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MAYANK KUMAR
Email: mayankjnu@gmail.com
Department of History
Satyawati College (Evening), University of Delhi

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'IT'S MY RIGHT': THE CHANGING NATURE OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE AGE OF COSMOPOLITICS

MAYANK KUMAR*

Abstract

Homegenisation of middle class environmentalism across the globe is recent phenomenon. At least till the last decade of previous century environmental concerns of developing world meant anxiety related of livelihood and conservation of nature. One can discern, since past couple of decades, definite shift in the attitude of developing world. Exploitation of natural resources for the sake of development; urbanizations, industrialization, infrastructure projects, etc. became acceptable. This tendency cannot be merely explained in terms of greater democratization of natural resources or in terms of greater integration with the capitalist economy. It will be fallacious to explain the exponential growth of consumerism merely as capitalist design. Capitalism could swiftly spread, also, due to easy availability of energy resource, i.e., Oil at abysmally low cost. It seems ironic to note that exploitation of natural resources is facilitated by discovery of low cost of natural resource, the use of which was definitely mediated by the capitalism driven 'technological modernity'. This ensured numerous conveniences of life at very low cost, which became difficult to forgo. As a result, despite being aware of the consequences, which are unfortunately considered to be in distant future, we encounter perpetuation of gratuitous consumption.

Key words: oil-energy, 'technological-modernity', liberalization, environmentalism, middle-class

* Associate Professor, Department of History, Satyawati College (Evening), University of Delhi, Delhi, India. Email: mayankjnu@gmail.com

Ever since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published in 1962, concerns for environmental degradation have slowly but steadily emerged as the focal point of every discourse on development, progress and growth. That the earth can take care of everyone's needs but not their greed is a fact understood and internalised by generations across the globe. 'The realisation that economic growth and environmental degradation go hand in hand is growing, and more and more people are protesting against environmental abuse; environmental pressure groups are mushrooming, school children are learning about the environment, the media are championing environmental causes and practitioners are trying hard to right environmental wrongs. *Why, then…is the problem growing?*' (Yencken, 2000: 221) (emphasis mine)

My intense classroom engagement with environmental issues dates back to 2007 when as part of the Supreme Court guidelines, environmental education was made mandatory for undergraduate students in India. What led to my research on the subject was a course-writing assignment for distance-mode education in the early 1990s which ultimately resulted in my doctoral thesis on human-nature interactions during the pre-colonial period in Rajasthan. With almost three decades of intense engagements with environmental issues in a country which proudly claims that we live in harmony with our surroundings (Gadgil & Guha, 1992) and worship nature (Vatsyayan, 1995), we are now witnessing an ever-increasing gap between realisation that we need to act and our inability to act. It is only recently that we have witnessed even greater manifestations of this dilemma: Is there even a need to act? Should we act? How effective will be our actions? How do we ignore the amenities and benefits of development?

The present paper makes an attempt to examine the question posed earlier 'Why then, is the problem growing?' and other related issues: Is it specific to any particular section of society or it is now all pervasive? What role did liberalisation of economy and drift towards market economy as against prevalent mixed-economy played in the process? Can deepening of democracy be seen as important catalyst?

Let me begin by reiterating an obvious but often undermined fact that liberalisation means a greater integration with global market and hence an enhanced possibility of the exploitation of natural resources of one region to cater to demands of other regions of the world. In other words,

this also means an intensification of capitalist investments in the local market—especially by the developed world—along with introduction of technologies with much greater capacity to exploit natural resources, which would lead to a gradual but consistent withdrawal of subsidies available to the local producer who worked with technologies with 'moderate' capacity to harness natural resources. This would lead to flooding of the market with cheaper products from regions where nature was forced to bear the brunt of capitalist technology-driven exploitation of natural resources (McNeill & Unger, 2010).

