environmental pollution and the depletion of natural resources. Subsequently there casted more focus on environment from international community as legislations and various national and international factions and blocs came to existence with different world views in a way that more or less reflects their political stands and affiliations. Later events corroborate the very controversies and contradictions between developed and developing countries where the North and South dichotomy unveiled with arguments of industrialisation, poverty and population. This paper tries to delineate trajectory of emergence and development of different environmental world views with the help of literatures which marked milestones in the environmental discourses.

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Introduction:-

Environment is a multidimensional entity which has been a matter of debate from the time it had been taken into the account, as for bureaucracies, cabinet meetings, national and international dialogues and parleys and corporate boardrooms as well as academic debates and class room discussions. Tracing from man's history of hunting and gathering to the 'great epoch' of technological high leaps which passed through its ebbs and flows, the discussions and debates have been taken different faces viz. reciprocity, interaction, dependency, exploitation and depletion, with irony that all those destined for human existence and wellbeing. Notion of bifurcating man from his vicinity as part of defining environment got momentous acceptance among the academic intelligentsia as well as the development connoisseurs and managerial experts. Post world war global scenario witnessed derivation of new world views on various spheres of human life viz. polity, economy, development and even the existence of humanity. In west environmental issues as a movement took shape in 1960s due to their popular concern about environmental pollution and the depletion of natural resources (Brenton, 1994). Subsequently there casted more focus on environment from international community as legislations and various national and international factions and blocs came to existence with different world views in a way that more or less reflects their political stands and affiliations. Later events corroborate the very controversies and contradictions between developed and developing countries where the North and South dichotomy unveiled with arguments of industrialisation, poverty and population.

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Environment: The concept

The term 'environment' has been used for various meanings in various contexts. Different disciplines present the word environment in particular way that fit the concerned subject matters. Natural sciences, physical sciences and social sciences approach the word through different viewpoints and perspectives, which is broad enough to envisage the respective meanings and narrow enough to exclude what all meant by the term per se. In common usages the word gets baffled with its variants like habitat and milieu. Apart from the certain operational definitions, the term independent of modifiers comes up with characterizations of both holistic and dualistic views in which the former refers to the totality which encompasses everything while the latter bifurcate the subject and 'others' with the relation of reciprocity or response (GL Young, 1986).

Environmental consciousness

Human relation to the environment and his habitat could be traced back to the genesis of human habitation on earth. His affinity to nature has been evolved through various social phenomena, which could be portrayed even by animism, devotion and believes in gods and goddesses in various natural powers. The very base of this indivisible attachment in one or the other way could be marked from his dependence on the environment for food for existence and minimal survival and consumption for subsistence. It is from this context the idea of 'ecological consciousness' has been taken its shape as various movements and struggles; be it the struggle of people against deforestation in the west, the long lasting fight of fishermen of coastal Kerala, the Chipko movement, etc. Such communities striving for livelihood exercise a high degree of social control over these resources in contrast to the situation under capitalism as this symbiotic relationship between the producers and the means of production is torn asunder. In this sense the notion that a popular ecological consciousness of worldview is an inherent characteristic of pre industrial capitalist society is a historical inversion, where ecological consciousness is neither a trans-historic given nor the exclusive character of any type of community; as it is a manifestation of conflict: class perceptions of relationship to natural resources (Ragunandan , 1987).

Environmental World Views

The global concerns on natural conservation and environmental protection, though it could be seen far back in the history, the words 'environment' and 'ecology' have been introduced in their current meaning, which emerged as a global issue only in early 1960s when the paper 'The Politics of Ecology' by Aldous Huxley published in 1963 (Brenton 1994). A new integrated way of scientifically understanding the earth in terms of 'biosphere' had been started by marked contributions of Lamarck (1744-1824), Edward Suess (1831-1914), and V.I. Vernadsky (1863-1945). The idea of environmentalism came to its form in the west from the period of industrialization which was boosted up later with the advent of colonization. Colonialism and imperialism had enormous environmental consequences, especially as many previously unconnected areas of the globe became primary sources of raw materials for Western industrialization (Clapp and Dauvergne, 2005). In a situation where the global coordination hampered by two world wars and great depression United Nations initiated the formation of International Union for the protection of Nature in 1948 (renamed as International Union for Conservation of Nature-IUCN in 1956), which stands to coordinate global efforts to conserve the nature. The protests and dissents against nuclear 'dread technology' after Vietnam War and chemical pollution by industrials gave momentum to the movement. The concerns prevailed in 1960s on ill-treatment of environment by industrialization led to the formation of The World Wildlife Fund in 1961.

