

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Today, the urge for economic development has become essential both in developed and developing economies. Developed economies undertake developmental programmes to maintain their rate of economic growth so as to enjoy still higher standards of living and avoid risk of cyclical fluctuations while developing economies emphasize on economic development not only for solving their basic problems of poverty, unemployment, ignorance, backwardness, low productivity etc. but also to touch the level of economic progress which has already been achieved by the rich countries. If economic development is the cause then economic growth is the result. Economic progress in any form is becoming the cause of slow death of environment. Human survival depends upon his harmony with nature. There exists a close relationship between man and nature. In the past man's closeness with nature kept the nature protected but in recent times man is more attracted by the materialistic world and has neglected nature. Economic growth seems to be the main driver of environmental degradation. Economic activities and zest for quick development are threatening the very survival of mankind on the earth. The rapid population growth and economic development in country are degrading the environment through the uncontrolled growth of urbanization and industrialization, expansion and intensification of agriculture and the destruction of natural habitats. This paper aims to explore the relationship between the economic growth and the pressure on nature from the environmental perspective. This paper seeks to study the adverse effects of economic growth on the environment. The study is based on secondary data.

KEYWORDS: *Economic Growth, Environmental Degradation, Natural Resources, Economic Activities, Urbanization, Industrialization.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, the urge for economic development has become essential both in developed and developing economies. Developed economies undertake developmental programmes to maintain their rate of economic growth so as to enjoy still higher standards of living and avoid risk of cyclical fluctuations while developing economies emphasize on economic development not only for solving their basic problems of poverty, unemployment, ignorance, backwardness, low productivity etc. but also to touch the level of economic progress which has already been achieved by the rich countries. If economic development is the cause then economic growth is the result. Economic growth is the ability of the economy to produce more and to earn maximum profits. The presence of the resources in sufficient quantity determines the pace of economic growth. If a country is insufficient in natural resources, it will not be in a position to speed up the rate of economic growth. A country cannot develop if natural resources are not adequately exploited and utilised. But economic growth becomes a problem when it leads to environment degradation. Environment degradation in its own turn means overall lowering of environmental qualities because of adverse changes brought in by human activities in the basic

structure of the components of the environment to such extent that these adverse changes affect adversely all biological communities in general and human society.

2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

Every country has its own basket of GDP drivers with its own temporal variations. In context of Indian economy initially it was largely driven by agriculture but later industrial sector became the main thrust. The per capita income increased at around 1% annual rate in the three decades after independence. The Fundamental Economic Reforms of 1991 brought about the three principal components of New Economic Policy – Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation, and their renewal in 2000's India progressed towards a free market economy. As economic reforms picked up pace India's GDP grew fivefold to reach US dollar 2.2 trillion in 2015 (as per IMF estimates). In the late 2000's India's growth rate reached 7.5% making it the fastest growing economy. The economic growth has been driven by the expansion of the services that have been growing at a rapid rate. Indian economy grew at a 7.6% & 7.1% in financial year 2015 -16 and financial year 2016-17 respectively as major reforms had taken place like demonetisation. The economic growth has been slow in 2017-18 and it is expected to grow at 6.7% but in spite of that India has emerged as the growing major economy in the world.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN INDIA

In India environmental degradation is a serious concern. Major environmental calamities in India include land degradation, deforestation, soil erosion, habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity. Economic growth and changing consumption patterns have led to rising demand for energy and increase in transport activities. Air, water and noise pollution together with water scarcity dominate the environmental issues in India. The impact of economic development on the environment is clearly complex in nature. The situation between 1947 and 1995 was even worse. According to the data collection and environment assessment studies of World Bank experts, between 1995 and 2010 India has made some of the fastest progress in dressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality in the world. Still India has a long way to search environmental quality.

4. ECONOMIC GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT IN INDIA

Economic growth in India has brought about radical changes in the industrial sector, agricultural sector and the human society. In the human society the consumption patterns, way of living, likes and tastes of the people are constantly changing leading to increased demand for goods. Industries are producing goods on a large scale with the help of modern machines and technology thereby causing exhaustion and degradation of the natural resources. Various ecological conflicts caused by developmental activities in India include.

