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Practical Contributions to Our Environment, Economy and Society

Ishani Ghoshal Roy
Doon University, Dehradun, India

ABSTRACT

Environment as it stands today; is a subject much discussed but less used in our daily lives. If we can use and not abuse our ecology; we might make our lives better in every sense i.e. working in our gardens gives us mental peace, physical exercise, fresh fruits and vegetables and most of all; an immeasurable amount of joy, happiness and self-satisfaction which does not cost us anything. It has been added to the school and college curriculum but only in theory not in practise. Working on environmental projects would transform our generally lazy and irresponsible youth into responsible, practical citizens who would not shirk away from hard work whether in life or educational pursuits. Sitting in class the whole day does not ensure positive minded individuals ready to face the challenges of the world and contribute towards a better world by the dint of their hard work in trying to absorb the various theories prescribed in their course content. Universities all over the world have realised that holistic education needs to consist of certain projects which would give the students some practice of what they might encounter later on in life. Community service is something for which credit is given in the form of marks or grades. If education does not enable students to think beyond themselves and their selfish interests; whether it is a career or personal life; the world will be full of stress and strife.

Keywords: *Waste Management, Forest Management, Ecosystem Management, active personal participation, community service*.

Author Details and Affiliations
Dr. Ishani Ghoshal is a Faculty at Doon University, Dehradun and can be contacted at ishani.doon@gmail.com

Introduction:

Environment as it stands today; is a subject much discussed but less used in our daily lives. If we can use and not abuse our ecology; we might make our lives better in every sense i.e. working in our gardens gives us mental peace, physical exercise, fresh fruits and vegetables and most of all; an immeasurable amount of joy, happiness and self-satisfaction which does not cost us anything. It has been added to the school and college curriculum but only in theory not in practise. Working on environmental projects would transform our generally lazy and irresponsible youth into responsible, practical citizens who would not shirk away from hard work whether in life or educational pursuits. Sitting in class the whole day does not ensure positive minded individuals ready to face the challenges of the world and contribute towards a better world by the dint of their hard work in trying to absorb the various theories prescribed in their course content. Universities all over the world have realised that holistic education needs to consist of certain projects which would give the students some practice of what they might encounter later on in life. Community service is something for which credit is given in the form of marks or grades. If education does not enable students to think beyond themselves and their selfish interests; whether it is a career or personal life; the world will be full of stress and strife.

Nature has always been and will always be an inseparable part of our lives. The beauty of the interdependence on nature and on everyone and everything around us has been undermined since the advent of science and technology. The latest advancements in science make a substantial part of our humanity feel that they can control nature; though time and again nature, in its fury has shown how tremendous a power nature has on our greatest scientific advancements. Science and technology has also shown their devastating effects on nature and

humanity. Like the great recent Fukushima nuclear Power Plant's devastating effects on humans and the entire bio-diversity around the Power Plant. The world conferences on climatic change and global warming have been warning the nations of the world to stop destroying the equatorial rain forests and other vital green belts to save the ecological balance they are trying to maintain, but the ambitious money minded business entrepreneurs, pressurise the governments to overrule environmental laws to profit a handful of greedy administrators and businessmen. Forest Researchers, (Kumar, Mishra, & Wadhera, March 2014) mention that:

The forests are important not only at the individual, community, sub-national and national levels but also at the global level for the ecosystem services they provide. According to Nasi, Wunder and Campos (2002), the forest ecosystem services (timber, fuelwood, non-timber forest products, i.e. NTFPs) and (Ecological, Cultural, Aesthetics and Amenity).Forests form a dominant part of the physical, material, economic, and spiritual lives of millions of people living in and around forests (Byron and Arnold, 1999). The general patterns of forest use are similar around the world, and there are two general classes : 1) use by local communities 2) use by commercially oriented outsiders (Alcorn, 1995)

Economic policies are created to benefit the wealthy landlords by providing subsidy for farmers on the basis of the area of agricultural land they own; i.e. larger the area, greater the subsidy, while it should be quite the reverse, to help the poor farmers with small plots of land. The voice raised by the poverty stricken farmers; do not affect the rich and powerful section of society who unfortunately run the country and form policies to profit themselves. This is the section which contributes in overruling the laws formed to save our environment. Yet they make up only 20% of society. So if the rest of the 80% of the population are dedicated to the cause of ecology, are aware of the contribution of pollution and are ready to take steps to counter it, we can still make a huge difference in protecting the delicate balance of nature. The government is trying to create awareness by broadcasting ideas encouraging tree plantation drives by people. Mass-media i.e. radio and television shows which suggest that a house is not made by the concrete structure but by the number of trees that are planted around it, is a recent example of one of these drives. All trees are numbered and cannot be legally cut without prior permission. Yet the large number of trees which are cut in the process of widening roads is not always replaced by young saplings.