The environmentalism boosted up academic interest, with internal ideological and political factionism, by which the movement got impetus. Scientists, economists, political scientists and sociologists all turned their attention to the issue. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 played influential role in the concerns, cautioning the indictment of excessive pesticide use and questioning man's ferocity on nature and environment. She highlights the idea that 'Life exists as an integrated web' with constant symbiosis with environment and not as a hierarchy.

One of the best known and most ambitious such exercises, was works of Club of Rome like '*Limits to Growth*' by a research team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It looks at mankind's prospects over the next century with conclusions that the exponential growth in rates of consumption of non-renewable resources would 'on the most optimistic assumptions' rapidly lead to their exhaustion. It predicts that if these trends continued, the earth would reach its limits within 100 years and suggests that Global calamity could be avoided only through very early and vigorous action to halt population growth and cut back on resource intensive industrial activity.

The Population Bomb by Paul Ehrlich (1970) was another iconic of its kind which observes that ‘ the battle to feed all of humanity is over, and in the 1970s the world will undergo famines, hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to the death in spite of any crash programmes embarked on now(Clapp and Dauvergne, 2005).

The Closing Circle by Barry Commoner (1971) like Ehrlich was also pointing out the predominant role of technology in environmental deterioration while emphasizing the role of population.

In 1972 John Maddox published *The Doomsday Syndrome* in which he questions the Malthusian arguments and Ehrlich’s prediction as ironically he says that there will be problem of how to dispose of food surpluses rather than famine and starvation.

The subsequent years marked by publication of another extraordinary work published by E F Schumacher called *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. He emphasize on the small and local economies for the development which support the idea of ‘think globally, act locally’.

Stockholm conference 1972

The consensus of UN General Assembly in 1968 on the need for discussion on the problems of the human environment and the need for international cooperation and agreement for the best solution of environmental problems gave birth for United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, Sweden, in June 1972 in the chairmanship of Maurice Strong. The focus of the conference was expanded from the problems of industrialization to the poverty and other development concerns. The whole conference witnessed for the upsurge of north-south tensions on environmental and developmental issues. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India emphasized ‘poverty as biggest polluter’.

Founex Report produced by group of scientists and experts from developing countries as part of preparatory to conference shows a hold of the third world countries against the dominant worldviews. This could make a distinction between the environmental problems facing developed countries and that of developing countries. Poverty, inequality, social participation, etc, were some of the issues relevant to third world environment. In their view the west’s obsession with population policy was little more than an attempt to distract attention from the real source of most environmental degradation fuelled by western consumption and intensive industrial technology. The solution suggested for the south was economic development through industrial development – problem of west where the means turned to the end, becomes solution of south for subsistence.

Though the conference as first of its kind could depict a great chapter in environmental history, was vague in terms of its influence on international community rather than creating awareness. Many of its principles triggered further tension in the concern; as the sovereign right for nations posed by principle 21 tends to fuel the tension rather than resolve it. Though Stockholm was precursor to important developments in the environmental issues Tendency to compromise to the point of inaction, Lack of commitment and the rhetorical principles led the conference in to rather less effective in global sphere.

The Stockholm conference came with new offshoots or gave more attention in approaches to environment and development as:

The eco-development approach focuses on the satisfaction of basic needs and an environmentally sound production system. It relies on the natural carrying capacity of a particular region and implies a particular technical style. It emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and need for structural changes for achieving a sustainable production system. As a development strategy aimed at self-reliance, eco-development posed a threat to multinational corporations.

The eco- societal approach to development is modification to the eco development approach. Its foundation is on redistributive principle in development and the improvement of environmental quality for the masses. It calls for society based solutions for meeting the local needs of the population as well as for avoiding the violation of natural carrying capacities of particular socio-ecological region. Orienting development planning towards a policy of redistribution is thus a prerequisite for meeting the basic needs of the population.

The quality of life approach also emphasis on the satisfaction of basic needs. It involves three dimensions: (a) maintenance of eco-system balance; (b) satisfaction of basic physical needs for human development; (c) satisfaction

of basic social needs. It puts forth alternatives to the existing techno cultural beliefs related to cultural development and analyses factors related with problems of basic needs, growing havoc in ecological balance and thereby economic system(Nayar 1990).

