

Environmentalism and Values

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Abstract: Changing values lead to changes in Environmentalism and especially in environmental attitudes thus it can be said that inculcation of environmental values from the beginning of the child development will definitely influence his attitudes towards environment. In a practical sense, environmental problems in Asia are becoming more and more serious. In comparison to all others, young generation have the potential for constructing a powerful collective force in society for environmental protection. Past studies found that supporters of environmental protection tended to be younger in age. Therefore with appropriate guidance incorporation of values for environment and environmental attitude in adolescents could constitute an important and legitimate societal force for environmental protection which will positively enhance the quality of the environment.

Keywords: values, environmentalism, environmental attitude, adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary environmentalism began in the 1960's & 1970's as public awareness on environmental problems was broadened by environmental events. Environmental problems were increasingly viewed as (1) being more complex in origin, often stemming from new technologies; (2) having delayed, complex and difficult to detect effects; and (3) having consequences for human health, well being as well as for natural system, as **Charles Harper**, claims in his book - *Environment and society* (p.299). People were finally realizing that these problems have not only affected the natural environment but could also potentially negatively affect humanity, thus causing a burst of support for environmentalism. Another theory given by **Kellert** explains that people want or need to be involved with nature and its upkeep which is the *biophilia hypothesis*. It is a belief that all people are naturally inclined and they need to have an affiliation with nature in order to succeed and obtain the optimal level of self value. **Wilson (1984)** stated that biophilia hypothesis boldly asserts the existence of a biologically based, inherent human need to affiliate with life and lifelike processes. This proposition suggested that human identity and personal fulfillment somehow depends on our relationship with nature.

The American Conservation movement is recognized by many as the beginning of environmentalism in the early 1900's with dedicated individuals such as **John Muir, President Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot and President Franklin. D. Roosevelt**. As it is known today, environmentalism is viewed as born in the 1960 by the combination of social forces. **Rachel Carson's** work "*Silent Spring*" shed light on the effects of widely used pesticides while **Paul Ehrlich's** "*The Population Bomb*" highlighted concern about the exponentially increasing population and the effects, that this increase was having impact on the natural resources. Earth day was celebrated in 1970 for the first time by approximately twenty million people. The incident at Love Canal became famous in 1978 bringing widespread awareness to the issue of toxic contamination, and 1979 brought the episode of the Three Mile Island nuclear reactor. Grass root movements spring up across the countries in response to these episodes, initializing changes in a number of educational fields. The United Nation Conference on Environment and Development or the Earth Summit which was held in 1992 in *Reo de Janeiro* resulted in heightened awareness on a number of global environmental issues.

Though Environmentalism has been around for decades, as outlined above, it has been a movement typically championed by the minority of the population and by grass root movements. The creation of the **Brundland Report** by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 brought Environmentalism to center stage by

introducing the idea of sustainable development. Most well known for the idea of meeting the needs of the present population without compromising the needs of future generations, the report by Norwegian Prime Minister **Gro Harlem Brundtland** is repeatedly referenced in discussions on sustainability and environmentalism. The topic of sustainability is closely tied with the carrying capacity. **Rees and Wackernagel** feels that the idea of natural capital as expounded on by **Hawkins**, gives valuable insight to the true meaning of the term sustainability in terms of carrying capacity; no developmental path is sustainable if it depends on the continuous depletion of productive capital. Environmental and social theory supports the *Biophilia hypothesis* asserting that we have a relationship to the natural environment due to our genetic and evolutionary history: Biophilia is a sociobiological attempt to explain why we do have a genetic concern for the non human world (pg.181). Therefore, according to the above sources, the *biophilia hypothesis* explains why we seek to have a relationship with nature and why we drive to conserve it (Pg.188).

Several studies have been done in the area of evaluating people's attitude towards nature. One of these is the *Houston's Child and Parent study* in which 24 black parents and their children from the city were questioned about their relationship with nature and its importance in their family. The goal of this study helped to characterize and give voice to black parents, perspective on nature and the importance of environmental education for their children. The results have shown that 100% of the parents were aware of some environmental problems. Animals, plants and parks play an important part in the lives of these parents and their families. Parents were aware of the negative effects of environmental problems such as air pollution, water pollution and garbage. This study attempted to show that city life has played an important role on parent's environmental values and the role that parentage played on their children's relationship with the environment (**Kahn**).

The term values are frequently invoked in discussions of environmental problems. Those who are concern about human impact on the environment have often suggested that changes in values are a route to more sustainable behavior and policy. The assumption behind these comments are that, values influence our individual and collective decisions and that if our values changed we would make decisions that are more protective to the biophysical environment. **Catton & Dunlap's New Environmental Paradigm** (NEP) revolved around the idea that humans are actually intertwined in the circle of life, linked with an infinite number of species and environment where regardless of technology and culture, ecological laws cannot be overruled. The *Historical Environmental Paradigm* (HEP) theory, dominates modern day society which is based upon a *Dominant Western Worldview* (DWW). The basic fundamentals of the DWW are:

- (1) People are fundamentally different from all other creature on earth over which they have a dominion;
- (2) People are masters of their destiny; they can choose their goals and learn to do whatever is necessary to achieve them;
- (3)The world is vast and thus provides unlimited opportunities for humans and
- (4) The history of humanity is on progress; for every problem there is a solution and thus progress need never ceases. It would then be the basic anthropocentric values of the DWW and in turn the HEP that are to blame for the current state of the earth's biophysical environment.

In philosophy the concept of values is central to many forms of ethical analysis, like the concept of value is central to environmental economics, where much research is concerned with assigning values to changes in the environment that is the field of environmental valuation. Further, nearly all work on the problem of the common people, considers the relative influence of altruism and self-interest in decision making. So the concept of values is related to the broad literature of altruism in evolutionary theory and the social sciences. Values are assumed to influence human decisions. This is also how values are invoked in expressions of concern and hope about the human impact on the environment. Changes in values are seen as leading to changes in decisions and thus to changes in behavior. Although values make a difference in human behavior but many environmentally consequential behaviors are thoroughly influenced by factors outside an individual's control. **Guagnano.et.al** offered an "*Attitudes — Behavior Constraints*" theory of proenvironmental behavior, that emphasizes the interaction between attitudes and constraints in shaping behavior and that suggest inconsistencies on either attitude or behavioral change which may be the result of not taking adequate account of both attitudes and constraints as influences on behavior. Despite these complications the core arguments about values are that they influence individual decisions and that individual decisions are consequential in shaping individual and ultimately group behavior with regard to the environment.

2. CONCLUSION

What can be said of the common assertion is that changing values lead to changes in Environmentalism and especially in environmental attitudes thus we can conclude that inculcation of environmental values from the beginning of the child development will definitely influence his attitudes towards environment. Since environmental degradation is a global problem that needs global efforts and collaboration, there is an urgent need to motivate members of Asian societies for environmental participation. Young people and children who have the power to change and save the biosphere should be motivated by the family and society. Parents and teachers should inculcate the values for the environment in young children and inspire them to treat other members of their surrounding environment may it is a plant, an animal or any living thing as a part of their family, this will help to develop love and affection for others. Thus positive environmentalism will develop a positive environmental attitude in adolescents which will surely reduce the disaster happening to our environment.

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