

## **Destructions and Progress: Removing Social Misconceptions on Environmental Issues**

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**Abstract:** *This paper attempts to argue that while we hear too much negative statements from the environmentalists against scientific and technological innovations, we do not have an opportunity to weigh the destruction trails against their achievements. It is apparent that technological advancement causes destruction to many idyllic 'nature' on earth, this also brings about many opportunities for humanity to reach certain glorious heights that were once unthought of. Sigmund Freud wrote as early as 1930 (rev 1931) 'Civilisation and its Discontent', and Tagore in 1941 'Crisis in Civilization' how science and technology are destroying the earth. The whole question is related to 'mankind' as a whole. Whether the development destroys the earth and mankind is a valid question that the environmentalists need to ponder on. At the same time, the technological development world needs to decide whether the progress by scientific achievements is worth its while against the possible 'direct' as well as 'indirect' side effects. The paper wishes to ask whether the responsibilities for environmental destructions by 'development' and 'technological advancements' and ask whether for such destructions should be diverted to another plane rather than on scientific developers and technological experts. Clearly science and technology do not plan to destroy the earth, they are achievers of wonders in various ways basing on acquired knowledge (both scientific and philosophical) accumulated since time immemorial. The paper concludes that causes of environmental destructions due to scientific and technological developments should be put on the powerful men/women, the aggressive statehoods, and their desire to achieve control on earth. The paper believes that the world's present system of encouraging 'power' of unscrupulous persons, industries, companies and many states are to be studied to determine how they misuse the 'progress' of science and technology. Every concerned citizen should rise against the system of 'misuse' of progress, not against the 'progress' itself.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The main objective of this paper is to offer explanations how the contemporary waves of agitations created by the environmentalists gain public support, which in turn undermines the achievements of science and technology. The paper will attempt to judge whether the public are being properly informed or being misdirected.

#### **Creation of Public Awareness**

The question is how in recent times the public in general have become aware of the ill-effects of scientific, technological and industrial progress. The question is based on *a priori* that earlier the public were unaware of these. How have the changes taken place in recent times?

The environmentalists in the Europe's industrially developed countries, collectively known as the West have long been talking of 'green house effects', 'carbon emission', 'destruction of trees and forests', 'pollution of natural water resources by industrial wastes' etc., but the public at first accepted them as academic exercises, which they felt did not affect their lives. They were busy enjoying the fruits of scientific and technological innovations in their everyday life. They were happy with new labour saving devices, improved housing, better health service, quicker communication in general, higher standard of living, and so on.

In the beginning, despite the warnings offered by far-sighted people and many well-intentioned legislations about controlling pollution, not much care was taken by the industrialists in particular to implement them. Soon, the ill-effects of rapid industrialisation started becoming 'news' in the West. Researchers started blaming the environmental pollution for many health hazards. They felt that many man-made disasters were directly related to scientific and technological developments. They also pointed out that the technological innovations are encouraging destructive warfare including making of Atom Bomb, and Chemical and Biological War weapons.

Civilisation was an apt word used by most scholars to describe the world advancements in learning. Soon after the First World War, Sigmund Freud wrote *Civilisation and its Discontent* (1930), and during the height of the Second World War, Rabindranath Tagore wrote 'Crisis in Civilization' (1941). They both seem to have deplored 'civilisation' for dangers looming around the corner for mankind.

It is generally believed that the public are gullible to words and examples that are easy to follow and observe. They usually believe in things, not just by listening to others, but by experiencing things directly.

Various writings offer to tell us how climate change is being effected by industrialisation and how to cope with such impending disasters. One journal *Global Environmental Change* has been in publication since 1990 solely on this theme. Some of its representative research articles are quoted in the endnotes below.

That happened in the West gradually and various movements against scientific and technological innovations, which disregarded preservation of Nature, gained ground in the West. The protesters gained support of the public in the West as they thought they were the ones to suffer most, The global destruction was not initially in the agenda of the West's environmentalists.

