

5. *The Ailing Planet : The Green Movement's Role*

(Nani Palkhivala)

ABOUT THE LESSON

The article "The Ailing Planet : The Green Movement's Role" was written by Nani Palkhivala and published in 'The Indian Express' on 24th November 1994. The article raises vital issues regarding the degrading environment of the planet and the immediate need to promote sustainable development, which have become the burning issues of the day. However, despite conscientious efforts of environmentalists and the rapid awareness towards the 'Green Movement', the success story of repleting the earth is bleak. The planet is heading towards catastrophic depletion. The immediate need is being felt to promote the concept of 'sustainable development' as popularised in 1987 by World Commission on Environment and Development and defined as, "Development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."

NOTES

- **Initiation of the Green Movement**
 - started nearly twenty-five years ago
 - world's first nationwide Green party founded in New Zealand in 1972
 - the movement has not looked back ever since
- **Changes introduced by Green Movement**
 - paradigm shift from the mechanistic view to a holistic and ecological view of the world
 - revolutionary shift in human perceptions as radical as Copernicus' concept that the earth and the other planets revolved round the sun

- initiated for the first time in human history, a growing world-wide consciousness that the earth itself is a living organism
- popularised the vital need to respect and preserve the metabolic needs and processes of the earth
- created a realisation towards our ethical obligations to be good caretakers of the planet and become responsible trustees of the legacy to future generations
- **Consciousness created by various agencies**
 - a notice on a cage in a zoo at Lusaka, Zambia warns about 'the world's most dangerous animal': Man
 - such consciousness has created a new awareness
 - need to shift from a system based on domination to one based on partnership
 - man shares the planet with about 1.4 million living species which have been catalogued
 - biologists estimate another three to a hundred million living species still unlisted and recorded
 - First Brandt Report raised the question : "Are we going to leave our successors a scorched planet of advancing deserts, impoverished landscapes and ailing environment"
- **Principal biological systems of the earth**
 - four biological systems referred by Mr Lester R. Brown in his book '*The Global Economic Prospect*' namely : fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands
 - they form the foundation of the global economic system
 - apart from supplying food, the four systems provide virtually all the raw materials for industry except minerals and petroleum-derived synthetics

- **Human claims on these systems reaching unsustainable level**
 - productivity is being impaired
 - fisheries collapsing & forests disappearing
 - grasslands converted into barren wastelands
 - croplands deteriorating
 - over-fishing common in protein-conscious and protein-hungry world
 - forests being decimated in poor countries for firewood
 - several species of life face extinction as a result of destruction of tropical forests
 - world's ancient patrimony of tropical forests eroding at the rate of forty to fifty million acres a year
 - growing use of dung for burning depriving farmlands of an important natural fertiliser
 - a five-fold increase in the rate of forest planting needed to cope with the expected fuelwood demand in the year 2000.
 - James Speth, the President of World Resources Institute declared that we are losing the forests at an acre-and-a-half to a second'
- **Constitutional & legal action - a farce**
 - laws never respected nor enforced in India
 - Article 48 A of the constitution provides for the state to protect and improve and conserve forests and wildlife, but the truth is quite contrary
- **Present scenario highly deplorable**
 - report of Parliament's Estimates Committee highlights near catastrophic depletion of India's forests at the rate of 3.7 million acres a year
 - unofficial reports indicate 8 times the rate indicated by government statistics

- a three-year study conducted by the United States using satellites and aerial photography warned of the 'critical condition' of the world environment
- growth of world population jeopardising the future of human society. Took one million years to add the first billion and at present the world population increases by a million every four days with a total population of 5.7 billion.
- **Population control – the only solution**
 - development the best contraceptive
 - fertility falls as incomes rise
 - education spreads and health improves
 - no development possible due to population explosion
 - rich get richer, poor beget children condemned to remain poor
 - compulsory sterilization not suggested but voluntary family planning should be promoted
 - choice to be made between control of population & perpetuation of poverty
 - population control to be given top priority in India
- **Transcending concern towards saving the planet**
 - survival just not of the people but of the planet
 - awareness about environmental issues does not signal our demise but our earnest effort towards a better future.
 - emerging new world vision has ushered in an Era of Responsibility seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than disassociated collection of parts
 - Industry has crucial role to play in this new 'Era of Responsibility'
 - a complete transformation would be effected if more businessmen took up the role of 'Chief Environmental Officer' like Mr. Edgar S. Woolard, chairman of Du Pont

