Review Article

Development vis-a-vis Sustainable Development: Conflict and Consensus with Indian Mythology

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Abstract

Definition of sustainable development given by World Commission on Environment and Development's (the Brundtland Commission) report which says 'Development which fulfils the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' ushers here two essentialities. On one hand overarching significance should be given to meet the essential needs of the world's poor, who usually do not have access to have the fruits of development. On the other hand, we have to be extremely cautious of resource depletion, which will deny the genuine needs of the future generations. But this paper is a thought piece that admits and acknowledges the thinking of Nobel laureate AmartyaSen on the very context of development (development as freedom), and at the same time asks whether the new conception of sustainable development means for the subject of 'how long?' and 'how much?' realizing the scenario of present generation. To some extent, the value of the phrase does lie in its broad vagueness. That is, if we enunciate the development as the modern concept does, how can this conception help us better defining sustainable development? And what similitude is there in our Indian Mythology with regard to sustainable development so defined? (This paper starts with the plain foundation that sustainable development is the suitable and the most proper goal of trade and investment policies) Further, what would this sustainable development which is considered as a new concept means to those institutions who believe in a complete reverse philosophy in the service of sustainable development? The last few years have seen a dramatic transformation in the environment-development debate. The question being asked is no longer "Do development and environmental concerns contradict each other?", but "How can sustainable development be achieved?" So here the very fundamental essence of sustainable development which has been tried to explain through mythology, perhaps this type of analysis is rare which has been portrayed here. This paper focuses on the application of mythology in modern India sustainable development practices.

Keywords: Development; Sustainable Development; Indian Mythology; Environmental Law.

Introduction

We can chart our future clearly and wisely only when we know the path which has led to the present.

- Adlai E Stevenson

The real sense of sustainable development can be realised from the work which is supposed to be done by a good leader. Perhaps there are two classes of thoughts, one is Long Sightedness and another is Short Sightedness which is well defined in our mythology as Garuda Dristi and Sarpa Dristi, generally we use in defining a character of a good leader in management mythos. Vishnu sits on a serpent and rides an eagle. Seated on a serpent, he has a snake's eye view of the world or sarpa-drishti: immediate and narrow. Riding an eagle, he has a bird's eye view of the world or garuda-drishti: wide and long. What matters more? Why does Lakshmi chase him, for his short-sight or long-sight, his immediate tactics or his long-term strategies? This is not a tough one to crack, Sustainable Development needs both. For long-term goals the leader has to plan out and for immediate goals also he has to look into the matters. So I highlight what has been said about the Garuda drishti and Sarpa-drishti.Perhaps this idea is vigilant when there will be paradigmatic shift in the way we look at the world, nature and humankind. It reminds me the story of Matsya (Mina) Avatar, where Manu (A kind man on the earth) went to the riverbank to begin his prayers and to mark the beginning of his prayer, taken the water in his palms, stretched it high above his head and offered it to the God (Lord Vishnu). From his handsa tiny voice was coming out,'Kindly do not put me back into the river… O great kind man!'
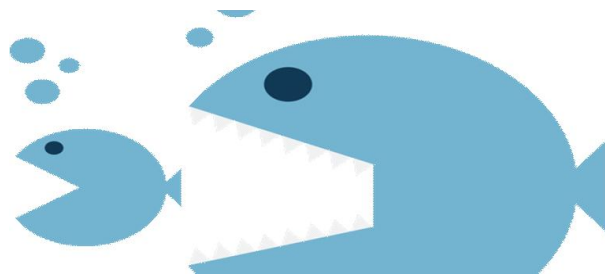

Fig. 1:

Manu got surprised and stared at his palms. There was a tiny fish, squirmingin the palms of his hands. 'Kindly do not put me back into the water because there are many bigger fishes in the river and they will eat me. Please, O kind man…' pleaded by the fish looking at Manu (Figure 1).