At that time, there was no attempt to weigh the surprising and often life-saving gains that scientific and technological innovations brought to the doorsteps of mankind. Such gains included stupendous developments in life-saving medicines, universalisation of medical knowledge, healthy food consciousness, water purity, improved sanitation, improved housing, protection from cold in winter and less suffering in summer, speedy communication with near and dear ones irrespective of physical distance, rise of digital technologies, and what not. Still, there was no system of weighing such benefits against the destructions caused, nor was there any philosophical statement and practical assessment to identify the culprits of such damages.

## **II. Industrialisation spreading in the South**

For a long time, the non-Western countries, sometimes called the 'South' or the 'Third World', or the 'developing countries' were thought to have escaped such ill-effects suffered by of the West, as they were not part of the harmful industrial productions. (I would like to tell the scholarly audience here that I shall be using Third World expression mostly in this paper). It was assumed that the villagers of Africa and Asia lead a simple and healthy life being close to nature and without 'pollution'. This notion is probably true only up to a certain limit. Colonial rules in most Third World countries meant extraction of mostly natural and farming wealth from colonies, and blocking improvements of life and livelihood of indigenous people, as well as discouraging industrialisation in those areas. During colonial period extending to mid-twentieth century covering two World Wars, most small to large gadgets, contraptions and mechanisms, as well as arms, ammunitions, military vehicles, military aircrafts were all produced in the industries located in 'West'.

This production scenario changed rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly as the colonies started becoming independent. Gradually industrial productions no longer remained the monopolies of the West. Similar industrial productions in the newly independent countries (old colonies and Third World countries) as these countries became global partners of the West in accordance with latter's various economic and neo-colonial strategies.

Consequently, 'environmental pollution' also gradually started in the non-Western countries. Apart from pollutions, some great disasters, such as Bhopal tragedy, also accompanied such industrial developments. The West continued to gain commercially as most industrial products in the new areas were patented or owned by them. These countries, now industrialising also carried the burden of environmental pollution all by themselves.

Such industries required factory hands who were mostly semi and unskilled labour than skilled ones. These labourers were paid meagrely, and their living conditions in urban and semi-urban parts of the Third World countries were not congenial to healthy lifestyle. Considering the vastness of the Third World countries, such industries occupied a very tiny area, the people living in which suffered most, but the public in general were enjoying the fruits of cheap industrial productions.

## **III. Rise of Universal Awareness of Destructive Elements in Progress**

As in the West, movements for cleaner environment in the Third World countries started as well, but on analysis they proved to be nothing more than copy-cat of the movements in the West. The world situation was that until recent times the environmentalists did not create such uproar about the ill-effects as to draw the attention of the public. Though by 'recent times' one may assume early to mid twentieth century, the academic thinkers were aware of the dangers looming over the earth due to industrial pollutions as early as mid-nineteenth century. But the information did not become totally or globally public. Gradually, some movements against nuclear arsenals, particularly by Bertrand Russell's Anti-Nuke movement, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth started drawing the attention of the general public of the West and western-oriented educated class of the Third World countries.

The situation changed during the late twentieth and early twenty first century as the environmentalists started presenting the data and statistics of total environmental pollutions that engulfed the non-industrial countries too. It is only then the Third World countries were brought into the information dissemination targets. Climate changes world wide were thought to have been triggered off by various reasons, the major culprits being the over-zealous and speedy industrialisations in the West without considerations about their effects on global climate. The greenhouse effects cause the glaciers to melt faster, raise sea level, destroy mangrove forests, elimination of free roaming animals, creating ecology imbalance, bring about new types of illness, both physical and mental in mankind, cause food poisoning by chemical fertilizers and preservatives and so on. The destruction list is almost endless.

The causes of such destruction were not confined in the West, but as stated above (see subheading *Industrialisation of the South*), the world's industrial production scenario changed after the Wars, particularly as the new politico-economic situations compelled the West took drastic steps. Such steps included moving capital from the Centre (which is the West) to the Periphery (i.e. The Third World countries), outsourcing (made possible by digital technologies and Internet) and creation of new economic zones to maintain world supremacy by the West. In such activities, the Third World countries apparently (but NOT actually) became 'production partners' of the West and initiated industrial productions with consequent urbanisation, ghettoization, climatic pollutions, and also due to lack of control and absence of technology widespread dumping of industrial wastes into the rivers.

