

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND LAW: A RIGHT FOR ALL****Paromita Das**

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Abstract

Environmental issues are a growing concern in today's world. All the countries, including India, are facing excessive environmental degradation. There are so many policies and laws but no one cares to follow them until the question of punishment comes. One's life is very much related to the environment. What causes environmental degradation, pollution, diseases and stress are to be known and understood and the remedial measures to be applied in local conditions starting from our own homes. If we become aware our duty is to make the people around aware of it for the sustainable development. Everyone will surely want their future generations to dwell in a healthy and peaceful environment with the fulfilment of all the basic necessities of life. The time has come to know all our rights and responsibilities and this can be achieved both informally, non-formally and formally through the education system. Environmental Education has been a core paper at the school and college levels but we need to be more specific about the laws in this paper, how much they are being implemented and what changes can be brought in the curriculum. The present paper is an attempt to make people realise the need for a common discipline in any course of study as well as an individual course of study itself which shall include not only the education part but also the study of laws. This will not only help students to gain academically but also know their rights and responsibilities. This course of study in itself should be a right for all.

Keywords: *issues, degradation, sustainable, curriculum, responsibilities.*



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Introduction:

Life today has become very challenging. Struggle for existence and survival of the fittest are the known words from our childhood but no one cares to know the life conditions that others are facing or rather the critical conditions people have to face which we may not have idea also. The need-based society has become greed-based and so some sections of the society are suffering due to the other sections. We are becoming so concerned with ourselves that nothing can be realised except the 'fittest' concept. No doubt every human nature is to struggle for existence and this is created by nature's own principles. But we have to understand that our own survival is not enough and we should care about the survival problems of others also. And since this ecosystem depends on the harmonious

interrelationship of all the living and non-living beings, long-term survival is possible only with the mutual co-operation, brotherhood and solving each others' problems as that of our own because we may not know when we have to face that similar situation. Respect for our mother nature, appreciation of nature's beauty and performing our day-to-day duties will bring a massive change in our environment problems by minimising them and also if we do it collectively.

Health and Environmental Consciousness:

A person's existence is not possible without the sound health and the healthy environment. Health and environmental consciousness are the necessities to sustain oneself and the earth. Also one's health and the environment are closely related to each other. If one's health is poor s/he cannot take any responsibilities towards the environment and if the environment is unhealthy the health is directly or indirectly affected. Once the Consciousness is developed the Sense of Responsibility also develops. This leads to a need for environmental education and knowledge of environmental laws. Sometimes even after being educated persons one may not be adequately conscious or aware of his/her environment. This proves that environmental education and laws are very much necessary today to develop the sufficient awareness. And this should be made mandatory that every citizen should know the basic environmental laws and rules. This can be evident from the duties given to each citizen towards environmental conservation.

Growing Need for Education and Awareness:

The degradation of environment day by day at an alarming rate has led to the growing need for environmental education and awareness. When we are in the 21st century we need to be very much advanced in our thoughts to create ways to protect and conserve our environment. Any development is always accompanied with threats to the environment and this creates a need for environmental education, awareness and laws for environmental protection. We do not have to read in newspapers only to know about the degrading environmental conditions. Witnessing our immediate surroundings and environment is enough to make us realize the situation in which we all are surviving. First of all our country is full of poor, illiterate and unemployed people. The greatest reason is it is over populated and lack of social and economic equity. So if the basic necessities of life are not satisfied by the Government then the greater environmental concerns cannot be solved. Environmental Education is a vast area starting from the local to the global and vice-versa. So fulfilling the basic necessities of millions of people, then making them aware of their environment is not a child's play. It needs regular systematic planning with the co-operation of the authorities associated with the

environmental protection, with an emphasis on the standard of living of the people. The people are getting restless to fulfil their desires, comfort and luxuries and this has become so competitive that the nature will not be in a position to produce anymore one day. The modern day demands and activities of the people are harmful to the environment and an obstacle towards sustainable development. So this is the main reason for the need for Environmental Education (EE) and Awareness. Also there is a growing need for this among the responsible citizens who are very much vulnerable to the harmful effects of the environmental problems and who want to save their own lives, their future generations and also want to contribute towards the environmental conservation by following simple approaches, laws and rules.

Role in Sustainable Development:

When the education and knowledge of the people in the 21st century increases regarding their environment, the government also faces a challenge to meet the growing needs of the people for environmental protection against degradation and pollution. Environmental education and laws can help in sustainable development to meet the needs of both the present and future generations. Environmental education and law can help people to have an idea about Sustainable Development which includes not only the Conservation of natural resources but also economic development and equity in society. People can bring about changes both in their personal and professional lives and activities. Nowadays people are more inclined towards economic development which can support the social life as well as save the environment. Also the attitude of people can change by not becoming selfish about their standard of living and being focused on environmental issues which means considering oneself as part of the entire globe and giving priority to the environment than one's own desires. Only need-based and not the endless greed can lead to Sustainable Development. In business sectors the Environmental law helps a company to survive and get better opportunities in future. In many factories or industries this law can safeguard the health hazards and risks of workers exposed to poisonous gases and harmful chemicals or emissions and even in agriculture sector for farmers who are using fertilizers or pesticides for the better cultivation and more production.