Manu watched the tiny fish with surprised pity look. It was of course his duty as a kind man to protect somebody who came to him for help. The kind man readily agreed and inside one 'kamandalam' he put the fish. [A small pot carried by sages to carry water is called Kamandalam]

Manu aftercompletion of his penance went home for the night with his kamandalam where the tiny fish was kept in safe inside.Next morning a strong voice was coming out of the kamandalam, 'O kind man!!!Your kamandalam is stifling me could youhelp me please? It is impossible for me to breathe in here…' Manu woke up hearing this and gaged at his vessel, as the vessel or we can say the pot was too small for the fish, it was pushing the sides of the pot. ManuOvercome his surprise and ran inside his house to get a bigger vessel. The fish said softly, 'Thank you, 'O kind man' and gulped few breaths. Manu was happy and when he was about to move out from his houseagain to start his morning prayers, he heard literally an even more strong voice, 'O kind man, this pot is not fitting me. Please change it to a bigger one' (Figure 2).
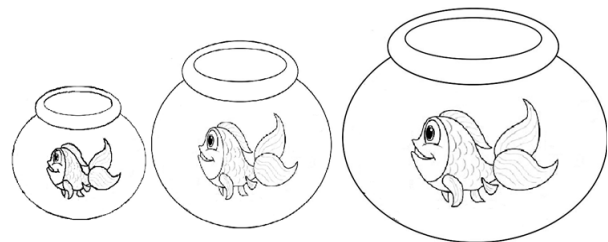

Fig. 2:

The fish was yet again struggling inside the pot for breath, hence Manu threw the fish inside the biggest pot in his house, the pot which he had to bring to accommodate the fish and once again the fish thanked the kind man. Later checking that the pot was big enough for the fish, when he was about to walk out from his house, again he heard a moresolid voice, 'I am sorry this pot is also not sufficient for me, kind man'. Manu stared in disbelief as he saw a huge fish was staring out of the big pot. However understandingthat this was not the time for questions, he had carried the fish and ran to the river and threw it inside from where he hadactually found the fish. The fish gulped a few breaths inside water and again thanked Manu. But Manu still could not stop protecting the fish, which had come to him for help and started staring at the fish for long. Before the fish covering up the entire river Manu used to carry the fish from one river to another river, and the fish kept getting bigger. Lastly he had torelease the fish inside the ocean and found that the fish now has grown to a full one side of the Ocean. Watching

at enormous (gigantic) fish, a sudden flash came to Manu (Figure 3).

Manu realised that in real the fish is his God, whom he worship everyday his Narayana (Lord Vishnu) and bowed before the fish. The fish smiled and said Manu that he appeared only because of the devotion what Manu had to accommodate the fish. Manu gazed with tears in his eyes, as he was seeing his God in front of him (Figure 3).

Fig. 3:

Manu said prostrating before the fish 'My Lord, my only desire was to see you and you have granted it. I want nothing else, nothing more in my life. What you want me to do now?'

'Manu, in the near future there will be a great torrent and all the living beings on the earth would be perished as the Yuga is on the threshold of end in these seven days. I want you to build a big ship where you take the male and female of every animal, the seeds of all plants, and the seven sages in consort with their families. Take them all together on the ship'. (This is portraying the end of the Yuga here)

Henceforth this is symbolising the truth of non-permanence and we need to accept that the concept of sustaining things is vague as there is an end to the whole shebang. It is really impossible to satisfy the gluttony and also we need to realise in the same way that there is no end to the development. In nature nobody saves the small fish from the big fish, it is the law of nature (law of jungle) where might is right but when Manu saved the tiny fish, it went against the natural law (the predator-prey relationship) and generally when humans appear on the scene, we say we will not submit to the law of nature. We will help the helpless. We will create a world with a meek have rights, which is basically culture and gradually it turns into development. So that is exactly what Manu does. When he picks up the small fish in the palm of his hand and takes him out of the sea, so basically disrupting nature. In a way disrupting, the law of nature and then takes him and puts him in a pot and says you will be safe here. Then the fish increases in size, it grows bigger, which means it needs more water, it needs a bigger pot and so a larger pot has to be designed. This demands utilisation of resources, because the water, the fish, the pot, clay has not come from vacuum, it has come from nature. This development continues to grow and grow demanding more and more from nature and in the mean while we forget that all creations are accompanied with destruction. Hence the concept of development is nothing but a never ending process where human beings are playing a crucial role to get significance in all compasses.

Extent of the Concept of Development with Contemporary Issues

We do sometimes miss the woods for the trees. And we do sometimes focus so much on the bigger picture, for which we fail to see the small but important things of life. That is why; to understand the meaning of sustainable development first we need to understand the meaning of development. We use the word development quite often because it plays a vital role in our life which simply denotes better change (or significance). That is what we all want and we say it "development" but we, time and again, forget that nothing is permanent and permanence is a vague concept. So there are two completely different philosophies come into the picture, philosophy of Alexander and philosophy of Gymnosophist. Alexander, a young Macedonian, met a "gymnosophist," a naked, wise man.