Neo-classical approach based on the market liberalism, which sees the environmental turbulence as some inevitable problems and believes that modern science and technology and economic growth can improve the global environment where poverty and weak economic growth, market failure and poor government policies trigger the problems.

Marxist approach based on the inter relationships between human and nature. It asserts that the unequal distribution of resources and capital mode of production and the uneven power structure of the society exacerbate the global environment. It presumes the concept of totality rather than dualism in man-nature relationship.

Towards the Rio conference

United Nations member states meeting held in New York in 1989 concluded with consensus for international discussion on environmental deterioration to be held which later called as United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development. The plan for conference was comprised with four preparatory sessions known as PrepComs, 1st in Nairobi, 2nd and 3rd in Geneva and 4th in New York. It was in the context where the cold war ends in the West and Economic crisis in the South and global ecology overshadowed by ozone depletion, global warming, deforestation, and soil erosion etc.

Prior to conference it got global attraction by two documents released prior to the conference namely *Our common Future* and *Challenge to the South* by UN Commission on the Environment and Development headed by Norwegian PM Gro Harlem Brundtland and Southern Commission headed by Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere with the initiation of Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohammed.

Brundtland report introduced to the world the rhetoric idea of ‘Sustainable Development’ which refers to ‘Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. Further explanations best show how the ‘sustainable development’ promote industrial and economic development and thereby the western interests; as she pointed out certain issues like Population and human resource, food security, species and eco system, energy, industry and urban challenges as central to global environmental crisis. Taking population and human resources she emphasize on the balance between population size and resources and between population growth and economic growth which could be attained by dealing population with more development. To her food problem exists only literally where, as she asserts the potential to grow food still remains which could be resorted by better management. She deals the species and nature as economic resources with no more explanation of species extinction. She suggests better to reframe the environmental destruction in terms of national economic development policies. The report presents the industry as an indispensable motor of growth and the sustainable development is better possible through increased efficiency resulting from technological improvement. The report put forward the concept of ‘commons’ which blend to the nation state sovereign right in contrast with concept that the traditional communities owning their resources and distributing it wisely. The whole document could be seen all against the background of growth imperative (Chatterjee & Finger 1994).

The southern report was raising new dialogue with north with no concern over environmental issues; for to them no concern for global environmental issues where millions of south starving to death. Though both the reports reflect the north-south tension ‘it is surprising that after foundation documents like ‘our common future’ and ‘the Challenge to the south’, leaders on both sides-the environmentally concerned North and its apparent opponent, the poverty stricken South- went to Rio with one message for the world –more growth, more trade, more aid, more science, more technology and more management (Chatterjee and Finger, 1994).

United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development 1992

According to the UN resolution 1989 (44/228) UN Commission on Environment and Development convened UN Conference on the Environment and Development on 14th June 1992 at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in which 178 countries participated including 117 heads of state and about 2400 non-governmental representatives. The conference was conducted on the twentieth anniversary of the Stockholm conference under the chairmanship of Maurice Strong. The countries signed the package of agreements namely Bio-diversity convention, Climate change convention, Statement

on forest principles, The agreement to work towards desertification convention, Rio declaration on environment and development and Agenda21.

Bio-diversity negotiated in 3rd PrepCom in August 1991 in Geneva. The convention got attention as Group 77 (G77) insisted on inclusion of issue of biotechnology in biodiversity convention for which a compromise document drawn later in Nairobi. The convention marked by the US refusal to sign when 156 countries signed. The whole convention reflected the western inclination as it asserted the sovereign right of nation state where biodiversity is a natural resource. Biotechnology was presented as central for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The convention resulted nothing that was held for, as to Vandana Shiva 'it is ironical that a convention for the protection of biodiversity has been distorted into a convention to exploit it'.

The Climate Change convention was initiated by Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) as it warned against global warming and directed CO₂ emission to cut by 60%. USA refused to stabilize and reduce the emission as it was projected as 23% of global rate. This issue got less consideration as the intention turned to the ultimate goal of economic development.

In 1990, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, UK and USA initiated the Agreement on Forest Principle realizing the fact that World's tropical forests are disappearing at the rate of 17 m hectares per year. The convention flopped after South refused the agreement conceiving the forest as national resources and observing that the North jeopardizes their right to their own resources. Forest became a new icon of North-South divide.