- need of the hour : fulfil our commitment towards the sustenance of the Planet Earth to whom we owe our existence, for we have not inherited it from our forefathers, but borrowed it from our children

GLOSSARY

- recall - remember
- gripped - taken strong held of; the attention of
- rapidly - at a fast pace
- irrevocably - not able to be changed, reversed or recovered
- mechanistic - relating of machines
- perceptions - view point
- revolutionary - challenging, fundamental
- holistic - as a whole / completely
- consciousness - awareness
- reveal - to show
- ethical - relating to values and morals
- obligations - as a part of duty
- trustees - caretakers
- legacy - inheritance
- sustainable - involving the use of natural resources without harming the environment
- dawned upon - revealed, brought to light
- catalogued - classified
- reckon - estimate
- languish - forced to stay or suffer
- ignominious - shameful, causing public disgrace
- impoverished - poor

- ailing - diseased
- deteriorate - decline
- impaired - harmed
- decimated - killing large number of animals, plants or people
- extinction - total destruction, disappearance, wiping out of something
- patrimony - inheritance
- eroding - disappearing
- anguish - severe mental or physical pain or suffering
- catastrophic - fatal, leading to death
- depletion - reduction
- reliable - dependable
- virtually - completely
- distorting - misrepresenting (words, a statement etc)
- contraceptive - controlling agent (here birth control methods)
- beget - to produce
- coercion - compulsion
- perpetuation - a belief
- transcending - going beyond the usual levels
- crucial - significant
- inter alia - among other things
- ushered - introduced
- felicitous - well suited or expressed

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

(to be answered in about 40 words each)

Q1. When and where was the 'Green Movement' started and what has been its contribution?

The Green Movement was initiated nearly twenty-five years ago. It was in 1972 that the world's first nationwide Green party was founded in New Zealand. It was launched to sensitize people towards the need of conserving the planet. It brought about a paradigm shift from a mechanistic view to a 'holistic and ecological view' which considers earth as a living being whose right to existence must be respected and protected.

Q2. Palkhivala dubs the earth as "a patient in declining health". Why?

Or

Why is the earth compared to a patient?

Man in his lust for materialism and mechanisation is continuously depleting this living organism and depriving it of its vital biological system so much so that the planet today has fallen a prey to diseases like ozone-depletion, global warming, environmental pollution. Today our planet reveals signs of a patient in declining health and if proper and timely help is not given, the day is not far when this patient would become extinct.

Q3. What do you understand by the concept 'sustainable development'?

Sustainable development was a concept popularised by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the year 1987. The report of the commission defined it as "Development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". In other words sustainable development means using natural resources in such a manner that enough of these resources will be available to the future generations too, without any threat to the planet.

- Q4. What does the notice "The world's most dangerous animal" at a cage in the zoo at Lusaka, Zambia, signify?** (Textual)

Or

In what way is man "the world's most dangerous animal"?

Man's lust for growth and development took such a vice-like grip of him that he recklessly pursued advancement without paying heed to the harm it was causing to the other living species with whom he shares the planet. Whereas all other animals took from nature only as much as they required to fulfil their physical needs, man destroys nature indiscriminately. Whereas other species helped in maintaining the ecological balance, man involved himself in activities which destroyed the balance to an extent that today it has become 'an ailing planet'. Thus the notice rightly terms man as the most dangerous animal for he is posing a threat to life of all other living species on earth.

- Q5. What is the new awareness that has dawned upon man - the most dangerous animal?**

Man has today started responding to the distress calls of the ailing planet. With the initiation of the 'Green Revolution' and conscientious efforts of various environmental agencies he has today realised the wisdom of shifting from a system based on domination to one based on partnership. He was awakened to the fact that he shares the planet with millions of other species and that there is a need to conserve the planet for future generations.

- Q6. What makes the author remark that the 'earth itself is a living organism'?**

The author feels that there is a widespread consciousness these days to accept the earth as an enormous living organism which has its own metabolic needs and vital processes. This enormous

living organism comprises four principal biological systems – fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands which form the foundation of the global economic system. Since man has tampered with its biological system, this living organism, like all other living organisms is ailing and diseased. The need is to provide adequate 'medication' through repletion to make it healthy once again.

Q7. What does the expression 'a holistic and ecological view of the world' suggest?

