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WALK TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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WALK TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Sustainability and Sustainable development are essential for Peace, Harmony and Wellbeing on our planet. Practice of Sustainable living requires a comprehensive understanding of the various elements of Sustainability, and a conviction that it is our decision making that impacts Sustainability and Sustainable Development and thus a holistic and balanced approach is needed. Further we need to understand the state of mind in which we can make holistic decisions and how such a state of mind can be attained.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Economic, Social, Environment, Conscious Living, Yoga, Meditation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Man's eternal quest has been for a state of peace, harmony, well-being, and happiness. Since we are affected by our surroundings, to attain such a state, the surroundings must be conducive. Unfortunately, this desire appears paradoxical when we look closely at human thinking and actions and their impact on the planet over centuries. History is replete with evidence of conditions non conducive to the eternal human quest, wars and conflicts being prominent amongst them. According to Peace Research Institute Oslo, between the years 2000-2016 the loss of precious human life across the globe due to fierce conflicts and wars has been nearly three quarter of million as per data available.

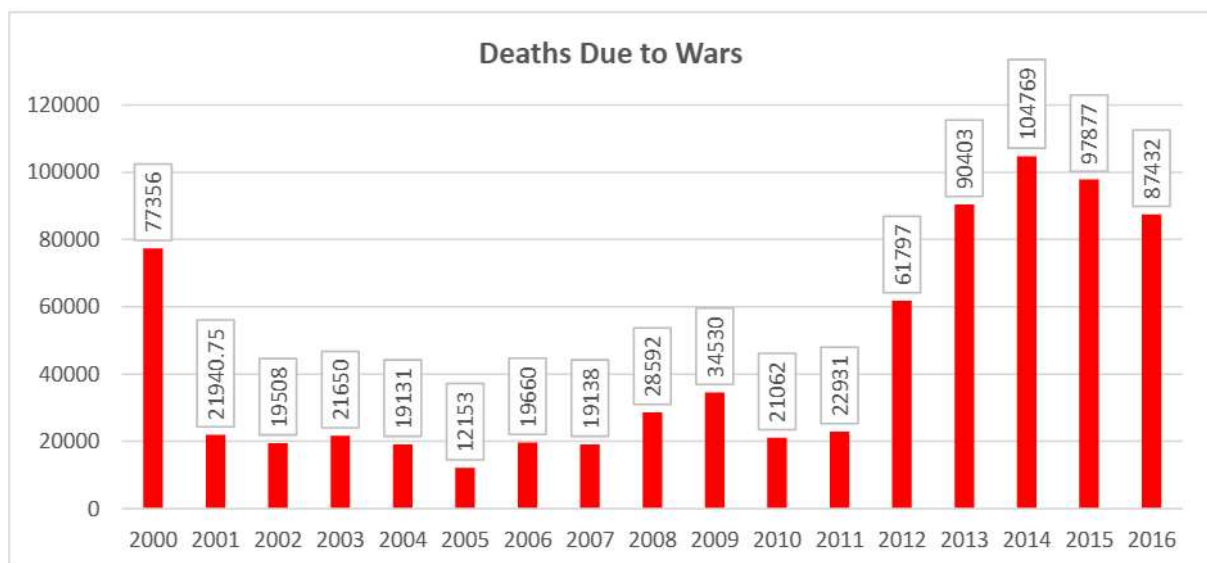


Figure 1.

Natural disasters which include floods, earthquakes, storms, wildfires, landslides, epidemics, droughts, volcanic activities, glacial lakes outbursts, etc. are another cause of enormous misery and suffering our planet has witnessed. While we may refer to them natural disasters, scientific evidence is beginning to show that we as humans may have had a role in these too. Available data on loss of human life, injuries, homelessness during the last two decades is indeed unbelievable. While nearly 1.3 million people have died and nearly 6.5 million injured, over 40 million people have been rendered homeless. The losses in money terms have crossed a whopping figure of 2.7 trillion dollars.

