



Indian Culture and Lifestyle for Environment Conservation: a Path Towards Sustainable Development

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(Received 27 December, 2016 accepted 16 January, 2017)
(Published by Research Trend, Website: www.researchtrend.net)

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the idea that instead of just following the cycle of over exploitation of Natural resources for development and then to find the ways to reduce its impacts on the environment, India as a country can find out the solutions of Sustainable Development by approaching our roots of Culture & Lifestyle & move forward on the path of Development. There can be many ways of decreasing our carbon footprints just by changing our present behavior of consumption & modern lifestyle by going back to our traditional living. We can better manage our Natural Resources by continuing the practices of Environment conservation of ancient India. Development does not only mean modernization & hence westernization rather it is PEACE, HARMONY & WELLBEING of all living creatures present on the Earth. There are many ways in the Indian culture & Lifestyle towards the Sustainable Development. This paper will focus on some traditional Indian Practices towards Environment Conservation & their relevance & practicability in today's Era of Environmental Degradation.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the second decade of 21st. century, we all can feel very modern and advanced, as we have crossed all the obstacles & hindrances to achieve a lifestyle of utmost comfort & luxury. It has been possible as we not only utilized but overexploited our natural resources, beyond the capacity at which they can be regenerated by nature with the help of advancements in technology in the last two centuries at a very high pace. The organizations across the globe have started realizing that this behavior of mankind can not go indefinitely. Though the concerns for environment degradation at international level had started with the first conference on Human Environment by United Nations at Stockholm in 1972 but the role of our Lifestyle has only been acknowledged at international level very recently.

In COP 21 which was held in Paris in 2015, Sustainable Development goals were adopted as a path to Sustainable Development. These goals set out a vision for ending poverty, hunger, inequality & protecting the Earth's natural resources by 2030. Out of these 17 Goals, the 12th Goal is about 'Responsible Consumption & Protection'. The 12th goal tells that Human kind must now look for ways of doing more & better with less.

The environmental consequences of unsustainable life style are now widely acknowledged.

According to Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) anthropogenic green house gas emission are driven by population size, economic activity, lifestyle, energy use, land use pattern, technology & climate policy. (WWF- India for MOEFCC).

II. ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

World has now clearly understood the relationship of our lifestyle and its impact on our natural environment. There is a need for change in the so called consumer & materialistic way of living.

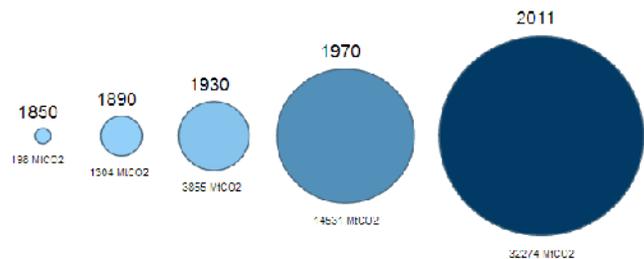


Fig. 1. Global Carbon dioxide emissions 1850 to 2011
(Source: Friedrich Johannes (2014).

Per Capita Emissions for Top 10 Emitters

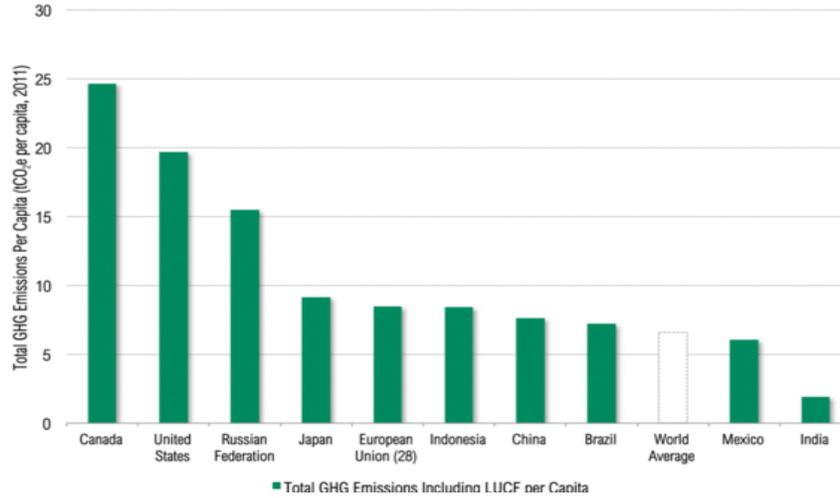


Fig. 2. Total GHG Emission Per Capita (Source: Ge Mengpin (2014)).

