

Sustainable development: - concept & contestation

Sarbani Guha Ghosal

Abstract

The concept of sustainable development is a new one in the domain of environment and development studies of our time. The concept is a highly contested one marked by the presence of several contradictory and competing ideas. Great emphasis is placed upon the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner while living within the limits of the supporting ecosystems. Sustainability is not simply an environmental concern but it has its political, economic, social, geographical dimensions as well.

Keywords: inter-generational equity, environmentalism, ecologism, anthropocentric, ecocentric

1. Introduction:

The idea of sustainable development has been specifically developed in the 1980s as a major political and environmental discourse. Since the days of the European renaissance followed by industrial revolution and the birth of colonialism the sphere of ideology of the world is dominated by the West. The last major political ideal that the developed countries persuaded the developing world to adopt was the notion of 'development'. From the perspective of the developed countries it was a devise to reduce the gap that separated them from the poor country. Accordingly, financial aids started pouring in the developing world. However, except countries like South Korea and Taiwan, the southern countries failed to realize the development ideals of the developed north. They continue to suffer from poverty, famine, uneducation and ill-health. Moreover, inequality within the countries increased in an unprecedented manner. The western dominant political ideology of development faced stiff challenge from the theorists and political leaders of the developing countries. It is in this juncture environment consciousness entered as a dominant model. Development paradigm based on nonstop conquering of nature associated with expansion, production, consumption and unrestrained growth are no longer considered as positive value for human progress and development. It is in this context the concept of sustainable development enters in our vocabulary as a linked idea of developmental and environmental concerns. In course of time gradually, the traditional notion of modern science and technology based "development" gave way to sustainable development and growth becomes "green growth".(Shiva., 1991., p. 10) Sustainable development was recommended, in particular, to the developing countries as a development path that would not replicate the environmental degradation that had been incurred in the industrialized countries. However, the leaders of the developing countries had a different agenda during the 1980s and they at that point of time were not ready to accept the western concept if sustainable development or to bear the entire load of keeping the world safe for the posterity on their own shoulder. The developed countries had become wealthy by despoiling their environments and those of the developing countries. So, it was seen as hypocritical of the former now to ask the developing countries

to protect environments and control population growth at the expense of their chance of development.(Grainger. & Purvis. (Ed), 2005., p. 4)

2.

Origin:

The notion of sustainable development emanates from the realization that nature's gift is more fundamental than financial strength for the overall development of the human being. However, the concern for environment and climate is not any new issue associated with modernity. They are seen as major determinants of growth and stability of civilizations throughout the history. The Egyptian civilization along the Nile to Indus Valley Civilization all were predominantly 'water civilizations' and they collapsed due to faulty use of the river and river-water. Similarly the Mayan civilization of the western hemisphere in the tenth century coincided with temperature rise and climatic change. Likewise, the fall of Mali civilization in Africa in thefourteenth century is attributed to severe changes in the climatic factors.(Rao., 2000., pp. 4-5)

The term sustainable development, though, is considerably newer terminology in social studies, but its core spirit, i.e., the concept of intergenerational equity, respecting the interest of those distant and yet to come is not new. In the Upanishads, the ancient Indian text for over 3000 years, it is stated that "all in this manifested world, consisting of moving and non-moving, are covered by Lord. Use its resources with restraint; do not grab the property of others, distant and yet to come."(Hulse., 2000., p. xii)Different religions like Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, Christianity, Confucianism, and Buddhism recognize restraint in consumption as an essential virtue. All have preached, in the words of the most indigenous man Mahatma Gandhi, "there is enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed". It is believed that nature is made in such a way that there will be a balance in the ecosystem and everybody gets enough what they need in proportions for them to lead a good life. Unfortunately it is our overarching greed which jeopardizes the entire arrangement.

