

SUSTAINABLE LIFE STYLE?

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It is now six decades since India became independent. But as for achievements, the scenario is somewhat odd.

India has nuclear bombs and missiles and rockets and satellites side by side with bullock carts and hand pulled rickshaws. There are five star hotels with luxuries and comforts matching with the best in the world. Right outside the Hotels within a walkable distance one could see the poor living on foot-paths. Five to ten percent of Indian population is leading a luxurious life indulging in hyper consumerism. At the bottom thirty to forty percent of the population barely manages to get a square meal per day—often do not have proper shelter or clothing and sleeps on empty stomach. The remaining thirty to forty percent leads a life with various inadequacies and discomforts.

What has gone wrong? Indians have passed through ten five year plans for industrialising the nation, creating infrastructure facilities and village development.

In villages, some roads, some hospitals some school buildings did appear. There was an improvement in farming techniques. Yet only the well-to-do section of the villages got the benefits. The landless poor did not benefit from these schemes.

Development of any kind—be it urban, rural including sustainable development is problematic. The process of development means setting up of industries and creating job opportunities. There is this problem of environmental pollution, soil degradation, exhaustion of earth's resources etc. Since the time of Industrial Revolution development has been proportional to exploitation of earth's resources like cutting down trees, forests full of them for charcoal, construction materials, fire wood, furniture etc. The smoke emitted by the factories created atmospheric pollution. The use of Petroleum fuels—Petrol, Diesel and Kerosene as energy sources, started in the first half of the 20th century has reached maximum levels now. Everybody know, that Petroleum is a fossil fuel non-renewable and the cars, power stations and factories even as they play a vital role in development are the main cause for earth's pollution to dangerous levels.

To quote Ranjit Chaudhuri “There is a fear that global famine of resources is impending. It is true that the industrial progress has brought many comforts and made some nations affluent. But it has made the world as a whole poor. Industrialisation has made earth poor in respect of natural resources, fossil fuel, mineral resources, greenery, maritime resources, sanitation, health and ecology”.

Factories have rendered forests and greenery into deserts. The gulf between the rich and the poor has widened. Peace in the society and health of the people are deteriorating, violence and diseases are flourishing.

Viewed in this background even 'sustainable development' would be a difficult proposition.

In ancient India, millennia ago, sages and saints lived in forests. Upanishads containing the essence of Indian Philosophy were created in the forests. The ashrams, which were the places of learning, were located in the forests. Indian sages lived in harmony with the plants and animals of the forests. “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”—(The whole earth is a family) concept was born in the jungles.

“From the centre of this world, the Sun radiates energy to the whole world—let us worship it” says *Rig Veda*. Message from *Yajur Veda* is “let there be Peace in space, Peace on this earth, Peace in the atmosphere and may the waterways and all things living prosper”.

Apart from the Vedas and Upanishads, Puranas and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata also contain such noble ideas. All these great works were created in verdant forests by great sages who lived in harmony with their surroundings. It is doubtful whether such noble ideas could evolve in multi-storied buildings under ceiling fans and air conditioners. In truth, such a phenomenon has not occurred in this world. Gandhiji travelled, through the whole of India in bullock carts and in third class compartments of trains. He lived in hutments of the Harijan busties. But for such a way of life he would not have become Mahatma.

In his famous work—*Economy of Permanence*, Kumarappa describes five types of economies in nature:

1. Parasitic economy : Some plants which take nourishment from other plants are called parasites. The host plant which provides the nourishment often dies. While the sheep and cattle live on grass non-violently, the tiger which eats them is violent and is a parasite. Parasitic economy is both destructive and violent.
2. Predatory economy : The monkey which feasts on mangoes—gets the benefit of its food without contributing to the growth of the trees. That way monkey is a predator. This economy is less violent but destructive.
2. Economy of enterprise : The honey bee visiting a flower gets pollen and nectar as food. The honey-bee in turn facilitates pollination among flowers leading to the formation of seeds and propagation of plants. This is economy of enterprise—constructive and mutually beneficial.
4. Economy of aggregation: Continuing with the honey bees, Kumarappa describes how the bees live in colonies and each bee contributing to the welfare of the colony. They have overcome self interest and act for group interest.
5. Economy of service: Kumarappa rates this type of economy as the best. He describes how the mother bird takes all efforts to feed young ones and risks its life when faced with enemies. Sustainable life style could be achieved by adopting the following steps:
 1. Sustainable agriculture: Farmers should give up chemical fertilizers and pesticides and substitute them with bio manures and bio pesticides. Vermi culture and vermin compost is a must for restoring the health of the soil.
 2. Khadi & Village Industries are eco friendly. They create employment and help in poverty alleviation. The persons in authority should encourage and promote Khadi and products of Village Industries.
 3. Appropriate technologies : Technologies which are simple and villagers are able to comprehend and run the machines themselves should be adopted. Use of electricity should be avoided or kept to the minimum extent.
 4. Use of renewable energy sources: Coal and Petroleum are non-renewable energy sources and are getting exhausted very fast. Solar energy is limitless and inexhaustible. One can harness solar energy for heating and lighting. Water and wind energies can also be harnessed for producing electricity.
 5. Sylviculture—or growing trees : cutting down of trees for fuel and construction of houses is inevitable. Approximate policy should be to plant two trees and every tree cut. Trees as a source of energy is non-renewable if people only cut them and do not grow them. When people grow two trees for each tree they cut, it becomes a renewable source of energy.

Lewis Thomas has something to say about what should be people's attitude towards the earth : “Except for us, the life of the planet conducts itself as though it were an immense, coherent body of connected life, an intricate system, an organism. Our deepest folly is the notion that we are in charge of the place, that we own it and can somehow run it. We are living part of Earth's life, owned and operated by the earth probably specialized for functions on its behalf that we have not yet glimpsed”. □□