

# POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE-CONTRADICTIONS AND REALITIES

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Though both the concepts of sustainable development and climate change related to the issue of environmental degradation, the former is the ideal goal of handing over safe and secure environment to future generations while the latter indicates the real status of global environment. The climate change associated with global warming negates the survival of life in general, human existence in particular. Despite the identification of the problem of climate change, it has been growing aggressively resulting in the widening gap between ideal and reality. This is a grave contradiction. This has to be addressed with serious scientific analysis to save the globe/ planet.

**Sustainable Development:**

It is important to note that as back as one and half centuries ago, **Karl Marx** in his Capital volume 3, clearly spoke about the concept of 'Sustainable Development'. He commented "from the stand point of higher economic forms of society, private ownership of the globe by single individual will appear as absurd as private ownership by one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the globe. They are only its possessors.... They must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition".

Despite this fact, the main-stream studies claim that the concept of sustainable development emerged during 1980's in the process of discussing about the prevention of environmental degradation.

**Climate Change:**

It is a dangerous manifestation of environmental crisis. The concentration of green house gases in the environment due to the emissions of carbon dioxide is the cause for global warming and consequent climate change which is risky to the sustenance of globe. This forests which are critically required for the earth's balance, have been destroyed. Further, soil erosion and soil degradation are at its height, destruction of bio-diversity, depletion of ground water table, air pollution, water pollution have already emerged and strengthened at the global level. The global warming is expected to result in the collapse of vast polar ice sheets which raises sea levels, results in the more intense and destructive weather events, spread of disease carrying mosquitoes, rise in the temperatures of the globe. The climate change leads to the occurrence of severe drought and terrible water scarcity.

**Identification of the Problem of Environmental Degradation and Distortion in Solution:**

The growing gap between the ideal goal of sustainable development and actual environmental degradation in terms of climate change and global warming itself is a serious challenge. The denial of dominant countries that it is induced by industrial development on the one hand, a critical distortion in the proposals of solution promoted by powerful corporate forces on the other strengthens ecological imperialism rather than enabling the global economy to move towards sustainable development.

Since the publication of the report of "**Club of Rome**" in 1972 on environmental deterioration to the recent *Katowice Climate Change Conference* during 2-15 December, 2018 at Poland, distortion in the proposals of solution continued strongly. The dominant forces who are responsible for the environmental deterioration will not allow the members to raise this issue rather throw the burden of mitigating the problem on emerging economies/third world countries.

To start with the Report published by '**Club of Rome**' in 1972, on the one hand recognizes the seriousness of the problem of environmental degradation by stating that if the same level of consumption of environmental resources continue, then in coming hundred years, it will exceed the regenerative capacity of the earth which is dangerous for the human survival. On the other, instead of raising voice against global dominant forces who are responsible for the crisis, throw the blame on emerging economies by stating that their high population is the cause. Thus, the misdirection of throwing the burden on victims commenced successfully.

This phenomenon continued even in the International Conference organized by UNO in 1972 on Human Environment, at Stockholm with 152 scientists and published a report "Only one earth; the care and maintenance of a small planet". Though it states that the environmental problems will vary according to the state of development of the country concerned, it fails to question the developed/dominant countries rather alleges that emerging economies with their high population and urbanization are the cause for environmental deterioration. Moreover, the dominant countries condemned the warnings of scientists.

In 1980, **Independent Commission** on International Development Issues published a report entitled "*North – South: A Programme for Survival*" which has been popularized as "**Brandt Report**". Its resolutions clearly strengthened the distortion. It attributes that the backwardness of poor countries is the cause for environmental destruction. Therefore, it suggests that these economies should be connected to global economy through commercial expansion. Thus, they suggest the transfer of value and environmental resources to dominant countries/forces on the name of environmental protection. It strengthens Ecological Imperialism which further destroys emerging economies. Moreover, this proposal will not solve the issue of environmental crisis rather it aggravates the problem itself is a serious contradiction.

The continuation of this misdirection till now is a bitter reality. The "**World Commission on Environment and Development**" published a report called "*Our Common Future*" in 1987. It states that the poverty of poor nations and excessive consumption of rich nations, both are responsible for the environmental destruction but fails to talk about, how does the economic model of rich nations cause environmental destruction.

The phenomenon of throwing the burden of solving environmental crisis on emerging economics further strengthened in the "*Earth Summit*" organized by UNO in Rio de Janeiro of Brazil in 1992.

The distortion continued even in the efforts of UNO in terms of organizing international conferences. UNO could establish "**United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC) in 1992. It organizes "Conference of Parties" (COP) every year. In this process, UN's Environment Programme published a report entitled "Global State of Environment" in 1997. It clearly states that "the progress towards global sustainable future is just slow, and a sense of urgency is lacking". The funds and political will are insufficient to halt further environmental degradation even though the technology and knowledge are available to do so. As a result, the gap between what has been done and what is realistically needed is widening.