Both Right and Responsibility:

In our country environmental education and law should be integrated and made both a right and responsibility. Rights given to know about environmental law and issues will then be a responsibility because Right will be in favour of public and which will make them in favour of the environment. All the people have a right to know about environmental education and law and then play whenever required an active role for environmental protection. People

belonging to industries, transport, agriculture, biotechnology, real estate, medicine and so on should know adequately about the environment and its laws because they have a responsibility to obey these laws and therefore follow them for environmental protection. Those who want to become lawyers and legal professionals with specialization in environmental law should be well informed about the environment and its concerns during their course of study and internship with other field activities because that will help them to give the legal advice to their clients in environmental problems and solve them for their client's welfare and for protecting the environment.

Common Laws:

Though many of these common environmental laws are known more or less to all, here it finds a requirement to be listed and recollected for the convenience of those who are interested in actively protecting their environment irrespective of gender, caste, race, community and age. The policies and statutes/legislations enacted particularly with reference to India for environmental protection should be known to every Indian citizen such as the National Forest Policy, 1988, Policy Statement for Abatement of Pollution, 1992, National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment and Development, 1992, the Water and Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act, 1974 and 1981 respectively, the Environment Protection Act, 1986, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, the National Environment Tribunal Act, 1995, the National Environment Appellate Authority Act, 1997 and the provisions in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in dealing with punishing those who try to adversely affect the Public Health, their Safety and Convenience are some of the common laws. But due to the lack of severity in punishment and the lack of sincerity in implementing these in the right time at the right place, these may not be sufficient and effective in checking and controlling the environmental pollution.

Itself As A Discipline:

Environmental education is a core subject at all levels beginning from secondary to higher secondary in the school system and followed by the higher education. If it is multi-disciplinary including other disciplines in it such as science subjects, mathematics, geography, ecology etc. then keeping other subjects along with it is a burden for the students. They will naturally lose interest in it. So being multi-disciplinary we can keep environmental education as the main discipline instead of so many along with the basic ones like languages, history, mathematics, economics and computer science with the objective that Environmental Education (EE) will be enriched with the knowledge of all these disciplines

and with the inclusion of environmental laws. Students will not only develop interest but will be aware of their environmental rights and responsibilities at a much earlier stage.

Constitutional Rights demand Awareness :

The Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution is combined with the Directive Principles and Fundamental Duties. This makes us clear enough that whenever rights are given the duties will itself arise from that. Article 24-A of the Constitution talks about the right of every child to get assisted in their basic needs and to be protected from different kinds of exploitation, harm and neglect and also Article 30-C talks about the right to clean environment and safe drinking water and so on with addition of pollution control, ecology conservation and the right to a healthy and safe life with nature in harmony and protection of environment for present and future generations which in other words means Sustainable Development in Article 30-D. The Right to Education exists for school children in Article-45 but Right to Environmental Education should be soon incorporated in my opinion at all stages of education as a separate discipline especially in higher education for students of all streams (which exists to some extent) and also as a course of study. People should become aware of their new rights yet to be given and once if rights given duties will follow. That means this can be added to the already existing New Challenges to Education Policy.

Physical Health and Right to Life:

Right to health and right to be healthy is not the same as mentioned in Article-21 of the Indian Constitution. Right to health means right to some health facilities and services and enjoying some freedom, healthy working conditions and medicines for prevention for all age categories. The Right to life means to have a right to protect the environment which is universally recognised and also at the same time to enjoy a healthy pollution-free environment. Right to life is a broad concept which refers to the right given to all the people whereas Physical health refers to individual health conditions, physiologically in addition to the mental health. The violation of the right to life is considered to be more important than the individual health. The physical health may be directly affected but right to life indicates both direct and indirect affects which first may affect the environment and then the people. Even little bit of inconvenience felt through environmental degradation and pollution is a threat to the right to life in a gradual way and may not be immediate. So to be knowledgeable about these minor differences also the environmental education and law holds great importance.

Conclusion:

Environmental Education with equal weightage to laws can be a new dimension in the already existing curriculum in schools and colleges and also as a compulsory subject in any field of study can make the students and younger generation much more aware and responsible atleast of their own rights, if not their duties. Also if this area is given emphasis as the main subject in degree and diploma in both regular and distance mode of education and research work with new job opportunities then the younger generation will have the interest to serve their nature as well as their country.

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