Alexander asked the gymnosophist, "What are you doing?" politely the gymnosophist said, "I'm experiencing nothingness." After that the gymnosophist asking Alexander, "What are you doing?" and Alexander replied, "I am conquering the world." Hence both of them laughed on each other by thinking the other was a fool. Here the gymnosophist query was, "Why is he conquering the world? It's pointless." At the same time Alexander thought, "Why is he sitting around, doing

nothing? What a waste of a life."

To understand the very logical-difference in standpoints, we need to comprehendAlexander's subjective truthhis myth as well as the mythology that constructed him like this. Basicallyhe grew up hearing the stories of Jason, Hercules and Theseus of Greek philosophy, which told him two things *Firstly*,This is the only life you have (You live only once), so make it count, and *Secondly*, By being spectacular make it count!

Here the gymnosophist grew up hearing different patterns of stories like the Ramayana and Mahabharata and so forth (Indian Mythology). His heroes, such as Rama and Krishna, were not the distinct individuals who lived once and made it count, but different lifetimes of the same hero.The yogi's stories alsotaught him two things *Firstly*,You must live your life but don't forget that you have to live infinite lives, until you get the point of your life. *Secondly*, Try to see the point of your life hencestop wasting the time by conquering things which have been and will be occupied countless times.

Here we are getting two diverse types of mythologies but nevertheless which is right? These can be two differentways of observing the world, one is completely linear and another one iscircular or we can saycyclical. One believes here, this is the one and only life. The other believes this is one of many lives. Hence, the denominator of Alexander's life was one for which the value of his life was the grand total of his achievements however the denominator of the gymnosophist's life was infinity. Hence, no matter what he did, it was always a zero. If we look into the gymnosophist's philosophy, the real ground reality is actually based on a cyclical world-view. It is in fact that, our world is rapidly changing, highly ambiguous,chaotic, diverse, and unpredictable and everybody is used to it. Also thisglobalization is playing a vibrant role therefore Modern institutional thinking demands are coming in and which way is better, 'this way or that way?' is the question here.Depending on the situation and particular context, depending on the outcome, we need to choose/decideour paradigm.The significance of each development keeps on changing and what we say development in today's context may not be called development in future.

Development vs. Environment

~Is there an on-going war between development and environmental conservation?

Human being has the choice of outgrowing hunger like Shiva, or indulging hunger like Brahma. The second choice is implied with development, when we choose the same, forests have to be cleared, to make way for agricultural fields and mountains have to be bored into, to get the minerals. The bull has to be castrated and turned into an ox, to serve as beastof burden. The spirit of the wild horse has to be broken if it has to be ridden. Each of these actions has a consequence. In Mahabharata, the Pandav brothers inherit a forest, Khandavprastha, and want to build on it a great city, named Indraprastha, the city of Indra. So Krishna says, "Burn the forest. Set aflame every plant, every animal, every bird and every bee." When the Pandavs express their horror at the suggestion, Krishna says, "Then do not dream of a city". So, ask yourself why you need development, what are you developing. Because every time when there is something done in the name of development you are going to feed on nature. Is it worth it? If not, do not do it, but if you can, be aware that something will also die [1]. Human being has been constantly finding new and innovative ways of controlling nature. First it was the agricultural revolution. Then it was the industrial revolution. All these are violent attempts to gain more and more resources to satisfy the ever-increasing demands of human race. With each economic evolution, something has been sacrificed. The agricultural revolution had nomads who wandered freely over land. The industrial revolution displaced farmers, made them landless workers in factories and cities. The knowledge revolution means that jobs are being outsourced to foreign lands, benefitting the rich in the homeland, at the cost of the poor.

There is one beautiful illustration I would like to state here to justify the point. When Tukaram bought a house in the suburbs ten years ago, he had a clear view of the sea and the mountains. But today his view is blocked by huge buildings, malls, roads and office complexes. He hates it. But then his wife pointed out, "Before our housing society was constructed I am sure there was a beautiful meadow here full of birds and butterflies. Someone would have been upset that a house was built here. But thanks to that decision by the builder, you and I have a home. Are you willing to sacrifice your house for the environment? Just as you wanted a house, other people also want a house and job and so for them new houses, offices and roads have to be built. As long as society wants development, we have to be willing to sacrifice the environment. Everything has a price." Perhaps from the above justification it is very clear that there is a tug of

war between environment and development, many environmentalists areclaiming that demands of the sustainable development are to protect the nature while seekingout different alternative strategies for economic development. Now those who believe that sustainable development concept is not vague and imprecise shouldexplain how it is going to addresses the major unemployment rate plaguing the country.