It is important to realise that these developments are to a great extent a product of post-Cold War era politics; an era which saw movement away from a bipolar world to the hegemonic presence of a singular ideology of capitalist production and consumption (Guha, 2006). The growing global hegemony of capitalistic productions necessitated the spread and promotion of an *insatiable appetite* (Tucker, 2007) among masses in developing countries like India. The philosophy of consumerism was unleashed and populist narrative shifted from democratisation of natural resources (Gadgil & Guha, 1994; Roy, 1999) to corporatisation of natural resources (Guha, 2014; Sundar, 1997; Chaube, 2015).[1] Moreover, the recent times have also seen diminishing social acceptance of liberal ideology, and its implications thereof, for the environment (Jipson & Jitheesh, 2019). In other words, the human-nature relations are matters of ethics as well. Therefore, it is imperative on our part to examine the questions of environmental ethics and the changes visible since the end of World War II in general and 1990 in particular.

This paper is divided into three sections: the first section sketches the context where liberalisation of the Indian economy needs to be placed to mark the contrast with the environmental movements which preceded its onset; the second section examines the significance of relatively low cost of oil-energy in affecting a depiction of bountiful nature which can sustain consumerism, and the last section examines the character of emerging environmentalism.

To begin with, it must be noted that the post-World War II era resulted in a new political map of the world. Since 1945, a total of 96 new states have been created as a result of the process of decolonisation (Christopher, 2002). However, it will not be incorrect to suggest that though most

of them went on to become independent states, in terms of the administrative setup and their aspirations they weren't very different from their previous masters; as far as visions of development or progress were concerned, they were more or less closely governed by the idea of 'technological-modernity' based on rapid industrialisation as the panacea of all ills. Where notions of development were concerned, there were very few dissenting voices; even the Socialist Bloc was an ardent supporter or rather propagator of technological-modernity. The dominant understandings of social development and progress—capitalist or socialist—differed very little when it came to nature and environmental resources (Guha, 2014: 136-70). Excessive insistence on technology-driven, high-energy intensive mechanisation of almost all spheres of life in the 'century of oil' became the ideal for most of the decolonised nation-states.

Nevertheless, it will be incorrect to suggest that there were no alternatives to the dominant views. There were few exceptions like Gandhi who represented the aspirations and visions of marginal sections of the society. India had to choose between the Gandhian insistence on 'living with nature' or the industrial imagination of 'living on nature'. However, it is important to bear in mind that in the initial decades after independence, Indian political institutions 'were clearly dominated by educated and nationalist elite. The business class was also politically influential, and the landed and caste elites were slowly brought into the ruling coalition. …The dominant political elites, moreover, practiced a reconciliatory approach toward the competing elites, while professing the hope that they would be able to bring the poor and the oppressed masses into the mainstream of India's modernising political economy. …five year plans accordingly stressed a mixed economy model of development that sought economic growth, self-sufficiency, and a modicum of wealth redistribution.' (Kohli, 1997: 384).

The impact of this compromise or path of development on the landscape and its appropriation of natural resources can be appreciated by the following two apparently contradictory approaches towards nature and environmental resources. The first has been captured very lucidly in the following anecdote by Ramchandra Guha.

> An anonymous journalist covering one of the showpiece projects of industrial development writes, '[T]his was Bokaro, site both of a thermal power project and a larger reservoir. Visiting the place in September 1949, the reporter found that 'Bokaro stood in the midst of barren rocky land, overlooking the confluence of two sandy rivers. The only habitation there was the office of the Executive Engineer manned by half a dozen persons, without any living or other facilities. One could reach Bokaro only by Jeep and we had to carry our own food.'
>
> Three and a half years later the journalist went back to Bokaro to see the prime minister inaugurate the power plant and the dam. 'What a different sight met my eyes', he exulted. Approaching the Bokaro valley on a 'first class tarmac road', he saw 'the three sturdy stacks of the power station against the grey background of the hills'. What had been 'a dry river bed in 1949 has been turned into a fair-sized lake' with a concrete barrage thrown across it. For those who worked in dam and plant, there was now, 'a modern residential area with tarred roads, electric lighting, a high school, hospital. Filtered water supply and all the amenities one expects in the present day.' (Guha, 2008: 225)

It is clear that while the aspirations of a nation were being fulfilled the cost was being borne by the environment and natural resources. Similar incidents have been repeated time and again (Roy, 2002; D'Souza, 2011; Baviskar, 1995).

