



Research Paper

## Assessing the Intertwined Path of Environmental Sustainability and Environmental Humanism: A Critical Analysis in Indo- Australian Scenario

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### Abstract

Environmental Sustainability upholds the twin parameters of meeting the present ever burgeoning resource demand of the world population and preserving adequate resources for the future generation. After the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 this concept gained importance and showed that proper nurturing of Environmental Sustainability ultimately leads in flourishing Environmental Humanism. But these large, diverse and rapidly expanding fields of enquiry, populated by heterogeneous discourses, multiple approaches and variety of recommendations as to the ways forward, seemed to be less competent regarding infrastructural plans and goal-oriented activities. Moreover, 'Developed' countries levelled allegations like 'pollution haven', 'industrial flight', etc., against 'Developing' countries for maintaining lower environmental standards and consequent weak Environmental Sustainability.

In this onset, this study tries to critically examine and bring greater clarity about the intertwined concepts and constructs regarding achievement and spreading of Environmental Sustainability and Environmental Humanism in India and Australia, countries who are unique in the long-term influences of very different physical environments, political frameworks and Indigenous inheritances. This paper, therefore, tries to meticulously view and review the nuances of both India and Australian environmental policies, infrastructures and achievements, which are more contrastive than similar and drive them divergently, and bring forth satisfactory concepts and practices which would thereby try to ensure strong Environmental sustainability and humanism. Although this paper does not aim to present a complete environmental historiography of both the nations but an objective analysis of strategies are the prime focuses of this paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Environmental Sustainability, Environmental Humanism, Environmental Policies.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Environmental Sustainability upholds the twin parameters of meeting the present ever burgeoning resource demand of the world population and preserving adequate resources for the future generation. World Commission on Environment and Development whose report Our common future (the 'Brundtland Report') (WCED 1987) firmly brought into fore the concept of Environmental Sustainability to the top of national and international policy agendas. But the problem arises in case of obtaining Environmental Sustainability since making agendas, policies, laws etc., and practicing it with conviction for proper sustenance appeared as two different asymmetrical halves, which would hardly yield a complete sphere. The long-term impact of past industrialization, exploitation and environmental damage cannot be taken away. It appears that the problems are complex and choices difficult and our common future can only be achieved by a better understanding of our common concerns and shared responsibilities. Numerous recent studies have offered solutions to the problem of achieving environmental sustainability and the long-term preservation of our environment for the future. Scholars have offered plenty of principles for development (e.g., Dresner 2002), design approaches (e.g., Birkland 2002), leadership lessons (e.g., Fullan 2004), measurement strategies (e.g., Bell and Morse 2003), production ethics (e.g., McDonough and Braungart 2002), and change strategies (e.g., Doppelt 2003; Edwards and Orr 2005) to guide societies away from older forms of engagement with the environment to new (and presumably better) ways of doing things. But these large, diverse and rapidly expanding fields of enquiry,

populated by heterogeneous discourses, multiple approaches and variety of recommendations as to the ways forward, seemed to be less competent regarding infrastructural plans and goal-oriented activities. Moreover, 'Developed' countries levelled allegations like 'pollution haven', 'industrial flight', etc., against 'Developing' countries for maintaining lower environmental standards and consequent weak Environmental Sustainability. Environmental Sustainability can be achieved if we can assure the present and future resource needs seamlessly by treading some complex environmental paths such as upholding strong sustainability reforms or approaching balance anthropogenic use of natural resources. In this connection we can aptly visualize that if resource need of human beings is optimized then only there can prevail an era of mutual growth and camaraderie which is the essence of Environmental humanism. It is the belief that humans have the right and the ability to control nature for the benefit of humanity. Aptly does David Ehrenfeld in his book "Arrogance of Humanism" describes the core of humanism as "a supreme faith in human reason-its ability to confront and solve the many problems that humans face, its ability to rearrange both the world of nature and the affairs of men and women so that human life will prosper." In this note, this study tries to critically examine and bring greater clarity about the intertwined concepts and constructs regarding achievement and spreading of Environmental Sustainability and Environmental Humanism in India and Australia, countries who are unique in the long-term influences of very different physical environments, political frameworks and Indigenous inheritances.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANISM- CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

Concern about environment in present world scenario has reached its climax. It can be identified in local struggles, national debates and international forums. Rightly does Orr puts it "Environmental Sustainability needs not only economic and social sustainability but also democracy, human resource development, empowerment of women, and much more investment in human capital than is common today i.e., increased literacy, especially eco literacy", Orr 1992). It is important that we examine the assumption that there exist self-evident environmental problems requiring some equally self-evident set of rational solutions since 'anthropogenic pressures on the environment are rising to the point of causing 'ecological overshoot' in many regions of the world' (Wackernagel et al 1999, 2002). There remains a plethora of underlying conceptions regarding the development of Environmental issues about the nature of risks to humans, for example, toxic wastes, natural calamities, clogging of forests, etc. Environmental policies and debates often turn on these issues and predictions that arise from such conceptions of varying degrees and lose its focus. Moreover, as Serageldin (1993) observes "Humanity must learn to live within the limitations of the biological and physical environment, both as a provider of, inputs ("sources") and as a "sink" for wastes." It is therefore imperative that we proceed toward ameliorative and logical framework of actions to achieve a balance between resource using and saving for true Environmental sustainability and humanism.

