

## ENVIRONMENT IN DANGER

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Synopsis: Environment is in danger and so are life and its quality. Many species of animals and plants are already extinct and many more on the brink of it. The phenomenon known as 'green house effect' is one of the greatest dangers to our environment. Enormous emissions of carbon dioxide have assumed alarming proportions and must be addressed immediately. It has helped spread and growth of our many dangerous diseases. It has also adversely affected the rainfall patterns. Our forest-cover is shrinking rapidly and giving rise to diverse complex problems. Water-pollution has been no less alarming. Discharge of various types of untreated chemical and other wastes are mainly responsible for pollution of our water resources. Industries have been the worst offenders in this respect. Both human and animals life have suffered a lot as a result of it. Foolish and excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers has polluted our fruits, vegetables, dairy products and cereals. The residues of these neurotoxins ultimately reach human system causing several diseases. Mother's milk too is not free from pollution. Some urgent and hard decisions are their implementations are imperative. Noise-pollution and international trade of toxic wastes are other areas of concern. Consequently, the Third World nations have been at the receiving end.

Environment is in danger and so life and its quality. Several factors like population explosion, industrial and technological developments in the last 200 years have done immense harm to environment which supports life and growth. Many species of plants and animals are already extinct and many more are on the road of extinction. Pollution has become a major problem of the present day society. There is too much addition of polluting substances to the environment causing a great imbalance in the elements of atmosphere. This imbalance in biosphere has not only deteriorated the quality of life but has also threatened its very survival. Environment and life are two very unique things found only on the planet earth. These make the earth the only living planet known so far. Environment and life are two aspects of the same coin. If environment is affected, life cannot remain unaffected and immune. As such, environmental pollution is a matter of global concern and needs global remedy. It is a threat to the whole world, nay to the very existence and survival.

The every thickening blanket of carbon emission is one of the greatest dangers to our environment. It has already caused the warming up of earth's atmosphere for minus 0.30 C in 1870 to plus 0.30 c in 1990. This dangerous

phenomenon, known as green house effect, has resulted in 30 per cent more carbon-dioxide in the atmosphere today than 200 years ago. Advanced countries in Europe and America produce more than half of the world's carbon-dioxide emissions. According to a study the U.S. alone has been causing 5.2 tonnes of carbon dioxide emission per head. East-Europe is producing 3 tonnes per head of carbon dioxide, West Europe 2.1 tonnes, China 0.6 tonnes; Africa 0.3 tonnes followed by India 0.2 tonnes. One of the major factors for this emission is the large scale and indiscriminate use of fossil fuels. During the year 1996 alone, carbon emission from burning fossil fuels all over the worlds accounted for 6.1 million tonnes. It is increasing further rapidly as the number of cars, buses, trucks, scooters and such other vehicles plying on the road is increasing the world over.

Such emissions cause bronchitis and various other respiratory diseases. The London smog of 1952 killed as estimated 4000 people. According to a WHO report increasing carbon emission has helped many tropical diseases like malaria, dengue, and cholera to assume serious dimensions in Africa and Asia. Besides, it also worsens the problems of malnutrition and water-scarcity. It also adversely effect the rainfall pattern and causes droughts and famines. It is reported that warming of the earth's surface by 3 or 4 degrees may result in the elimination of 85 per cent of the remaining wetlands and many species of water birds and turtles.

Records indicate that as a result of the emissions of these greenhouse gases, the year 1995 has been the warmest year so far since record-keeping began some 130 years ago. This increase in earth's temperature has resulted in dwindling of food grain production, shrinking of forest cover, extinction of many plant and animal species and acid rains. The average global temperature during 1995 was 15.390 C, breaking the previous record 15.380 C in 1990. The constant rise in temperature makes oceans release more energy into the atmosphere, leading to more violent storms and cyclones.