However, it will be unfair if we do not share examples of alternative visions where the state played a proactive role in limiting the damage to nature and to people on the margins. Examining the dilemmas and concerns of the age Mahesh Rangarajan argues that '[T[he sense and thrill of discovery of wild made him (Nehru) and his colleagues far more open to ideas about keeping some spaces aside for nature than one might have imagined in a country with mass poverty and land hunger.' (2015a: 290). In the subsequent era, 'Indira Gandhi's engagement with environmental issues was strongly evident during both her tenures in office as prime minister of the world's largest democracy. The major milestone in her appearance on the world stage with ecological overtones was undoubtedly the speech at Stockholm in the first UN Conference on the Human Environment…(her) speech was marked by an awareness of the inequities across the

nation-states which could be a barrier to joint action to keep the earth habitable. Nations could not be 'preserved as museum pieces' in the name of diversity. … she asked, "Are not poverty and need the greatest polluters? The environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty. Nor can poverty be eradicated without the use of science and technology.'" (Rangarajan, 2015b: 151-55).[2] Science was seen as the saviour and the solution to larger socio-economic problems located in the construction of multipurpose river valley projects, big industrial setups, and agrarian expansions.

The changing demographic profile, however, was making it imperative for the state to devise new mechanisms to manage the affairs of governance while providing provisions for the ever growing numbers. Acutely aware of the limits of natural resource exploitation M.S. Swaminathan in early 1973 wrote that, '[G]rowth in the consumption of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, is proceeding at an alarming rate. Petroleum consumption is expanding at 4 per cent yearly, fresh water at 3 per cent, marine protein at 4 per cent and the use of chemical fertilizers at 7 per cent. A 3 per cent annual growth rate means a doubling every 10 years. In their study *Limits to Growth*, Meadow (1972) and co-workers, therefore, stressed that the exponential growth in consumption of finite resources, however large the reserves may be, cannot continue indefinitely.' (2007: 162)[3]

Nonetheless, despite being acutely aware of several unnecessary demands like irrigation facilities, artificial fertilisers, etc. associated with the introduction of High Yield Variety Seeds-led Green Revolution, India was almost forced to adopt the latter. 'The occurrence of drought in 1966 caused a severe drop in food production in India, and an unprecedented increase in food supply from the US. Food dependency was used to set new policy conditions on India. The US President, Lyndon, put wheat supplies on a short tether. He refused to commit food aid beyond one months in advance until an agreement to adopt the green Revolution package was signed between the Indian agriculture minister, C. S. Subramanium and the US Secretary of agriculture, Orville Freeman.' (Shiva, 1991: 31-32). Nevertheless, although the onset of the Green Revolution helped India in averting a major era of political unrest, its success depended in India, as in other countries, primarily on the basis of oil and its byproducts (Timothy, 2011; Simmons,

2008). It also resulted in greater mechanisation of agrarian production, thus consolidating heavy industries. Fertiliser plants, tractor manufacturing units, diesel-generator-set-manufacturing industries were promoted, which created an unprecedented ever-growing demand for oil (Guha, 2008: 587-89). This era also witnessed a concerted drive for electrification which to a great extent exploited the hydro-electricity potential, often at a great ecological cost (Gadgil & Guha, 1994; Roy, 1999).