In the name of growth and development man singularly focussed on industrial and mechanical growth. In doing so he did not pay heed to the metabolic needs and vital processes of the planet earth, thus making it diseased and ailing. The need is now being felt to adopt a holistic and ecological view of the world, wherein efforts are made to restore the planet of its healthy natural resources so that the overall ecology of the world is enriched.

Q8. What are the earth's principal biological systems and how do they form the foundation of the global economic system?

The earth is seen by the ecologists as a living organism having its own metabolic needs and vital processes. Mr. Lester R. Brown in his book 'The Global Economic Prospect', pointed out that the earth has four principal biological systems – fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands. They form the foundation of the global economic system as they provide for virtually all the raw material for the industry except minerals and petroleum-derived synthetics.

Q9. What does the author mean when he says that human claims on the earth's biological systems are reaching unsustainable levels?

Or

How are the earth's principal biological systems beings depleted?

Or

(Textual)

What are the consequences of human claims on the earth's biological systems?

With indiscriminate human claims on the biological systems of the earth, they have become depleted to unsustainable levels. As a result productivity is being impaired, fisheries are collapsing, forests are disappearing, grasslands are getting converted into barren wastelands and croplands are deteriorating. Since the tropical forests are the powerhouse of evolution, several species today are on the verge of extinction on account of their destruction.

Q10. Explain: "forests precede mankind, deserts follow."

The so-called development of mankind results in additional burden on earth's resources due to industrialization and urbanisation. Blatant exploitation of these resources coupled with pollution of all sorts has resulted in the depletion of forests. Hence, as mankind expands, forests disappear. The very same human activities viciously pollute, denigrate and destroy eco-systems thus turning once self-sustaining eco-systems into irreversible wastelands – deserts. Thus deserts follow mankind means human developmental activities cause the formation of deserts.

Q11. "What goes under the pot now costs more than what goes inside it". Explain.

The rapid depletion of forestlands due to deforestation has contributed tremendously in the rise of prices of timber and firewood. As per the net present value, a hectare of forestland costs anything between Rs. 5.8 lacs to Rs. 9.2 lacs (Source : Down to Earth June 30, issue). In most of the tropical countries, where

firewood is used for cooking purposes, the price of the fuel is sky-rocketing, so much so that it is being strongly felt that the fuel that is burnt to cook food is more expensive than the food which is cooked for human consumption.

Q12. What according to the author, is the pace at which forestlands are depleting in the world? Or

Why does Parliament's Estimates Committee term the loss of forest, cover in India as near "catastrophic depletion"?

Tropical forests are depleting at an alarming speed with around forty to fifty million acres of forestlands being wiped out everywhere. The depletion of forestlands is alarming and catastrophic too - 3.7 million acres a year. The actual loss, however is expected to be eight times the rate indicated by government statistics. The irony is that even officially demarcated forestlands are virtually treeless.

Q13. Economic growth and population growth are contradictory forces. Comment.

Poverty means poor living standard, ignorance, ill-health and hunger. So to beat these odds, poor people tend to produce children hoping that more working hands will mean more income. Economic growth not only results in effective solutions to these problems but also brings about awareness regarding excessive population and means of checking it. It is a well known fact that better educated and better earning couples have fewer children.

Thus economic growth and population growth are contradictory forces. Each negates the other.

Q14. What, according to the author, is the transcending concern today?

So far, rather in a selfish and short sighted way, mankind has been concerned about its own existence and well-being. For the

first time in human history, we have begun to realize that the survival of the whole planet ought to be our concern. We have now begun to see the whole world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts and that the onus of safeguarding and sustaining the planet is on us – the crowning glory of creation. We must share the earth with other species and bequeath to future generation a healthier planet.

Q15. How do poor countries cooking fuel needs spell disaster for forests?

People in poor countries are forced to plunder and ravage local forests to procure firewood for cooking resulting in not only the loss of precious forest cover but also in the escalation of cost of cooking. Moreover, the burning of firewood adds excessive carbon dioxide to the atmosphere thus, leading to global warming and ozone depletion.

Q16. How has population increased after the year 1800?

It took mankind more than a million years to reach the mark of one billion. That was in 1800. The next century saw another billion added to the world population. But the population multiplied rapidly in the twentieth century which added 3.7 billion people to the world population. Today, it increases by one million in every four days.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

(to be answered in about 120 – 150 words each)

- Q1. Taking ideas from the chapter, "The Ailing Planet : The Green Movement's Role," write an article for your school magazine on "Let's Bequeath a Healthier Planet to Our Future Generations."

