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A Three-Legged Approach for Sustainable Environments through Reinforced Awareness

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“But in this fleeting world, nothing is forever, desire is potent, and greed hard to conquer.”
Amitav Ghosh *Jungle Namah* (2021)

Abstract

The 21st century Anthropocene could be heading towards a planetary catastrophe. Today flooding, sinking of skyscrapers and the westward movement of the Antolian plate are all concrete facts of climatic crisis. However, “hope springs eternal”. Sustainability is a three-legged scheme made of economy, society and environment and in this paper, I put forward each of these aspects. I draw from Yuval Noah Harari. He has pointed out that some countries will benefit from the melting ice while other ones might be threatened with desertification. He adds that thus a deglobalization will occur. As a result, some countries will prosper through economic growth which nevertheless carries ecological crisis. The prosperous countries will wield power and become proficient with AI while the rest of the world population will be deprived ones. The rich countries will keep on producing and inflation will rise while sustainability of environments will be neglected and exploitation of natural resources will continue. I propose a three-legged approach for sustainable environments in which the first step should be to reduce consumerism in a considerable way. Second, I recommend the use of solar and eolian energies. Third, I suggest that youth power be allowed to flourish. I refer to Benjamin Myers and Benjamin Zaphaniah.

Keywords: Three- Legged Approach, deglobalisation, youth.

Today’s Situation:

If up to 2008 climate change was taken as a possibility, today climate catastrophe is here and we are experiencing it either directly or through the media and nurturing empathy for those involved. Fiona Harvey, the Environment Editor for *The Guardian*, on 8 June 2023, reported that the greenhouse gas emissions have reached an all-time high and that it is threatening to push the world into “unprecedented”

levels of global heating. In September 2023 Libya had 100 times the monthly rainfall in 24 hours only. In almost every part of the planet, we are examining our physical features and taking safety steps. Unfortunately, it is only after the catastrophe that we can evaluate the viability of our preventive measures.

In 2019 European Union set up a GREEN DEAL Target: By 2050 carbon neutrality should be reached. By 2030 at least 55% of net emission should be reached. At the 18th Summit meeting of G20 held on 9 and 10 September 2023, in Delhi, Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General declared that it was time for global compromise. On 19th September 2023 at the UN General Assembly referring to the new multilateral agreements, taken during the past year, on the right to a clean healthy and sustainable environment, he declared that tools and resources were available but what was required was determination. On 21 September 2023 at the summit on Climate change Antonio Guterres, declared that “Humanity has opened the gates of Hell”. He added that we can still limit carbon emissions to the limit of 1.5C and that we have to move fast and aim at solidarity and climate justice. He ended by saying that the future of humanity is in our hands.

There is a necessity for a three-legged approach to a sustainable environment. For a fairly long time, the problem of climate change has been taken in isolation. Now and then attention was drawn to the fact that climate change concerns all. Yet not enough has been done as the 1.5 C target still seems a dream to be achieved. We have only seven years to attain the 55% net emission. Today it is clear that climate change is inherently linked to other components of society.

Yuval Noah Harari in his book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (2018) points out that during the early twenty-first century, most humans have enjoyed peace and prosperity to a degree never attained so far because it is under the aegis of liberalism. However, he adds :

“But liberalism has no obvious answers to the biggest problems we face: ecological collapse”.

Some countries have had economic growth.

He adds :

“However economic growth will not save the global ecosystem-just the opposite, it is the cause of ecological crisis” (16).

The Three-legged approach proposed :

Less Consumerism

The idea of reducing consumption was brought forward by Ayse Lahur Kirtunc at the 4th Literature and Cultural Studies Conference held at Ege University in Izmir Turkey on 3rd to 5th May 2023. Indeed banks are now planning to consider the environmental social and risk factors before granting loans for projects. A sustainable loan at preferential rates is often recommended. Some banks have decided not to finance projects linked with coal.