Thus, India was at crossroads; socialist ideology expected an equitable distribution of resources among masses but the demands of heavy industry required a greater accumulation of capital. Either way, it was clear that the bounty of nature would have to be harnessed. It was most probably due to lack of heavy machinery that exploitation of natural resources was restricted. Another important fact was that the primary source of energy being deployed in Indian agriculture and industrialisation was either human or animal, especially in the agriculture sector. 'Human beings, for instance, are about 18 per cent efficient: for every 100 calories I eat as food (chemical energy), only about 18 are converted into mechanical energy: the rest are lost for practical purposes, mostly as heat. Horse's efficiency is only about 10 per cent' (McNeill, 2000: 11).[4] However, 'the energy densities of coal, oil and natural gas are many times those of wood and other plant materials... In comparable energy density terms, each kilogram of crude oil averages about 43 MJ, natural gas 35 MJ, coal 23 MJ, air-dried wood 14 MJ, cereal grains 15 MJ, lean meat 7 MJ, fish 6 MJ, potatoes 4 MJ, vegetables 1 MJ, and human faeces 2 MJ. The energy intensities of materials vary according to their methods of production and the technologies used, and so vary through time and place (Simmons, 2008: 9-10). Along with high energy density it is important to realise that the cost of fossil fuel in general and oil and natural gas in particular was very nominal. In the words of John Urry, '[V]irtually free energy spurting out of the ground led many to believe that there really was a free lunch. There was (black) gold at the end of the rainbow. One only had to drill at the right place and, very little energy expended, vast amounts of more or less free energy were enabled.' (2013: 5-6).

Greater dependence on almost free natural resources—fossil fuels in general and petroleum products like oil and artificial fertilisers in particular—during the Green Revolution unleashed an

unprecedented exploitation of the same. If on the one hand relatively low running cost diesel pump sets and submersible water pumps enabled greater access to irrigation facilities, then the byproducts of petroleum provided much needed fertilisers. The introduction of Green Revolution-related production techniques thus liberated agrarian production from the clutches of nature and natural forces to a great extent, and this led to greater industrialisation of agriculture. 'The industrialisation of agriculture required more than just technological change. It was also driven by a changing mindset that began to view farming as another industry, akin to making cars or textile.' (McKittrick, 2012: 412). There was also a shift in attitude towards nature with the onset of the Green Revolution; 'it differed from the indigenous strategies primarily in the lack of respect for nature's processes and peoples' knowledge. In mistakenly identifying the sustainable and lasting as backward and primitive and in perceiving nature's limits as constraints on productivity that had to be removed, American experts spread ecologically destructive and unsustainable agricultural practices worldwide.' (Shiva, 1991: 34). This ideology gradually but very subtly seeped into the psyche of the people. The ideal of life still prevalent was: Simple living and high thinking (Sada Jeevan Uchch Vichar/ सादा जीवन उच्च विचार). Conspicuous consumption which was earlier neither possible nor promoted was gradually challenged by the bounty of agrarian production based on low cost of energy. Soon after, an apparent inevitability of the requirements of the masses and greed of the better-off resulted in the merger of Indian economy with the emerging globalisation.[5]

Before moving on to the next section of my paper, it is necessary to briefly comment on the nature of environmental movements of the early decades of independent India. Even a cursory look at the inherent ethics of these movements makes clear the influence of Gandhian vision on human-nature relations wherein nature was celebrated and worshipped. People were ready to sacrifice their lives for the protection of nature and natural resources of their regions. The Chipko Movement was the epitome of environmental consciousness where it was proven that nature and natural resources were integral parts of the people's lives, and their livelihood was closely integrated with their surroundings (Gadgil & Guha, 1994). In accordance with the traditional vision which Gandhi had also envisaged, industrialisation or industry-based growth and progress

was not an option. Creation of wildlife sanctuaries was encouraged and large parts of landmass were segregated for the conservation of flora and fauna (Rangarajan, 2015b).[6] At times, development projects were also shelved to encourage preservation of pristine nature (Rangarajan, 2015c).[7] Nevertheless, we must not ignore the fact that the other parts of the world, especially developed countries, were gradually reaping the benefits of the 'free lunch' based on the abundant supply of energy available at very low production costs, which reflected in the interrelated cluster of four systems: electricity, individual motor vehicles, suburbs and places of leisure.

Of the four interrelated clusters, let us begin with electricity. On a very basic level, '[T]he gradual evolution of electricity has historically provided societies with a means for using energy in a multitude of ways. Electricity not only conditioned rapid industrialisation and economic growth in many parts of the world in the past century but also continues to play a crucial role in various aspects of everyday life throughout the world today.' (Winther, 2011: 1). Social benefits of electricity cannot be denied but what is being argued here is how the generation of electricity, its distribution and consumption culminated in an unprecedented change in people's relation with nature. Electricity supply means, 'systems of electric power generation and national electricity grids meant that most homes were lit, heated and populated with electricity based consumer goods and that Fordist factories were powered up. …Increases in the generation and consumption of energy led to the USA being the most high-powered society in history. …The average US household of 1970 commanded more energy than a small town had used during the eighteenth century' (Urry, 2011: 46). Energy consumption has only increased in developed countries since: electricity-based systems in place ensured that even the cacti in its native place, Arizona, were supplied with couple of drops of water every evening; the entire system was mechanised and continuously drew energy available in plenty in USA.

