

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - SOME SOCIOLOGICAL ISSUES*

S.T. HETTIGE

Introduction

As is well known, the environmental movement with its diverse manifestations has emerged as a major global social movement over the last several decades. The relentless pursuit of economic growth resulting in the over exploitation of natural resources and environmental damage and pollution is at the core of the environmental problem. While, in the developed countries, the desire for continued economic growth is reinforced by consumerist tendencies, the over exploitation of available natural resources in the developing countries is a product of the need to provide a fast growing population with basic goods and services. The present state of the environment is a product both of the ignorance as well as the inadequate attention paid to the environmental implications of economic and other activities. Similarly, the environmental conditions in the future will undoubtedly depend on what we do about the environmental problem today.

It is common knowledge that the environmental issue is complex and has obvious multidisciplinary implications. This is clearly evident in the wide array of disciplines involved in the study and discussion of environmental problems. Among these, sociology and anthropology have also made a significant contribution to our understanding of the issues involved, thereby facilitating the processes of policy formulation and programme development and implementation relating to the environment.

In the present paper an attempt is made to focus attention on some sociological aspects of the environmental problem in Sri Lanka. The paper is divided into two parts. Part one attempts to outline those aspects of social structural change in Sri Lanka which have a bearing on the environmental question. Part two deals with the implications of such changes for the environment and sustainable development.

PART I

Social Structural Change in Sri Lanka and the Environmental Issue

As is well known, our society underwent significant structural change during the colonial period. The introduction of a plantation economy served to cause major changes in a social system which was hitherto primarily organized around subsistence agriculture. Moreover, agriculture itself has become more and more market-oriented over the years under the influence of modernizing forces as well as the emerging patterns of division of labour. This shift from subsistence production to commercial production

* I acknowledge with thanks the valuable assistance provided by Dilrukshi Dias and Sandya Hewamanna of the Department of Sociology of the University of Colombo in preparing this paper.

was marked by a change in people's relationship with their environment. The introduction of large-scale plantations not only created conditions leading to a disruption of the ecological balance in the country and other environmental hazards, in addition the infrastructure required by such an economy also generated social conditions with environmental implications. Services such as banking, and retailing as well as transport and other facilities became important for the functioning of the economy. The necessity for such services and facilities created new occupations which were, unlike subsistence farming, not directly dependent on environmental conditions. In addition, while the large-scale plantations did not change the agricultural base of the country's economy, it caused a subtle change in the relationship with the environment of those involved in agricultural labour on these plantations. The subsistence farmer's livelihood was directly dependent on the regeneration of soil fertility, consistency of weather patterns and suchlike. The livelihood of a labourer working on a tea plantation on the other hand, was directly dependent on the wages he earned which were determined not so much by environmental conditions as by other factors such as his bargaining position with management. In this manner, one result of the separation between labour and ownership in the production process was an apparent lesser dependence of the worker on his natural environment and thus a decline in his need for the careful husbandry of natural resources. For the wage labourer, the quantity he produces acquires primary importance since he must satisfy his numerous other requirements through the income he earns, but for the subsistence farmer, renewal of the resources he utilizes is perhaps of equal importance, since it is ability to produce his own subsistence which generates the satisfaction of his basic needs.

The owners of the plantations, on the other hand were even further removed from their production environments. The income derived from these plantations served to support the affluent lifestyles pursued by them. This together with the drive to maximise profits characteristic of a capitalist mode of production compelled them to be exploitative of the natural resources in the country.

The post colonial period in Sri Lanka witnesses an intensification in the process of social structural change set in motion during the period of colonial rule. The diverse occupations created by the demands of a market economy led to a rapid growth in the urban tertiary sector. Dependence for their livelihoods of increasing numbers of people on clerical and other occupations or professions such as law and accountancy is instrumental in causing a fundamental change in the character of the relationship individuals have with their environments which in turn affects what a society does about its environmental problems.

The gradual displacement of subsistence agriculture by commercial agriculture in response to the demands of a market economy, has sociological relevance to the current environmental issue. The subsistence farmer's chief goal in his production activities has been the satisfaction of the consumption needs of his household. In such a situation, the quantity that the farmer is required to produce would be limited largely by the require-

ments of his household which are in turn determined by such factors as family size and age of family members. A farmer engaged in commercial agriculture on the other hand produces for a large, impersonal market. The forces that govern the market are far more complex than the factors that determine subsistence production and the farmer engaged in commercial agriculture finds himself compelled to increasingly exploit his available land resources in order to meet the market demand if he is to satisfy his own consumption requirements through the income he earns. The operation of a market economy is also such that, while subsistence farming requires the cultivation of a variety of crops so that the varying nutritional needs of a farming household could be met, the cultivation of a single crop appears to be more profitable for commercial purposes.