4.1 Environmental Pollution

Today, India, being an agrarian economy is heading towards rapid industrial growth. Industries are being set, goods are being produced and resources are being utilized. But economic growth in general and industrialisation in particular has led to the humongous amount of waste and toxic pollutants into the environment. The pollutants have entered the land (soil), water and air. The pollution load exceeds the assimilation capacity of the environment resulting in environmental degradation. Today, environmental pollution is one of the most serious problems our country is facing. Various environmental pollution are: Air pollution, River pollution, Groundwater pollution, Light pollution, Noise pollution, Thermal pollution, Mining pollution, Plastic pollution, Municipal solid waste pollution and Soil pollution.

4.2 Disrupting Bio-Geo-Chemical Cycles

4.2.1 Global Warming

Economic growth, industrialisation, urbanisation, increasing population has led to the increasing demand for energy causing global warming. The effects can be seen on its low lying islands, coastal lands and glaciers in the Himalayas. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, India was the seventh most affected by the devastating impact of climate change globally in 2019.

4.2.2 Green House Emissions

'Green House Gases' trap the heat that radiates from the earth's surface. It is these gases who regulate the radiant energy balance on earth, thus making it warmer and habitable, but over the last century the burning of forest fuel like coal/ oil, clearing of lands for agriculture ,industrial activities, human activities and various developmental activities have increased concentrations of green house gases.

4.2.3 Ozone Layer Depletion

On the earth's surface ozone is a pollutant but in the stratosphere it forms a protective layer that reflects radiations back into the space, protecting us from the damaging ultra-violet rays. Industries that manufacture things like insulting foams, soaps, cooling things like Air Conditions, Refrigerators and 'Take Away' containers use (CFCS) Chlorofluorocarbons, nitrous oxide from fertilizers and pesticides have led to ozone depletion. Reduction of ozone levels is leading to higher levels of UVB reaching the earth's surface causing adverse effect on humans, flora, fauna and environment.

4. Depletion of Natural Resources

Natural resources are depleted when the rate of its utilisation exceeds the rate it can replenish itself. Mankind has consumed more natural resources over the past century than all earlier centuries put together. Rapid economic growth has led to depletion of renewable and non- renewable resources. Resources such as fossil fuels, forests, healthy soil, and many minerals are rapidly being depleted and are in the danger of disappearing from the planet. India's economic growth is not without a price a report on environment accounts released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has revealed that when the average growth rate of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) during 2005-2015 for almost all the States was around 7% -8%, 11 States registered a decline in their natural resources. Another resource which has been adversely affected is the water resources. The Report (Down to Earth) shows 24% decline in the area under snow and glaciers in some States and also notes the impact on wetlands. The unsustainable extraction of ground water resources is causing decline in water tables in some States. Down to Earth's State of Indian's Environment 2018- in figures has talked about increasing dependency and unsustainable use of water resources. Another depleted resource is the fishes. Many people rely on fish as a major food source. Fossil Fuel is also a depleted resource. Three quarter of all our energy comes from fossil fuel. This model of economic growth may not let the country to sustain the rate of economic development for long.

5. LOSS OF BIO-DIVERSITY

Biodiversity is the variety of different life forms on earth including different plants, animals, micro-organisms, genes they contain and the ecosystem they form. Wild plants, animals and micro-organisms have provided essential products to humans. Flora and fauna had productive, medicinal and commercial value for centuries. Coastal communities have used

plants and animals of coral reefs for their medicinal properties but the coral reefs have been damaged by human kind. Biodiversity loss has always existed as a natural process but threats to biodiversity arise when the rate of extinction exceeds the rate of speciation. Although India is designated as a mega-biodiversity area it has two of the World's most threatened Hot Spot's the Eastern Himalayan Region and the Western Ghats. To quote Professor M.S. Swaminathan," Both are paradises of valuable genes but are inching towards the status of Paradise Lost." At least 10% of India's recorded wild flora and possibly more of its wild fauna are on the list of threatened species. A large area rich in biodiversity has been reduced to small pockets because of increasing developmental activities and urbanisation.