An equally (if not more) important representative of affluent lifestyle has been automobiles. 'They are the major item of consumption after housing and until recently more popular with each generation of young adults. Cars provide status to their owners through speed, security, safety, sexual success, career achievement, freedom, family and masculinity. Various "automotive

emotions" are built into owning and possessing a car. This developed into a dominant culture generating new notions of an *Autopia*' (Urry, 2011: 46-47).

A couple of systems more closely related with 'Autopia' have been places of residence and specialised leisure sites. The sheer thought that one's place of residence would be far off from their place of work can be directly related to the onset of the automobile revolution. Unlike traditional societies or the developing countries, development of suburbs in developed countries is for the rich—to a great extent—a manifestation of 'going back to nature' kind of environmentalism. 'This affirmation of country life, in direct opposition to the emerging urban-industrial culture, was perhaps most eloquently expressed in a rich literary tradition, flowering in some of the finest works in the English language. …During his lifetime Wordsworth walked some 175,000 miles through England… In his travel Wordsworth saw only "the darker side of the great change wrought by the Industrial Revolution: the outrage done to nature" by the cities and factories, such that the common people no longer "breathing fresh air" or treading the green earth' (Guha, 2014: 15). The last of the four systems has been the establishment of 'many specialised leisure sites, supermarkets, fast food outlets, national parks. Sports stadiums, theme parks develop. American society, with its suburbs, urban strips and mobile motel culture, is founded on car-based living. …Most necessitated travel from home and neighbourhood, especially by car. …increasingly, as in the case of the pleasure capital of Las Vegas, these are visited by air. Such places of leisure and pleasure involve the long-distance movement of many objects and foodstuffs on trucks, ships and aircraft.' (Urry, 2011: 47-48).

These four systems combined necessitated movement and consumption on a mass scale, initially in USA which very soon spread to western Europe and subsequently to the entire world. This process was facilitated by few very important global developments– technological development during the World War II, decolonisation, and emergence of the two blocs and mutual rivalry with each other during the Cold War and the subsequent post-Cold War era (McNeill & Unger, 2010). Growing affluence, comfort and reliance on energy-intensive amenities of the developed world was to a great extent the product of 'virtually free energy spurting out of the ground' (Urry, 2011: 5-6). However, the lesser known fact is that human capacity to extract and exploit natural

resources became economically feasible only due to the relative cost-effectiveness of this source of energy. The virtual 'free' nature of oil-based energy also facilitated movement of goods and services between long distances. If on the one hand low cost of energy resulted in lower cost of production for capitalist economies on an unprecedented scale, the low cost of transportation made it possible for them to flood the markets of developing economies, as a result of globalisation of consumerism. Gradual but continuous replacement of human labour by petroleum-driven heavy machinery unleashed unrestrained extraction of natural resources. Tragically, since the cost of production has only reduced, this has enabled the availability of goods at lower costs, making it difficult to oppose in economically-backwards societies.

One must not undermine the significant role of petrochemical revolution in furthering this process. Petrochemicals are a very complex set of industrial products that have reshaped almost every sphere of our daily life. A variety of industrial raw materials are either obtained or synthesised from petrochemicals, i.e., fertilisers, wax, soaps and detergents, preservatives, dyes, plastic commodities, plasters, sports shoes, explosives, etc.[8] An important byproduct of petrochemicals has been synthetic rubber, which has ensured an exponential expansion of the automobile industry (Tucker, 2007).