The increased geographical mobility of the population is another aspect of social structural change which has a bearing on the present day environmental problem in the country. Internal migration has been, on the one hand a result of the deliberate action taken by successive governments since the 1930s. On the other hand, it has also been a product of spontaneous individual action taken in response to the "push" and "pull factors" operating to draw people from the rural areas into the urban centres of the country.

It is common knowledge that it has been the policy of various governments in Sri Lanka to redistribute the population of the country which tends to be largely concentrated in the wet zone. The resultant resettlement schemes attempt to relocate families selected from the overpopulated Wet Zone in various parts of the Dry Zone. This process is of some environmental significance in terms of reducing the population in high density areas of the country. However, the social effects of such changes may also be far from desirable. The relocation of entire families in the Dry Zone involves an uprooting of people from their known and familiar environments and their resettlement in strange, unfamiliar surroundings. This separation of individuals from their accustomed social and physical environments results in an erosion of certain social and cultural norms which were supported by the community from which the new migrants are isolated. Such a situation of normlessness and ignorance is conducive to an indulgence in environmentally unfriendly behaviour such as the destruction of forest land and indigenous vegetation. The social void experienced by the new settlers further reinforces such behaviour through creating an overriding concern with immediate economic gains thereby causing mindless exploitation of environmental resources in order to maximize production.

Rural-urban migration in Sri Lanka (1) has been a consequence of certain pressures in the rural areas such as lack of income earning opportunities as well as external factors such as the facilities and opportunities offered by urban places which draws people into these areas. The uneven development taking place in the country which tends to concentrate superior educational, health and other social infrastructural and income earning opportunities in a limited number of cities is largely responsible for this situation. This concentration of resources and opportunities draws people from the rural areas

into the cities, one result of such migration being overcrowding and environmental pollution.

The process of urbanization is also significant with regard to the character of the relationship individuals have with their environments as social beings. The organization of social and economic life in cities rarely promotes close contact with the natural environment. Essential services such as water supply, garbage disposal and energy supply are provided to the urban dweller by external, formally organized bodies with which he has often no personal contact. Thus the environmental factors that govern the continued provision of such services are of little concern to him. As far as the urban dweller is concerned, the problem of ensuring continued water supply or energy supply does not concern him since the provision of such utilities is managed by large bureaucratic organizations, his contact with which is often limited to the payment of bills.

The urban dweller is also far removed from the processes through which the goods he purchases and consumes are produced. Thus, although indirectly responsible for any damage caused to the environment through the production of commodities he creates a demand for, he often neither feels concerned about nor responsible for such damage.

The occupations characteristic of the Sri Lankan urban environment are also instrumental in distancing the individual from his or her natural environment. Since urbanization in Sri Lanka and other developing countries has not been a concomitant of industrialization as in the developed countries, urban areas here are characterized by a proliferation of service activities (2). Tertiary employment could be said to be that sector of employment which offers the individual least contact with his environment. A bank clerk or a lawyer for instance, works in surroundings and uses equipment which to him are completely devoid of environmental implications.

Also of some sociological significance to the environmental issue in Sri Lanka has been the process of international labour migration consequent to the open economic policy pursued by the government since 1977. Drawn by the economic benefits offered by employment opportunities in the Middle East and to a lesser extent countries such as Greece and Singapore, many Sri Lankans have engaged in short term migration to these countries. Such labour migrations have rarely resulted in a productive investment of earnings in the country. Rather increased incomes and exposure to affluent lifestyles pursued by the inhabitants of wealthy countries has promoted the pursuit of consumerist lifestyles which are detrimental to the pursuit of sustainable economic development by the developing countries. As is well known, a large proportion of the Middle East returnees tend to return to the Middle East as their earnings get exhausted within a short period after they return to the Sri Lanka.

