

## Chapter- 4

# Chapter Name- The Ailing Planet by Nani Palkhivala

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- ❖ **Nani Palkhivala** was born in 1920 in Bombay to blue-collar, middle-class Parsi parents.
- ❖ He was educated at Masters Tutorial High School and later at St. Xavier's College, both in Bombay.
- ❖ He was a dedicated scholar and excelled even though a terrible stammer hampered him.
- ❖ At college, he earned a master's degree in English literature and thus, overcame his speech impediment

## Theme

The article 'The Ailing Planet: the Green Movement's Role' discusses various environmental issues. It was written in 1994 but is relevant today due to the continuous deterioration of its health. This article shows the earth as an ailing patient whose condition is getting critical day by day. It also focuses on the activities of human beings, which contribute to the depletion of the environment. You will learn about the Green Movement and its role in conserving the environment.

There is also a focus laid on the human race being the most dangerous and destructive force in the world. Many species are there on the earth, and everyone has an equal right to live on this planet, but the point is raised about the domination of the human race over other species. The concept of coexistence is lost. There are industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation at the cost of a healthy environment.

This article also highlights the facts and statistics about the trees being cut and the growing deforestation either to acquire land or for industrialisation. The chapter brings to light various important yet neglected issues which might cause devastation if not addressed immediately.

In this chapter, you will understand the importance of conserving natural resources and how this planet is a place to live for everyone and not just humans alone. It brings the true yet harsh reality of the destruction by human beings in the name of modernisation and improvement.

The article also talks about over-population, which is also responsible for the imbalance in the environment.

## VOCABULARY

Gripped – clutch; hold

Green Movement – It is a movement that stresses people to follow environmentally friendly practices.

Irrevocably – in a way that cannot be changed or reversed

Holistic and Ecological View – It means a view for the preservation of the environment. It also refers to the understanding of the importance of earth's resources for the use of future generations

Revolutionary – evolving a complete change

Metabolic needs – needs of a living organism that enables them to have a chemical process that causes food to be used for growth and energy

Ethical Obligation – when someone is required to do something based on a righteous standard of rules

Stewards – manage or look after

Sustainable Development – economic development without depletion of natural resources

Dawned – begin

Catalogued – classify; characterise

Reckon – calculate

Languish – lose or lack of vitality of a person or plant or animal; grow weak

Ignominious darkness – disgraced as no one knows about them

Among other things – among other things

Scorched – burn the surface with heat of a fire

Impoverished – made poor

Ailing – in poor health

Synthetics – an artificial substance

Impaired – weakened or damaged

Barren wastelands – barely inhabitable piece of land

Deteriorate – become progressively worse; decline

Decimated – to reduce in number

Procure – obtain with care or effort

Precede – come before in order or position

Patrimony – property inherited from father or ancestor

Deprives – prevent a person from using something

Endeavour – trying hard to achieve something

Anguish – pain; suffering

Casteism – discrimination on the grounds of caste

Catastrophic depletion – a harmful reduction in several something

Distorting – deform; disfigure

Beget – give life to

Condemns – found guilty of something

Sterilised – make free from bacteria or other microorganisms

Voluntary – done or given of one's free will

Coercion – force

Perpetuation – keep going

Hutments – a collection of huts

Transcending Concern – a concern that existed for a very long time and has passed down from one generation to another

Demise – death

Ushered – guide someone somewhere

Decisively – clear and definitive

Felicitous – well-chosen

Freehold – permanent tenure of land or property

Tenancy – possession of the land

## Introduction

The chapter comments on the deteriorating condition of our planet. It speaks of the problems faced by our planet, the reasons for its poor condition and the changing view of the world for the planet.

## Explanation

### The Green Movement

The author comments on the excellent attention received by the Green Movement that began some 25 years ago. The world's first nationwide Green party was founded in New Zealand in 1972, and the movement has been a great success since then.

### A change in human perception

A revolutionary change has come in the perception of human beings bringing in a 'holistic and ecological view of the world. There has been a shift from Copernicus's understanding of the people's belief that the earth is a living organism whose needs must be respected and preserved by us. According to the writer, our earth is like a "patient in declining health". Thus, we have to realise our ethical responsibility for guarding the planet.

### Sustainable Development

The World Commission on Environment and Development propagated the concept of "sustainable development in 1987. Sustainable development calls for a well-balanced action to meet the present's demands and not to deprive our future generations of the natural world of resources.

### Man and the other living-species

Man has been considered the most dangerous being on the planet. However, due to several agencies' efforts worldwide, man is learning to live in harmony with the other living species on the earth. Man's existence is shifting from the system of domination to that of partnership.