Some scholars are of opinion that with the escalation of transboundary ecological problems from the 1970s onwards emerged as a dedicated subfield of International Relations; a new wave of green scholarship has developed reinterpreting the central concepts and discourses of International Relations and global politics. It has challenged the traditional understandings of security, development and international justice with "new discourses of ecological security, sustainable development, reflexive modernization and environmental justice." The concept of sustainable development opens up a critical inquiry on the issue of global climate change by including neglected areas of environmental domination and marginalization, such as the domination of non-human nature, the neglect of the needs of future generations and the skewed distribution of ecological risks among different social classes, states and regions. To their views, the environmental degradation caused by human activity has a long history but before European global expansion and industrial revolution it was largely uneven and relatively localized. The modern ecological crisis, in particular, has started in the latter half of the twentieth century or more precisely as "environmental side effects of the long economic boom following Second World War".(Eckersley., 2010., pp. 248-249)

3. Definition:

The buzzword in the domain of social studies regarding the genre of development since the last two decades of the past century is sustainable development. However, sustainable development is a “notoriously difficult, slippery and elusive concept to pin down”.(Williams. & Millington., 2004., p. 99)At least eighty different and often competing and sometimes contradictory definitions have been identified. The concept is often identified as “environmental paradox” for nearly all commentators on sustainable development mismatch between what is demanded of the earth and what the earth is capable of supplying.

It is evident from the various scholarly literatures that sustainable development is a concept where different actors have different perspectives and interests, so one cannot expect that all will agree even on the meaning of the term. At the same time, it is not worthy to make any attempt to provide an ideal definition. Contrarily, sustainable development is a type of concept for which instead of a “good definition” we should attempt to provide a “good description”.(McNeill., 2000., pp. 10-16)Some others believe that sustainable development attempts to meet the overall challenge presented by environment and development. Originally, in the 1950s, sustainability described the continued thriving of a biological species which might become depleted or even extinct through human activity. Later, it was extended to describe the whole ecosystem. Conservation and biodiversity are directly linked to the notion of sustainability.(Wilson., 2010., p. 7)This normative concept refers to a desirable state that refers to the robustness of something and its continuing ability to do whatever it does effectively. There are many sustainabilities, but predominantly they are grouped into three interconnected areas of concern: environment, society and economy. At the same time, it has to be accepted that sustainability is not an end state, but is continually being reinvented.

In their introductory note of their popular collection Agyeman, Bullard and Evans have remarked that sustainability is a clearly contested concept, but our interpretation of it places great emphasis upon precaution, on the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, while living within the limits of supporting ecosystems. They mention that, “unless analyses of development begin not with the symptoms, environmental or economic instability, but with the cause, social injustice, then no development can be sustainable.”(Agyeman. Bullard. & Evans., 2003., p. 3) At the same time, we have to remember that, “a truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare and economic opportunity are integrally connected to environmental concerns.”

With the publication of “Our Common Future” or the World Commission on Environment & Development report (WCED), popularly known as the Brundtland report, 1987 an important shift can be noted in the traditional conservation based usage of the concept of sustainable development as developed in the 1980 by the International Union on Conservation & Nature (IUCN). It has developed a framework emphasizing the social, economic and political context of development. But WCED later has adopted a more holistic view on the issue of sustainable development. The Brundtland Report so far has provided the most popular definition of the concept by simply using the meaning of the term development in a simple way; as “what we all do in attempting to improve our lives”. The report categorically states, “...we must ensure development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs...sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the

direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with both future and present needs...” WCED does not make any pretension and thus says, “...the development process is not easy or straightforward... painful choices have to be made...and in the final analysis sustainable development must rest on political will”.(ibid., p. 5)

The concept of sustainable development, according to the green theorist like Robyn Eckersley, draws influence from the disciplines of environmental ethics and environmental philosophy., which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s when anthropocentrism and human chauvinism have been questioned. Since the beginning of human civilization humans are considered as the apex of evolution, the centre of value and only beings that possess moral worth. Rejecting such a posture as “arrogant, self-serving and fool-hardy, the green theorists have embraced a new ecocentric philosophy that seeks to respect all life forms in terms of their own sake, and not merely for their instrumental value to humans.” From ecocentric perspective, “environmental governance should be about protecting not only the health and well-being of existing human communities and future generations, but larger web of life, made up of nested ecological communities at multiple levels of aggregation like gene pools, populations, species, ecosystems.”(Eckersley., 2010., p. 251)

To conclude this section, we can say once again that sustainable development is a normative concept. Indeed, the heart of the argument deals with “a fair distribution of natural resources available among different generations, as well as among the populations of the First, the Second and the Third World of our own generation. Though the concept is given massive support throughout the whole world, the realization of sustainable development is highly problematic.”(Dietz. & Straaten., 1993., p. 134) One of the greatest problems is the operationalization of the concept. In this respect many questions arise and remain unanswered. Our next section of the article will deal with some of those problem areas. Actually, without understanding the debates related to the issue of sustainable development and the major challenges and diversifications within the issue it is not possible to comprehend the exactness of the concept.

