
Globalization and Wildlife: An insight into the human impact on biological diversity

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Introduction:

History reveals that it was Man himself who protected and nurtured Mother Nature so that she in return would benevolently protect them. Sadly, times have drastically altered with the entire human race developing ruthless characteristics and unsympathetic behavior towards the ecology. Ulrich Beck (1992) produced a thesis that viewed us living in a ‘community of danger’ accepting medical and ecological side effects as a product of modernization, human glorification and material prosperity. His conception of ‘risk society’ gives us a brutal picture about how we are transforming into a society living constantly under threat and how our current pressing insecurities are because of overproduction and over consumption and not because of shortage of wealth or technology. In the recent years we have been quite familiar with the notion of Earth as a dying planet with artists all around the world busy depicting scary images of the planet as a result of human atrocities and aggressiveness on the beautiful calm and spiritual nature.

It has been well analyzed that environmental problems are the causes of miscalculation of forceful cultural infliction by over ambitious and over indulgent humans trying to prove their superiority by bringing in radical change. Along with global warming, the conservation of biodiversity was one of the two major issues at the June 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in

Rio de Janeiro. Twenty years before, the term biodiversity was unknown and it was not to be found in any compendium of threats to the environment. Now this issue is placed on the same platform as acid rain, ozone depletion and climate change. The shocking graph of biological diversity loss reveals how a ‘transnational epistemic community’ can assemble, present and successfully contest a global environmental problem (Hannigan 1995).

Tester (1991) elucidates the view of Social Constructionism by saying that environment is essentially a product of society and when it comes to animals they are what humans classify them to be, which means that they exist in the ways humans interprets them to be. This obviously emphasizes how the entire world is dependent on the classifications and descriptions by human beings. “Udall (1991: 83) uses the metaphor of a ripe pumpkin that has been hollowed out to describe the damage to our ecosystems which has been inflicted by trapping, ploughing, logging, damming, poisoning and other forms of human intrusion” (Hannigan 1995).

Religion and animals:

Since ancient times, animals have occupied an important status in religions and sacred texts. Apart from being associated and worshipped as companions of Gods and Goddesses they have been thought of being reincarnations of ancestors who were believed to have returned to Earth in the body of an animal. This, being quite a popular belief in the Indus Valley Civilization, of course demanded that they be treated with respect. The notion of having a soft approach towards non human beings have been exemplified in the Vedas which preach that those who cannot accept life in lesser beings are failing to understand the meaning of life as well as losing their touch of humanity. Eastern religions like Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism

have well elaborated their hatred towards destruction and harm towards living beings and expressed their preference for vegetarianism and friendliness towards all creatures. The concept of Karma in Hinduism teaches that any kind of wrongdoing would have negative consequences so cruelty towards animals should be avoided and kindness and love towards them would be rewarded. The central emphasis of Jainism and Buddhism is on ahimsa which means non-violence to any creature. According to Jain beliefs harm of any kind should not be done on any being and like humans, animals too have souls which should be treated with love and tenderness as welfare of animals is extremely valuable. Buddhism also emphasized that killing animals is as big a sin as killing humans and hunting animals would be an act of evil.

Sadly social ideas about animals have dramatically changed over the years. Erika Cudworth (2003) writes how changes in social notions towards animals have been accompanied with changes in human relations with animals with the onset of economic, social, scientific and political modernization. According to Thomas (1983) “society grew less dependent on animal power with the advent of mechanization, and the difference between humans and animals increased with the spread of urbanization”. Cudworth (2003) continues by saying that in contemporary society people interact with animals, everyday. We eat animals, wear animal products, watch them on television, pet them, trade them as well as engage in sports involving animals like hunting, shooting or fishing. Vandana Shiva, the Director of The Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, has argued that in pre-colonial India, under the influence of Hindu philosophy, animals were known to have spirits. This concept only changed with the colonial spread of scientific rationalism that encouraged the idea of non humans being inert objects. Carolyn Merchant (1980) suggested that “modern

Western scientific culture established the notion of a hierarchy of species and legitimated human domination over animals”. Thus modernity established a hierarchy between humans and animals reinforcing the domination and superiority of humans over animals.

There is also the concept of ‘speciesism’ coined in 1970 by British psychologist Richard D. Ryder which believes in humans being entitled to behave in ways towards other species that would be highly inappropriate if the same kind of behavior was subjected to humans. As Singer (1990) puts it, speciesism is exactly like racism or sexism. In the same way as racism or sexism violate the laws of equality by favouring the interests of their own race or sex, speciesism, in the same way, look after their own interests overlooking the greater interest of other species and adopt discriminatory attitude towards them.

Globalization and wildlife:

Because of globalization and the consequences of mass sabotage of natural habitat by humans we see the fragile physical environment getting altered jeopardizing the well being of humans as well as non-humans. Effects such as climate change are being observed everywhere, species are getting endangered and extinct, there is loss of diversity, habitat destruction, degradation, all of which threatens to erode the entire ecosystem.

The different kinds of species found in the natural environment provides us humans not only with food, clothes, fuel, medicine but also looks after the purification of water and air, regulates the climate, prevents soil erosion, helps in pollination of crops, beside many other such services. (Ed by Vie, et al. 2009). Animals are exploited in two ways: their labor is exploited (in the form of wool, honey, reproductive excretions such as milk or eggs, etc.) and they

themselves become commodities (in the form of their flesh, as companions, etc.) (Torres, 2007). As a result harming them would consequentially lead the human race towards doom.