### The depletion of the principal biological systems

There are still many millions of living species that have not been catalogued. The author mentions the ecological concern pointed out by Mr Lester R. Brown in his book "The Golden Economic Prospect". Mr Brown points out four principal biological systems – fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands. These form the foundation of the global economic system as they supply food and provide raw materials for industries except minerals and petroleum-derived synthetics.

The demand for human beings on these systems increases to such an 'unsustainable' extent that these systems' productivity is hampered. The excessive demand results in deterioration and depletion of resources leading to the breakdown of fisheries, the disappearance of forests, deterioration of croplands and turning of grasslands into barren lands.

### Deforestation

The forests are being destroyed in large proportions to obtain firewood in poor countries. Depletion of tropical forests has led to the extinction of several species. The tropical forests

or "the powerhouse of evolution" are eroding at the rate of forty to fifty million acres per year. Besides, the increasing use of dung for burning deprives the soil of critical natural fertilisers.

According to our Parliament's Estimates Committee, a near "catastrophic depletion" has been marked in the number of the forests of India over the last four decades. Ironically, Article 48A of the Indian Constitution states that the state shall "protect and improve the environment and safeguard the country's forests and wildlife. However, India is losing its forests at a rate of 3.7 million acres a year. The condition of the environment is 'critical' as per a study conducted by the United Nations,

### **The problem of over-population**

One of the major factors adding to the deforming future of human society is the fast-growing world population. The present world population is estimated at 5.7 billion. With this ever-increasing population, development seems a far-fetched dream.

As per the author, the best contraceptive to control the population is development. Voluntary family planning with an element of coercion is the only alternative. A rise in income, the spread of education and improved health would lead to a fall in fertility. Population and poverty are directly proportional to each other. Thus, control of the population should be our top-most priority.

### **"Era of Responsibility"**

The author now re-mentions the "holistic view" of the basis of our existence. He points out that it is an "Era of Responsibility" that calls for "seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts". Industry plays an essential role in this responsibility. Excellence in environmental performance is required for the manufacturers to continue their existence. Our earth belongs as much to the future generation to us. We should soon realise our duty towards our planet and should not treat it solely as our property.

The chapter concludes with the beautiful lines of Mr Lester Brown, "We have not inherited this earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children."

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the writer raises an issue about the deteriorating health of the earth. As human beings have been exploiting natural resources for decades, presently, the condition has made the environment critical. In 1972, the Green Movement helped environmentalists to raise awareness about the harmful condition of the earth. Since then, there has been no looking back as the movement has successfully educated people about conserving the environment.

Earth is like a patient whose health is declining, and we must improve it. In 1987, the term Sustainable Development was used by the World Commission on Environment and Development. A zoo in Lukasa, Zambia, has a cage where a sign reads 'The World's most dangerous animal' and inside there is a mirror. It gives a message that human beings are the most dangerous animals. Brandt Commission raised a question "Are we to leave our successors a scorched planet of advancing deserts, impoverished landscapes and the ailing environment?"

Four principal biological systems form the global economic system's foundation - fisheries, grasslands, forests, and croplands. These four systems also provide food and raw materials for industries except for minerals and synthetics. With these systems becoming unsustainable, fisheries will collapse, the forest will slowly disappear, grasslands will turn into a barren wasteland, and croplands will worsen.

In poor countries, forests are being cut down for fuelwood which is used for cooking purposes. There are some areas where the cost of fuelwood is more than the price of food. It is leading to deforestation at an alarming rate.

One of the reasons for the exploitation of the environment is the increasing population. It is observed that about one million populations are increasing every four days. This is not a good sign. There is an urgent need to control overpopulation in the world. Development is the best contraceptive for this problem as it will help in reduction in fertility, increase in education and income and improvement in health.

We must see the world as a whole and not as dissociated parts. It is a holistic and ecological view. According to Lester brown, we have not inherited the earth from our forefathers, but we have borrowed it from our future generations.



## MIND MAP

### The Ailing Planet

(By NANI PALKHIVALA)

#### About the Author-( By NANI PALKHIVALA)

**Nani Palkhivala** was born in 1920 in Bombay to blue collar, middle-class Parsi parents.

He was educated at Masters Tutorial High School, and later at St. Xavier's College, both in Bombay.

#### Characters :

L.K JHA

Lester Brown

#### Theme of the lesson

- The deteriorating condition of our planet. It speaks of the problems faced by our planet, reasons for its poor condition and the changing view of the world for the planet.

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