



Sustainable Living - 1



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Dear Friends,

Greetings from Amrita.

Beginning this month, we plan to start a new series on the theme of Sustainable Living / Sustainable Lifestyle. At the outset, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Working Group on Inner Sustainability, initiated by Vivekananda Kendra – Nardep, Kanyakumari. Most of the ideas I plan to include in this series have been accumulated through my participation in this working group, and I acknowledge the contributions by the group members.



In this series, we shall try to answer the following questions for the general public:

What is Sustainable Lifestyle?

- What is sustainability?
- How do lifestyles impact sustainability?
- Defining a sustainable Lifestyle

Why is this important?

- Our Mother Earth has abundant but limited resources
- All life forms have a claim on these resources
- Human beings are usurping the lions share, upsetting the balance
- Mother Earth is trying to reset the balance. (Unable to take the load?)

What are the principal components of Sustainable Lifestyle?

- Human beings consume Earth's resources to satisfy four basic needs:
 - Housing
 - Food
 - Transportation
 - Others, termed as Purchases

Sustainable lifestyles enjoin us to use our discretion in limiting our requirements to needs only, as best as possible.

It also suggests that we question our wants, and examine if they fall under the category of 'greed'. Gandhi-jee famously said, "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." [7]

How can one contribute towards promoting Sustainable Lifestyles?

There are various ways in which one can practice sustainable lifestyles in one's own life. Several resources are available towards this end. One of them is a tool known as 'Positive and Sustainable Lifestyle Tool'.

We shall now attempt to take a closer look at each topic.

What is sustainability?

The Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

In this section we attempt to make a subtle difference between sustainable development and the concept of sustainability per se, delinking it, in a way - from the ideas of 'development'.

Here is a summary of the background and history of sustainability drawn from Scopus AI

Caradonna (2017) traced the history of sustainability beginning with the United Nations series of conventions in the 1970s and 80s. [1]

Bergquist (2019) links business with sustainability, and highlights how the 20th century witnessed exponential growth in energy use, exercising excessive demand on Earth's natural resource reserves, leading to acute environmental problems. Add to it, the resulting societal inequity and conflicts, and we have a handful of grand challenges facing humanity. [2]

Helge (2010) proposed that the central theme in the nineteenth century was democracy, followed by the welfare state in the twentieth century and sustainability in the twenty-first century. [3]

Robinson (2004), in his review proposed an integrative approach towards sustainable development, taking care of the social aspects through involving local communities. [4]

Dabija (2021) traces the history of the concept of sustainability; and concludes that essentially it is a balancing effort between the demands of the planet and those of we humans. It is also a question of striking a balance within the human civilization. In other words, it is a balance between economic development, societal equity and justice, and environmental preservation. [5]

Let us now turn our attention on the evolution of the thought of sustainability based upon the Indian Perspective.

Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi (fondly called as Amma, meaning Mother), the world-renowned humanitarian leader emphasizes the fact that the entire creation is sustained on the principle of service, of giving. Beginning with the cosmos, the sun, the moon, the stars; coming down to a humble blade of grass, everything in Nature exists to give themselves unconditionally, without any discrimination. In fact, the very existence of Nature relies on this principle. A tree gives itself entirely, even after it is dead. Amma has equated spirituality with selflessness. Amma says, "Nature is a textbook, from which we must learn". The general reader may think that spirituality is not her / his cup of tea, and thereby skip or ignore this and similar other ideas. However, if one approaches the subject with an open mind, one would

find that spirituality must be everybody's business, as it deals with the very essence of our existence.

Swami Vivekananda cautioned:

“If you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilization of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.”

Amma, while addressing the UN Academic Impact – START / Amrita University Conference [6] on Technology for Sustainable Development stated:

“Segregating science and spirituality has been the greatest crime against humanity in the past century. ... All the recent natural disasters and the alarming changes in the global climate are challenging the further survival of this beautiful earth we live in. Now, many people cannot help thinking that all this may be the result of weighing science and spirituality on opposite sides of a scale and deeming that one is much greater than the other”.

There are several other indicators for sustainability in traditional Indian thoughts, but these two quotations would suffice to assert that the spiritual principles hold the key to defining sustainability, and thence provide us the pointers for living sustainably.

In conclusion, we suggest that humanity must look into spiritual traditions all across the globe, and draw lessons from Nature, as recommended by Amma, in order to find a workable solution to the dangers of present-day lifestyles of the rich.

References

- [1]. Routledge Handbook of the History of Sustainability, Caradonna, J.L. 2017.
- [2] Business and Sustainability, Bergquist, A.-K. The Routledge Companion to the Makers of Global Business, 2019.
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- [4] Squaring the circle? Some thoughts on the idea of sustainable development, Robinson, J.B. *Ecological Economics* 2004
- [5]. Principles of Sustainability: History and Evolution, Dabija, A.-M. Green Energy and Technology, 2021
- [6] <https://www.amritapuri.org/36660/15-un.aum>
- [7] <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/427443-the-world-has-enough-for-everyone-s-need-but-not-enough>