6. LOSS OF FOREST COVER

A forest in India is significant in rural industry and is a major environmental resource. The total forest cover is spread across 802088 sq km which is 24.39% of the geographical area of the country. Besides enhancing the quality of environment and life support system forest plays a vital role in the economy. Forests provide rubber, fruits, nuts, medicinal herbs, floral, greenery, firewood, charcoal etc. Many pharmaceutical companies obtain raw materials from tropical forests for making drugs. But the reckless felling of trees by humans for their ultimate ends has resulted in deforestation. Forests are burned, cut down for various reasons, like clearing of land for agriculture, for industries, for cities and many more. Private industry and official bodies have together stripped the State off its green cover. Mining, quarrying, irrigation and industrial projects also have resulted in loss of forest cover. From 2006-07 to 2010 -11 all States except Goa and Sikkim have shown a decline in forest stock. However from 2010-11 to 2015-16 even though there was a marginal change in forest cover in Assam and Uttarakhand growing stock has reduced by more than 10%. India recorded 1% jump (8021 sq.km) in overall forest tree cover between 2015 and 2017 despite of livestock and population pressures according to Indian State Forest Report (ISFR) 2017. The Indian State Forest Report 2019 released recently shows an increase of 5188 sq km of forest and tree cover across the country as compared to ISFR 2017. The report also highlights that India will have to go a long way to achieve the target 33% of its geographical area under forest cover.

7. SOIL EROSION

Soil is a renewable resource. It plays an important role in the determination of quality and composition of the biosphere. In fact the biosphere develops over the soil and is not only a home for microbes but is also a source of nutrition for plants. All the growth activities are having a direct impact on land. Land degradation is loss of productive capacity of the soil. No doubt soil erosion is a natural process but it becomes a problem when developmental and human activities cause it to occur at a much faster rate. Soil erosion in India is wide spread and a serious threat to environment. It occurs in forest lands, arid and semi arid lands, agricultural lands, construction sites, roadways, surface mines, coastal areas. Soil formation is a long process which takes million of years to form again once eroded makes the land unproductive.

8. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Achieving economic growth and arresting environmental degradation is surely a dilemma for countries worldwide. Balancing the agenda of economic prosperity in an environmentally sound manner is the need of the hour. Human self enrichment at the cost of nature can prove to be a disastrous mistake. Scientists have already pointed the Earth having entered the 6th mass extinction and anthropogenic factors are anticipated to have accelerated it further.

- The reality that the agenda of environmentally sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved in silos has to be accepted. The efforts of one set of nation could be jeopardized by another set. A reckless attitude of a developed nation in the form of high emissions could in turn prove to be a death knell to an entire low lying oceanic nation in the form of sea level rise. Global solidarity is an utmost requirement.
- On a national level the environmental aspect has to be integrated with our way of life. It has to be internalized in the way nation functions. India has already committed to reducing GHG emission by 33-35% by 2030 from 2005 levels under Paris agreement to UNFCCC. Abiding by its soul India at its annual INDC's report at fore with displayed it being in line to achieve the stated objective.
- EU, China and more recently Japan and South Korean have recently displayed their plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, 2060 and 2050 respectively. India also needs to make more ambitious goals which not only abide by political commitment but to broader sustainable economy.
- Air quality has been taking a toll mainly in Delhi and regions near it. With India's 8 cities coming in the top 10 most polluted cities in world (WHO Report 2018) its time tackles it. The recent Pusa bio decomposer to deal with stubble burning issue is a welcome. With its success such models can be replicated. More such models are the need of the hour.
- This brings us to the most important point R&D. It is equally important if alternatives as to environmentally sound ones are to be found.
- A very interesting concept on lines of CSR namely ESR has been doing rounds. ESR meaning Environmental Social Responsibility. The big manufacturing companies need to assimilate this in their structure. Government can also make it an obligation on part of the companies so that they cannot evade their responsibility toward environment.
- Recent EIA notification 2020 needs to be seen in light of criticisms it has received, so that economic growth does not jeopardize nature's health.

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