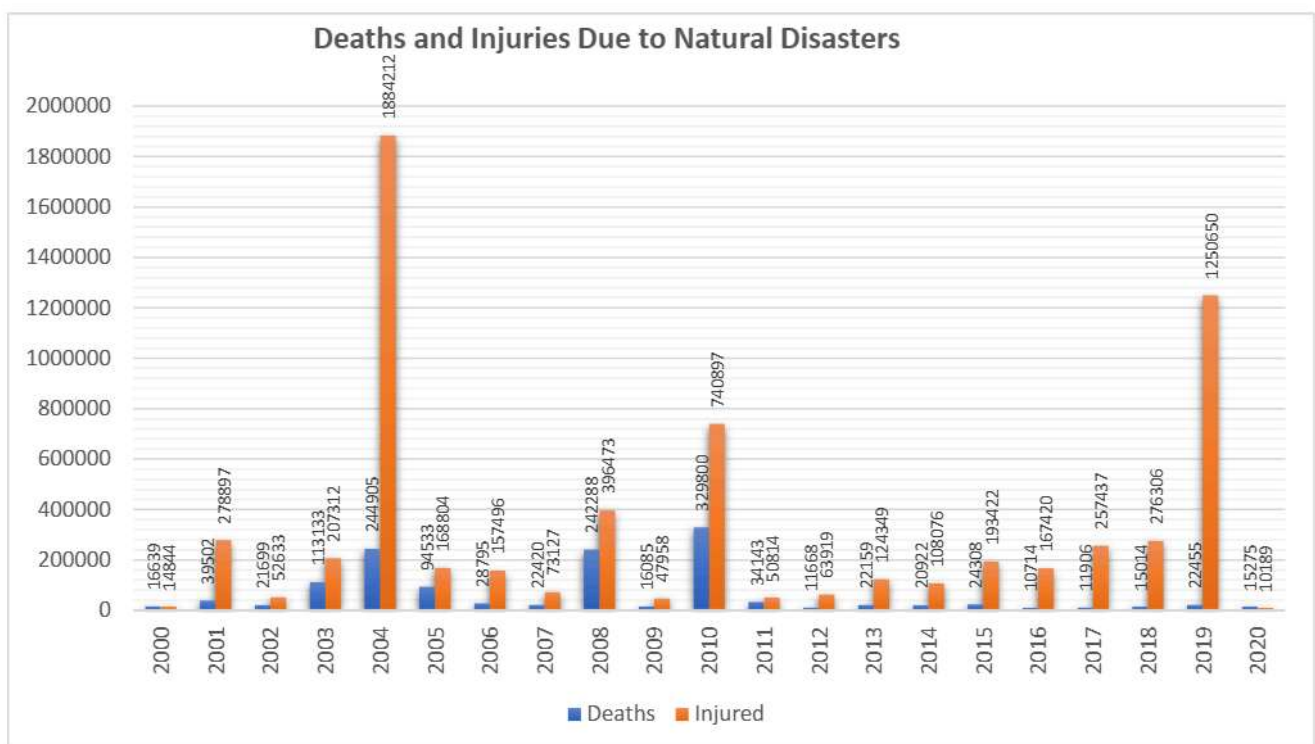


Figure 2

Besides the impact of wars and natural disasters, social unrest, inequality, poverty, diseases, etc. remain additional sources of strife and misery for humans.

But despite such depressing data, there is a silver lining; there is now a growing global concern about what we may have done to our planet and a realization that we need Sustainable Development to ensure long term Sustainability for Equity, Harmony and Balance. Somewhere deep within we know that as humans, we can play a decisive role in preventing further damage and reversing the damage already done.

United Nation (2020) SDG Report states that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in 2015 to end poverty, inequality, disease, etc. and set the world on a path of peace, prosperity, and opportunity for all on a healthy planet. Conditions like Peace, Harmony, Happiness, Wellbeing, and Sustainability are indeed inseparable. A deeper look at what is Sustainability, and what supports it, will help us identify the course of action with appropriate measures.

2. SUSTAINABILITY:

In simple terms Sustainability is the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level. However, considering the damage inflicted resulting from reckless activities being pursued in the name of development and prosperity, Sustainability means much more.