Taking the cue from the Covid period a campaign for less consumerism may be undertaken and put into practice. There is a glut of goods appealing to those who can afford them but also to those who cannot for these people are helped through the higher purchase system. Needs and desires have been blurred and this has not only benefitted industry but also contributed to the degradation of the ecosystem.

The contradiction between the claim to find money urgently required to address climate change and the claim for minimizing consumerism is striking. A similar contradiction is seen when it is reported by Eurostat, an official website of the European Union on 16 August 2023, that in the first quarter of 2023 greenhouse gas emissions showed a decrease of 2.9% compared to the same quarter of 2022. But this decrease took place simultaneously with a 1.2% increase in Europe’s gross domestic product.

When faced with such a dichotomous situation, the only solution seems to turn to individuals who can act on their own and contribute on a personal basis. Even if it is on a regional basis, no matter how minimal, it will count and contribute to the worldwide scheme. There is no end to the list of the various ways the individual action can help in redressing the climatic crisis. These individual actions “to be effective, they must be on a global level” says Harari (119). Individuals can act on their own, in different parts of the world and thus create a global effect without being under the umbrella of a formal governmental or international organization. Today through the advanced means of communication provided by modern

technology instant inter-personal connection is easily achieved. Members of families living in different parts of the world, far from one another, can join up, form, maintain and sustain relationships over a network. Similar steps can be taken by individuals. These individuals can care for the environment in different parts of the world, each in his or her own way, tackling problems particular to their locality. Thus they can achieve the goal of attending to the climate imminent crisis at a global level, as recommended by Harari. Individuals, careful not to be contaminated or to contaminate other people, even after the restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic imposed by governments were removed, must have helped in limiting the spread of the disease and all its mutating new strains. In the nineteen fifties the slogan “ the personal is political” became a battle cry and was a change-maker as far as the second wave of feminism was concerned. Personal efforts, by individuals can be encouraged and harnessed to tackle the problem of climate crisis be it in the form of unexpected floods, drought, land slide, damaged crops or in any other form.

The Second Leg: The use of Solar and Aeolian energies.

It is known that what the sun provides to the earth in one hour can be sufficient to cover the energy the planet requires during one year. However, unlike rain water, we cannot store it as suggested by Jonathan Swift, 300 years ago, in his *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). It is not a constant source as it is weather-dependent. It is not ubiquitous, manageable or easily accessible everywhere on the planet Earth. It also requires space and its storage is expensive. Besides some toxic materials used during the process of solar photovoltaic installation can indirectly impact the environment. Yet its maintenance and repair costs are rather low. This renewable source of energy, currently used in the form of solar heaters, is a provider of free street lighting but it could be exploited widely had direct action been taken by governments.

The Aeolian energy is recognized as cheap, clean and renewable. It is considered to be a sustainable natural form of energy. It has a minimal impact on the environment compared to what burning fossil fuels can have. The turbines that are used occupy small areas and do not produce emissions; hence there are no greenhouse ill effects or

acid rain resulting. Just as solar energy can be used for domestic purposes; it can also produce a substantial amount of energy for modern life in cities as well as for people living in the countryside. Normally the windy areas are not used for agriculture but owners of such land can rent out their property. Already some wind parks have been created in India: the Jaisalmer Wind Park in Rajasthan and the Muppandal Wind Farm in Kanyakumari.

The Third Leg: Youth Power.