Developed countries like Canada, the United States, and Russia emit more than double the global average per person whereas India’s per capita emissions are only one-third of the global average.

All the nations in the world have a different quantity & quality of natural wealth existing within their boundaries. Hence with the help of a unique system of production & consumption one can achieve a true sustainability by keeping their ecological footprints within the limits of their biocapacity.

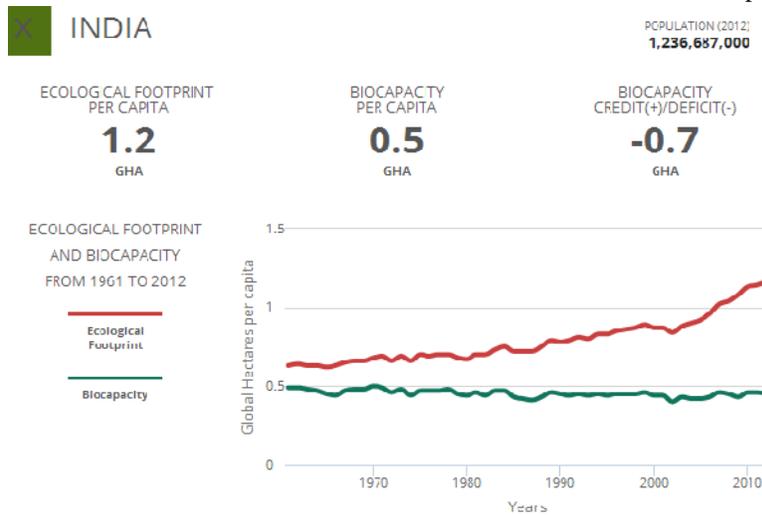


Fig. 3: Ecological Footprint & Biocapacity Data for India (year 1961 to year 2012).
Source:http://www.footprintnetwork.org/ecological_footprint_nations/index.html

Figure 3 is clearly indicating the fact that India as a developing country had already exceeded its Bio capacity hence to achieve sustainable development, we need to find some unique model of production & Consumption. Hence our lifestyle of moderation can be the strongest tool in achieving the Sustainable development.

A. Sustainable Lifestyle

“Patterns of action and consumption used by people to affiliate and differentiate themselves from others, which: meet basic needs, provide a better quality of life, minimize the use of natural resources and emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle, and do not jeopardize the needs of future generations” (UNEP 2011 to 2012).

“A sustainable lifestyle means rethinking our ways of living, how we buy and how we organize our everyday life. It is also about altering how we socialize, exchange, share, educate and build identities. It means transforming our societies and living in harmony with our natural environment. As citizens, at home and at work, many of our choices – on energy use, transport, food, waste, communication and solidarity – contribute towards building sustainable lifestyles.” (WWF-India for MoEFCC)

B. Culture & Lifestyle

World culture report says “Culture shapes the way we see the world. It therefore has the capacity to bring about the change of attitudes needed to ensure peace and sustainable development which, we know, form the only possible way forward for life on planet Earth.”

Our Culture can be a crucial key to solve the issue of environment degradation due to overconsumption & lifestyle which does not care about the environment. Lifestyles shape and are shaped by social, cultural, technical, economic, political, institutional and geographical surroundings. (UNEP 2011 to 2012).

III. SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE & INDIAN CULTURE

The Indian conception of life is embodied in a coherent world-view in which all its aspects exist in a state of inter-related harmony, being governed by a universal order that is reflected in all realms of human experience. The human being is part of a well-ordered system in which all aspects of life and nature have their place, and are not in opposition, but in harmony with each other. This harmony between humans and nature is integral to the Indian tradition and ethos.(WWF-India for MoEFCC).