Daniel Christian Wahl (2020), sustainability is that which maintains the underlying pattern of health, resilience, and adaptability that maintain this planet in a condition where life, as a whole can flourish. This entails redesigning the modern societies using the regenerative principles which may reverse the damage and retain the planet and all its inhabitants in a state of balance, harmony, and wellbeing, in the future and beyond, as originally designed by nature.

Sustainability is generally understood to have three aspects to it, i.e., Economy, Society and Environment. These aspects are inseparable from one another and are deeply intertwined. It is the limited and biased perception of humans that sees them as fragmented, separate from each other and is also the reason why we are where we are. The corrective measures involve facilitating integration of this perception progressively in a manner which ensures Sustainability. We examine each aspect to understand what they may mean, and the attention they require.

2.1. ECONOMIC ASPECT:

The economic aspect deals with flow of money and monetary well-being of individuals, businesses, and nations. Economy also entails technology, systems, resources, management, innovation, etc. and they all form the mechanism which make the money flow. Economic aspect is often also referred to as 'Profits'. It is an obvious correlation because we live in times

of stock markets, shareholder value, return on investment, growth in GDP, increased production, and consumption to propel economies, and so on; so, Profits in businesses are necessary.

But should they be the core objective of any enterprise or an individual?

Peter Drucker says, “The essential purpose of any business entity is to fulfil the needs of the society in an innovative and productive manner; profits are a result that follow and sustain a business.” This philosophy applies equally to individual services providers, enterprises, and perhaps high net worth individuals holding senior positions in enterprises.

In reference to Profits, natural follow up may be, “How much Profit? Maximum, or Optimum? At what cost?” And who determines what should be the Profit margin?

Many great thinkers have also shared another interesting perspective on money. Dr Deepak Chopra, the well-known author and alternative medicine advocate, describes money as the life energy that we exchange and use because of the service we provide to the universe. So, when we work, we spend energy, we earn money which helps us buy means to sustain ourselves by replenishing energy. Sounds logical and convincing indeed!

The money energy obviously is a part of the total sum of energy that exists, and we have learnt in science, energy can neither be created or destroyed; it only changes form. So, if the relative energy levels at various entities are reasonably optimum, there are minimal natural or forced blockages of energy, then the flow of energy will be harmonious and serene! Unused money which is like blocked energy, or enormous surplus of money possessed only by a few entities, resulting from profit maximization, market capitalization, or hoarding, disturbs the ecological balance. While Corporate Social Responsibility is expected to release this surplus energy at least from the organised sectors, this may not come naturally, so is often induced with allurements of tax savings, etc.

Since the money energy is controlled by humans, unless there is awareness and understanding that all entities in the universe are interconnected, and that energy flow affects overall ecology and other inhabitants of the planet including the animals and plants, we remain blinkered, missing a holistic perspective and our decisions may be severely flawed. True Sustainability

ensues from balanced overall ecology, which comes from equitable and effective management of the flow of money energy across.

2.2.SOCIAL ASPECT:

“*Man is a social animal*”, we have learnt this since our childhood. But the need for companionship does not exist only amongst human beings; it is found in abundance in animal kingdom, and for those who are truly aware, it exists in the plant kingdom too!

We need each other for our existence, and therefore harmony, equity, physical, mental, emotional well-being, education and growth, equal opportunities, gender equality, clean living conditions, etc. they all form essentials of life and social harmony and balance. Inequality is one of the key causes of conflicts.

Dr. Håvard Møkleiv Nygård (2020), writes about what causes armed conflicts. Research has shown that such identity group inequality is an important cause of armed conflict. This is especially the case when the relative position of identity groups is changed—for instance, if a group that has had access to political power is suddenly excluded from political participation. There is a significantly higher risk of conflict in states that exclude ethnic groups from political power when those groups have previously had the opportunity to participate in political processes.

Sensitive and integrated decision-making by those in positions of power, remaining focused on what society truly needs for its well-being, strengthens the social aspect of Sustainability.