This situation has not been helped by the adoption of Western lifestyles by certain elite sections of society who in return act as role models to the poorer social strata. The incorporation of Sri Lanka begun during the colonial period, has resulted in the adoption

of western manners of speech, mode of dress and habits. In more recent years, the pursuit of consumerist and ostentatious lifestyles characterizing western societies has become a mode of acquiring social prestige and status in Sri Lankan society. The economic policies adopted by the government since 1977 have further fostered this consumerist orientation by flooding the market with various consumer goods. One feature of consumerism is the unlimited desire for the purchase of commodities and a craving for variety and abundance. For such an orientation, scarcity is an intolerable evil. Simple living is virtually equated with poverty and socially rejected. The new patterns of consumption are hardly beneficial to a social and economic system which is struggling to meet the basic requirements of a fast growing population. Attempts to satisfy the consumerist wants of the powerful segments of society could only result in indebtedness and over exploitation of resources which, while somehow supporting the present day population of the country, may jeopardize the survival of future generations.

The rapid expansion of the population of the country is also significant to the environmental problem (3). This increase has largely been the result of a decline in mortality rates due to the processes of modernization, particularly the import of western countries however, this fall in mortality rates, thus creating a tendency towards over population with its resultant environmental problems. Worsening man-land ratio in the countryside, over-crowding in the urban areas etc. are the direct consequence of population growth with serious environmental implications.

The growing landlessness and the fragmentation of family holdings in the countryside have encouraged rural people to encroach on to forest and other land reservations which are vital for maintaining the ecological balance in the rural hinterland.

Furthermore the manner in which cities have evolved in Sri Lanka and other Third World countries is also of significance. Cities and towns in Sri Lanka, unlike in the industrialized countries, have emerged not as centres of production, but rather as centres of consumption and exchange. Since the cities also represent the centres of power in the country in economic, bureaucratic, political and other terms, urban-rural exchange relations tend to be unequal and lopsided. The consumption requirements of the cities are largely supported by the productive work carried out in the rural hinterland in return for which various services and goods are provided. Pressure on rural producers to provide for the increasing demands created by the affluent lifestyle led by the urban elites compels them to exploit their natural environment in order to maximize output.

Scarcity of land has altered traditional practices of chena cultivation in some areas. While formerly abundant availability of land permitted chena cultivators to leave their plot once cultivated to lie fallow for a period of six or seven years before recultivation of the same, present day conditions prevent this practice. Today, in certain areas, the same plot of land is cultivated over and over again with no intermediate period of rest in which the fertility of the soil could be regenerated. In such a situation, the low fertility of the soil compels the use of various fertilizers and agro-chemicals which may damage the

environment by polluting the water bodies and perhaps affecting the edibility of the crops grown due to chemical residues.

In Wet-Zone villages, the problem of land scarcity is even more acute. In this part of the country, almost every inch of land has been brought under cultivation and natural vegetation is virtually wiped out. In certain areas where mono-crop agriculture is practised such as the tea plantations, large trees have been cut down since they are not compatible with the requirements of such cultivations.

The destruction of trees has proved particularly hazardous to the maintenance of the ecological balance in the Dry Zone. Pressures to grow crops such as pulses and vegetables for commercial purposes has led to the cutting down of large trees in this area, causing severe droughts and unpredictable weather patterns. In contrast to this situation, when large trees existed in this part of the country it was provided with fruits, shade and moisture all of which contributed to environmental quality.

PART II

Social Change and the Environment

It is a well known fact that modern societies in general are over-populated, exploitative and productivity-oriented. The phenomena of over-population, exploitation and productivity are intertwined as one tends to reinforce the other. Even though population tends to stabilize once a certain level of economic growth is achieved, persisting preoccupation with economic growth world over continues to promote the exploitation of natural resources. The situation is perhaps worse in developing countries like Sri Lanka where a growing population with rising consumer aspirations continues to reinforce exploitative tendencies. Recent social structural change in Sri Lanka has given rise to conditions which may further aggravate the environmental problems. While the environmental conditions in a given country are influenced by various forces operating on a global scale to a greater or lesser extent, whether these conditions remain stable or deteriorate further will also depend on a variety of internal factors such as environmental policies and programmes as well as consumption patterns, both public and private.

