

21ST CENTURY HUMANS AND/Vs THE ENVIRONMENT

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Approximately a quarter of the species of plants and animals are under threat of extinction, at a rate unprecedented in relation to paleo-historical records; three-quarters of the terrestrial environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions; more than a third of the world's land area and almost 75% of freshwater resources are now used for agricultural or livestock production; the value of agricultural production has increased by about 300% since 1970; the raw timber harvest has increased by 45%; and each year approximately 60 billion tons of renewable and non-renewable resources are extracted globally, almost double of what it was in 1980. (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019) 1*

In the highly digitalised world, sunk deep into technology, electronics, bots, metaverse, cloning and different kind of mutations, we humans constantly fret over the dangers posed to the humankind, as what we see is that we are not too far from the times when humans will no longer be the only cognitive entities, that it is only a matter of time when we will find ourselves a puppet in the hands of merciless technology. However, what we fail to see is that we ourselves are responsible for the dangers hovering over us; what we fail to see is how utterly selfish we are in looking at the bleak picture only in relation to ourselves; what we fail to see is how audacious it is of us to believe ourselves to be at the receiving end of cruelty when we ourselves are the perpetrators.

The aim of this article is not to present a scientific study of environmental concerns or to use scientific jargon to make of some theoretical observations for the sake of discussion. What I aim to do with the article is to hold a mirror to all of us and show how, as we indulge in our routine day today life, we unknowingly become our strongest enemy while abusing everything that should have been preserved as a precious gift.

In the past few years, a new vocabulary has made its way into our academic discussions where we often find ourselves discussing the ideas relating to posthumanism and the Anthropocene, and strangely, these discussions reverberate in the corridors of theories and criticisms, whereas the need of the hour is that they should stimulate awareness, sensitisation and responsibility in all humans so as to what should be our measures at the grassroot level to contribute to the environment preservation in the slightest way possible. Every step, every measure counts when it comes to harm or preserve the environment, in which direction we take that step is going to decide the health of our environment and our wellbeing at the same time. Pollution, carbon footprints, climate change, greenhouse effect, ozone layer, soil erosion, deforestation, mention any word, and one cannot fail but notice how human beings are at the centre of the environmental concerns, and how ironic it is that we ourselves are responsible for creating a vicious circle we endeavour to break so desperately yet inefficiently and superficially.



One can clearly see that it is the self-centredness of human beings, their urge to see everything in relation to them that has caused havocs. If analysed critically, what one sees as signs of progress and development and a representation of the highly advanced modern world, are the very examples of how insensitive and mindless we have been in playing our roles as thinking beings. Industrial revolution was only a starting point that led to movement to urban spaces, gave birth to consumerist culture, gradually, made people conscious of their social status and living standards, and thus, humans embarked on the journey of environmental degradation. In the name of scientific and technological progress, through new innovations to meet our needs, we are constantly exploiting and destroying what offered to us by benevolent nature.



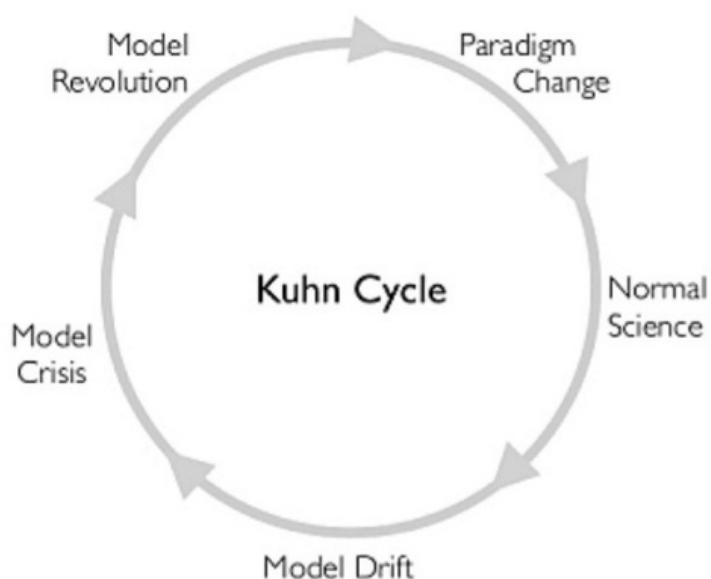
In their greed for betterment and advancement and in their pride as thinking and evolving beings, humans became indifferent to the fact that the earth is not their sole property, and that survival is also about co-existence. Population explosion is an example of our selfishness, as we wrongfully claim the spaces that were meant for other species. Extinction of different species is only one example of how we are stripping others off of their rights to space and natural resources. Habitat destruction and deforestation exemplify humans' greed for more. Our food habits, comfort-living patterns, plastic usage, electricity consumption, chemical and radioactive waste that we discard so mindlessly, all suggest our self-centredness.

To add to this, technology has also made this possible for us to reach to the obscure areas that were earlier untouched by our greed. We constantly cross our limits and barge into spaces that are meant for the indigenous population and disturb the ecosystem 2*. Tourism, seen from this viewpoint, can easily be perceived as an enemy to the environmental balance 3*.

In the last two years, the unprecedented situation of the pandemic also made us face the reality which we soon chose to ignore and forget. Work from home, online teaching and learning, day long scrolling on social media, all these activities in the virtual space have contributed further to climate crisis and greenhouse emissions, as we leave environmental footprints with every single click on our gazettes. Apart from these, our routine activities in life, while constantly make our life comfortable, prove us an enemy of our environment, and in turn, of ourselves. Driving for work or enjoyment, buying multiple vehicles as a sign of social status; improper disposal of non-biodegradable products; unsparing use of paper; mindless use of electricity; cosmetic products; non-veg consumption; automatic faucets and sanitary wares or something as simple as brushing teeth, are all signs of indifferent self-centredness of human beings 4*. In the 21st century, living in a globalised world, if we think about the environment only because there is a lack of fresh air, unpolluted water, healthy spaces for us, we need to think twice about what should serve as the motivation for us to be sensitive towards the environment and nature. When we express our concerns about, water pollution, acid rains and ocean acidification, the loss of biodiversity, global warming and climate change, talk about 'climate-anxiety' or 'ecological grief' 5*, we can clearly hear the shallowness and the guilt in our voice 6*.

What we need to understand is that technological advancement, a life of comfort and luxury, the desire to have everything at our disposal or just a click away, every seemingly small and unharmed activity, mindless exploitation of natural resources, the use and throw attitude, all of these combined make us sin not only against our environment but against ourselves also. Our sense of responsibility towards ourselves and the desire to have the best of everything for ourselves need to be ingrained in inclusivity.

We need to realise our position in the ecological system. Our ambitions and efficiency, our position in the chain of being should make us realise that more than any other living or non-living entity, we humans are gifted with the cognitive skills that once channelised in the right and altruistic direction would create an environmental harmony where we will not work against our ecological system, while working for our growth, but will rather adopt measures that will ensure a holistic safeguarding of all the elements of nature and environment including ourselves.



Source: -https://miro.medium.com/v2/resize:fit:720/0*-ubnv3X

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