Environmental laws are often manipulated by ministers to cut forest land for mining purposes as is being done by the ESSAR group in the Mahan Forests in Madhya Pradesh. Reserved forest land is often used by business tycoons to build industrial townships. The great protest against agricultural land being given by the government to the industrialists, in 2008 to establish its factory to build TATA NANO the car unit in Sangrur in Bengal, during the communist party government in Bengal; lead to immense death and destruction of the poor farmers whose fertile land was being forcefully given to the TATA group of industries. Finally the activists and Leader of Trinamool Congress, Mamta Banerjee along with film stars and educated masses supported the poor farmers and after a lot of death and destruction of their land and property, they won the battle. The poor farmers of Chhattisgarh have taken up arms in order to protect their land which is increasingly given to industrialists; this movement also called the Naxal movement, is also spreading to other states, it is caused by the corrupt officials of the government who work with private agencies to destroy the very roots of our existence for their selfish purposes. On the other hand there are many researchers who are doing valuable work to protect and save the ecology and manage the immense amount of waste generated on earth on a daily basis.

These researches can provide solutions to almost all the major problems and make the earth a better place if properly used and encouraged by the government, but unfortunately it is usually not done to enhance efficiency in every field of life. T. Senthivel from Gandhigram University has created plastic pellets which are made from plastic waste products and help in making tar roads which do not need repair or maintenance for ten years. Production of bio-gas from decayed organic waste products is increasingly being used instead of the LPG which is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain. Waste-management has become a specialised subject focussing on the re-cycling and safe disposal methods of organic and inorganic matter. Every house-hold needs to separate the organic wastes; which can be reused as manure in the garden and inorganic matter which needs to be separated and re-cycled as far as possible. Re-cycled paper should be used in order to save trees from being axed. Battery operated vehicles need to be used instead of petrol and diesel run vehicles to improve the condition of air pollution. Chemical products should be replaced by herbal products in daily life to reduce the manufacture of toxic materials which destroy the aerobic and anaerobic bacteria which break down matter into their original elements. Use

of cycles and battery operated vehicles also greatly reduce the chances of fatal accidents and the educated section of society should act as role models to promote the cause of environmental concerns. They must be responsible citizens and encourage the youth to resist the temptations of high speed vehicles that use extra petrol or diesel and cause fatal accidents.

Frequent change of gadgets and electronic goods which has become a trend these days amongst the younger generation causes a lot of electronic wastes which are not properly disposed in e-bins which are so scarce in smaller towns and villages. These lead to highly toxic leaks into our drinking water which is usually underground water and increase chances of cancer and other skin problems. Fast food habits and lazy routines of living indoors have generated a host of mental and physical health problems. Chemicals, whether used for cosmetic purposes or maintenance of material goods need to be reduced. We need to change our attitude towards materialistic goods and behave as responsible humans and become a little simple and natural in our daily lives. A planet devoid of trees and full of skyscrapers and technological advancements is not likely to survive for long. Till date science is yet to invent something that takes in pollution and gives out pure air without the use of chemicals. Therefore no matter how advanced we become we have to revert back to nature for sustenance and survival.

According to forest management experts, from the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education:

Food, water and livelihood security of the masses can be ensured through restoration of ecosystem health by way of reversing land degradation, conserving natural resources and practicing sustainable land management. The sustainable land and ecosystem management (SLEM) is a joint initiative between the Government of India and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to help address the issues of land degradation in a comprehensive manner with support of World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organization and United Nations Development Programme. Watershed management, rain water harvesting, its economic utilization and ground water recharge, reclamation of degraded lands and sustainable land management, integrated farm development, livelihood activities in collaboration with joint forest management and alternative source of energy have emerged good approaches and practices for poverty alleviation and improved livelihoods. The project envisages dissemination of such best practices to larger areas for the benefit of stakeholders. Policy gaps and barriers are also being addressed in order to suggest interventions for suitable policy reforms. (Dasgupta & Singh, 2014) .