**LET'S BEQUEATH A HEALTHIER PLANET
TO OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

(by)

Our Earth has several different types of 'environments' or eco-systems each with its own unique climate, animals and plants. Every single environment (called biome) is being largely depleted and thus suffering the aftermaths of environmental pollution.

According to a recent report, the air over Antarctica has warmed dramatically over the past 30 years. The greatest warming, nearly 1.4°F per decade in the winter has occurred about 3 miles above the surface. Scientists are feeling themselves hard pressed to explain the temperature hike, which is three times larger than the global average. The scientists are also well aware of the colossal deluge that melting of the snow caps can cause.

No one can rule out the fact that indiscriminate deforestation – with forestlands being literally wiped out – is one of the major culprits of this global warming. The earth's principal biological systems – fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands – are diseased and virtually weakening the roots of the global system. The natural resources of the earth are depleting at unimaginable rates and disturbance in the ecological system has brought many living species on the verge of extinction.

The Earth today is diseased and ailing as its health giving resources are widely depleting. If the pace is not checked, the day is not far when this ailing planet would become extinct. It is imperative for us to fall back upon Green Movement and

sustainable development if we wish to bequeath a healthier planet to our future generations.

Q2. "Are we to leave our successors a planet of advancing deserts, impoverished landscapes and an ailing environment". Elucidate.

Or

(Textual)

Prepare a speech to be delivered in the morning assembly of your school emphasizing the need to stop ruthless destruction of eco-system to save the planet Earth.

Dear Friends

Even as we stand at the threshold of the New Millennium, mankind today is left with only two choices, a slow lingering death or a sudden death, as Nature and Mother Earth have started reacting violently to man's callous and ruthless destruction of the eco-system that supports all forms of life. Plundering the earth's natural resources to meet the demands of the present scientific age has left us with no choice but to ponder on the bitter and harsh reality that our indiscriminate activities are consistently causing harm to nature. Instead of forest lands provided by Nature we shall be bequeathing wastelands as a legacy to the future generations!

The rapid climate changes being brought about by global warming and ozone depletion have triggered the panic button. Climate change has now become a hardcore reality and with the global average temperatures rising between 1.4°C and 5.8°C , it would mean more droughts, the disappearance of coral reefs, the melting of glaciers and the extinction of species.

The need, therefore, is to adopt a holistic approach towards economic development without destroying the life support system that sustains all life forms. Otherwise we will be left with

a scorched planet of advancing deserts, impoverished landscapes and an ailing environment to pass on to our future generations.

Thank you.

- Q3. "We have not inherited this earth from our forefathers, we have borrowed it from our children". We, therefore, need to strictly give up ruthless and thoughtless exploitation of natural resources. Discuss with reference to Nani Palkhivala's "The Ailing Planet: The Green Movement's Role".

The earth is not the absolute property of a single species not even if a species like 'human beings' claims it to be. We human beings share it with 1.4 million known living species along with an estimated three to a hundred million other species still to be discovered and studied.

Our existence, too, is squarely dependent on the safe existence of other species – plants, animals and birds and even ecosystems. Unfortunately, while other species sustain us, our activities spell disaster for them.

The human generations in the last 100–150 years have so ruthlessly exploited the natural resources of the planet and destroyed biomes, that the very existence of life on earth is threatened.

Since, we got this world in inheritance from our ancestors, it is our duty that we bequeath a healthier planet, which really belongs to little children of today. Thus, the quotation by Mr Lester Brown, which forms the statement of the question grimly reminds us of our responsibility towards the ecosystem, the planet and its future generations.

- Q4. "The emerging new world vision has ushered in the Era of Responsibility." Explain with reference to the lesson "The Ailing Planet: The Green Movement's Role".

The environmentalists and ecologists have given a clarion call to respond positively to the environmental issues. This new world vision has today ushered in an Era of Responsibility making the modern man adopt a holistic view of the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts. Men at all levels, whether industrialists, businessmen or teachers have awakened to the need of popularising environmental issues and finding their existence in excellence in environment performance. Man today has thus realised his responsibility towards the planet. There is a need to conserve it, not as a legacy inherited from our ancestors, but a property borrowed from our children. As caretakers of their property, the onus lies on us to keep it conserved and protected for the future use.