#### **IV. Globalisation**

We are living in a time when 'globalisation' in its various facets are facts in every country of the world, from richest to the poorest. This is appreciated as well as criticised by many. Industrialisation is often equated with increased employment, rise of standard of living, skill developments, internationalisation of trade and investments, and so on. Of the major criticisms, one is that globalisation does not really alleviate poverty of the poor countries. Instead, it is argued, it increases social problems as the rich-poor divides increase within the Third World countries themselves. Consequently, the general public (who constitute the largest segments of population in the developing countries) become powerless as economically and politically strong business and bureaucratic groups emerge to take the helms of the country. The latter are bent on 'making money' with no regard to the environmental issues. As these new industrialists are also country's power holders, despite laws against industrial pollutions, they continue to flout such laws (to save the expenses of constructing proper waste disposal system) and pollute the environments.

The above clearly tells us how globalisation of industrial productions has increased the environmental pollutions world wide. This is no longer the responsibility of the Western industrialist countries, but of all countries of the world.

#### **V. Global Action Plans**

Various action plans have been taken by small as well as big organisations to tackle the environmental problems rising from industrialisation. Such action plan and concerns in emphatic language started by the end of last century, but they became more vocal in more recent times. For example, the Global 2000 Report to the President was commissioned by US President on May 23, 1977. The report was released at a press conference in the White House Press Room on July 24, 1980. The report concluded, "If present trends continue, the world in 2000 will be more crowded, and more vulnerable to disruption than the world we live in now. Serious stresses involving population, resources, and environment are clearly visible ahead. Despite greater material output, the world's people will be poorer in many ways than they are today".

There have been a number of important world conventions in the last century of which Kyoto Protocol of 1994 is considered by many as most effective one. It was held to tackle the challenges of climate change due to industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse effects. Kyoto Protocol was adopted in 1997 and UN produced United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (better known as UNFCCC). The first phase of this convention covered 2008 to 2012, and the next phase is to end in 2020. Kyoto Protocol had many adaptations, viz. Cancun Adaptation Framework, Nairobi Work Programme, LDC Work and Report Programme etc.

In this year Bonn Climate Change Conference is working to ensure that the goal for harmful emission reduction targets are achieved.

## **VI. Global Compensation Plans**

That the countries which have suffered from environmental pollutions should get compensations has become a movement by the end of twentieth century. The world met at Copenhagen in 2009 to determine what compensations should be given to which country. The Convention pledged \$100 billion by 2010 to 133 countries. It also urged the industrially advanced countries to ensure that the global temperature would not rise beyond 2 degree Celsius.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Without going into the history of various action plans to save the planet earth from destruction due to industrialisation, it may be worth for today to round up the discussion by asking ourselves whether the progress in science and technology is outweighed by the ill-effects of the same.

The question cannot be answered in one sentence. Despite the ill-effects, if we think of marvellous achievements of science and technology and also enhanced knowledge of mankind about everything, the ill-effects seem greatest mistakes by mankind in using the advancements of science and technology. Development of scientific knowledge by which technologies came to be the champion in many sectors in this planet earth, and also be the beneficiary of mankind all over the earth. The achievements are often misused by unscrupulous business people and greedy industrialists who could not be brought under control either by the States they are citizens of, or by their own conscience as responsible citizens of the planet earth. In this regard, an article by Noam Chomsky is worth referring to. He tells his readers that ‘Capitalism as it exists today is radically incompatible with democracy’.

A major question raises its head if there will ever be time for the world’s economic and business world to stop harming the environment and become aware of their responsibilities towards the well-being of the planet and its people including themselves. It is worth noting what Pope Francis thinks about the issue. For Francis, there is a vital distinction between human needs, limited but non-negotiable, and appetites, which are potentially unlimited. The poor, Francis states, have their needs denied, while the rich have their appetites indulged. The environmental crisis links these two aspects of the problem.

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