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BOOK REVIEW

Environment and Sustainable Development: A Geographical Appraisal
Edited by Seema Sahdev & Manish Kumar, Published by Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, India, Price : ₹ 1250.

This is a book from a team of geographers and Spatial Information Technologists. It covers a wide range of issues pertaining to environment, development and sustainability. It seeks to sensitise the readers of different economic and social processes, which make life on earth unsustainable. The book contains 24 chapters contributed by authors from varied fields including from economics and botany. The book has been divided into 3 parts. Part – 1 is sub-titled: Resource depletion and its appraisal; Part - 2 is sub-titled: Environmental ethics and sustainability; Part -3 is sub-titled: Spatial information technologies in environmental management.

The contributors to Part – 1 of this book: The main argument in this section is to impress upon how natural resources are being depleted or degraded; and in order to go with the carrying capacity of the earth, how to make optimal use of various resources. Every emerging city and town put pressure on existing environmental resources. Depletion on one-side and pollution on the other have become major threats to environment. One of the authors argue that religion in India plays puzzling roles with regard to resource use – one is polluting water bodies and land resources during festivals and ceremonies; and the other is conserving many plant species and animals in the name of god. Growing medicinal plants and Indian system of medicine also help cultivate and have conservation-sense while harvesting medicinal plants and herbs. The last paper in this section covers the impact of quarrying on various elements of environment such as quality of air, noise pollution, large scale deforestations, habitat fragmentation, loss of bio-diversity, landscape degradation and so on.

The contributors to Part – 2 of this book take an ethical stance and argue that the concept of sustainable development is closely linked to the carrying capacity of the earth, and the provision the eco-system can make to the demands of the species on the earth. It puts forth the fundamental notion of favouring an economic growth that does not take from nature more than its ability to regenerate, and does not pollute the nature beyond its ability to assimilate. Environmental problems and their solution occur at the intersection of natural systems and the human systems that manipulate the natural world. The authors put across that a carrying capacity based planning process, innovative technologies for efficient energy use and high productivity, moving towards less resource conserving production processes are highly essential for achieving sustained development. Problems like acid rain, ozone depletion, global

warming, water pollution, etc., are important issues of today's concern.

They suggest that in order to tide over these problems the native community should take up initiatives to conserve environment in small steps which will become a major leap in the future in conserving environment. The key institutions of the government (such as MHRD, MoEF, MoNRE and CPCB) and State governments' arms like SPCB and all the educational institutions have to play crucial role. There is no dearth of institutions or policies. All environmental questions boil down to changes in life styles, and commitment at personal levels.

The contributors of Part – 3 focus on addressing environmental issues mostly through spatial information technologies. These authors put across that the information technologies and data accuracy are indispensable for planning, and successful implementation of the environmental management initiatives. They refer to Geographic Information System (GIS), Global Positioning System (GPS), remote sensing and spatial data management systems. Every aspect of life – starting from rural or urban development through agricultural planning, urban-planning, land use management, water use, etc., have to be planned bearing in view the sustainability question. On use of geospatial technologies, some of them are of the view that the cost of software often becomes prohibitive by researchers and even by some of the institutions unless they manage to get funded projects. The recent developments in this field have come out with open source GIS software with which any department of geography can establish a GIS laboratory and start using.

The 24 chapters of this book have been well-arranged into three chapters for ease of use and readability. The index provides easy navigation to the concept one might be interested in. The extensive list of references provided by the authors of each paper help locate related papers on each chapter from other sources. Some of the case studies – be it biomedical waste disposal in Delhi or quarrying in Southern Bihar – provide a firm grounding, and insights on issues that is commonly prevalent in many States of India. The book makes a good read.

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