

Role Of Individuals As Change Agent For Sustainable Development: Integrating Spirituality And Ecology

Akanksha S. Chatterjee, Aneesya Sharma

Abstract— The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I'm convinced that it is the outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for the lack of a better word, spiritual.

Al Gore (1992, 98)

All of us are proud of our nation's rapid development but the point is whether we will be able to sustain and preserve this and if so, at what and who's cost? In fact the development we all talk about is basically based on the US business model which is many times questioned in seminars and conferences at world platform.

We all are trying to make our existence in the time of ecological devastation, in which our materialistic and selfish culture is posing a catastrophic impact on the ecosystem. We have exploited our very own earth up to the extent that now the creation itself is calling all of us for its help by sending the danger signals of imbalance, like: floods and droughts, we can feel it in a piece of land which is poisoned by pesticides and in fact all those people whose hearts are open can even listen the cry of the world soul i.e., spiritual being of our mother the earth that sustain us. It is the cry of need and misery, that compassion and humankind which were supposed to be the guardian of the whole planet has forgotten its onus towards the earth and destroying it at global level.

Thus, our paper argues that for sustainable development of any business enterprise participation as change agent in activities and efforts that save the environment will lead to a shift in holistic perspective. Such a shift is possible only if we can connect our spiritualism as it deeply questions our relationship with the nature, our role towards the planet and the ultimate value of this transition. This transition from a contemporary to inclusive world view can be termed as spiritual transformation that leads to deeper understanding and awareness about the environmental crisis and contribution that can be drawn from the field of spiritual ecology.

Index Terms— environmental crisis, sustainable development, spiritual ecology, change agent..

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I. INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time there was an argument between God and a scientist. The scientist claimed that he could create the things that God had made. God took some sand and clay and made a human being. The scientist picked up the sand and clay to attempt to do the same. "Drop the sand and clay," God told him. "This was not made by you." (Dr. Murali Vallabhan, Reader, Department of Economics, SVRNSS College, Vazhoor)

In recent years efforts have been made to promote everyone to become more vulnerable and receptive towards the relationship between people and environment (Besthorn, 2000; Coates, 2003; Hoff & McNutt, 1994). There is considerable evidence that points out the change that will occur if existing trends of environmental devastation continue this is going to have its alarming impact on quality of life as well as on the social interaction phenomena. (Berry, 1988; Daly & Cobb, 1989; Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens, 1972).

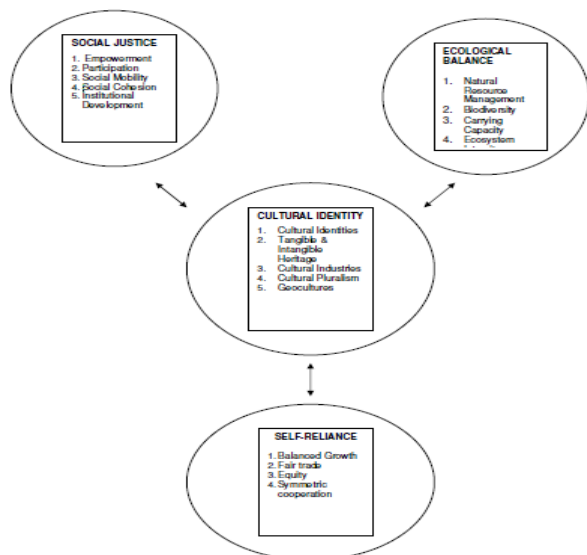
We should have the feeling from the bottom of our hearts that we should save the earth. And cognitive thinking should be done regarding how to save the earth. Union of thinking and feeling comes from spirituality. Real spirituality is one that teaches us that the whole world is one. Global quality can be improved by implementing change that ensures dignified life for all and foster all human rights. These changes must embrace the abolition and mitigation of widespread state of affairs of poverty, joblessness, and unfair social conditions. Sustainable development ensures well-being of all individuals by integrating social development, economic development, and environmental preservation and fortification.