Q5. Why does the author say that the growth of world population is one of the strongest factors distorting the future of human society? *(Textual)*

Our world is bursting at the seams so much that eco-systems in many parts of the world have come on the brink of collapse. Startling and stark realities are revealed from the population statistics. Whereas it took mankind more than a million years to reach the first billion, which was the figure around the year 1800, it took only 100 years to add on another billion i.e. by the year 1900. The twentieth century has added another 3.7 billion and presently the world population is estimated to be over 7.1 billion (2013 statistics). It is alarming to note that the world population is increasing by one million every four days.

With population growth going out of control, all the problems related with the living conditions have been aggravated - congestion in towns, more traffic on roads, more deforestation, more smoke, more factories, more effluents and dust in the environment, more demand for food and fuel.

A time may soon arrive when the earth will be able to take in no more and all its systems will collapse threatening to annihilate the very existence. The dire need, therefore, is to give top-most priority to population control. Otherwise there is no hope for countries like India. With all other methods of controlling population having failed, awareness is the only effective solution we are left with.

Q6. "No generation has freehold on this earth. All we have is a life with a full repairing lease". Explain with reference to "The Ailing Planet: The Green Movement's Role".

Or

What is the essence of Margaret Thatcher's statement quoted by Palkhivala in his essay?

A rising concern is being felt globally to strive for the survival not just of the people but also of the planet. An Era of Responsibility has been ushered in where people have begun to take a holistic view of the very basis of our existence. The need to strike a natural balance in the eco-systems of the world is being felt strongly than even before.

One cannot, however, rule out that man will continue to callously and ruthlessly destroy the eco-systems of the earth. The rapid deforestation to create space for the increasing mouths has resulted in soil erosion, and denigration of land resources and also the destruction of the climate controlling factors. The depletion of the Ozone layer, which is nature's umbrella to protect it from harmful rays, has exposed the planet to grave dangers.

The efforts of the ecologists and scientists have contributed tremendously in bringing about awakening towards conserving the planet. Man today has begun to realise that human beings have an ethical obligation to be good stewards of

the planet and responsible trustees of the legacy of the future generations.

The concept of 'sustainable development' as popularised in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment has made man conscious of his responsibility to use the earth's natural resources for his present needs, 'without stripping the natural world of resources which the future generations would need.' This world belongs to the future generations. Therefore, we the present generation, must fully understand the implications of Margaret Thatcher's words and act responsibly towards safeguarding the planet for our children. It is our paramount duty to undo or repair the damage we have caused to the global environment.

Q7. "We have shifted – one hopes, irrevocably – from the mechanistic view to a holistic and ecological view of the world," says Nani Palkhivala.

What personal, social, economic and political values do you think have made this change possible?

The denigration of the Earth's environment is not a natural phenomenon but a man-made one. It is a result of the overall decay in the personal, social, economic and political values all over the world. At the individual level, for example, people have stopped bothering about the loss of trees or the ecological imbalance. They are wasteful in their everyday life and remain unmindful of the pollution they cause. This individual behaviour turns into a social scourge in no time. The economic considerations also harm the environment. There is greater exploitation of Earth's resources – minerals, forests, water, land, air – than ever before. The consumer culture results in more and more waste that is impossible to handle in an eco-friendly way. At the political level, too, there is either a lack of vision or a lack of will to control the damage to the ecology. In many cases, laws to

protect the environment are not implemented in letter and spirit. Moreover, in spite of several world summits, deforestation, global warming, freak weathers, floods and droughts continue to trigger ecological disasters in the world. Then there are man-made disasters like nuclear accidents and wars that are the greatest threat to Earth's survival. So, it is this overall degradation in human values at all levels that is leading to the degradation of the environment.

Q8. What moral issues does Nani Palkhivala raise when he talks about unrestricted population growth and its impact on poverty?

According to Nani Palkhivala, the growth of world population is one of the strongest factors distorting the future of human society. It continues to put extreme pressures on the already depleting or crumbling resources of the Earth. What is worse is that this growth is uneven and leads to imbalances in areas that are already vulnerable – South East Asia for example. Nani finds a direct link between illiteracy, poverty and population growth and believes education is the best way to control unrestricted population growth, not coercion. He believes only development can bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, end child labour and exploitation of the poor, especially women and children. Although he is in favour of a potent programme of family planning, Nani does not advocate such animal methods as compulsory sterilization. He cautions that unless population control is given utmost priority, hunger, poor health, crime and poverty would continue to haunt countries like India. Thus, Nani Palkhivala raises many a moral issues about the unrestricted growth of the world population.