Today, when people throughout the world are perturbed by the degradation of the environment and the disastrous consequences of this, traditional ethics of nature conservation could be looked upon as a source of inspiration and guidance for the future. Perhaps no other culture can provide such a profound variety of cultural practices and ecologically sound relationship with nature as the Indian.

According to the Greendex (an international report on sustainable living by National Geographic & research firm globe scan, published every two year), India is the most sustainability minded country in the world.

IV. TRADITIONAL INDIAN LIFESTYLE PRACTICES

Traditional Indian Lifestyle can give us hundreds of examples of living in harmony with nature. Living a

life of moderation & giving back to nature is not new to us. Some of the examples are :

A. Nature Conservation

In India, forests are revered and trees worshipped. Forest and tree cover in India stand at 24.01 per cent of the country’s geographical area and is on ascendance. Forests neutralize approximately 12 per cent of India’s GHG emissions. (WWF-India for MoEFCC)

Sacred Groves. Conservation of sacred species, groves, forests and landscapes has been an important aspect of the ethics of Indian culture. The Sacred Groves / Forests are important repositories of floral and faunal diversity that have been conserved by local communities in a sustainable manner. The sacred groves in Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, and elsewhere not only highlight community managed conservation efforts but also offer potential for carbon sequestration.

Bishnoi Community. Bishnoi is a social group found in the Western Thar Desert of India, who follows the tenets of conserving biodiversity of the area and ensuring a healthy eco-friendly social life for the community. For them, harming the environment means harming themselves.

Khejri Tree Conservation. In Rajasthan, a desert state of India, the Khejri tree (*Prosopis cineraria*) is valued for its moisture-retaining properties, and it is not axed even if it comes between the constructions. The live example of this is seen in Salasar Balaji temple in Sikar district.

Traditional Rain water harvesting systems of India. Indians Communities are harvesting rain water since centuries as we knew the importance & scarcity of fresh water since long time. These rain water harvesting systems are specific & Unique according to the topography, climate & Rain at that location. Step Wells of Gujarat, Tanks of Tamil Nadu, johads of Rajasthan & Zabo System of Nagaland are few examples.

B. Food

Food production, processing, marketing, consumption and disposal have important environmental externalities because of energy and natural resource usage and associated GHG emissions. (WWF-India for MoEFCC).To respect food has always been a way of Indian life.

Locally Grown & Seasonal foods. Eating locally grown & season produces are recommended for good health, which significantly reduces the need for preservation & transportation of food. Eating seasonal is primarily encouraged by our traditional system of medicine.

Utilizing the food waste. Preventing the waste is also an accepted practice.

Numerous examples can be found from north to south & from east to west for the creative reuse of the extra food prepared, hence reducing the waste. Many recipes to recycle the leftover food are prevalent in our country hence reducing the food waste. (Khakra , Curd rice , dal parathas , vegetable peel chutneys etc.)

Energy Saving Techniques of Cooking. Various energy saving techniques like hand , grinding & hand churning using madani.Food preservation has also been done in a very environment friendly manner without using energy generated by fossil fuels instead simple method of pickling , sun drying etc. (Aam Papad , Pickles etc.) (CEE for MoEFCC 2015).

General aversion to food wastage and respect for food are deeply ingrained in Indian psyche. Children in Indian homes are taught about respect for food at a young age.

Indian diet is primarily plant based. About 42 per cent of the households in India are strict vegetarian (they do not eat fish, meat or eggs). The remaining households are less strict vegetarians or non-vegetarians. The per capita meat consumption in India for the period 2011-13 was 3.3kg, which is one-tenth of the global average.

Food transportation is one of the biggest and fastest-growing sources of GHG emissions worldwide. Locally grown foods, is an important lifestyle choice affecting resource consumption in packaging & transportation.