- **Social development** implies that the basic needs of the human being should be met through proper implementation and consciousness of human rights.
- **Economic development** expands the accessibility of work and the ability of individuals sustains themselves and their families. Economic development includes industry, sustainable agriculture, as well as amalgamation and full involvement in the global economy. Social and economic developments strengthen and are reliant on each other for full realization.
- **People development:** It is next to impossible to disconnect the well-being of the individual with the well-being of the earth. Therefore truly sustainable

development places much significance on the protection of earth and its resources. Dynamic involvement in sustainable development leads to effective execution of change

II. PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1: Pillars of Sustainable Development



III. SPIRITUALITY AND SCIENCE: AN INDISPENSIBLE TWINS.

The current terrible environmental crisis demands a spiritual retort. The fundamental requirement is inner consciousness of individuals towards deep commitment towards the earth. The scientific quest and the spiritual quest are two great quests that take its roots from spirituality. The scientific quest is about discovering the essence of world space, time, energy and matter. The spiritual quest is to discover order in our consciousness.

Actually, both the spiritual and scientific quests are two complementary investigations into reality. Any feeling of opposition between them is the byproduct of a narrow thinking. Science deals with what is quantifiable; religion is about discovering and appreciating this immeasurable. The two quests have to go hand in hand. Human understanding is incomplete unless it covers both aspects of reality i.e., matter as well as consciousness. Both the scientist and the religious man need to be intensely conscious of the restrictions of the human mind and to go beyond them if they desire to have a holistic perception of reality. Education should address the creation of inquiry in the mind which is both scientific and religious at the same time.

IV. TWO WAY APPROACH OF PROTECTING AND CONSERVING FRAGILE SYSTEMS TO ATTAIN SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Man and nature are interdependent and one way to attain sustainable growth is to appreciate the interdependence of man and nature. It has been revealed through various studies

that all living things depend and interconnected with each other through natural cycles and ecological systems. All such cycles are naturally and recurrently subject to change that foster all the living beings but simultaneously all these are experiencing stress within the environment. Therefore, it can be traced that both these systems are exceptionally fragile, and it is only now we are beginning to recognize the myriad interactions and interdependencies that sustain each of them. And we are also realizing that once they are gone, there are no replacements.

Spiritual Ecology

"Ecology is the relationship between organisms and their environment," explains Sponsel. "The spiritual part can refer to religion but it doesn't have to. There are many people who don't consider themselves religious, yet they consider life sacred. Spiritual ecology alludes to a deeply felt personal transformation in the way we relate to our environment."

But the lack of spiritual orientation in the people has resulted in the crisis of the relationship between man and nature. There is need for spirituality in the environmentalist movement. Spirituality gives people the strength to sustain their action throughout their lives. Sustainable growth cannot be achieved unless we determine ourselves to rejuvenate the relationship between we, the people and the nature. But the question is how to orient ourselves to reestablish this vital relationship. The answer to this is Spiritual Ecology, which is a response to this crisis. "Mother Earth has a body that is very much like our body. When there is some problem she heals herself. But like our body, if the body is exploited again and again and filled with more and more toxins and is never given the time to replenish itself, then it can't heal itself and the result is serious diseases. When Mother earth gets a disease the reactions are severe earthquakes and tsunamis. It is necessary, therefore, to clean the ecology of our consciousness and the simplest and most powerful agent to remove the pollution of our minds and hearts and restore the love, compassion and inner satisfaction that we are all longing for is the chanting of God's holy names." (Radhanath Swami).

Materialistic Behavior

Materialism is the doctrine that teaches that physical matter is the only component of reality. As Gandhi said, "Earth has enough for our needs, but not enough for our greed." People are closing doors of spirituality that lies deep inside them and moving towards outer surface where their behavior is directed towards materialism.

Individuals tend to view the world in terms of separateness and "other". Instead of acknowledging the interdependence of the ecosystem, the materialistic-dominated culture views nature and the earth as a material and mechanical object that can, and should be, manipulated and controlled. However, an increase in materialism has actually little or no effect on the well-being and happiness of its people. We are moving or rather have moved to a great extent towards a "joyless society".