Present day environmental problems, i.e. resource depletion pollution, etc. are a product of past attitudes and actions. Given the prevailing social and economic conditions and political imperatives, it is unreasonable to assume that either recent historical trends could be easily reversed or the present day environmentally unfriendly attitudes and behaviour patterns could be drastically altered to create a totally environmentally friendly atmosphere. In other words, in spite of growing idealism relating to environmental issues, pragmatism with respect to politics, law enforcement, human nature, exploitation of natural resources, private and public consumption, commerce, scientific knowledge, technology, etc. will continue to be important factors influencing individual

and collective behaviour. This is also partly due to the intangibility of the environmental problem. For many people, the unseen mechanisms of environmental degradation appear to be virtually uncontrollable.

What is evident from the above is that it is not just material interests alone that influence behaviour with environmental implications. Subjective notions, values, perceptions, etc. are equally important. Moreover, environmental outcomes are not simply the direct result of environmentally unfriendly behaviour guided by ideas and interests. As Figure 1 indicates, in the context of modern societies, it involves a more complex process. It is, in fact this complexity which offers both challenges as well as opportunities.

As depicted in the diagram, while values and interests are fundamental to behaviour, there are several intervening mechanisms which are also effective in shaping and modifying behaviour in modern complex societies. The values that exist in a society could be said to be mediated by the world views held by the collectivity which may be spiritual or secular in nature. Material interests in a society are largely shaped by social structure (which is the network of social relationships in a society.) Both values and interests could be either personal or collective. In general, traditional societies are characterized by value consensus and collective interests as evident in the collective nature of economic and other activities in these societies. The prevalence of religious ritual in the daily affairs of individuals in a traditional community also indicates an orientation towards spiritual rather than secular world views. In contrast, modern societies appear to be largely governed by a secular and totally materialistic approach to life while the values and interests existing in such societies are largely individualistic or personal, thus creating the potential for conflict.

The values and interests in a society are instrumental to the formation of attitudes in the collectivity. However attitude formation is also mediated by the knowledge system in a society which also differs between past and present societies. In the past, this body of knowledge tended to be chiefly traditional in nature, being formed through the incorporation of parental values and norms. Today, although parental norms continue to be important, such institutions as science and education exert an overriding influence over the existing knowledge system.

Attitudes like values and interests, could be collective or individualistic. The individualistic nature of attitudes in modern societies creates a tendency towards conflict while traditional societies were relatively "conflict free" due to the existence of shared attitudes. Attitudes may also be exploitative or conservationist. In general, excessive materialism, over population and other pressures would create a tendency for the growth of exploitative attitudes.

In traditional societies behaviour is most often a direct result of attitudes. In modern complex societies however, behaviour is also mediated by the mechanism of policy framework. State policies represent the collective interests in a society and the programmes and actions that they lead to can be legal, political or social in nature.

