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Value Education

Values are one's own principles and standards - either learnt or autonomously developed - from which one judges what is right and what is wrong. As the dominant paradigm of development privileges economic growth over the question of environmental sustainability, the realisation of the urgent need to sustain the Earth can be generated only through value education. This section explores the ways in which value education can serve the cause of the sustainability of the planet.

Both formal and non-formal education can be used to persuade people to understand environmental values i.e., to value nature, appreciate nature-based cultures, respect the rights of traditional ecosystem communities in the light of social justice, value human heritage, propagate equitable use of resources, sustain common property resources and oppose the global and local destroyers of ecology. Cultivation of environmental values, thus, consists in appreciating the value of environmental assets and disapproving of their destruction. But the question is to identify and contradict the ideas and attitudes that prevent us from valuing the Earth as a planet in urgent need of protection from environmental degradation.

The greatest impediment to the inculcation of environmental values is the dominant idea of 'development'. This idea of development puts a high premium exclusively on economic growth and blinds us to urgent need for sustainable and equitable use of resources. In our rush for economic growth we do not care to register that many of the growth-oriented technologies and industries are indeed threatening the sustainability of the Earth. This mindset must change if the planet with its natural resources, its biodiversity and ecological balance is to be sustained. It is environment-insensitive economic growth that is the greatest single cause behind environmental degradation and inequitable enjoyment of the Earth's resources.

The cultivation of environmental values also calls for the rejection of consumerism, which, in its modern form, is itself a correlate of idea of economic growth that capitalism propagates. Consumerism thrives as an ideology because the capitalist world that we inhabit considers the consumption of resources as a major index of development. Indeed, capitalism and its attendant consumerism look upon the Earth's environmental resources, too, predominantly as resources to be utilised and consumed. Valuing nature as a phenomenon to be conserved is marginal or residual to this utilitarian attitude of capitalism to nature.

The urgent need to conserve Nature and sustain the planet enjoins that the modern Western attitude of valuing the resources of Nature exclusively for their utilitarian

importance should be abandoned. One has to go beyond valuing the river for its water, the forest for its timber and non-wood forest products, or the sea for its fish.

But merely going beyond the utilitarian attitude to nature would not amount to the formation of environmental values. Environmental values cannot be built upon a mere negation of the attitudes that promote unsustainability; they need some positive attitudes to found themselves on. Environmental values need to be derived from feelings that add up to a principled position that it is wrong not to preserve Nature as a whole.

The most fundamental, positive sentiment on which environmental values can be best founded is valuing Nature itself. The realization that our lives are an integral but miniscule part of nature's complex web of life leads to an appreciation of Nature as a whole and this leads to positive feeling on which a pro-environmental consciousness can be based. We must, however, also learn to value and respect diverse human cultures. Actually, many of the tribal cultures of our country and of the world are vanishing because the economically dominant, with their advanced ways of life, do not respect the tribal lifestyles that are in fact closer to nature and frequently more sustainable.

The idea of oneness with Nature, however, becomes an active environmental value when it translates into pro-conservation actions in all our day to day activities. Most of our actions have adverse environmental impacts unless we consciously avoid them. One of the ways in which the value of respecting and preserving nature as a whole can be cultivated in the place of the modern Western attitude of subjugating and exploiting nature is to question the intellectual processes that have invariably suppressed these innate sentiments

This feeling for Nature is a part of our Constitution, which strongly emphasises this value. Article 48A of the Indian Constitution states, "The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife in the country." Article 51A (g) of the constitution expects that each citizen of the country must "protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for all living creatures."

As one of the greatest causes of anthropogenic environmental degradation is a lack of awareness of the consequences of unlimited and unrestrained anti-environmental behaviour, we need to the appropriate behaviour in relation to the longevity of our surroundings and of other species on Earth. Each action by an individual must be linked to its environmental consequences in his/her mind so that a value is created that leads to strengthening pro-environmental behaviour and preventing anti-environmental actions.

This awareness can be best generated through educational processes, both formal and informal, which should be initiated right from the stage of early socialisation of the child. Schools, colleges and universities are, of course, Providing environment-sensitive answers to children's questions about their surroundings can help to foster a set of values that most people in society would begin to accept as a norm as they have been reasoned

into accepting it since their childhood. Thus pro-environmental actions would radiate from the domain of individuals towards that of the community.