4. Debates and Diversifications:

The concept of sustainable development as a major theoretical devise and practical mechanism to protect the environment from depletion and degradation is marked by the presence of several interrelated debates. The major one is the debate between the issues of weaker sustainable development and stronger sustainable development. This debate is very much a part of the environmentalism versus ecogism debate and the northern interpretation of sustainable development versus the southern interpretation of sustainable development debate.

Conjoining the conflict between the demand on the environment and resources of the environment is a major political problem. The weaker and stronger concepts of sustainable development have developed in this regard as a method of conflict resolution.(Williams. & Millington., 2004., pp. 100-102)The weaker sustainable development does not see the need to transform either the predominant narrative on nature or existing prominent on economic progress and development. It continues to believe that economic growth is a valid measure for progress. It follows an anthropocentric view on the relationship between people and nature and considers that:

- a) People are separate from nature;

- b) The nature is a resource to be used for the benefit of society or individuals;
- c) We have the right to dominate over the nature.

Advocates of weaker sustainable development argue that capitalism must better accommodate environmental concerns. Thus, they advocate for provisions of better environmental management. Their overarching belief is that “economic growth and resource exploitation can continue, what is required is better accommodation of environmental issues. Actually, at the heart of weaker sustainable development is an implicit optimism. There is a confidence that people will be able to find a solution to any kind of environmental problem. They will be able to enhance the stock of resources. Technological progress will enable people to manipulate the earth to meet their enormous demands on it.

In the school of weaker sustainability two groups of scholars are identified. The first one believes in the possibility of improving the efficiency of economic growth by using fewer natural resources. This group is in favour of ecological modernization. The believers in this group, like Peter Roberts, argue to improve the efficiency of economic growth through sustainable waste practices. The second group believes that economic growth can continue but there is a need to redistribute the cost and benefits in a more equitable manner on either an intra and /or intergenerational level. The followers of this group, like Agyeman and Evans, upheld the idea of environmental justice. These weak or soft sustainability theorists accept that certain resources can be depleted as long as they can be substituted by others over time. This approach focuses on the relationship between socio-economic disparities. It believes that natural capital can be used up as long as it is converted into manufactured capital of equal value. The problem of weak sustainability is that it can be very difficult to assign a monetary value to natural materials and services and it is also a fact that some of these cannot be replaced by manufactured goods and services. (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans., 2003., pp. 5-6)

The harder or stronger sustainability discourse implies that renewable resources must not be drawn down faster than they can be replenished. It emphasizes upon changing the demands made on the earth. This group of theorists considers the earth as finite and no habitable future is possible unless the demand side of the equation radically alters by rethinking our attitude towards nature as well as our views on economic progress and development. Stronger sustainable theorists believe that “weaker versions of sustainable development are more about sustaining development rather than sustaining environment, nature, ecosystems or the earth’s life support systems.” (Williams & Millington., 2004., p. 102) This approach tries to eliminate anthropocentrism completely regarding the relationship between people and nature. Their approach is ecocentric and they assert that “nature has similar rights that do not need to be justified in terms of their benefits to the humankind.” For achieving a better world, the stronger sustainable development commentators ask for the need to change demands on the earth. They advocate for a more small-scale decentralized way of life based upon greater self-reliance, so as to create a social and economic system less destructive towards nature.