During the twentieth century, according to Hall and Ruane (1993), “Of the 3831 breeds or breed varieties of ass, water buffalo, cattle, goat, horse, pig, and sheep . . . 618 are estimated to have become extinct”. Hall and Ruane continued that in Europe and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), breed extinctions have generally been highest in those countries, such as Switzerland, that have the highest per capita income. It has been roughly calculated that between half a billion and one billion songbirds are hunted in Europe every year in the name of sports and food (Bird Life International 2008f). Millions of sharks are trapped and targeted each year for their fins which are used to make the Asian delicacy shark fin soup. In the Mediterranean Sea, the increasing noise pollution due to marine traffic are inflicting harm on cetaceans by impairing their potential to communicate and locate their prey. Solid waste like thrown out plastic bags has resulted in the death of many marine animals such as turtles, birds or dolphins that mistake the bags for jellyfish and die from ingesting them. Runoff of agricultural fertilizers results in the formation of “dead zones”, where no oxygen is available and fish and crustaceans cannot survive (Diaz and Rosenberg 2008). Discharging of pollutants and waste in the water has revealed its hazardous consequences particularly in eastern Mediterranean for monk seals who are finding it difficult just to survive (IUCN 2007). Atlantic cod, formerly found in plenty, started to disappear in the 1970s, as an outcome of over fishing and increasing global demand. The Mediterranean bluefin tuna, a delicacy in Japan, has met with the same fate, threatened, again, by over fishing.

Occasionally, pressures of globalization can be shown to be causally

related to the loss of a particular kind of domestic livestock, as in the case of the near demise of Haiti's Creole pigs, which were small, black, long-snouted animals, who required very low maintenance and were the central component of both soil fertility and rural economy (Aristide 2000). But in 1982 and 1983 majority of these pigs were killed as a part of a plan for disease control which was initiated to integrate Haiti into the hemispheric economy. So these animals were substituted with pigs from Iowa, USA whose high maintenance led to a speedy miscarriage of the project. The poor peasants of Haiti lost an estimated US\$ 600 million.

There is also the issue of illegal trade which continues to flourish due to conditions of conflict, corruption poverty and the absence of livelihood alternatives, persistent demand for illicit wildlife products and a lack of public awareness of the consequences of such demand, as well as other environmental pressures that contribute to wildlife population losses (e.g., environmental degradation, habitat loss, and ecological fragmentation) (Wyler, Sheikh 2013). Despite trying to overcome the threats of overexploitation to species, the range and scale of illegal wildlife trade has increased to historic levels.

According to the data provided by the U.S. government, this felonious trade of wildlife products which include elephant ivory, rhino horns, and turtle shells, is worth at least an estimated \$7 billion to \$10 billion annually, and this does not incorporate the illegal logging and illegal fishing which can account, respectively, for roughly an additional \$30 billion to \$100 billion annually and \$10 billion to \$23 billion annually. Black market prices for these illegal products have reportedly risen up to \$90,000 for a live Lear Macaw, \$50,000 for a kilogram of rhino horn, \$8,000 for a luxury shahtoosh shawl, \$1,200 for a kilogram of tiger bones or beluga caviar, and \$1,000 for a kilogram of raw elephant ivory.

The water bodies of the planet are the homes to a whopping number

of species while generating 70 percent of atmospheric oxygen, absorbing most of the carbon dioxide and restoring fresh water to land through the formation of clouds which clearly states that any kind of trouble for the oceans would mean trouble for mankind. In recent times, there has been a spread of concern concerning the threat faced by marine species of becoming extinct because of over fishing, climate change, invasive species and coastal development (Dulvy et al. 2003; Roberts and Hawkins 1999). Governments have started displaying interest to conserve marine life though being faced by the challenge of deficit information. Population biologists now also cite the case of sea turtles which were being caught in shrimp nets. They revealed data to the WTO showing that turtle populations were declining drastically as a result of shrimping.

It would be inadequate to discuss just about animals when our existence depends on plants as well. It has been estimated that around 50,000 to 70,000 plant species are used for traditional and modern medicine (Schippmann et al. 2006). These medicines are extremely important for healthcare in less developed countries and according to World Health Organization 2008 upto 80% of the population of some Asian and African countries depends on traditional and herbal medicine for primary health care. But its not just restricted to developing countries. Developed countries have recognized the significance of these treatments and accepted these as alternate treatments. It has also been noted about the usage of amphibians have been quite valuable in traditional medicines with their diverse skin secretions being of particular interest (Stuart et al. 2008).

Conclusion:

It is clear that environmental concerns do not have borders and its impact is felt globally. For instance, globalization has a very

empowering effect on India, home to over 90% of Hindus who accepted vegetarianism as a part of their religion, by encouraging her to move in tune with a meat eating world. McDonald has a menu dominated by chicken especially for Indian market which has created a bottomless demand for chicken spelling out the slaughter of billions of chicken to meet the rising demand (Kala, 2005).

Thus, regulated global governance is mandatory to manage globalization and the environment as well as the relation between the two. Another solution would be sustainable development which has been accepted as the new global goal. “Not only is sustainable development quintessentially about the linkages between environment and globalization, it is also a goal that has increasingly been adopted by various elements of the global system. For example, it is not only the overarching goal of all environmental organizations and instruments, it is also now a stated goal of the World Trade Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization and many others” (Najam, Runnalls, Halle 2007).

Dada J P Vaswani, Spiritual Head of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission remarked that animals also are entitled to rights and talking about animal welfare is not the solution; giving them their rights is. He continues by saying that the most fundamental right is the right to live and when we humans do not have the capacity to give life to the dead we absolutely do not have the right to take life either. Vaswani believed that the 21st century would give rights to animals and when all the killing would stop then only the Earth would attain peace. (Vaswani, 2003)

We need to comprehend the diversity and differentiation of species and we should indulge in care, love and affection for animals and tailor our actions that would respect all varieties of species living in the same world as us.

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