Thus materialism has negatively affected the entire frame of our society.

Social ecology

Humans have been living as part of natural ecosystems. Each of us lives in relationship with other living beings and the nonliving parts of our environment. We are, in other words, members of ecosystems, which are simply communities of these relationships that function as a system over a period of time. As we move away from spiritualism towards behavior directed towards materialism, in the mid way we neglect or rather surpass the relationships and emotions. The ecological crisis is the result of deep-seated social problems.

Social ecology is a discipline which is concerned with values, ethics and process of change. Thus, it needs to consider:

- Issues of power, gender and separateness
- The importance of nurturing imagination, vision, creativity.
- Development of a sense and spirit of belongingness towards the country.
- Developing the compassionate skills of communication, facilitation and community learning,
- Developing leadership and team work, and nurturing self- and group-maintenance.

Milbrath (1989:85–87, adapted) understood that, people must learn following things for social learning to move towards sustainability:

- become conscious about their ways of perceptive;
- understand the critical roles of values and beliefs in shaping the reality
- think holistically, systemically, and integratively;
- avoid interfering with nature's systems and cycles and recognize the limits to growth;
- Empathize with and extend our compassion towards people and future generations to preserve the integrity of the ecosphere and the survival of all.
- exploit a wealth of information and overcome the legal, social, and financial barriers to the easy sharing of such information;
- find better ways to disseminate and use information,
- emphasize integrative and probabilistic thinking;
- emphasize values as much as facts by learning how to learn from the values of others and how values relate to the interpretation of facts;
- critically and constructively developing procedures to question science and technology so to develop procedures to evaluate and control the role of science and technology in society;
- think that change is possible because people need to be empowered to believe that change is possible;
- examine outcomes for further learning;
- foster systemic and future thinking in government, business, and other major organizations by developing institutions;
- institutionalize the practice of analyzing future impact of major societal decisions and developing methods of value impact analysis;
- Encourage citizen participation and maintain candidness so as to promote learning and

counterbalance excessive bureaucratic policy making.

V. INDIVIDUALS AS CHANGE AGENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Government's initiatives and efforts, and other efforts such as 'Earth Day', 'Earth Hour' by several other environmental organizations may help to reduce the negative impact, but it's not enough, we must understand that unless there is a change in consciousness, there would not be sustainability. Consider the recent movement regarding cleaning of the Yamuna, where people in large numbers marched to Delhi to put political pressure. It is quite evident that we cannot clean the rivers unless we clean our hearts because then people will pollute the rivers again. We have to clean our hearts and fill it with consciousness. We're all in the same boat,(the earth and nature) all of us would be no more if the boat sinks. Therefore, the primary emphasis should be to imbibe certain values which focus on environmental protection, and link these to the core faith/ beliefs or religion of the people. The much required ideological change should be to appreciate life quality rather than constantly running after an increasingly comfortable, materialistic higher standard of living. The very idea inherent in sustainability is to 'sustain' – to organize how human beings live in such a way that we sustain the two fragile systems i.e. ourselves and the planet over a long term time frame. It is high time that 'now' we take the onus on our shoulder's to move towards a Holistic World View- a view of collectivism rather than individualism so as to sustain both fragile systems. It is 'now' when each one of us should desperately fall in love and give away our heart and soul to our most important relationship with our environment. The awareness about our unity and interdependence with nature needs to be created for a better future.

It is time for the human race to realize that its existence is connected with the existence of the planet earth and all the living beings present on it. Anew perspective has to evolve where the relationship between man and earth, and the role of human beings for saving the nature as well as the other surviving species has to be redefined. An individual sense of existence and identity needs to be replaced by the "experience of profound interconnectedness with all life" (Macy, 1990) and a foundation can be laid through a spiritual awakening towards protection of all and against all forms of exploitation.

