

ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

(What we must do, What we can do)

- Devesh Pradhan*

Today's world is not as it used to be in its yester ages. Man while fulfilling his unlimited selfish desires, has polluted and destroyed the environment resulting in its degradation.

So far as Nepal is concerned, 89.9% of the total population of the country resides in village. Hence, in Nepal, the villages are highly responsible for the anti-environmental activities which are influenced by various factors.

Deforestation forms the most important factor. There used to be large expanses of forests in the hills and mountains of Nepal in the past years. Between 2020 BS and 2065 BS itself, thousands of hectares of forests has been destroyed.

The chief causes of the felling of trees are (i) for fuel, (ii) for building of houses and (iii) for making of furniture, electric – poles, etc. Deforestation has brought about certain complex consequences like drying up of water sources, very low frequency of rainfall, losing of the fertile top-soil, decrease in the flora and fauna, increase in the atmosphere carbondioxide concentration. It also results in landslides earthquakes, etc. To avoid these intricate environmental problems in the near future, it is a high time to search for solution and practice them. Through it seems that the government is showing an inclination towards afforestation programmes, there hasn't been any significant progress. According to one school of thought, 'there can't be successful forestry unless people themselves are made the centrepiece'. Thus privatization of forests is a wonderful solution if certain rules are formulated and implied carefully.

Another solution is the introduction of alternative energy (for fuel to widely used fire wood) for daily uses. In this respect, animal and human waste (land-filled) utilization may protect the environment to a great extent.

Pollution caused by various industrial complexes like factories, mills, etc, established in rural areas have also been significant. The pollution activity by hundreds of brick factories in the Kathmandu valley is a striking example. Millions of tons of top soil is destroyed every season along with coal and fire wood. The

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pollution caused by factories and mills in the villages of Biratnagar, Janakpur, Birgunj, etc is also alarming.

The air pollution brings about acid-rain, smog, destruction of ozone layer and global warming, which are all harmful or fatal to human and plant life. To reduce the pollution, a rule must be passed stating; 'the exhaust gases must not be let out into the atmosphere.' They must be recycled. For example, carbondioxide gas is adsorbed by lime stone, forming gupsum. The industries should be established as far as possible from the sites of human dwelling, and the solid waste should be recycled if possible or dumped carefully. There should be no use of materials like polythene, plastics, foils (of lead, tin, aluminum) while packing the finished products.

The problems of sanitation have also given rise to complications. The accumulation of sewage (chiefly in Terai area) accounts for a number of diseases (like malaria). The sewage and animal wastes must be disposed off at a few-feet dug cavity (like tank's) covered with some kind of a covering. The sewage can be later used for crop, as it is a potential source of organic matter. Sewage must not be allowed to collect at the ponds, lakes, rivers, etc. Toilets must be clean and must be at least 15 meters away from the houses. Drinking water must be pure and germ-free. To avoid risks, it should be always boiled thoroughly. The water sources like tanks, small ponds, springs, etc, should be chlorinated regularly to ensure no contamination.

Good health is a basic necessity for all progressive acts. Through various hospitals and numerous health posts have been established ail over the country, a large population die each year due to various diseases. The children die chiefly due to diarrhoea dysentery and malnutrition. It is also due to no knowledge about vaccination-practices and general health-care. Conceiving mothers die due to various reasons, most of them being supported by poor socio-economic conditions and wrong out-moded cultural briefs. The deaths can be controlled by : (i) informing to all concerned, about available medicinal facilities, through various media, (ii) increasing the efficiency of the prevailing health posts and hospitals, (iii) abiding by hygienic habits and (iv) establishing health institutions where they are very wanting.

Nepal is basically an agricultural country, whose most people are farmers and their day-to-day living depends on the successfulness of their agriculture. Most of the farmers still rely on the monsoons for water. There must be extensive use of modern gadgets like tractors, water-pumps, etc, to increase the yield. Right fertilizers should be used; some fertilizers destroy the soil fertility after continued use for many years, and also tend of destroy the environment. Some pesticides not only destroy more

good bugs (which are natural predators of harmful pests), they also end up in the food-chain with long-term impact on human health.

Instead of only going for fertilizers, the farmers should also go for: (i) maintaining the original fertility of the soil, (ii) using manures of various animals including human waste, (iii) using decaying vegetation as manure (iv) maintaining a reliable water-source, and (v) using disease-resistant and better-yielding varieties of crop as much as possible. Government should provide information (through various media) to the farmers about the right climate, optimum time, etc for the planting of various crops. Loans should be supplied to the farmers with low percent of interest as a means of encouragement towards agriculture.

The rate of population is increasing at an alarming rate, inspite of the efforts of various national and international agencies. Since the rate of growth of population is directly proportional to the rate of environmental degradation, there must be effective means to arouse self-consciousness among the people themselves. Giving special facilities to those families which have only one child (for the proper development of the latter) may become an effective solution to the become an effective solution to the problem. Most of the rural people are unaware of the high-population growth-rate and its consequences. Some, who are aware, have practically no knowledge of the pregnancy-preventing methods (contraceptives). The high infant and child mortality rate and the concept that more children means more helping hands are other reasons why they produce more than one or two children. Government and other agencies, via various media, should give proper information regarding these aspects.

Education, 'the light of modern age', has still not lightened many Nepalese of the rural areas. For all-round development of the villages the children and even the adults should be educated irrespective of their sex. The education quality in schools of villages is still low and many schools are still waiting in some remote areas. Education at schools, colleges, and adult-education classes must include the aspects of environment, pollution and the preventive and control measures. Education must be made free upto SLC-level in low socio-economic areas and the brilliant students, especially girls, should be provided financial assistance (scholarships). There must also be a provision for vocational education. Unless an appreciable form of education is not established in the villages, every reform or development act may prove futile.

Though tourism has emerged as a potent source of obtaining foreign currency, it is also gradually becoming an agent for environmental pollution. Large number of tourists, who go for treks and mountain-climbing, use large quantities of

wood from the forests as fuel. They should be fined. Mountaineers (both of foreigners and nepalese) are known to leave oxygen-masks, gas-cylinders tin-cans, clothes, papers, medicines, tents, cameras, binoculars, strings, ropes, dry-cell batteries, etc, during the expeditions. In some cases, dead bodies of mountaineers are also found. Thus the sacred Himalayas are gradually becoming the 'highest junkyard and graveyard' in the world. Government should make rules Every expedition must bring their junks and wastes along with them otherwise they must be penalized.

To remove the gradually increasing burning problem of unemployment and to establish good economic standard in the villages, the following can be done by the government :

- (i) Establishing certain villages as tourist spots,
- (ii) Harnessing the rivers of Nepal for irrigation, electricity and foreign currency ,
- (iii) Giving farmers loan facilities and technical knowledge for establishing various small-scale industries, sericulture, bee-keeping, poultry-keeping, fruit cultivation, etc, according to the topography of the respective rural areas and
- (iv) Manufacturing in large scale, the cheaper and safer homeopathic and ayurvedic medicines (in comparison to medicines of other systems) from the herbs and flora found in Nepal.

The allotment of a large percentage of the budget for the upliftment of the rural areas exemplifies the concern of the government for the environment and development in the country. Government should use the foreign aids and the budget carefully, giving the most stress to the 'priority area'. It should cooperate with the NGOs active in the country, and also evaluate the latter's role.

Finally, we can conclude that environment and developmental activities are intimately related to each other and that, it is a very high time for us to join our hands to improve our environment for better, by various means, to make the so called 'Switzerland of Asia' an appropriate introduction of Nepal.