

CAN WE STILL TURN A BLIND EYE TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

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“We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it.”

- Barack Obama, Former US President



Should we be surprised that climate change has made its way into our day-to-day vocabulary, so much so that it sounds absurd and judgmental to propose its definition while attempting to discuss the major concerns relating to climate change? The even greater irony of the matter is that despite the awareness about the issue and how grave it is becoming with each passing day, we still seem to only talk about it, express our concern, discuss its hazardous results and then continue with the activities that led to the starting point of climate change in the first place. It is high time that we should feel worried about it, as the disaster caused by climate change is approaching us at an accelerated speed, and any time, the future ecological dystopia will become our present reality.

Environmentalists constantly revolt against the mindless experimentation and exploitation of natural resources and, often, are perceived as people who do not understand the importance of a forward-looking mindset and are ignorant of the role of technological and scientific advancement at this juncture of human civilisation.

Their concerns are often ignored as the irrelevant words of the ones with primitive approaches towards life – how can the environment's health be perceived to affect human life in such a grave manner in the face of all the technological and scientific progress we have so painstakingly made over the years?

But the bitter truth is that in the last few years, the effects of climate change have become so conspicuous that one cannot ignore them even if one wishes to. There is a crisis posed in terms of our basic survival needs. This should alarm us from the long slumber that ‘the average temperature of the Earth’s surface is now about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s (before the industrial revolution). The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record, and each of the last four decades has been warmer than any previous decade since 1850’.¹ Studies show that the Arctic Sea ice is reducing by 13.1% per decade; 418 billion tons of ice sheets melt yearly and the global sea level is rising by 3.3 mm per year.² All these are affecting planet earth's health and drastically changing our living conditions in an unprecedented manner.

Water scarcity and contaminated water are only part of the problem, as what follows are the various health issues that sometimes are beyond treatment. Floods, forest fires, droughts, storms and societal damage are the other ends of the extreme related to water. Even the geophysical phenomena are eventually affected by climate change; volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis are all indicators of how climate change is causing a danger to human existence. Warmer land and air are one of the initial effects of climate change, and no one is untouched by its harmful results. The warming of the oceans, melting of sea ice and glaciers, rising sea levels, ocean acidification, changes in ocean currents and unusually extreme weather conditions³ are the starting points of more alarming issues directly affecting us. Mass migration due to climate change and other related factors has led to problems that require immediate attention and solutions. Not only that, climate change has also led to the extinction of many animal species and habitat destruction. Changes in seasonality, infrastructure damage, and food insecurity affect our way of living and cause behavioural changes that often go unnoticed.

Martina Igini, the Managing Editor of Earth.Org, points out in her article on the 'tipping points of climate change', "Prior to the Industrial Revolution and all the subsequent detrimental human activities, the global average amount of carbon dioxide was about 280 parts per million (ppm). Today, that level is close to 420 ppm; and every tonne of CO₂ emissions adds to global warming."⁴ Every step taken in the name of advancement is leading us towards a catastrophe. One cannot deny that greenhouse gas emission constantly changes the weather pattern and our ecological system, and may result in irreversible consequences. Our day-to-day activities or one can rather say the mere act of living on our terms, is causing drastic changes in the environment – the burning of fossil fuels in the modes of transportation, emissions by industries,

, unnecessary use of electricity, internet usage, the recent introduction of cryptocurrency, use of fertilisers and deforestation⁵ – everything is making us responsible for turning the earth into a deadly gas chamber for posterity.

Before it is too late, we need to be mindful of the choices we are making for ourselves. Unfortunately, every step we take in the name of human progress and evolution moves us farther away from our connection with and fulfilling our responsibilities towards the environment. The gravity of the matter can also be put in perspective by the fact that, in recent times, even the entertainment has focused on the issue of climate change. To name a few among many at the regional, national and international level, in films, series and documentaries like Bhopal Express (1999), Kadvi Hawa (2017), Bhatinda (2017), An Inconvenient Truth (2006), The Day the Earth Stood Still (2008), Chasing Ice (2012), Eating Our Way to extinction (2021), Burning (2021), Don't Look Up (2021), the filmmakers have constantly drawn attention to the causes and impact of catastrophic climate shift including issues of scanty rainfall, barren lands, fires, water-contamination, increasing number of thermal power plants and factories, melting glaciers, political indifference and inaction, lack of media attention, dire consequences of human actions, and the negative impact of the food industry while also suggesting the possible solution to the global issue.

As intelligent as the human species is believed to be, we know that rarely any environmental change happens overnight. Therefore, when we express our concern for climate change, it is inevitable for us to look back and analyse what led to the current situation to find out solutions to it and see if it is only a retreat in certain aspects that can redeem us or if it will take an entirely different course of action to save the climate and ourselves. In both scenarios, a consciousness of the past and future is what we need. What we now need to realise is that the emergent need to remove that blindfold of selfishness and self-

importance is standing face-to-face in front of us, and if we do not still pay heed to it and continue with our destructive actions, we will soon be devoured by our desire for control and self-sufficiency. Now is the time to address and hold conclusive discussions to answer all the questions that climate change has posed before us. We must efficiently execute our plans and take measures to avoid environmental deterioration. We must ensure that we immediately stop all the activities impacting the environment negatively and, if not that, adopt more environment-friendly alternatives even if it is done at the cost of initial inconvenience. We need to sincerely and altruistically address the issue of the continued burning of fossil and look for methods that are not harmful to our climate. There is also a need to accept that many of the recent natural calamities are part of the vicious circle of destruction by human beings and vindication of nature in turn; therefore, we must stop our destructive steps before it is too late. Most of all, we must ensure the success of the 'green' agenda and limit activities that increase carbon footprints in any way.⁶

At an elementary level, we can adopt some preventive measures to avoid further deterioration of climate conditions. It is vital to encourage the use of renewable energy resources and invest in energy-efficient and good-quality electric appliances to reduce the harmful effects of energy consumption. Saving water in whichever way possible also reduces the energy consumption used in water treatment. No food wastage, and composting the leftover food helps create a better environment.⁷ It requires a little effort until that first step becomes a habit.

A change in our socio-political approach and increased sensitisation towards climate will ensure the well-being of our environment. With that, as we continue making technological, industrial and scientific advancements, we should also remember that renewable resources and immaterialist behaviour patterns are a --

we should also remember that renewable resources and immaterialist behaviour patterns are a way to a healthy ecological system that benefit all. Systematic approach and thoughtful development patterns are a way to construct a sustainable society that paves the way for a future that would be more welcoming than dystopic. Even the most minor step taken in the right direction makes a huge difference and can lead to collective consciousness and actions to reverse the negative impacts of climate change.

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