### **DEBATES, ALLEGATIONS AND COUNTER ARGUMENTS**

With the perception of the need of Environmental sustainability simultaneously crops the practice of allegations and counter arguments. World policy makers instead of conceiving 'one world' and its environmental problems are more spirited in levelling allegations upon other nations. This practice has given rise to multitudinous debates and consequent hypothesis. Economic segregation of nations as 'developed' and 'developing' holds important place in Environmental Sustainability debates. Developed countries are in favour of the idea that environmental damage is due to the low environmental standard of developing countries leading to migration of 'dirty' industries there (the 'industrial flight' hypothesis). In addition, these countries may often, purposively, undervalue the environment in order to attract the multinational firms (the 'pollution haven' hypothesis) leading to excessive environmental degradation. On the other side we can see that India, as a developing nation, in Stockholm Conference of 1972, declared that 'poverty is the greatest pollution' and environmental sustainability is largely compromised in developing countries for the sake of economic sustainability. Moreover, developing nations also points out that environmental problem have increased due to turning of their lands into dumping grounds of wastes and this issue is now even more prominent in the wake of the world economic order towards a liberalized trade regime. In this regard 'The Uruguay Round of General Agreement on Tariff and Trade' (GATT) and the 'North American Free Trade Agreement' (NAFTA) have posed a concern for policymakers regarding the state of natural environment in developing countries. Analysis of such debates mostly results in futile allegations and pushing our world far away from gaining Environmental sustainability and thereby jeopardizing the concept of Environmental humanity.

### **INDIAN AND AUSTRALIAN SCENARIO**

Donald Worster defined environmental history around three levels, three clusters of issues and questions. The first level seeks an understanding of nature itself. The second brings in consideration of the

'socioeconomic realm as it interacts with the environment'. The third is dealing with the values, laws and myths that shape these interactions. These tiers of environmental history depict two very different scenarios in case of India and Australia, since these two countries are unique in the long-term influences of very different physical environments, political frameworks and Indigenous inheritances. Australia is an ecologically unique nation characterised by mega-biodiversity. Australia is a highly urbanised country and therefore meeting the demands of manufacturing, the energy sector, transport, mining, etc constitutes a growing challenge on its environmental and agricultural aspects. Early environmental policies of Australia were directed at limiting the local impact of natural resource exploitation and large development projects. But after the adoption of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development in the early 1990s, efforts are now directed at into Australia's sustainable development policy agenda and meeting the challenge of integrating the practice of sustainable development into economic and sectoral decisions. Australia has made considerable progress in developing a framework for the integration of environmental and economic policies whereas presently, India is in the throes of industrialisation and development and the liberalisation of the economy has triggered intense growth in all sectors of the economy. This rapid development has intensified the concerns for the environment and the rapidly depleting natural resources (Rangarajan, 2009; Ravindranath 2000; 2007). Also, India's diverse environment makes it particularly 'difficult' and 'fragile' as each region poses a different kind of challenge in terms of the environmental issues it raises (Joshi, 2005). Though Several Environmental policies and Acts, as the National Environmental Policy (2006) and Five-Year Plans (*The ninth five-year plan (1997-2002)*) are directed towards Environmental Sustainability little has been achieved in India due to *poor state of infrastructures, increased social and regional imbalances, the looming environmental threats including water and energy shortages*. Contrarily, in fact, the country has headed towards greater unsustainability and inequity

## II. CONCLUSION

After a meticulous analysis of the available sources regarding Environmental Sustainability and Environmental humanism in India and Australia we can perceive that though Australia is way ahead in its environmental policies and infrastructure in maintaining sustainability India is also heading toward achieving this goal by carrying side by side its ancient environmental conservation ethics, formulation and implementation of policies and finding solutions to its practiced environmental negligence. To gain Sustainable development, most earnestly economic sustainability, India to a certain degree is practicing soft authoritarianism in case of environmental protection. It is, therefore, high time that we need to understand about what we can practice, use, reuse and pile for gaining true Environmental sustainability and conjoin it with Environmental humanism. This idea is mightily echoed in the words of Mahatma Gandhi (as cited in Khoshoo&Moolakattu, 2009, p. 144), 'A time is coming when those who are in a mad rush today of multiplying their wants, will retrace their steps and say: What have we done'.

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