2.3.ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT:

Environment is essentially everything that surrounds any organism. For us as humans, the environment comprises other humans, various species of animals and plants, the five elements of nature, i.e., earth, water, fire, air, and space. For the animals and plants, we humans, other animals, plants, and elements of nature comprise the environment, and so on. In reference to Sustainability, we usually consider environment to be air, water, waste, pollution, etc. We generally see things from a human perspective, ignoring that our sustainability will depend on the sustainability of animals and plants too, and that our actions do impact their sustainability.

Animals and plants are known to follow the laws of nature for their existence. It is imperative that humans who are endowed with the ability to think, create, and change, need to be aware of what constitutes ecological balance, the relationship between different organisms, the role played by each one, and what is needed for survival of various organisms, etc.

Modifications in the name of growth and economic development, with scant knowledge and regard for ecology, is a perfect recipe for long term damage which may not be apparent immediately but progresses slowly and surely.

United Nations (2019), *The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services brings to light some startling facts about harm caused to environment at the hands of humans.*

3. BALANCING AND INTEGRATING THE ASPECTS:

The three pillars that support Sustainability may be depicted by the simple model of a three-legged stool, where each one serves as one of the legs. Disproportion in the three legs will make the stool unstable and weak.



Figure 3

Irrespective of what we do, which walk of life we belong to, what business we may be in, our decisions and actions guided by a balanced approach to Economic, Social and Environmental aspects will only be able to promote true Sustainability. Sustainability is often also depicted by a Venn Diagram of three circles representing the various aspects. Sustainability occurs at the Confluence of the three circles depicting Economic, Social and Environmental aspects of life

on the planet. The closer the three circles move, indicating enhanced knowledge and awareness of the three aspects by an observer/decision maker, the sustainable area increases indicating possibility of long-term enhanced Sustainability.

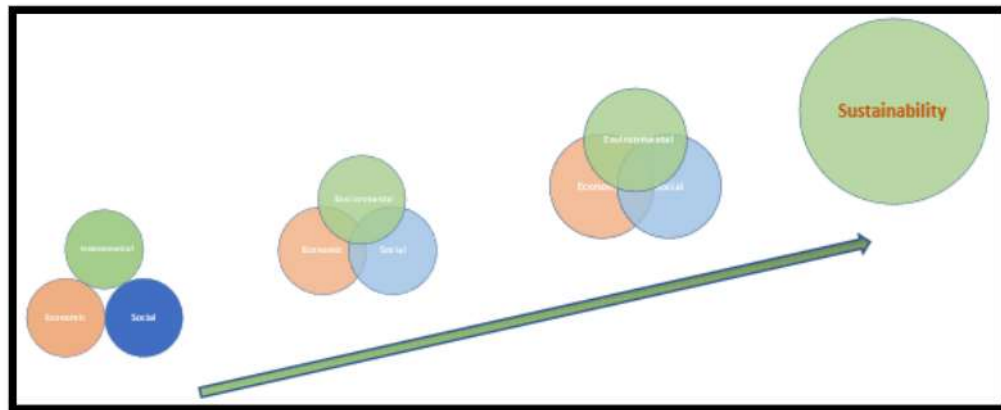


Figure 4

4. THE CORRECTIVE STEPS:

Problems cannot be solved with the same mindset that created them.

Albert Einstein

There is no doubt that with a superior ability to think and act, the responsibility of sustainability rests with us, the humans. Each one of us should be able to contribute to the extent our current capabilities permit and be prepared to progressively learn and become more aware for enhanced contribution. This would demand breaking away from the set patterns of functioning and imbibing values and habits that support and promote sustainability; essentially changing our mind set, re-orientating our thinking process. However, this may be easier said than done because we are products of our habit patterns - feeling habits, thinking habits, and doing habits. Breaking the mould would be challenging because our insecurities, ego inertia, and current affiliations may come in our way.

A conducive environment, and company of right mentors, guides, and co-seekers would however be able to initiate a positive change.