Forest management and waste management are the two most important factors to maintain the precarious balance of nature which the common masses along with experts and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) have to protect from the corrupt elements of society who are generally the most powerful section of society. Therefore awareness and proper practical implementation at the proper time is the only way to save our bountiful planet. The hazards and problems of managing inorganic solid wastes is the most important challenge being faced by most countries. According to a study by Siti Zubaidah Ahmad, Mohd Sanusi S Ahamad and Mohd Suffian Yusoff :

Most countries in the world, including Malaysia, are having problems dealing with their municipal solid waste (MSW). Landfilling is the cheapest method used for the disposal of MSW in Malaysia, and most of wastes through landfill sites are open dumping areas. However, disposal of wastes through landfilling has become complicated, with the landfill sites filling up at a very fast rate (they will be full in 5-10 years). At the same time, construction of new landfill sites is more difficult owing to landfill to land scarcity, an increase of land prices and high demand, especially in urban areas with increasing population (Manaf et al., 2009). Locational criteria are important in the problem of where to site a landfill. Bagchi (1990) and Tchobanoglous (1993) state that landfills should be located a certain distance from features such as lakes, ponds, rivers, wetlands, flood plain, highway, critical habitat areas, water supply, well and airports. Currently, landfill siting is prohibited in areas where potential contamination of groundwater or surface water bodies exits. Generally, special approval from local authorities will be required when the proposed landfill site does not meet locational criteria. (Siti & Mohd, 2014)

Science has taken such immense strides in developmental activities suited just for man; without consideration to the other forms of life that unless we retrace our steps which seem nearly impossible, managing our creations i.e. scientific advancements are becoming impossible to handle unless we learn to love and respect nature and create new forms which can reduce the harm done by the ambition of man we shall certainly have to find another planet to live on. It is always the question of the rich and powerful; the rest are just used to secure a better living for them. Interfering with the laws of nature to suit the tastes of the rich and powerful has brought on global warming on even those who have contributed insignificantly to

it. The wiser have resorted to environmental laws, environmentally sustainable governance and eco-tourism but the short sighted powerful people are still behaving like spoilt children not ready to understand their crucial role in the tremendous effort required to reverse the detrimental effects of a luxurious life. It is as if nature as a teacher; as William Wordsworth the famous poet has often alluded to it is teaching lessons which human beings refuse to learn; intoxicated and infatuated with their power over nature by using science as a tool they are digging their own graves. If we do not learn to live in peaceful co-existence all our knowledge is futile.

The main problem lies in the implementation of corrective measures; man is so much in love with comfort and luxury that the very thought of giving up these comforts to restore the balance of nature, is painful. Man cannot believe the impeding calamities have been created by hundreds of years of his degradation of nature. Just as the luxurious life style of the rich give birth to diseases in their body and they are forced to buy the body parts of the relatively poor but physically healthy people, similarly the richer countries are trying to buy the relatively less polluted parts of the earth to dump the toxic wastes they are generating. It is an irony that the section of society which has the means to the best educational institutions does not get educated in the true sense of the word. They are not ready to take the responsibility of what they have created and try to buy things which money can never buy.

The most important thing to understand is perhaps that money is the worst enemy of man; it has created inhuman actions and unthinkable pain. The barter system or inter-dependence of living things on each other is the greatest message to society or civilisation, from nature which is on the way to self-destruction unless radical measures are used. Everything that we need is already provided in nature, we need to be open to the sustainable possibilities, instead of creating wars to grab the greatest share of energy resources, we need to learn to share whatever is left with every one and create possibilities to heal, cure and replenish what has been polluted and destroyed. We need to discipline our temptations and learn to do more physical rather than mechanical or electronic or radio-active action, in order to curb the disastrous effects of technology. We must inculcate the maturity to transcend the urge to fight, avenge, fear, torture and punish and try to be more tolerant, ecologically creative instead of technologically constructive; in order to save, sustain and renew what we have lost and are losing every minute.

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