

# ECO-PHILOSOPHY, ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

MATHEW GEORGE

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NEHU, SHILLONG.

An attempt has been made in this paper to discuss the desirability of a sound philosophy as a basis for any action programme for the protection of environment which is salient characteristics of Eco-Philosophy. Further it emphasises environmental education (EE) for all and lists the guiding principles of EE. Finally it suggests utilisation of multi-media communication technology and its effective management to generate environmental awareness among the masses and to transform 'environment for sustainable development' as peoples' movement.

We all know that theory and practice are intimately connected. Immanuel Kant said that theory without practice is impotent and practice without theory is blind. Part of our present practice in preservation of environment is blind because it is not informed by theory or rests on non-viable theory. Philosophy, like life, is a process of perpetual re-examination, for philosophy is a peculiar distillation of a conscious part of our life. It is an important part of our image of ourselves, which we form in interaction with the external world, with our past history and with our future dreams. Without philosophy we have no anchor, no direction, and no sense of the meaning of life. E.F. Schumacher maintained that one of the urgent tasks of our times is a meta-physical reconstruction. Once we know what we are doing and why, other forms of reconstruction including the economic one, will follow more swiftly. If our foundations are cracking, no partial reconstruction or repair at the top of our edifice will be of any avail. The ills and profound frustrations which have overtaken man are not merely due to industrialization inadequate planning and faulty execution of projects, but are caused by fundamental errors in our basic thinking about goals. Hence we have to set our thinking straight forward.

Eco-philosophy of Henryk Skolimowski (1981)

is a sound philosophy for any action programme for environmentalists. It deals with the interaction of persons with one another and their environment. It is meant for designing new tactics for living. If accepted and acted upon, this will lead to greater satisfaction and fulfilment - indeed restore a missing meaning to human existence. Let us examine the salient characteristics of Eco-philosophy.

- (a) Eco-philosophy (EP) is life oriented, while contemporary philosophy (CP) is language oriented.
- (b) EP signifies commitment to human values, to nature and to life itself, whereas CP spells out a commitment to objectivity, to facts.
- (c) EP is spiritually alive, whereas CP is more or less spiritually dead.
- (d) EP is comprehensive and global, while CP is piecemeal and analytical.
- (e) EP is concerned with wisdom, where as most of CP is directed towards the acquisition of information.
- (f) EP is environmentally and ecologically conscious, whereas CP is very largely oblivious to environmental and ecological concerns.
- (g) EP is aligned with the economics of the quality of life, whereas CP is aligned with the economics of material growth.
- (h) EP is politically aware because our actions are pregnant with political consequences.
- (i) EP is vitally concerned with the well-being of society.
- (j) EP is vocal about individual's responsibility.
- (k) EP is tolerant of transphysical phenomena.
- (l) EP is health-conscious.

Human life cannot be nurtured, nursed and

sustained unless we nurse and sustain the ecological habitat within the womb of which we all reside. We have to treat with relevance not only human life, but also life of the ecological habitat. Values regulate man-to-man relationships and man-to-life relationships. To live the life of a human being is to entertain sacredness and participate in sacredness, both of which are given to us potentially. One has to strive and labour, sometimes in great pain, to actualize this potential. Ecological humanism broadens the concept of ecology to encompass the balance of the human environment. It holds that the coming age is to be seen as the age of stewardship. The world is to be conceived as a sanctuary and knowledge is to be conceived as an intermediary between us and the creative forces of evolution.

### **Environmental education**

Concern for the environment has been a part of our social and cultural heritage. This land of ours is the birth place of sages and of religions preaching love for every living thing, a concern for life and conservation of nature. Indian history and literature stand as witness that our scriptures as well as teachings have been advising man to reduce his needs to the bare minimum. His simple living and high thinking made him co-exist in perfect harmony with other organisms and surroundings. It is only when he became greedy, selfish, unscrupulous and highly ambitious that he came in direct conflict with nature. Jawaharlal Nehru observed once thus "In spite of our culture and civilization, in many ways man continues to be not only wild but more dangerous than any of the so called wild animals". Mahatma Gandhi said, "There is enough in nature for everyman's need but not sufficient for everybody's greed". Thus, however ridiculous it may sound, until and unless man shuns comforts and luxuries and uses the natural resources for his necessities only, he cannot restore perfect harmony with nature. Education helps man to become more humane, compassionate and creative and if it is misused it leads to destruction. That is why H.G. Wells observed, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe". The guiding principles of EE are to :

- (1) improve the quality of life;
- (2) assist in the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes values and lifestyles that are inherent in a quality environment;
- (3) assist in developing harmony between man and environment and to maintain ecological balance;
- (4) provide learning experiences that directly involve people in identifying and solving real community environmental problems;
- (5) enhance the learners interest in awareness of and sensitivity towards the environment;
- (6) provide information about the environment and its associated problems to people to make the best possible decisions on the utilization of resources;
- (7) focus on current and potential environmental situations;
- (8) examine environmental issues from regional, national and international points of view, so that learners develop insight into environmental conditions in other geographical areas;
- (9) emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and the need to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills; and
- (10) utilize diverse learning environment and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching/learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first hand experiences.