The very appropriately titled chapter 'Consuming Miles' (Urry, 2011) summarises the above discussed transitions and hints at the growing acceptance of new ideas about nature and environmental resources. 'Modern lives involve much movement beyond the neighbourhood. …The systems that link production and consumption became more extended in time and space, especially because of the way "electricity and the automobile transformed society"' (ibid.: 61). This holds true for the post-liberalisation era of Indian society, if not for the earlier periods as well. Vandana Shiva rightly argues in *Soil not Oil: Climate Change, Peak Oil and Food Insecurity* (2008), that '[T]oday the car has become inviolable. Culture and constitution can be violated to protect the car. Globalisation is literally being driven into India and corporate globalisation proclamation of the car as sacred silences other things held scared. Cars need highways and overpasses, they need fossil fuel, and they need aluminum, steel, and petrochemicals. Cars redesign the countryside and the city.' (2008: 49).[9]

This transition is very evident now; the 'chief concerns of the common man today are *बिजली, सड़क और पानी* (electricity, roads, and water). These priorities suggest that mobilisation around *roti, kapda aur makan* (food, clothing and shelter), which marked politics in the 1970s, is now passé; the demand for these bare essentials has been met and a second-order set of concerns now constitutes the basic needs of ordinary Indians.' (Baviskar & Ray, 2011: 1-2). However, this does not mean that poverty has been eliminated; rather new kinds of inequalities have emerged and these aspirations are merely manifestations of the ever-expanding middle class. It may be remembered that, 'despite the definite improvements in poverty levels, in the sense of the proportion of the poor falling, …the absolute number of the poor was still intolerably large in India, about 300 million in 2004-05. This made the size of the poor population nearly as large as what the size of the total Indian population was at Independence.' (Chandra, et al., 2008: 503).

For the sake of convenience, this paper restricts its focus to the middle class of India, especially those born in the present millennia. This can be termed as the post-liberalisation era; an era of the rise of the new middle class whose identity was not conditioned by the moral dilemma of past generations. The increasing dominance of market forces with greater integration with the world economy can be observed in 1990 and the years after. 'It facilitated foreign direct investment and trade, freed business firms from the license raj, and eased banking regulations to increase consumer credit and encourage spending. At the centre of these policies was the idea of a middle class unleashed from the chastity belt of Nerhuvian socialism and Indira-era austerities, finally able to savour the fruits of its disciplined and diligent work. This middle class would be the producer as well as consumer driving the engine of economic growth and prosperity…' (Baviskar & Ray, 2011: 2-3).

The emergence and consolidation of the middle class cannot be reduced to mere dynamics of globalisation and liberalisation. There is a long history of this emergence, but what is different for the era is the change one could see in their approach towards liberal values (Jipson & Jitheesh, 2019) and nature and environmental issues. The middle class has long been treated as a custodian of the ethics of society as well as guardian of nature and natural resources. It has been

argued quite appropriately that, 'Liberal democracy, …would not have been possible (in India) without the presence of a middle class mediating and moderating the sharp social conflicts of an unequal society, pre-empting authoritarianism of the right and the left. …To be middle class was to inhabit a particular orientation towards modernity. It meant being open-minded and egalitarian; following the rule of law and not being swayed by private motive or particular agenda; being fiscally prudent and living within one's means; and embracing science and rationality in the public sphere.' (Baviskar & Ray, 2011: 3-6).

These middle-class ideals and aspirations to a great extent were influenced by the 'goal of life' as envisaged during the national movement for independence. These were further reinforced through the ideals of education and education policy in the early years of the formation of the republic. It also cannot be ignored that the inherent potential as well as dilemmas of education culminated in the reorientation of middle-class values in the beginning of this millennia. In the early years of formation of the republic, education (especially higher education) was considered by the state as an important arena of investment to reap greater benefits. Demands of growing industries required trained and qualified manpower to manage the technical affairs of the industry. Well-educated youths were required to manage the civil and financial affairs of state bureaucracies and other allied affairs associated with 'nation building' (Mathew, 2016; Nandy, 1988). More importantly, given the linguistic divide, English retained the status of lingua franca, in other words it was able to retain its hegemony. With the middle class as the most prominent beneficiary, it could also secure a greater share when the Indian economy got merged with the global economy and the IT industry took a lion's share in the process.[10]