In the literature concerning the environmental crisis and the ecological movement the environmentalist-ecologist dichotomy is a major area of concern. In the views of Wouter Achterberg, environmentalism is a “superficial” or “reformist” vision. It regards that environmental problems are mainly management problems and those can be resolved within the context of dominant political and economic system and “without any rigorous change in our values and culture.” Contrarily, there is a second version of ecologism or deep ecology, aiming at more structural change. It proposes a radical change in our attitude towards nature, and therefore in our political and social system also. The value perspective of environmentalism is anthropocentric and that of ecologism is fully ecocentric. However, for

Achterberg's pragmatic view, ecocentric does not mean subordination of human values to those of nature, but complete recognition of non-human intrinsic values. It is with this vision derives sustainability or sustainable development as the right path towards the solution of environmental problems. This view can be elaborated in such a way that tends towards environmentalism, and can be extended as well to include proposals that recognize nature's intrinsic values.(Achterberg., 1993., pp. 84-85)

Eminent British green political scientist Andrew Dobson has analyzed the concept of sustainable development with reference to green political theory at different points of time. In his illustrious book on green political thought he begins with a distinction between environmentalism and ecologism. The former, to him, is a managerial approach towards environmental problems with a belief of solving those without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production or consumption; while the latter holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with non-human natural world and in our mode of social and political life.

In dealing with the environmental problems, in essence, the green politics seeks nothing less than a "non-violent revolution to overthrow our materialistic industrial society and in its place tries to create a new economic and social order which will allow human beings to live in harmony with the planet." According to Dobson, "the green Movement lays claim to being the most radical and important political and cultural force since the birth of socialism". He feels this very character of the green movement will be missed if we restrict our understanding in the guise of an environmentalism that seeks a "cleaner service economy sustained by cleaner technology and producing cleaner affluence".(Dobson., 1995., pp. 1-10)

The political ecologist's view of sustainable society is of two fold. Firstly, that consumption of material goods by individuals in advanced industrial countries should be reduced. In other words, a limit to growth is impossible without limits to consumption. Secondly, the human needs are not best satisfied by continual economic growth. The deep greens further argue that truly sustainable society would replace the present consumer society and would provide for wider and more profound forms of fulfillment than provided by the consumption of material objects. The green contention is that the sustainable society would be a spiritually fulfilling place to live in. Indeed, "radical green programme can hardly be understood without reference to the spiritual dimension on which it likes to dwell."(ibid., pp. 16-18)This view is the target point for the critics of deep-greens, because since the renaissance and enlightenment, officially at least, the domain of spiritualism is separated from political life. In fact, spiritualism cannot be a mandatory principle to be obeyed for human existence.

Deep ecology or ecologism is equally critical to capitalism and socialism. It identifies "the super ideology of industrialism as the thesis to be undermined." Their perspective does not make any difference between capitalism and communism as they do not make any appreciable difference on who owns the means of production.(ibid., p. 30)To them, the high levels of environmental degradation in Eastern Europe is on no way lesser harmful than that of the capitalist world. Dobson further observes that ecologists and environmentalists are inspired to act by the environmental degradation they observe, but their strategies for remedying it differ wildly. Environmentalists do not subscribe to the limits of growth thesis, nor do they typically seek to dismantle industrialism. They believe that technology can solve the problem it creates. He elaborates three principal thoughts related to the limits to growth thesis that have come to be of prime importance to the radical green position. Firstly, technological solutions

cannot themselves bring about a sustainable society. Secondly, the rapid rates of growth aimed for by industrialized and industrializing societies have an exponential character, which means that dangers stored up over a relatively long period of time can very suddenly have a catastrophic effect. Thirdly, the interaction of problems cannot be dealt with in isolation and solving one problem does not solve the rest and may even exacerbate them.(ibid., pp. 61-62)

The landscape of political theory has been greatly transformed by the ecological challenge of the last few decades. Eruption of the environment on to the political scene has seen a palpable rise in interest in environmental political theory among mainstream political theorists. Virtually no branch of political theory has escaped the influence of sustainability. In this regard we can again refer to Dobson who has raised a very important question in this regard. He has pondered whether a sustainable society can be brought about through the use of existing institutions? To him, environmentalism and liberalism are compatible, but ecologism and liberalism are not, because a lot of liberal political theory runs counter to radical environmental ideology. Individualism, pursuit of private gain, limited government and market freedom are contradicted by radical economic commitments.(ibid, pp. 162-165)However, a more prudent theoristAchterberg believes that the political conception of sustainable development is largely based upon central elements in the political philosophy of liberalism. Therefore, it can play a legitimizing role within a liberal democracy, which is necessary in view of the radical changes connected with the solution to or control of the environmental crisis.(Achterberg., 1993., p. 99)