The environment is deteriorating rapidly which can be seen and experienced in many ways. For example, the deforestation of the planet continues unabated resulting in soil erosion, flash floods, droughts, the elimination of many species of animals and plants. About 40 per cent of the earth was covered with forests a few decades ago but not it has shrunked to just 20 per cent. And most of this damage has occurred since 1950. The tropical and sub-tropical regions have suffered the most in this respect. Large forest areas have been cleared for the purpose of cultivation and farming. Over-grazing, logging and felling of the trees indiscriminately on a large scale for timber and fuel has

further worsened the situation. Rain forests are disappearing at an estimated rate of 4.6 million hectares per year which sustain and support a vast species of animal and plant life. Moreover, the destruction of forest causes soil-erosion which silts the rivers, lakes, canals, streams and other reservoirs.

Water pollution has also been on increase alarmingly all over the world. Sewage and industrial waste have fouled our seas, rivers lakes and other sources of water. The norms regarding the discharge of industrial effluents are being flouted by the industries with impunity. Even the drinking water being supplied in towns and cities by the civic bodies is not safe. This has directly affected the health of people. They suffer from many diseases, deformities and illness. The destruction of wholesomeness of our water resources is causing havoc. The encroachment upon lakes, rivers and seas by industries is a serious threat to our environment. Since most of our cities are on the banks of the rivers or the coast of the seas, our rivers and seas have turned murky and polluted with industrial and human waste and effluents. The toxic chemicals, industrial wastes discharged into rivers, lakes and seas from mills and factories have proved fatal to all kinds of marine life. People often fall ill by eating fish etc. taken out of these rivers, lakes and seas and they are often poisoned by industrial wastes pumped into these natural sources of water.

Industries, especially in developing countries, pay no attention towards pollution control measures and treatment of effluents before discharge into rivers and seas. Recently, the Supreme Court of India ordered out the hundreds of industrial units around the Taj Mahal. Similarly, in many States like Delhi, Gujarat etc. the courts have ordered the closure or immediate shifting of the hundreds of manufacturing industrial units. The ostrich-like approach to the problem of pollution by Indian industries is really condemnable. It is better that the industries in India immediately realize that the key to their survival lies not only in their ability to cope with competition but also in pressures of all sorts including that of following zero-pollution norms.

The indiscriminate use of pesticides like DDT, BHC (Benzene hexachloride) etc. has seriously damaged the fragile ecology of soils by weakening the micro-organisms in it. These pesticides ultimately contaminate fruits, vegetables, cereals, and dairy products. The neurotoxins reach the human body through various food-stuff and severely impair the central nervous system and cause other disorders. The milder forms of pesticide poisoning result in migraine, dizziness, stomach-ache, abdominal cramps and diarrhea. Dairy products have been found containing very high levels of pesticides residues. Mother's milk too is not free from this contamination. Vegetables and fruits suffer

from pesticide overload. Insecticides like carbofuran are used to quicken fruiting. Parathion is used to give fruits and vegetables a fresh look. Bananas, grapes, apples etc. are sprayed with harmful ripening agents, fungicides and pesticides.

Urgent steps need to be taken to stop this deterioration in our atmosphere and environment. The balance of nature should be restored at the earliest. Some hard and effective decisions are the need of the hour. Something should be done to stop the damage caused to the ozone layer by the discharges from the rockets and airplanes besides the emissions of synthetic chemicals, chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons and such other substances. The developed countries should immediately phase out the use of these chemicals. With the rapid increase in consumerism and the use of white and brown goods, the demand of appliances that use ozone-depleting substances is growing fast. The cult of owning of refrigeration is spreading fast in the developing and underdeveloped countries.

Noise pollution and international trade in toxic wastes are other areas of concern. The recyclers and processors of the toxic wastes expose the humanity at large to many hazards. People should be made aware of these hazards. Industrialized countries are dumping their toxic wastes in under-developed countries. All the countries should be obliged to accept the Base Convention to keep the environment clean of such wastes. There should be an effective ban and control on global trade in hazardous wastes. No country should be allowed bartering the health and well being of its people for a few dollars. During April 1996 to January 1997, over 15,000 tonnes of lead and battery wastes were imported in India. During this same period nearly 12,000 tonnes of zinc waste was also imported. In 1996 alone, Australia exported at least 8,500 tonnes of hazardous wastes and 1.9 million scrap batteries, and India, the Philippines and China were its major destinations.