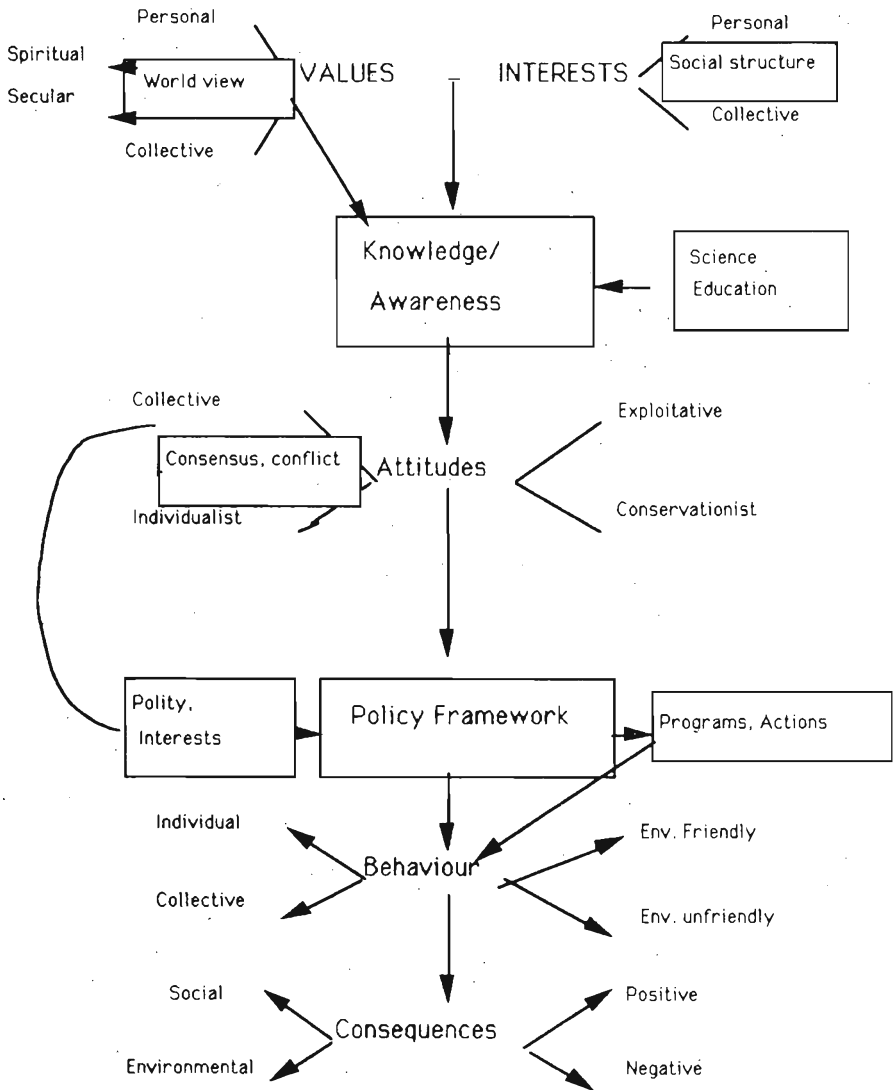


Figure 1: A sociological framework for the analysis of the environmental process.

1	2	3
Mode	Subsistence Reprod.	Market-oriented production
Envir. practice	Adaptive	Exploitative, Manipulative
Social Unit	Village, tribal band	National, Global
Nature of contact	Close, harmonious, spiritual	Distant, pragmatic, secular
Life Style	Simple living	Mass consumption

Figure 2: Social and environmental transition

The behaviour which takes places in a society through its existing attitudes and policy framework could be collective or individualistic. Whether it will be environmentally friendly or unfriendly will be determined by any one of the preceding stages in the sequence depicted in Figure 1. At present, despite the existence of largely materialistic values and interests, the West is characterized by an engagement in collective action leading to environmentally friendly behaviour.

The last stage in the framework would be the consequences of behaviour. Behaviour may result in a change of lifestyle, leisure habits, consumption habits etc., or in a changed approach to environmental issues. Consequences would be negative if causing increased destruction or degradation of the environment. Consequences would be positive when they lead to environmental conservation or have any other enhancing effects on society in general.

Most contemporary societies have moved away from an environmentally friendly existence, characterized by simple living. Modern societies which are increasingly market-oriented promote consumerist life styles. While affluence and abundance are highly valued and sought after, simple living characterized by the absence of an elaborate array of material possessions is looked down upon. In short, poverty results in social stigma, while affluence carries social prestige.

With some risk of over simplification, simple, rural societies could be contrasted with modern societies as outlined in Figure 2. As was evident in the discussion in Part One of the present paper, Sri Lanka has already become highly market-oriented and its villages are no longer small, self-containing social units of production and consumption. We have increasingly adopted an exploitative attitude towards the environment. With the fast exhaustion of land and water resources available in the countryside for production purposes, emphasis has recently been placed on outward-oriented activities of income generation such as labour migration, export-oriented manufacturing and tourism. The avowed objectives of all these endeavours are eradication of poverty and achievement of growth and prosperity leading to higher levels of consumption, both private and public. With a still growing population, such strategies are more than likely to exert more pressure on the environment including its productive resources.

PART III

Sociological Issues in Environmental Management

It is against this background that the problems and prospects for sustainable development in Sri Lanka have to be discussed. Sustainable development has been defined as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Strugdill, 1990:21). While I am not technically competent to deal with the viability or otherwise of sustainable development given the present national and global trends in the exploitation of non-renewable resources in a context of growing demand for goods and services, an attempt can still be made to identify some of the sociological issues relevant to the national context and explore what social responses are possible to the growing environmental challenges in the country.

As mentioned earlier, recent social structural change in the country has given rise to conflicts of interests which tend to guide economic and political processes. In other words, economic and political imperatives directly influence the way the resources are allocated and utilized. In this regard, it should be noted that, in the recent years, we have been gradually moving away from public control of resources to private control and management of productive resources.