Protection of environment is part of the core curriculum in school education. Meghalaya Board of School Education has set apart 20% of the curriculum for EE at lower primary stage and a few units at upper primary stage and the secondary stage. A resourceful teacher can find ample opportunities in

most of the subjects for correlated teaching with the environment. At pre-degree level, undergraduate level and postgraduate level a few units are set apart in life sciences for environmental education. In teacher education at primary level and Academic Staff College level, certain units are set apart for EE. It is essential that teachers should give environmental bias to their courses to reinforce environmental awareness.

### **Environmental education for all**

To create general awareness about preventive, corrective and restorative measures as well as punitive measures, people of all shades, all vocations, all ages and all creeds need to be enlightened about the related causes, effects and controlling measures. This obviously calls for EE for all, including the housewife, cow-boy, domestic servant, milk-maid etc. Special emphasis should be given to methodology of EE during in-service and pre-service teacher education. Distance Teaching, Adult Education, National Service Scheme, Continuing Education, Youth Clubs and Libraries should educate people and inspire them to join a mass movement against forces of pollution and defilement.

### **Environmental awareness and communication technology**

Since the problem of environment has to be tackled with multi-pronged attack, the audio-visual media in totality needs to be pressed into service. Posters, Charts, Maps, Signboard displays and Pictures shall continue to play an important role in our country. Without a mass movement, we need not expect spectacular results in improving the quality of environment.

Newspapers, magazines and journals in all languages should devote a section on environmental problems as well as on preventive and corrective measures. Particularly there should be articles that deal with real life situations, conservation and preservation programmes and sustainable development. The cases of areas where such steps have led to socio-economic gains should be highlighted through pro-

grammes like 'face in the crowd' in Doordarshan. It is interesting and inspiring to see how an ordinary teacher in Bombay city succeeded in solving the garbage problem through her effort for some time. Another ordinary person by name Thankaswamy in Puthukottai (Tamil Nadu) succeeded in greening a substantial area of his village by planting seedlings of a variety of trees to convey the message "trees for life". These ordinary persons have become "face in the crowd" due to their commitment to the Eco-Philosophy. "Individual commitment in group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work and a civilisation work". The Chipko Andolan and the Sukhomajari experience are eye openers. Demonstration effect is really contagious. Case studies, group discussions on success stories will be more useful in radio and television than continuous talk on environmental degradation. Appropriate newsreels in cinema halls on environmental problems will be useful for viewers from urban and rural areas. Mass media should highlight rural and urban environmental problems for the benefit of all. NCC, ACC, Scouts, Girl Guides, NSS, Youth Forums, Women's Organisations, Ex-Servicemen's Organisation, Other Voluntary Organisations and Associations can organise task forces to solve the problems of environment. Now literacy should mean not only Reading, Writing and Arithmetic (three R's) but also awareness about the environment. Only those who have actually served the people and produced results, should be allowed to compete as representatives of people at all levels, from village to parliament. The existing institutions for Eco-Development at various hierarchical levels should have a coordinated effort and network of communication to transform separate efforts into a mass movement to protect the environment. The universities and colleges should organise environmental camps, nature clubs and observe World Environment Day, Wild Life Week etc. with the help of NSS and the Community. For each target group, appropriate communication technology should be used, such as One Act Play, Drama, Mono Act, Group Songs, Folk Dance and Folk Songs, so that all the members of the community will assimilate the key message on the Environmental Problems and the preventive measures. Often community oriented programmes have been found more productive

in the long run.

Management of EE is a far more difficult task than the management of a factory or a firm, for it involves higher managerial skills and a dedication rarely found in a common bureaucrat. It requires the fond attention of a mother for child, the attention without which the child will not have that glow and smile on its face which exude health. It requires the tender care of a gardner for his plant, the care without which it will not grow and blossom and will remain stunted and dwarfed. It requires the skill of a leader who by using his wit and wisdom, mobilises resources for social development and by using his grit and gusto can achieve formidable tasks. In brief, it requires personal attention, dedication, determination, social skills and indomitable will to succeed. Nothing succeeds like success. Success would be a mistress of one who possesses the qualities mentioned above and the environment around him would be a beautiful haven for humans.

" Woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep.  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep".

- Robert Frost

## References

1. Adiseshiah Malcolm, S. ed. (1987): Economics of Environment , Lancer International Centre, New Delhi.
2. Bahuguna, Sunderlal (1987): "People's Response to Ecological Crisis in the Hill Areas" In Bandyopadhyay, J. (ed.) India's Environment : Crisis and Responses , Natraj Publishers, Dehradun.
3. Chib, S. S. (1988): "Environmental Degradation and Management: Need for Environmental Awareness and Education in India" In S. Bhatnagar and S. Anand (eds.) Education and Communication Technology, ESS ESS Publications, New Delhi.
4. Mathur, H. S. ed. (1988): Environmental Resources: The Crisis of Development , RBSA Publishers, Jaipur.
5. Sarabhai, K.V. (1987): "Communication Strategy for Environmental Education", In Desh Bandhu and G. Derberet (eds.) Environmental Education for Conservation and Development, Indian Environmental Society, New Delhi.
6. Saxena, A. B. (1986) : Environmental Education, National Psychological Corporation, Agra.
7. Sharma, R.C. (1986): Environmental Education, Metropolitan Book Company, New Delhi.
8. Skolimowski, Henryk (1981): Eco-Philosophy, Marion Boyers Inc., London.