Therefore, the UNFCCC has been attempting seriously since 1992 to come to an agreement where all the State parties should accept to reduce green house gas emissions. Finally, the decision has been taken in this regard on 11, December, 1997 in Kyoto of Japan which has been popularized as "Kyoto Protocol". However, the agreement has not been implemented till February, 2005. It is a bitter reality that the share of US in the World's green house gas emissions is as high as 23 per cent and the share of Australia is more or less equal to US. Still, these two countries refuse to ratify the Kyoto protocol on the ground that they did not accept that the global warming is industrially induced is really a serious contradiction. On this ground, Canada withdrew from the Agreement in 2012. Thus, industrially advanced countries are not ready to reduce CO2 emissions.

However, the Principle of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of Kyoto protocol is acceptable to rich nations as it allows them to purchase 'Right to Pollute'. The MNCs of rich nations, which invest in the projects that claim to reduce green house gas emissions in backward countries, will earn credits and are allowed for green house gas emissions to that extent. This principle provides double benefit to the corporate forces of rich nations. i) in the name of environmental friendly technology, they can export obsolete technology to emerging economies and earn profits; and ii) they can acquire 'right to pollute' to that extent. Thus, the solution that is acceptable to dominant countries aggravate the problem of environmental destruction is again a serious contradiction.

The Paris Agreement, 2015 has been popularized as great agreement and acceptable to all. It is a known fact that only an agreement which is beneficial to global dominant forces will be accepted by them. Therefore, it is called as 'acceptable to all' i.e. 'all' means powerful corporate forces. All the 196 parties of this 'Agreement' accepted not to question about who is responsible for the problem of Climate Change but take measures to reduce CO2 emissions and restrict temperature to 1.5° C so as to achieve zero green house gas emissions by 2030-2050. Every country is expected to determine its own goal. Further, the rich nations will allot \$100 billion to backward countries for climate change. Major part of it is loan.

Thus, the reality is that in this 'Great Acceptable Agreement' the rich nations could successfully throw the burden of mitigating the problem of climate change on poor nations even by giving loans to them which not only throws the poor nations into debt trap but also tightens the grip of dominant countries on poor nations. In this context, the Head of Oxfam's International policy, Time Gore, states that the "Worlds' most powerful nations had used the summit to flex their muscles against weaker ones have really seen the kind of brutal nature of the power politics of these talks". In this way, the victims of environmental destruction are forced to bear the burden of solving the problem i.e. victimization of victims is a real tragedy. Further, the wrong diagnosis never solves the problem.

#### **People's Movement for the Protection of Environment:**

If the governments and ruling class of under developed countries obediently accept the warnings and directions of global dominant forces to protect the forests, a serious doubt arises as to why do people of emerging economies including India compelled to build strong movements to protect forests and environment like APPICO, CHIPCO and Narmada Bachao Andolan, strategies against Polavaram project and Anti-sterlite movement against the functioning of Sterlite Company in Toottukkudi, Tamil Nadu, at the cost of their lives? Is it not a serious contradiction? Who are the actual protectors of environment? If the State protects it, what is the need for the people to sacrifice their lives to protect forests? This clearly shows who the real culprits are and who are protecting environment?

#### **Environmental Deterioration in the Third World countries especially in India under the effect of Ecological Imperialism and Toxic Colonialism**

The ecological imperialism is part and parcel of imperialism. The imperialist forces will initiate various methods and measures to loot all the resources of politically independent Third World countries. The introduction of Green Revolution in the Third World Countries is first and foremost of this kind. With this, they could successfully suppress and divert the emerging peasant uprisings in the Third World countries. Simultaneously, it could bring entire agriculture sector into the grip and control of MNCs. The Green Revolution requires inputs of seeds, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, major dams, machines and fuel which are necessarily supplied by MNCs. With this, they could establish control over our entire agriculture sector. The green revolution resulted in the dis-appearance of common property resources, destroyed mixed crops, balanced diet, bio-diversity, forests. All this resulted in soil erosion, depletion of ground water table, water logging and desertification. Thus, the green revolution made the lives of peasants critical and an instrument of imperialism and destroyed environment as a tool of ecological imperialism.

As an answer to the terrible adverse effects of Green Revolution, the Agro-Ecological Approach was strongly been promoted which has its roots in the collective knowledge practices and ecological rationale of indigenous and peasant agri-culture throughout the world. It is not only productive but also pest-resistant, productive, nutrient-conserving and resilient to shocks and stresses. In addition, it will protect bio-diversity levels and natural eco-systems. In fact, it is the best answer to the issue of climate change. Despite all these benefits to the society as well as to environment, the global corporate forces will not accept and promote it is definitely a cruel contradiction.