Similarly, in the sphere of values which are basically derived from the particular world view of a society, there have also been significant changes owing to the fact that many people do no longer operate within a relatively insular village society eking out a simple living through their close contact and almost spiritual relationship with the natural environment. While many have moved away from the rural environment altogether, even those who are left behind have developed a drastically different attitude towards the environment. In a context of commercialized and modernized agriculture, producers have become pragmatic and secular in their orientation with respect to the production environment. Optimal exploitation of resources and maximization of production have

become main targets of most rural producers whose life chances now depend on the quantities produced and the prices obtained in the market. Their relationship with the environment in general has become one of exploitation rather than adaptation. Increasing geographical mobility, and change of both habitat and mode of living have further reinforced the above tendencies.

In the emergent context, environmental consciousness and consequent environmentally friendly behaviour is unlikely to emerge spontaneously because many people may not recognize the fact that our well-being is inextricably linked with the quality of the environment. In other words, they may be blind to the fact that there is no conflict between environmental concerns and the material well-being of people. Many may also fail to readily recognize the fact that environmental degradation means damage to the natural resource base (land, water, energy, clean air, etc.) upon which material well-being depends. On the other hand, if there is no broad-based interest and enthusiasm among the members of society about environmental problems, the latter are unlikely to occupy a prominent position in the political agenda. It is due to these reasons that conscious efforts to raise knowledge, awareness and sensitivity with respect to the environmental problem are required.

With the weakening of traditional social structures, communities and related causes accompanied by an increasing atomization of society leading to the predominance of personal interests over collective wellbeing it seems to be futile to expect a spontaneous popular movement to gather momentum and arrest the current trend towards environmental degradation. It is in this context that the state and other non governmental structures have to play a vital role in propagating environmentally friendly values and rewarding environmental friendly behaviour and discouraging environmentally destructive patterns of behaviour through such varied mechanisms as education, social and economic rewards and strict enforcement of legislation. This cannot however be done by a partisan state or by socially and culturally insensitive parasitic non governmental organizations. Like in the case of other social and political crisis in our society the need for a non partisan public policy in the context of the environment can hardly be overestimated.

As mentioned before, the intangibility of the mechanisms of environmental damage (Gijswijt, 1992) is a major sociological problem that seems to promote indifference towards environmental problems. With such widespread indifference, immediate personal interests tend to override larger environmental concerns and persuade many people to consciously or unconsciously resort to what has been termed "transfer" of environmental costs caused by their behaviour. This "transfer" may take place between social strata, between rural and urban areas, between rich and poor nations and also between the present generation and future generations.

In the face of research findings pointing to serious environmental damage and rapid resource depletion on a global scale and the growing social influence of the environmen-

tal movement, the indifferent attitudes and insensitivity towards the environmental problem seem to give way to "friendly" attitudes, sensitivity and idealism. It is perhaps the alarming facts about environmental damage uncovered by natural scientists that have been instrumental in bringing about change in the environmentally unfriendly attitudes and behaviour in recent years. However, given the prevailing and emerging patterns of consumption and leisure increasingly guided by the standards of the affluent West and the clear unwillingness on the part of the latter to "slow down", it is unreasonable to assume that there would soon emerge a major socio-political thrust, either global or national, towards addressing the root causes of the environmental problem for it would necessitate fundamental social and economic change.

A major challenge to the environmental cause seems to be the growing social inequality both within and between nation states. Since such inequality is manifested mainly in terms of consumption, the general social thrust towards greater consumption can hardly be checked. In countries like Sri Lanka, there is the added problem of widespread absolute deprivation which is socially and politically unacceptable. While the already well-to-do wish to participate in the patterns of consumption prevailing in the affluent countries, the poor and the not-so-poor are eager to reach the level of consumption found among the elites. While such struggles for social mobility are highly unlikely to level off social inequalities they may nevertheless result in an increase in consumption in absolute terms exerting greater pressure on natural resources. Given the renewed global thrust towards "growth and prosperity" following the "collapse" of the socialist world, competition for growth among developing countries is also likely to increase further. Sri Lanka, given the fact that it has pursued an outward-oriented growth strategy and possesses a population which is constantly reminded of the beauty of growth and prosperity on both the political stage as well as the TV screen, is likely to find it extremely painful to get out of the global competition for growth. Caught in such competition, it may not be easy to subordinate immediate interests to wider environmental concerns.