Thus, the desires and claims of the middle class became predominant in their political engagement.[11] Now, they had to secure their status and ensure continuance; this cost was logically borne by nature (D'Souza, 2015; Emmett & Lekan, 2016). It is equally important to note that the hegemony of capitalist production is so entrenched in the lives of the middle class that their desires and wishes can be easily manipulated by capitalist interests. A classic example is the almost 'elimination' of seasonal and regional specialties; with ever-increasing global connectivity coupled with possibilities of refrigeration, products of a particular region/s and

season/s are now available round the year across the globe. Homogenisation of taste and value has gradually eliminated diversity (Scott, 1998). This distancing from nature is further perpetuated by the perennial availability of once seasonal vegetables and fruits. Apples are easily available in supermarkets throughout the year; the notion that it will be available only in a particular season does not even occur to the customer. The concept of 'rarity' which the past generation had, has become 'regular' for the current generation. Availability of processed food has further alienated the millennia generation from nature (Kimbrell, 2002).

The present generation takes electricity and other luxuries as granted; this wasn't the case for the past generation. The new tool in the hands of this capitalist class is information and communication technology and it is so ingrained in their daily life that it is very difficult to ignore or negate its presence. The power of information and communication technology is being gradually recognised and low cost access to the digital world is a force to be reckoned with. The emergence of virtual reality has eliminated almost all social barriers and public collective actions. At the same time developments in the realm of artificial intelligence (AI) have been subtly shaping the desires and visions of masses, especially the middle class, because they have time for leisure.

It will not be out of place to mention here that the introduction of satellite television-led mass visual media showcased possibilities of a very comfortable life to the masses; this only increased with time. Subsequently, one of the most potent tools being deployed to channelise this demand was influencing behavioural patterns, which has been very elaborately captured in *Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019). Without going into the details of surveillance capitalism I would like to point out that it is the marketability of nature which is determining our response or negotiations with it. Tastes and aesthetics are now being redrafted in accordance with capitalistic supply of goods, rather than by their seasonal or regional availability. Distancing from nature has gone to the extent that nature itself has become a 'product' and is unfortunately mediated by the capitalist manipulation lubricated by easy and cheap availability of 'oil'; this is most beautifully and succinctly manifested in the slogan '*Yeh Dil Maange More…*' (Munshi, 1998). One of the most powerful manifestations can be located in the growth of the aviation industry in developing

countries like India during the past couple of decades.[12] Till 1990s, only the top-most bureaucrats were allowed to travel by air while availing facility of the Leave Travel concession, but now even entry-level officers are eligible to travel by air.

The exponential growth in the travel and tourism industry is also fuelled by the middle classes' desire to 'experience nature' but with provisions of 'air-conditioned accommodation' and 'continental gastronomic delicacies' facilitated by air-conditioned travel. The term 'air-condition' is the most apt description of middle-class sensibilities of nature; 'air has been conditioned' according to the conveniences or desires of the humans/ middle classes. Initially, air-condition led to proximity yet some 'distance' from the surroundings; it ensured a sort of immunity which ultimately resulted in a disdain for realities of nature. The new emerging character of middle class environmentalism can be put together in the following words: 'A striking feature of the Indian middle class is that it is largely immune to the transparent deprivations around. As per official statistics, close to 300 million people live below the poverty line. ...Another 300 million people hover just above this poverty line: one death in the family and or one accident and the entire family dips below poverty line. …If this is the degree of deprivation in India, why is it then that it is largely unnoticed by its middle and elite classes? This is the civilisational question posed to us when we seek to determine whether the middle class in India today, in the age of cosmopolitics, can build a civil society which alone can ensure its own future prosperity in the long term' (Varma, 2002: 87-88), and guarantee conscious efforts not to meddle with nature beyond ensuring basic needs.

Notes

[1] Distinction between environmental movements of the rich against the environmental movements of developing countries as argued by Guha (2014) captures these two divergent worldviews.

[2] At times her second tenure is considered to be dominated by populist measures which were contrary to middle class notions of environmentalism. Middle class 'back harsh measures against local people.' (Rangarajan, 2015c: 122).