Further, the plunder of resources from the third world countries is associated with the creation of environmental pollution in them. The important form of Ecological Imperialism is the transfer of highly polluting industries such as Petro-chemical and Pesticide industrial units to third world as they release high level of toxic gases. One such unit transferred to India is Union Carbide India Ltd to Bhopal which is a subsidiary unit of US, MNC, America Union Carbide. We all know about horrifying Bhopal disaster. The terrible toxic effects have still been continuing over generations. Is it possible to estimate consequent environmental damage? India has no Act to resist the release of toxic waste. More-over, our governments will invite these highly polluting units with red carpet treatment by offering so many concessions and facilities.

Similarly, we all are the spectators for the Toothukudi massacre on 22, May, 2018. Tamil Nadu police fired on a demonstration against heavily polluting copper smelter unit run by Vedanta's Sterlite, a London based MNC, killed 13 people and injured more than a hundred. Thus, the people are subjected to police firings for the reason of fighting against environmental damage in the form of pollution. Thus, there is a strong State -Corporate nexus to pollute the environment for their accumulation of affluence.

Further, the mining activity in India is known to its cruelty in converting so many villages into grave yards and in making so many hills like Aravali to disappear. In every State of India, the same situation can be seen where the government extends support for illegal mining and destruction of environment.

What about the environmental destruction done by the establishment of harmful Nuclear Power Plants despite the availability of renewable and environment-friendly resources abundantly? Despite serious warnings of scientists in this regard since 1970, for the benefit of dominant nations and powerful corporate forces, the people and environment of third world countries have been dismantled.

#### **Victimisation of Victims by the 'Climate Change itself:**

The problem of climate change resulting in extreme changes in weather conditions aggravates poverty and throws majority into critical living conditions. UN's Inter-governmental panel on Climate Change, 2018 estimates that the Global warming to the extent of 1.5 c will throw tens of millions of people into poverty trap. In addition, the severity of water scarcity will be on the rise. The Cape Town of South Africa is already experiencing gravity of the problem of water scarcity. Further, the report states that hunger and malnutrition will be intensified and floods as well as droughts will make the lives of poor very critical.

The World Report, 2018 on 'Food Crisis' prepared by 'World Food Programme' estimates that 39 millions of 23 nations in Africa are already subjected to severe food crisis due to climate change and 30.6 millions are displaced due to floods and drought. Still, there is no end to the profit-thirst of dominant forces and they are transforming third world countries as dumping yards for toxic wastage.

#### **Emerging Economies as Toxic Colonies:**

**The hazardous toxic waste produced by the industrially advanced dominant countries was being transferred to third world countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the name of "Global Waste Trade".** UN's report entitled **"What a waste: A Global Review of Solid Waste Management"** clearly states that the industrial development and urbanization of developed countries create enormous quantities of waste. They have successfully been utilizing the neoliberal policies of Third World Countries for waste dumping. Thus, the developing countries have been transformed into the colonies for harmful toxic waste. This, naturally intensifies the pollution problem in these countries. Moreover, they dump toxic waste in the name of recycling to make it legal shows the brutal nature of dominant class as a whole. Thus, ecological imperialism creates toxic colonialism. They, together, convert under developed countries into inexpensive alternatives for the disposal of hazardous waste and make them as toxic colonies. It is known to all that the chemical waste will be dumped on the name of fertilizers. The destiny of toxic waste of European countries is India. The solid waste is converted into ash and thrown into Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Contrarily, the World Economic Forum, which is the intellectual forum of global dominant class, loudly speaks about the protection of Oceans. No national or international law is there to prevent it.

India is the world's greatest "Dumping Yard". It is overloaded with a huge amount of toxic and hazardous e-waste estimated to be 18 lakh tons. India is a great victim as a toxic colony. Is it not aberration for the ruling class to talk about "Swatch Bharat"?

The ecological imperialism strengthens toxic colonialism with the strong support extended by comprador bourgeoisie governments of third world countries with their favorable policies.

#### **Conclusion:**

Is it possible to enable the global economy to move towards the achievement of sustainable development? It is a serious challenge. Will the global dominant class accept that they are the real culprits? Are they ready to forego their control over global economy? Is it attainable to build the global society free from ecological imperialism and toxic colonialism which destroys whole environment in the third world countries? Is it possible to check the global powers not to pressurize the backward countries to bear the responsibility of solving the issue?

As long as capitalist mode prevails and persists, it is impossible to move towards sustainable development. In this regard, **Evo Morales**, the President of Bolivia states that if we want to save the planet earth, to save life and humanity, we have a duty to put an end to the Capitalist System. He further says that to put an end to the exploitation of human beings and to the pillage of natural resources, to put an end to destructive wars for markets and raw-materials, to plundering of energy, fossil fuels, to the excessive consumption of goods and to the accumulation of waste, it is inevitable to end the Capitalist System.

Similarly, **Greta Thernberg**, a 15 year old girl, while speaking at Katowice Climate Change Conference clearly states that "if the solutions within the system are so impossible to find, then, we have to change the system itself – a transformative change".

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