Environmental issues are often not of any immediate interest and concern for many people whose main preoccupation is with personal interests. This is so not only with those who are detached from the natural environment in their day-to-day lives but also with rural agricultural producers whose fortunes are very much dependent on such environmental factors as soil fertility and rainfall. Even if they realize that their future well-being is dependent on the quality of the environment, they are often not in a position to do much to help conserve the environment. A case in point is the position of the small commercial vegetable producers in the up-country areas. The relationship between a host of other categories of people who make use of natural resources and the environment is no different.

What is evident from the foregoing discussion is that the task of safeguarding the environmental resource base cannot be left to be taken care of by private interests. This is particularly so in the present day national and global contexts where ecological units

are increasingly integrated into even larger wholes. If we take the case of Sri Lanka, what is happening in one part of the country is affected, both directly and indirectly by events elsewhere through networks of migration, commerce, transportation, electrical grids, river diversion, etc. The result is that what comes to surface are often the symptomatic manifestations of wider processes, not the processes themselves which are amenable to almost abstract scientific research. In such a context, a world view based on conventional wisdom may not necessarily equip the people with the kind of understanding and empathy needed to grasp the complexity of today's environmental issue. Hence the significance of environmental science and education, the environmental movement, mass media and social reform. It is the relative strength of these forces viz-a-viz those of environmental destruction that will determine whether we will persist with sustainable economic development or continue to deplete and degrade the natural environment contributing to further ecological chaos and mass human tragedies mostly witnessed in the underdeveloped world.

Conclusion

Many of the recent socio-economic changes in Sri Lanka, in particular those that have taken place over the last two decades, are heavily weighted against the country's environmental interests. Rapid exploitation of natural resources resulting in resource depletion and environmental degradation, the spread of wasteful western consumption patterns, apparent decline in civic consciousness, the growth of material values largely at the expense of spiritual ones, the increasing loss of harmony between people and the natural environment due to widespread migration, mobility and urbanization the growing pragmatism and expediency on the part of the politicians, higher official and business elites with respect to environmental concerns, and the growing popularity of the market accompanied by an increasing mistrust in technocratic national planning are some of the salient features of the process of development and change over the last two decades.

It is against the above odds that the attempts to protect the environment have to be planned and implemented. It is not necessary to mention that the reversal of the current trends towards environmental protection and improvement is a daunting task. On the other hand, no community can easily give up its fight against environmental depletion and destruction as it might turn out to be a matter of life and death. It is precisely because of this challenge that the situation is not totally hopeless.

Many environmental enthusiasts often get disappointed due to the overpowering nature of the environmentally destructive forces. On the other hand, their idealism and the growing public concern with the environmental issues have been responsible for the global environmental movement which is behind much of the positive things that are happening around the world. Perhaps, one advantage a country like Sri Lanka has is that we do not have to go full circle but prevent some of the damages that can be prevented. Examples for such steps are switch to renewable sources of energy like solar and biogas, increasing use of bio degradable material, minimization of waste production,

environmental education and the enactment and strict enforcement of environmental protection legislation. Taking such steps is the only way to prevent the country from succumbing to the pressures of the environmentally destructive forces.

Notes

1. While urban growth in Sri Lanka has not been very great, a significant proportion of the rural population has been drawn into the cities and their suburbs due to the expansion activities taking place in them.
2. The percentage of the employed income receiving population in 1981 was below 50% indicating that more than half of the employed population in the country was engaged in non-agricultural activities.
3. Population density in the country has increased from 37 people per square kilometre in 1871 to 260 people per square kilometre in 1989. Today Sri Lanka is second only to Bangladesh in the South Asian region in terms of population density.

Estimated population size for the year 2040 is 23,260,000.

References

- Census and Statistics, Dept. of (1982). Labour Force and Socio-economic Survey, 1981/82.
- Central Bank of Ceylon (1984). Consumer Finance Survey, 1981/82.
- Gijswijt, A.J. (1992). Steering Society towards Sustainable Development, in *Research Notes* Siswo, The Netherlands.
- Harris, M. (1977). *Cannibals and Kings, the Origins of Cultures*. Random House, New York.
- Hettige, S.T. (1989). Urban Informal Economy, the Politico-economic Process and the Sharing of Urban Space, in *Upanathi*, Vol.4 No.1 and 2.
- Trugdill, S.T. (1990). *Barriers to a Better Environment*, Belhaven Press, London.