[3] Further he points out: 'Taking agriculture, Meadow and co-workers have calculated that at the present level of productivity about 0.4 hectares of arable land will be needed to feed a person. The total world availability of arable land is about 3.2 billion hectares. As the population grows, more land is not only needed for producing more food, but also for urban-industrial use. Calculations show that in 2000 CE, the land available for agriculture will fall short of the amount needed to produce requisite quantity of food for the population at that time, at current productivity

levels. This 'doomsday' year will come 25 years later, if the productivity can be doubled and 50 years later, if the productivity can be quadrupled.' (2007: 163).

[4] Incidentally, it is important to note that, even at the outset of the Industrial Revolution in Europe (c.1800), more than 70 per cent of the mechanical energy used was supplied by human muscles.

[5] 'In India, until 1984 cars were designated a luxury product and their production was regulated; there were quotas on imports. Six Indian manufacturers dominated the Indian automobile industry' (Shiva, 2008:51).

[6] 'One set of critics whose platform calls for a more drastic overhaul of the conservation regime may be classified as members of the urban intelligentsia. …In general, they are not uncritical supporter of tradition, but they question the style and kind of modernization that has taken place. Livelihood is important to these critics, but increasingly they favour more far-reaching steps for the empowerment of disadvantaged social groups. Biological diversity was often the starting point for many such researchers and activists, but they hope to protect it through innovative and participatory measures, not coercive government machinery.' (Rangarajan, 2015a: 261-62)

[7] 'This was not the only such case (Silent Valley) where her (Indira Gandhi) intervention was critical to staving off a hydel project. The Moyar Dam that would have inundated the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary in neighbouring Tamil Nadu was also set aside.' (Rangarajan, 2015b: 179-80)

[8] Petrochemicals are chemically extracted from petroleum. Two major petrochemical classes are olefins like ethylene and propylene and aromatics like benzene, toluene and xylene isomers, etc. 'Petroleum History', in The Environmental Literacy Council, Washington DC. Accessed on 10 July 2019 at https://enviroliteracy.org/energy/fossil-fuels/petroleum-history/

[9] **'**From 2006 to 2011 India is projected to be the fastest growing auto manufacturer among the world's top 20 car-making countries. Most automobile companies are descending on India in their search for cheap land and cheap labour. …Bloomberg, the economic news agency, describes this as "cashing in on the nation's auto lust" but also recognizes that the "nation" in only 0.7 percent of the population. In India only 7 people in every 1,000 own a car, compared with 450 in the US and 500min Europe. The "market" is not 1.2 billion Indians but the 216 million members of the middle class.' P.50. Further she suggests, 'Since 1997, auto production has stagnated in Europe, North America and Japan, but in Asia and India, production has doubled. China accounts for the biggest increase, with production going up threefold from 1.5 million vehicles in 1997 to 4.6 million in 2005.' (2008: 51).

[10] Any discussion on the contemporary Indian middle class has to take account of its colonial origins and the changes that have occurred during the last century and a half in its social origins, composition and the role and orientations of this class. Moreover, an important feature of the new Western educated sections during the colonial period is that they were by and large upper caste, and predominantly Hindu (Ahmad & Reifeld, 2002: 11).

[11] According to Régis Debray (2019) the dominant capitalist philosophy of the world seems to be —"primacy of space over time, image over text, and happiness over the tragedy of everyday life (*le drame de vivre*)" (Majid, 2018).

[12] India is the ninth-largest civil aviation market in the world and presently has a market size of USD 16 billion. The industry is poised to become the third-largest aviation market by 2020 and the largest by 2030. It is among the five fastest- growing aviation markets globally, growing at over 20% year over year. The passengers carried by domestic airlines have increased by 41% from 129 million in Jan 2013- December 2014 to 181 million in Jan 201-Dec 2016. The growth of the industry is being propelled by the development of airports, presence of several low-cost carriers, a liberalized FDI policy, increasing adoption of information technology, and focus on improving regional connectivity. (Achievements Report, 2017: 3).

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