To arrive at this state, we need to make a journey from the outer materialistic behavior towards closed doors of spirituality. In the midway lie our neglected emotions and relationships which we need to embrace so as to open the closed door of our innermost manifestation, i.e. spirituality. The word "Spirituality" is about finding answers for the questions: "What am I supposed to do with my life?" One possible answer to this question leads us to see the human species as the change-agents in this world. We are through our each and every action causing changes in this world and environment, it is only a matter of realigning our priorities, and create positive changes, which can ensure a healthy living for ourselves, our future generations and for all life forms. We have been the most privileged species, the most intelligent creatures born on earth, and it is only us, who are capable of

helping nature to balance the driving forces of life on earth. We have to assume the role of God's Angel, and realize our responsibilities as the wisest creatures on earth. And if we are not going to do it, we are no better than the animals, which can at best focus on just ensuring their own survival. We have identified a gap, and to a large extent we have created it, so we must fill it.

Even if many of us do not believe in the spirituality concepts, as rational broad minded and learned beings, it is our prime responsibility to gift to our future generations whatever good that the nature has offered to us. We must realize and work considering the wise saying that - "*We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.*" We should also use our new age thinking to create awareness and urgency towards saving the planet through scientific and rational approaches.

Both the approaches – spiritual and scientific, emphasize the same aspect that it is humans who have created this situation of others on the earth and they are the ones who need to take action to restore back the system. It is for the happiness, growth and survival of the whole life on earth that certain major changes need to be done by humans.

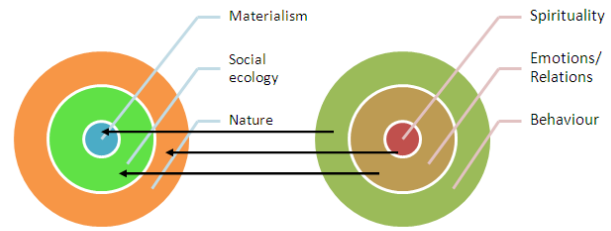
Leadership for social change through cultivation of personal spirituality is evident from the life stories of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and many other peace activists. For example, Gandhi led India to independence as a spiritual tenant of non-violence (*Ahinsa*) and through truth's insistent call (*Satyagraha*) (Dorn, 2002) and Martin Luther King, Jr. led the non-violence movement with the spirit of *agape* (Radhakrishnan, 2002). In addition to these world figures, many grassroots leaders also endorse the importance of spirituality in their activities.

We have to create an inspiring and competent change agent within us who has the courage of conviction which in turn will trigger off the process of sustainable growth. This is how we move towards a Holistic World View- a view of collectivism rather than individualism. We should not look for the change agents; rather take the role of change agents. To be a change agent is a state of mind in the same way as is to be contended and happy. We must understand that we are an integral part of the environment; therefore we can be observers and change agents. Even one thought, one touch, one glance can make difference! This is how we can induce and produce positive changes in the environment so as to sustain it, which in turn will sustain us. We need to go for self-introspection and questions to ourselves.....

It is important that we associate sustainability with enabling imaginative, progressive change at all levels, from individual to species to biosphere, from home to planet,. For promoting conservation, protecting vital ecosystems, preventing undue climate changes, securing water accessibility, or reducing air pollution, we should develop and execute innovative solutions to critical environmental problems.

"I had a moment where I realized how it was. I just sat in front of the mirror and said to myself: You're stuffed, don't whine on because nothing further will change.

So, don't lose your time. Take that! Go for it! And that's the way it is."



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VI. CONCLUSION

The realization or experience of a connectedness to all things will help us move towards the goal of sustainability. It will require fundamental changes in human attitudes and behavior. We must try honestly to understand the interdependence and interconnectedness of all life forms, plants and animals alike. A sense of personal responsibility emerges when we begin to question not only the role of humans and our society but also the personal role that each of us plays. Such a deeply ecological spirituality incorporates inclusiveness and leads humans to challenge both the co-modification of everything, and the foundational assumptions of modernism. We will need to re-examine human identity, the relationship of human beings to nature and most fundamentally, the role of the human species in Earth's evolution and survival.

"If you don't have a moral question in your governing process, then you don't have a process that's going to survive." – [Oren Lyons](#), Faithkeeper, Turtle Clan.

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