The contributory steps towards Sustainability that individuals can take entail:

1. Embark on transformation of personality – this is a continuous ongoing process and remains at the core.
2. Introspection before undertaking activities
3. Enhancing awareness on Ecology and Sustainability related to specific activities.
4. Taking decisions and performing actions with awareness
5. Assessing the impact of decisions and actions, expanding awareness, and refining further decisions and actions.

In simple terms these steps mean Practicing Conscious Living, where we break away from the mould of a set pattern and continuously evolve, practice constant situational awareness, or in other words Live in the Present! Transformation of Personality remains at the heart of the process which involves the Human Mind, the finest instrument we are endowed with. All actions of ours are preceded by the thought process and the feelings which lie even deeper. Hence it becomes essential to sharpen this instrument and develop it. This does not just mean populating with more information, but to develop clairvoyance and discerning power to objectively choose from available options, a path which is conducive to Sustainability of self and the surroundings.

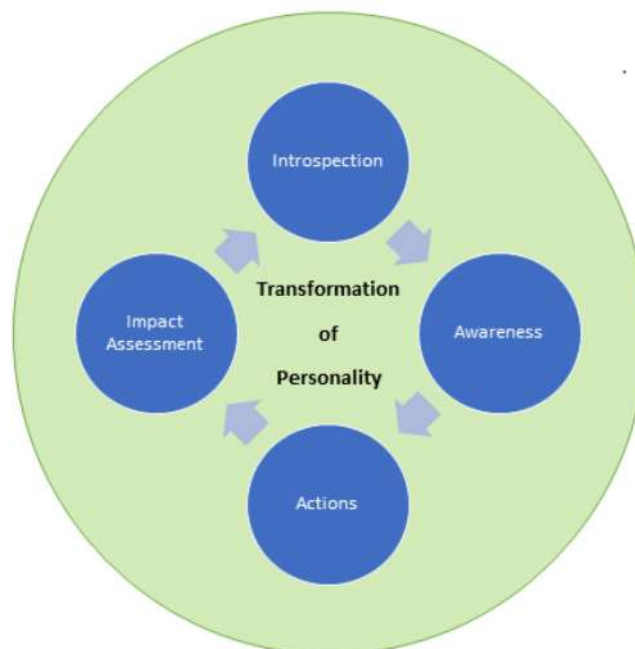


Figure 5

For transformation of human personality, there is no method or science as effective as practice of Yoga in its truest form which is the eight-fold path codified by Seer Patanjali in Yoga Sutras.

Yoga supports progressive overall development of the physical, mental, emotional aspects and beyond. Meditation forms an essential part of the practice of Yoga and helps in calming the mind, sharpening the intellect, and freeing one of prejudices and biases.

Wanphen Sreshthaputra (2020), writes, "At the heart of the agenda of Sustainable Development Goals, is a comprehensive perspective on development and sustaining human life, based on an understanding that environment, economy and society are embedded, interdependent systems and not competing pillars, with the environment being the base that underpins all other goals...."

As the Mind starts to develop through practice of Yoga and Meditation, the process of Introspection too becomes refined and objective. What follows is expansion of personality, development of inclusiveness and empathy, all essential for promoting Sustainability.

5. CONCLUSION:

Currently phenomenal amount of work is happening globally in the direction of Sustainability and Sustainable Development Goals. However, despite the program being in its 6th year since 2015, has made limited impact on the overall scenario. The UN report on SDGs 2020 states:

United Nation (2020), "SDG Report Member States recognized at the SDG Summit held last September, global efforts to date have been insufficient to deliver the change we need, jeopardizing the agenda's promise to current and future generations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020 brings together the latest data to show us that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress remained uneven, and we were not on track to meet the Goals by 2030...."

While global concentrated endeavours will hopefully bring about the desired improvements, realization and efforts have to trickle down to the individual levels for sustained effectiveness. For a long-term sustainable impact, we need to address the human mind, through comprehensive education and training, and redesigning the modern societies using the regenerative principles as expounded by Daniel Christian Wahl. Yes, this would be challenging, but then, it is the need of the hour. We do it now or never!

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