African delegates lobbied the Agreement to work towards Desertification Convention. Failing to mobilize support from others it concluded by UN decision to negotiate the issue later in the eve of 1992 and formed committee based in Geneva.

Rio declaration as the core product of conference was the merge of both philosophies of Brundtland commission and Southern commission. The declaration comprised of 27 principles expose the narrative of sustainable development and consider human as central to it. It asserts the sovereign right of nation state and right to development where it pose the development priority over environment. It elevates technological transfer from North to South. The declaration put forward an open international economic system which promotes free trade catalyzing phenomenon described as 'toxic terrorism' and 'garbage imperialism' (Nayar 1994) by opening up of the south's economy to western investment.

Agenda 21 came to picture in August 1991 at Nairobi by Maurice Strong prospecting developmental guideline for the 21st century. It was 800 page document consisting of 40 chapters on six important themes viz. a) quality of life which was focused on economic growth and industrial development contrasting human activities and resource consumption, b) Efficient use of natural resources based on valuing everything on economic terms, c) Sustainable economic growth, d) Protection of global commons considering atmosphere, ocean etc as global resources, e) Management of human settlements viz. urban, energy and transportation etc, f) Management of chemicals and wastes

The entire conference shows the economic growth and technological improvement as panacea for the whole global problems. Neither northern consumption, nor global economic reform, nor nuclear energy, nor the dangers of biotechnology were addressed in Rio, not to mention the fact that the military was totally left off the agenda, instead, free trade and its promoters came to be seen as the solution to the global ecological crisis (Chatterjee and Finger 1994).

Sustainable development

The post cold war scenario of development discourse was fairly unpleasant to the western infallibility and its economic and political hegemony. 1970s marked the emergence of certain expressions like 'limits to growth' and 'carrying capacity' of earth through some influential work. One of the best known and most ambitious of such exercises was the Club of Rome's like '*Limits to Growth*' by a research team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It looks at mankind's prospects over the next century with conclusions that the exponential growth in rates of consumption of non-renewable resources would 'on the most optimistic assumptions' rapidly lead to their exhaustion. It predicts that if these trends continued, the earth would reach its limits within 100 years and suggests

that Global calamity could be avoided only through very early and vigorous action to halt population growth and cut back on resource intensive industrial activity.

Another extraordinary work published by E F Schumacher called *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. He emphasized on the small and local economies for the development which support the idea of 'think globally, act locally'(E. F. Schumacher 1973). By this time it became quite obvious the distinction between two protagonists viz. 'Development over Environment' and 'Environment over Development' which is generally portrayed as 'North' and 'South'. The widely challenged resource-intensive development and the burning discussions over environmental degradation and resource depletion resulted by exploitative use of modern technology, paved way to think about new strategies of development which was later named as 'sustainable development'.

The 'World Conservation Strategy' published in 1981 by IUCN, UNEP and WWF literally introduced -albeit vague, the concept of sustainable development. But the term 'sustainable development' was widely adopted by mainstream development agencies and got due attention following the publication of "*Our Common Future*" in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) set up by United Nations in 1983, chaired by the then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, followed by another document '*Caring for the Earth: A strategy for Sustainable Living*' published in 1991 by IUCN, UNEP and WWF. The idea got impetus by the "Earth Summit" held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 with the representation of 178 member countries of UN under the banner of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Thereby the term was used as a unifying theme in presenting its environmental and social concerns about worrisome trends toward accelerated environmental degradation and social polarisation (Barraclough S L, 2001) in the 1970s and 1980s. It stated that "Sustainable Development is development that meets the 'needs' of the present without compromising the 'ability of future generations' to meet their own needs.

As proposed by WCED in 'Our Common Future' the pursuit of sustainable development requires: i) a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making, ii) an economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self-reliant and sustained basis, iii) a social system that provides for solutions to the tensions arising from disharmonious development, iv) a production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development, v) a technological system that can search continuously for solutions, vi) an international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance, and vii) an administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self correction (Brundtland, G. H, 1987).