Benjamin Zephaniah in his novel *Refugee Boy* (2001) shows how young people can create sufficient pressure to create awareness within the community and on the national level regarding problems that officials and courts do not understand. As a result, they might make errors and might take inhuman measures. In this novel, set in England, Alem a 14 year boy is left alone in a hotel room by his father. The latter simply disappeared. They had been fleeing a home country which was being torn by civil war in Africa. They had entered England as tourists. Overnight Alem becomes a refugee and has to apply to the Home Office for political asylum. In the meantime, he is assigned to a foster family, the Fitzgeralds whose daughter Ruth finds that he must be helped. She initiates action. With the help of the school, where Alem has been admitted and where he is highly appreciated for his dedication to studies and the young people of the local community, a pressure group is built. Then, different groups of the community rally together in his favour. In the meantime, his father, who had reappeared, is killed in a street attack. Alem had already lost his mother; she had been killed in what had become an ongoing civil war in his home country. In the end, the court recommends, in an official way, to the home Office that Alem should stay in England. Youth power has contributed immensely to raising the awareness of high officials regarding the plight of a refugee whose parents had been killed and could not be deported to a war-torn home country on humanitarian grounds.

In India, young people's capacity for work and eagerness to forge ahead is recognized. In England during the First World War, their enthusiasm was tapped in a most futile way. The British war poet Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) highlighted the great waste of the energy of young people in his poems *Anthem for Doomed Youth* and

Dulce et Decorum. But now they can contribute to the world's engagement in attaining 1.5 C and in sustaining it.

Another text illustrating that young people can lead people back to nature is Benjamin Myers' *The Offing* (2018). In this novel, a young adult, at the end of his college days, decides to spend his summer holidays walking. He was mostly interested in mathematics. Once his final examinations are over he sets out walking. He walks away from his village near Durham, England. He sleeps in the open air and survives on minimal food offered to him by farmers until he is spotted by Dulcie Piper, an elderly independent woman who lives with her dog Butler in an almost decrepit cottage. During conversations over shared meals, she introduces him to well-known authors in English literature, including poetry. While he is doing a minor repair on the cottage, he discovers a manuscript with the title *The Offing*, left by a former lover, a German poet. Later she reveals some secret transactions carried out during the World War between herself and someone on the continent.

This novel highlights living with minimal consumerism but also points out that youth power can foster a return to nature for a sustainable future. Repair of damage done and concrete efforts towards sustainability are possible with willpower and global commitment.

A Required Re Awakening of Awareness.

Repetitions of warnings cause boredom and can lead to failure in effectiveness. Parents as well as those in authority are fully aware of this fact. However, a reinforced awareness can be fostered through sustained reading and public debates on the climate crisis. Amitav Ghosh in his non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016) points out that in future, leaders and politicians will be blamed for not attending to the issue of climate change and he insists on the responsibility of artists and writers (181). Ghosh highlights the point that we need to respect Nature, more precisely, in the sense that we need to ask her permission before entering certain areas. Any action that can disturb the creatures or appear to challenge them or invade their privacy can be highly offensive and be heavily punished. It is seen in his novel *Gun Island* (2019) where Deen, the narrator, walks into Manasa Devi's temple without permission. A

blood-chilling incident follows. Rafi, with “eye-popping terror” watches on while Deen slowly walks towards the exit. Deen was not aware that a huge king cobra, a hamadryad, was right behind him, with its hood raised and its head above his shoulder. The cobra was emitting the growling sound which Deen had heard but had by mistake attributed to Rafi. Deen realized the extent of what he had escaped only when it struck Tipu, another village dweller and friend of Rafi, “with astonishing speed and power”. Tipu had tried to subjugate the cobra by throwing a net on it. Deen becomes aware of the gravity of the mistake he had committed and of the danger he had created for himself when he learns that “a King Cobra’s bite can kill an elephant”. Deen, awe-stricken, helplessly watches when Tipu becomes delirious and has seizures. (78-97)