Ecologism is not compatible to socialism either, to Dobson, as the socialists identify capitalism as the source of all ills of contemporary society, while the ecologists condemn industrialization per se. The greens actually consider themselves to be “beyond left and right”. In a later writing Dobson has dealt with another related issue.(Dobson, 2003., pp. 83-94) It is the relationship between social justice and environmental sustainability. Initially he argues that these are not always compatible objectives, though from “political point of view there are tremendous benefits in marrying the two”. From his observations of the German situation he derives that this kind of rapprochement can be temporary and transient only. To him, the reds (advocates of social justice) and the greens (advocates of ecologism) have fundamentally different objectives and “to expect socialists and environmentalists to form a common cause is as unrealistic as to expect liberals and socialists to make a common cause.” Their difference is not merely tactical but strategic as well. He admits that social justice is as contested a term as sustainable development. However, in later part of the article he somehow mellowed his stand and states that from the point of view of providing the future generation with adequate opportunity and not to deprive them from enjoying and experiencing available all alternatives “the objectives of social justice, i.e., equal distribution of opportunities and sustainability as the preservation of biodiversity are same.”

Another important political concept, nationalism also is related to the issue of sustainable development. Nationalism, with its idea of nation as an ongoing chain of generations that is not only past, but future oriented and which extends beyond one’s lifetime into future, may sustain an obligation to future generation that overrides any time preference. This obligation is a key to sustainable development. Nationalists argue that we contemporaries must not inflict harms on our descendants, because it might risk the continuation of nation. Nationalists are therefore likely to consider environmental issues as a matter of distribution of access to environmental goods across generations and rule out any policy that arbitrarily inflicts harm on future generations.(Shalit., 2006., p. 80) However, we can say that in the practical politics many methods adopted by nationalists are often not congenial to sustainability discourse as it often encourages parochialism and destruction of environment.

The relationship between feminism and sustainability studies is another important area in academics. Since the early 1970s a growing interest in women's relations with the environment in the countries of the south emerged within the development discourse. At the Nairobi Forum 1985, held parallel to the UN Women and Development Conference, women's actions and special role in environmental management were presented with case studies that documented their involvement in forestry, agriculture, energy and so on based on the experience of the women living in the south. Women were portrayed as environmental managers whose involvement is crucial to the achievement of sustainable development. After the publication of the Brundtland report (1987) the WED (Women, Environment, Development) debate focused on the imperative for women's involvement in strategies and programmes aimed at sustainable development. Since the late 1980s the images of the poor women in the south as victims became transformed into images of strength and resourcefulness in the WED theme. In the wider debate on sustainable development women were increasingly promoted as privileged environmental managers and depicted as possessing inherent skills and knowledge in environmental care. A cultural stream of thought sees women's position as essentially closer to nature because within the sexual division of labour their work has always entailed a close relationship with nature. It perceives the women, nature relation as one of reciprocity, symbiosis, harmony, mutuality and interrelatedness due to women's close dependence on nature for subsistence needs. (Braidotti. & Charkiewicz., 1997., pp. 54-56)

In her radical form of environmentalism Eckersley has established a significant relationship between the Critical theorists and green perspectives. (Eckersley., 1990., pp. 740-743) Critical theorists, notably Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse were of opinion that the original emancipatory promises of Marxism had not been fulfilled because the existing development process is essentially a negative one that gave rise to the domination of both outer and inner nature. This was reflected, on the one hand, in the environmental crisis and on the other hand, in the repression of humanity's joyful and spontaneous instincts. These Frankfurt School theorists had longed for a reconciliation of the negative dialectics of Enlightenment that would liberate both human and non-human nature. While Adorno and Horkheimer were pessimistic in this as to the prospect of such reconciliation ever occurring, Marcuse remained hopeful of the possibility that a new science might be developed, based on a more expressive and empathic relationship to the non-human world.