Though the new strategy seemed to be positive regarding notions of development, the idea was rhetorical, logically contradictory and semantically ambivalent. Moreover, it disguised the implicit assumptions and political motives of the west. Most of the social scientists and thinkers both in the West and the East expressed concerns about the operability of the idea. W Sachs observes that in the new concept, the locus of sustainability has subtly shifted from nature to development; while sustainable previously referred to natural yields, it now refers to development; instead of nature, development became the object of concern and instead of development, nature became the critical factor to be watched (Sachs. W, 1997). K R Nayar questions the conceptualization of Sustainable Development and he points out that "while considering the satisfaction of needs in the present generation, the definition or its explanations are vague considering the fact that sustainability in the south is linked to the subsistence of poorer sections. It would be unrealistic, even as an approach to environment, to assume that the basic needs of these sections in the South have been met unlike in the North. Therefore, the issue of intergenerational equity in the definition tends to be negatively biased towards such sections in the present generation"(Nayar, K. R. 1998). He further argues that the concept of sustainable development has emerged from those countries which themselves practice unsustainable resource use. The notion of sustainable development is quite anti-south, anti-poor and thereby anti-ecological (Nayar, K. R. 1994). William F Fisher observes that though the term 'sustainable development' won world wide consensus, it is vague in the sense that there is no agreement about the specific goals of sustainable development or the appropriate means to achieve them. To him the term obscures the central issue of balancing the need for income redistribution and economic growth with limited resource and growing population (Fisher W F. 1997).

Green Movements

Green politics or the green movement gripped in the history of environmental movements in the North as well as in the South. Late 1960s witnessed the emergence of green parties in west started root in Scandinavian countries

thereby spread over followed by the political ecology movement of 1970s. It is evident that such parties could mark their strand though slightly in the Stockholm conference. Green movement got momentum passing through different phases starting from Citizen's Initiative movements 1969-74, through Ecology movement 1974-77 and parliamentary phase 1977-81 in west to the influential presence in the global frond. The entry of green party into the political spectrum of Germany in March 1983 marked the historical turn in the movement. Subsequently Green thinking developed against multi faceted global crises. As it stood against universal-mechanistic paradigm, unlimited progress in terms of economic and industrial growth, and against male dominance, Green politics rejects all forms of exploitation, while it encourages a rich cultural life that respects plurality. The Green politics has its foundation on four principles as:

1. Deep ecology which envisages, more than protection or repairing status quo on which the environmentalism brought up, the nature's subtle web of interrelated process and human interaction to the nature. It refuses hierarchical thinking as it observes that the ecological manifestations are the result of underlying structures and their dynamics.
2. Social responsibility which stands against the social injustice of class society to assure the social justice regarding poor and working class in a liberal market based society.
3. Grassroots democracy on its very base of decentralization and complete power involvement of citizens, where the decisions and programmes are designed by and funds are administered by citizen's initiative at bottom level.
4. Non-violence based on Cessation of both structural (State) and personal violence and built on the concept of self-determination for individuals and groups which believes on peace as for Gandhi "There is no way to peace, peace is the way".

Though the following decades demonstrate the political fade of green parties, its strive and thrive as environmental movement being seen different parts of the world.

Henceforth attributes of development from sustainability got translated to Green development. It paved way for a rather radical environmental consciousness which marked the tensions between Ego-centric and ecocentric environmentalism for which the major concern is the nature and the society who nurture it. Green development is not about the way the environment is managed, but about who to manage and how it is managed. Thus the development starts from people's needs and their capacity to meet their needs; for many poor, need for existence. And it enhances their capacity to sustain their livelihood and assimilate their lives with nature. where it corroborate 'The poor are not the problem, they are the solution'(Chambers. R, 1988)

Conclusion:-

Environmental movements got derivations and development throughout the history of mankind. From the struggle for existence of the people who strive earning meager for hands to mouth to the ferocious attack of the luxurious affluent. On one side the attempts done to protect and preserve 'mother' earth while on the other side efforts taken place to utilize and exploit the planet; form conservation to consumption. Environmental movement, from villages it took its dramatic movements taking off the national boundaries to the global theatre with all its political and economical mantles and costumes. Second half of the twentieth century witnessed the tides that took place in the global environmental scenario as from obscurity it has taken its gigantic shape that could polarize the globe. From 1960s it struck the global attention which prompted two ever greater conferences viz. United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Both the historical conferences were grand enough to exhibit the clear picture of the global environmental consciousness and attitudes then prevailed. As for North it was an icon against South in global game board where for south it was a bargaining tool in the international market. Moving from former conference to the latter it demonstrates the changes that took place in the world environmental spectrum. The initial valor of South to defy the northern ploy has seen to be changed to the 'valiant' subordination in front of the imperialist giant of Northern industry and technology.

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