

NOTE

## How to save the Planet

Bharat Dogra writes :

According to various estimates, there are over 13 million to 30 million species of various forms of life in the world. All these together contributing to a beautiful natural panorama.

And what a complex structure each living being is. A new-born baby, for example, has over 2000 million cells.

Among millions of life-forms, human beings alone have the capacity to work in a planned way for the welfare of all forms of life. Human beings alone have the capacity to work in a planned way for the protection of environment and habitats that sustain such diverse forms of life. Human beings alone can perceive the threats to the coming generations and take timely measures to protect future generations of human beings and other forms of life.

It is this unique capacity of human beings which defines their role on earth. The essential role of human beings on planet earth is to protect and promote the welfare of all life forms, including of course human beings, now and in future generations.

Whenever human beings have lived in greater conformity with this protective aim, there has been more happiness and less distress in this world. But when the tendency to deny and violate this aim dominates, the result is an increase in distress and destruction.

During the last century the tendency to violate this aim has dominated. Further massive technological changes have increased the capacity to cause distress and destruction to such an extent that for the first time in the history of earth human-made changes threaten the survival of many, perhaps most forms of life. Climate change and nuclear weapons (or other WMDs) are just two manifestations of this destructive capacity.

This means that the need for establishing the protective role of humanity so that human beings fulfil their essential role on earth is greater than ever before.

For about 5 billion years the earth had existed in a lifeless state after its first independent existence from the sun. The first signs of life appeared millions of years ago in the form of slimy micro organisms; this led to jelly followed by shellfish, vertebrate fish, and then reptiles. The largest reptiles, the dinosaurs were the dominant form of life on earth for 200 million years. Then suddenly dinosaurs disappeared—the reason is not firmly established yet, but it probably involved asteroids hitting earth and huge volcanic eruptions.

Depending on whom exactly we're willing to recognize as our first ancestor, human history goes back to anywhere between 40000 years to 300000 years or more. An element of DNA

has been traced back to a common ancestor who lived (in Africa) about 300000 years back. About 40000 years ago the 'newest human model' (Homo sapiens) spread all over the world.

If earth's life is seen as a single day, then human beings proper appear only in the last second before midnight; yet their role on earth has been of a very critical nature as it is due to the activities of human beings that in 20th and 21st century AD serious global threats to life-creating conditions on planet earth have appeared. Again out of the nearly 40000 years of Homo sapiens existence on earth, for nearly 39800 years humankind did not pose any such threat to the planet's life creating adverse conditions. It is only during the last 200 years or so that Homo sapiens's activities created such threats. Such threats increased the most in the 20th century, which is also the time when humankind created weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), capable of destroying most forms of life many times over. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons were actually used to kill several hundred thousand people. But it is ironic that humankind largely considers these last 200 years, and particularly the 20th century to be the time when they have 'progressed' the most or 'developed' the most.

Today people are familiar also with the concept of tipping point according to which global warming beyond a point—a rise of over 2°C—may create conditions of a steady, unstoppable drift towards worsening disasters and catastrophic conditions.

Warnings about grave harm to life-creating conditions on earth have been voiced several times in the late 20th century, not to mention the first decade of the 21st century.

Despite such warnings, however, the predominant opinion among humankind is still to regard the last two hundred years (when the causes for such threats to life-creating conditions were created by humankind's activities) as the years of the greatest progress of humankind and indeed as the period of greatest progress on earth. With such a worldview, isn't it most likely that what is considered as progress will be speeded up further and in the process the life-nurturing conditions on earth will be further endangered?

This is a very important question for the future of all life-forms on earth and this is the reason why in any history of earth the history of humankind (despite its short duration in the earth's history of billions of year) deserves special attention and why the last two hundred years of humankind demand even more concentrated attention. Today more than ever before people need to assert and establish the protective role of humankind on planet earth. □□□