The north-south controversy associated with the concept of sustainable development is another important issue area. It is often considered as an agenda for the developed north to annihilate all forms of possible challenges and competition from the south. The rise of the concept coincides with the rise of east after the decolonization process and particularly after the emergence of the People's Republic of China as a frontal power. The neo-imperial north never accepted the rise of the south positively. The entire UNCED process can be seen as a struggle between the developing and developed countries to define sustainable development in a way that fits their own agenda. The developed countries put the environment first. By contrast, the developing countries put development first. The term was not used in the UNCED documents to refer to an optimum path of development. "It was simply a device to reconcile the aspiration of the developing countries to develop and the developed world's desire to curb this development in order to protect the global environment." (Grainger., 2005., pp. 299-301) In the views of Grainger, sustainable development has its place only in the minds of states, a codeword for bargaining. The developed countries want a better global environment, while the developing countries was for more development, and the groups of states will trade off one against the other in course of

extended negotiations. This means that “sustainable development at the global level remains a compromise, but a different and less attractive one from that which most idealists would like.”

The concept of sustainable development is often regarded as a mechanism to further the neo-liberal objectives and ambitions. It was originally a creation of international relations, being offered by the developed countries to the developing countries as “a guide to best practice”. If the latter countries comply with the sustainable development ideals, as proposed by the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN) 1980, they would have to avoid the past development paths of the developed countries, with all the environmental degradation these caused, and not replicating them.”(ibid., p. 279)In other words, through the mechanism of sustainable development the first world countries that have polluted significantly during their development process encourage the developing countries to reduce pollution. However, till today, pollution generated, particularly in areas like carbon emission or nuclear waste disposal of the western countries is much higher than the sum total of the developing countries. Critics thus argue that for a planet where 20% consumes 80% of natural resources a scheme of sustainable development for those 20% is just not any acceptable proposition.(Brockington. Duffy. & Igoe.(Ed), 2008., p. 133)

The north versus south debate of the concept of sustainable development has its clear effect on the nature versus people issue as well. The north prioritizes conservation of nature over alleviation of poverty and the protagonists of the south desire to invert the order. It is in this context we can refer to Vandana Shiva, the eminent physicist turned environmentalist, who is of opinion that G7 can demand a forest convention that imposes international obligations on the Third World to plant trees. But the Third World cannot reverse it nor can parallelly demand that the industrialized countries should reduce the use of fossil fuels and energy. “All demands are externally dictated – one way –from North to South. The ‘global’ has been so structured, that the North (as the globalized local) has all rights and no responsibility, and the South has no rights, but all responsibility.”(Shiva., 1993., p. 154)Thus, it is not wrong to say that sustainable development establishes dualism and false dichotomies. It is completely partial in approach as different sets of rules and practices are suggested for different groups of human beings of different areas. It does not try to resolve the conflict between the life-producing and preserving and the commodity producing activities.

There is also a stream of anthropological critique of sustainability. The theorists from New Zealand Rixecker and Matua have said that the contemporary system of environmental politics enshrined in and legitimated through international and national laws premised upon western legal system and modernity. It becomes especially challenging for indigenous peoples to reclaim and control their native homes, cultures, practices and beliefs. The rise of the corporate giants has added another dimension to the challenge as multinational corporations become major economic and political power brokers in decision making previously reserved for the national governments and their respective heads of the state. In this context, the indigenous have had to become more resourceful than ever before to secure and protect their cultural and environmental heritage.(Rixecker. & Matua., 2003., pp. 253-254)

Pro-active governance is the most important prerequisite for the sustainable development plans. It is very difficult to create a system of governance that promotes, facilitates and formulates policies and strategies striving for human development, resource conservation and upholds the rule of law in allocation and judicious utilization of development resources. Feeble legal and judicial systems and inefficient administrative and implementing mechanisms undermine the entire process sustainable

development. There is no denial of the fact that the concept of sustainable development is inherently “technocratic, bureaucratic and managerial in outlook and approach”. At the same time, in its application local perspectives are largely discounted, as the actions of the locals are held responsible for environmental degradation by the developed world. The local elites of the south often take advantage of the situation as well. They, equipped with the sustainable development discourse and impression of environmental crisis, seek to acquire foreign funds for their projects related to the issue of environmental protection. For the anthropologists, emic perspectives that is knowledge, interpretation and perspectives of those within the culture are sidelined and environmental concerns are addressed ahead of basic survival interests of the locals. (Smyth., 2011., pp. 80-82)