C. Sustainable consumption values

Simple sustainable consumption values, such as switching off unwanted Electrical appliances are imbibed in homes as well as schools from a young age. During summers, people often prefer to sleep out in the open, in courtyards or on the terrace, thus leading to reduced usage of cooling appliances in homes. For generations, earthen pots or matkas have been used to store water and keep it cool. This helps reduce the refrigeration requirement during summers. The practice of sun-drying of clothes and hand washing dishes reduces the usage of energy-intensive tumble driers and dish-washers, respectively. Hand washing the dishes would save around 200 to 300kWh/year assuming one cycle per day of dish washing. This also results in reduced water consumption as compared to dishwashers. People to bathe with a bucket and mug which is significantly less wasteful than bathing under shower or in bath tubs. Some people also prefer to bathe in cold water for most of the year. (WWF-India for MoEFCC)

D. Clothing

India is a home to many unique types of hand woven fabrics or handlooms. Traditional practice of weaving textile with a weaving loom does not require any energy,

it only requires the skill to weave. Also we have a rich heritage of various hand embroidered fabrics. Examples like banarsi , kanjivaram , patola , zardozi, kalamkari, tye & dye, sujani, phulkari, kashida, kantha, Nagaland weaves etc.

Khadi. Khadi is made from cotton, silk or wool .Yarn spinning by charkha & woven manually, i.e. without any electric support (not utilizing any fossil fuel), if dyed with natural dye, it becomes green fabric.

Production of one meter of khadi fabric consumes just three liters of water against 55 liters consumed in a traditional textile mill .This hand woven fabric has the smallest carbon footprint . (The Hindu, may 19, 2016)

Cotton Handkerchiefs & Kitchen towels. Are used over a long period unlike the use & throw tissue papers. Paper products are harsh on the environment as use timber & are cause of water & air pollution.

Tradition of passing cloths & Books to younger siblings

Recycling of used cloths to make new products. Our Culture of recycling is evident from the fact that most of the household have dusters made up of used cloths. Other examples of reusing & recycling can be: Rugs from old blankets, Foot mats from jute sacs, Cushion covers from used saris, bags from used clothes etc.

All these examples quoted above give sufficient evidence that sustainable lifestyle is rooted in our culture. The path for sustainable development for a country which already has a rich culture of sustainable lifestyle should not be the same as the path taken by developed countries. The path must be unique and one that promotes these environment friendly lifestyle practices. So there is a strong need to redefine the meaning of development for our country which can become the alternate model of development for the rest of the developing nations.

V. REDEFINING THE MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIA

Development in the present era only means Economic development, higher GNP & per capita income & more consumption goods. All the developing countries are looking to be developed in the same way as U.S or U.K. The era when these now developed countries started the path for development through industrialization, world was unaware of the consequences of this type of linear development on the state of our natural environment. As at that time only a fraction of the countries took this path of development through industrialization they could afford an affluent lifestyle which was based on mass consumption.

As this lifestyle of comfort & luxury attracted the world, all the developing nations & their respective citizens have been trying to follow the same lifestyle as prevalent in these developed countries.

Being the second largest populous country (1.25 billion) in the world if we try to achieve the same level of consumption goods for example the private car ownership of U.S.A as 900 per 1000 that means 1.12 billion car on the roads which all the oil resources of the world can not support this. (Saran Syam 2016)

Now after around two centuries of the start of industrial revolution it should be very much evident that developing countries need to find an alternate model of development. Hence we need to relook at our development strategy & we need to pioneer a different approach to growth. If we go back to Indian culture, growth means not only material growth but the overall well being & happiness. We had a concept of 'Mangalya'. Mangalya is not limited to any individual but covers all those humans & other lives in and around individuals. Modern development can take place, at the cost of other people & nature but not Mangalya. Mangalya means 'Collective Welfare' & 'overall Wellbeing & happiness' of not only one individual but of all associated.

Hence in today's era we need to redefine the meaning of development & affluence. It should not be only materialistic growth but should be something like fresh air to breath, clean water to consume & green earth to walk along with the moderate amount of goods to be consumed. (Saran Shyam, 2016).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

India needs a cultural shift & mindset which takes us back to a value system given to us by our forefathers to look upon nature as a source to nurture, not an object to consume or conquest. Have a lifestyle which allows taking from nature only that much as it can regenerate. There is a need to shift from a *Modern Consumer Culture To A Post Modern Sustainability Culture*. (Unep2011-12).

Sustainable lifestyle has to be location specific & can not be same Standards across the globe. A transition from a focus on growth, GDP & material welfare to more social & fair well being is necessary.

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