Surely 'Development' may be changed by its definition, depending on who you ask. Hence on the responsibility to explain how various 'environmental friendly' activities would help must be striking in our minds and now surely we must be thinking of occupations like fishing or some kind of craftsmanship, which would move the country from a struggling third world economic nation to one which can adequately meet the needs of a modern generation population sustainably. Perhapsthe urban planner,the government official, the housing contractor might have overlying views but whereas the visions don't overlay and there is a lot of such spaces is a chasm of determinations now, which has here greater evidence than the battle between the development and the environment.

Sustainable Development

We use fancy terminologies like 'sustainable development' but we don't practice what we preach. Overwhelming greed and consumerism are costing us dearly but we are brushing facts under the carpet. We can't be deprived of our right to *industrial growth* and *material prosperity* because it is very essential in the present modern world but at the same time that should not materialized at the cost of our environment.

There is a different approach of Gandhi particularly in this context, according to him "Our world has enough for each person's need, but not for his greed." Hence who will decide how much is too much? There has to be a demarcating line between need and greed, and then only sustainable development will be possible what we are imagining to an extent to happen.

The Brundtland report "Our Common Future" defining sustainable development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Sustainable development requires an interdisciplinary approachthus development which involves economic along with social and environmental changes.

Fig. 4:

- Social: Social inclusion communities
- Environment: Natural environment renewable resource
- Economy: Jobs prosperity wealth creation

Are the nation's developmentsconcerns coming today will blow with its environmental matters? The question is how India is going to maintain a balance among the three fronts which are economy, social and environment. And keeping in view, to promote industrialisation and to ensure high economic growth we are going by the eagerness of the Narendra Modi government to ensure changes in the existing environment and land acquisition laws of India.

On one hand we may illusorilycategorise here an angry environmental lobby that isanti-jobs, anti-development, and thus anti-growth, while on the other hand a conglomerate-paced government is fighting withthe challenges of shifting the national economy towards a measurable growth that has significant impact in people's lives which we havediscriminately made. 'Environment OR Development' we project thisheading but these gloves have combative approach to the national discussion on how to reconcile environmental, social and economic targets is a precarious one that does not include the plethora of methods which an environmental regime is necessary to have as the economic regime or plan of action and vice versa.

Conclusion

Sustainable development concerns in India's development philosophy are in the sense of enrichment of welfare society, generally perceived in a habituated theme. According to themodern environment regime, contemporary consensus

generally reflects three fundamental aspirations *Firstly,* human beings should be able to enjoy a decent quality of life, *secondly,* humanity should appreciatethe finiteness of the biosphere, and *thirdly,* neither the objective for the well-being, nor the significance of biophysical limits should prohibit the search for *greater justice* in the world, whereas the concepts like *'Progress'* and *'Development'* are not easy to assess because these concepts are not absolutelyimpartial. Improvement in the quality of people's lives should be targeted by 'Development'; according to the persons involved in it. Finally, the goals of development and the means to achieving them will be prioritized differently. Mostly, the basic needs for development include amongst others are food, shelter, health, safety and education and at the same time poverty alleviation is essential for human development. If thewell-being would bemeasured from an absolute financial point of view, Sustainable Development which comprises environment, social and economic dimensions along with sustainable decision-making would be very difficult to achieve. GDP (Gross Domestic Products) has though has become a measure tool to access economy sustenance but still doesn't adequately or we can say efficiently take into consideration environment-social-economicwelfare. Besides that environmental costs such as the depletion of different resources and the destruction to the environment are also neglected in a huge way.

It would be a valuable exercise if we are having compassion for our environment and thinking for future generations, to gauge how far these environment, social costs and economicpr of its could be assimilated in the measures used to define 'wealth, development and well-being' of the existing generation in order to meet the expectations of the future generations. In addition to that, perhaps if we look at the mythological view point, we can find that every action that we do is having repercussion over generations. For example one generation says, you know we will do what we want, and the next generations have to pay for it. So it is well said in Indian Mythology that the child inherits the sins of his father. Hence in this shrinking global village, development which enables individuals and communities in underdeveloped regions of the world to raise living standards through profitable products, consistent with minimizing adverse environmental effects will be called sustainable development as it is expected to give extensive benefits. Perhaps from the above discussions probably it would be admitted by every one that our closest ties are with those branches of scientific research which have to prove itself with the development of man's culture, and as a consequence with man's process of mind.

References

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