5. Conclusion:

From a green perspective, the idea of sustainable development, particularly, the Brundtland approach represents “an artful political compromise rested on an instrumental orientation towards the non-human world and ignored the question of biodiversity preservation in focusing only on intra and intergenerational equity. Even more problematically, the Report assumed that sustainable development could be achieved by increasing economic growth rate”. They maintain that the technologically oriented discourse of ecological modernization have overestimated the synergies between capitalist development and environmental protection. The green critics also argue that a strategy of technologically driven modernization provides no means of addressing the deeply skewed distribution of ecological risks among different social classes and nations. In contrast, the Brundtland Report was concerned to promote the intra and intergenerational equity, but it relied on the “tickle-down effect” brought about by increasing growth. The recommendations of sustainable development encapsulate a paradox that, “environmental protection is best achieved by pursuing more (albeit environmentally efficient) growth, which generates more aggregate environmental problems (albeit at a slower rate). It is believed that ecological problems persist because they are generated by the very economic, scientific, and political institutions that are called upon to solve them.” The paradox of sustainable development therefore cannot be resolved by pursuit of more environmentally efficient means to pursue given ends. It is rather necessary to pursue “reflexive modernization”, which entails reflecting critically and continuously on the means and ends of modernization. (Eckersley., 2010., pp. 253-254)

In reality, sustainable development is not at all a desired project for the developing world; it is a necessity for the whole of humanity. The holistic and inclusive nature of sustainable development encompasses a wide range of issues as interconnected parts of a whole and addresses the entire population of the globe rather than the conventional differentiating state centric model. (Mirabagheri. (Eds), Nikolopoulou. Abraham., 2010, p. xx) Contrarily, this is also not a full proof method particularly when we look at issues like climate change or hole in the ozone layer. On the one hand, these are problems for the entire human race and on the other, the intensity of these problems are not same everywhere and so policy prioritizing should also be different. At the same time discriminatory policies must not be encouraged. In this context we can refer to Vandana Shiva who is of opinion that we are against transforming common natural resources into commodities and deprivation of politically weak communities of access to resources, robbing the resources of the nature and growth of the market for the privileged social groups. (Shiva., 1993., p. 154)

6. Epilogue:

The concept of sustainable development is definitely one of the most paradoxical and contested area in the domain of theoretical and practical politics of our own times. But it does not mean that we do not require it. It is about social justice, equity and human rights for the future generations. Demand for sustainability is in fact, a particular reflection of universality of claims – applied to future generations, vis-à-vis us. But following Amartya Sen we can say that, “in trying to prevent the deprivation in the future we must not ignore the deprived people of today.”* **In other words**, the notions of inter and intra-generational equity along with the discourse of environmental justice needs to be firmly placed within the framework of sustainability. These issues require to be respectfully followed both by the citizens and policy makers in order to make them practicable. Optimum use of natural resources along with precautionary principles and compensatory principles should be executed as far as possible. Polluting and destroying nature should be considered as acts of violation of human rights of the present and future generations. Furthermore, a balance has to be restored between ecological and environmental principles of development without allowing any single one to usurp the objectives of the other. It may sound impractical at the onset but the intellectual development of the world will be able to find a solution definitely. The Human Development Report has categorically stated that sustainability can be most fairly and effectively achieved by addressing health, education, income and gender disparities together with the need for global action on energy production and ecosystem protection.(UNDP., 2011.)

UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon in his address to the General Assembly on September 21, 2011 has identified sustainable development as the first and greatest imperative of the 21st century to shape the world of tomorrow. To him, “...saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, advancing economic growth...these are one and the same fight. We must connect the dots between climate changes, water scarcity, energy shortages, global health, food security and women’s empowerment...Let us develop a new generation of sustainable development goals to pick up where the Millennium Development goals leave off. Let us agree on the means to achieve them.”(UNSG., 2011.)

Finally, if we are morally obligated to assume responsibility as the central characteristic of our existence we cannot stop with the intra and intergenerational responsibility towards humans we definitely have to incorporate the biosphere. At the same time we have to remember also, on the basis of the above discussions, that consensus regarding environmental issues can never be achieved because the different stakeholders have different kind of interests on the issue. To keep the world habitable for human and non-humans we have to strike a balance between the anthropocentric / environmental issues and the ecocentric/ecological issues. Total dependence on the former will sooner or later reach a critical stage and the opposite will be a utopia. At the same time this convergence is quite problematic.

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