In *Gun Island* (2019) there is another incident which clearly shows that human beings might face death if they invade the territory of non-humans. Later Deen, meets Cinta, a friend in Venice. Cinta wanted to show Deen the spot where her uncle had tried to spot the Sea Monster of the Customs House. It was dark; they were on the pier. They used their cell phones. Cinta used a hairpin and pricked at the rotten wood. They saw shipworms “wriggling inside the wood” of the pilings. Immediately the railing they were leaning on “slipped away”, “their cellphones flew” and “vanished into the water”, “a creaking sound” was heard and “a mass of squirming shipworms came pouring out of the broken logs”. They “came swarming towards” Cinta and Deen. Soon “the worms were swarming over” them. The narrator adds: “It was as though the earth itself had sent out tentacles”. This time it is Tipu who has entered Venice and saves them. They are taken to a hospital. Later Deen meets Rafi, who is working at the hospital; the latter casually says:

“The worms. It’s just like the Sundarbans”

They talk about Tipu and the seizures which he still has. (250-256)

Ghosh has made it clear that human beings have to respect nature and that it is one body though dispersed over the planet.

Ghosh in his non-fiction *The Nutmeg’s Curse: parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) says:

“It is often said that climate change should be tackled as though it was a war” (164).

Yet he adds that it is unlike the two World Wars of the first half of the twentieth century, climate change does not have a human enemy for environmental changes are “forever wars”. Further on Ghosh points out that climate change is an ongoing war which perpetuates ‘slow violence’ and is caused by inaction. (164-165).

Another text that emphasises the commitment human beings have towards trees is Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018). In this novel trees are the heroes and characters mark important events of their life by planting trees. There are nine main characters and the narrator displays the way each of them engages with trees. It is also about those activists who protest vehemently against logging. The idea that trees are like human beings and can communicate among themselves comes up.

However, it is Barbara Kingsolver’s review of Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018) which is most interesting. According to her trees and human beings have much in common though they have different life spans. She explains that trees look after their families, undertake sacrifices for their sake, offers gifts, communicate among themselves, cooperate, save and record important events in their lives. She adds that trees even send some members of their families to settle elsewhere, spot intruders and deal with them. She also draws attention to the fact that human beings admire trees yet walk on their hearts.

For a reinforced awakening.

A concrete step in re-awakening awareness concerning climate change can be established through direct educational programmes. Today through online teaching thousands can be reached in one session and this can be multiplied exponentially. The fact that through educational institutions messages for improvement can be transmitted to great numbers within a short time must be exploited. The COVID pandemic has frightened the world so much that some universities felt the need to include a module on ways to manage the stress that can be caused by such calamities. In 2021 Susmita Talukdar drew up a programme entitled *Pandemic Politics, Health and Society* for the Pokhara University in Nepal. If in response to the Covid pandemic, innovative measures are introduced in educational institutions, there is no doubt that efforts can be mustered to awaken

awareness through the inclusion of courses dealing with climate change.

Furthermore, Kiri Manookin's article entitled *Ecopedagogy in Action: An Example of engaging and connecting/ Making a case for Ecopedagogical Writing Program in Nepal* (2021) can be interpreted as a reinforcement of the point made above. Manookin points out that ecopedagogies can promote eco-justice and a sense of biophilia which in turn can foster a feeling of being connected to all living entities. In addition, she asserts that digital literacy must not obliterate 'nature literacy'. Referring to her former teaching sessions, in which students from different parts of the world, were present she explains that during a four-day trip, students had the opportunity to practise sustainable habits and record their reduced environmental effects; they also experienced being 'digitally disconnected'. It is seen that the students had to analyse their chosen topics, which as seen from the programme could be related to their home countries. One of the topics was :

"Illegal cutting of rosewood in Madagascar."

The exploitation of rosewood and sandalwood might result in a situation similar to what happened in Mauritius in the seventeenth century when oak trees were cut down for shipbuilding by colonial powers and the Dodo birds became, more than ever, easy prey.

Hence for a sustainable environment a three-legged approach, with a focus on reduced consumption, use of solar and aeolian energy and youth power, could be implemented. An immersion into the fictional world created by a novelist would help those away from calamities to imagine the consequences of being disrespectful towards nature. Including educational programmes directly related to the climate crisis would reinforce awareness regarding the urgency for the adoption of remedial measures.

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