

SUSTAINABLE MODELS OF ECO-LIFESTYLE: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

S.R. Vincent Vijayaraj¹, Dr. G. Gladston Xavier²

Research Scholar¹, Associate Professor & Ph D Guide², Department of Social Work,
Loyola College, Chennai-34

'The world has enough for everyone's need, not for everyone's greed'

-Mahatma Gandhi

ABSTRACT

Planet earth is bestowed with sufficient resources to provide for everyone's need. The rate of consumption and utilization of resources at accelerated leaps in the name of financial growth and economic development around the globe have exploited all (re) sources far beyond its ability to renew itself. At this point in history, the globe is like a melting pot facing several environmental crises and striding fast into the destructive phase. The ultimate consequence of such exploitation will affect every single life and hence calls the attention of all those who occupy this place (Hellidie, 2014). Environmental problems have grown huge beyond individual capacities posing great threat to humanity and other forms of life on the planet (Haines, Kovats, Campbell-Lendum, & Corvalan, 2006). The need to quickly transit to a simple, less consuming and sustainable eco-lifestyle become inevitable and is the only option at all levels to address the concerns of environmental crises. There are individuals who challenge the consumeristic society and have moved on to become less consuming, leading simple sustainable lifestyles (Jackson, 2005).

Eco-conscious individuals focus on implementing pro-eco strategies of preservation and lead ecologically friendly lifestyles ensuring sustainability. Ecological lifestyle is the environmental consciousness among individuals that is reflected as their attitudes, values and practices related to their consolidated efforts taken to protect their environment (Fraj & Martinez, 2007). Ecological lifestyle is also known as eco-lifestyle or ecological living. These terms have been interchangeably used by different authors (Haraldsson & Svensson, 2008) and mean more or less the same. Ecological lifestyle is a process of moving towards sustainable living by creating alternate forms of living patterns. The core idea underlying as a principle of eco-living is 'self-sufficiency'. Exploring and documenting sustainable models of eco-lifestyle is the need of the hour to ensure its replication. Such cumulative efforts on the long

run would ensure concrete contribution to environmental protection. In this article the researcher explores such practices and experiences that could be popularized and made available to the common man.

KEYWORDS: *Eco-Lifestyle, Sustainable Models, Self-Sufficiency*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability is best understood through the above famous quote of Mahatma Gandhi. It clearly implies the tendency of nature to replenish itself provided ample time and space is given. Planet earth is bestowed with sufficient resources to provide for everyone's need. But unlikely, today large exploitations in the name of development have led to total destruction of ecology. Attaching to material wealth is a redundant pursuit as it leads humankind to an endless maze of complications. Never before in the history of human race have such large-scale mindless violations been waged on mother nature to strip of the wealth of resources. This act has also in silence led to dig own grave for the human species. The rate of consumption and utilization of resources at accelerated leaps in the name of financial growth and economic development around the globe have exploited all (re) sources far beyond its ability to renew itself. At this point in history, the globe is like a melting pot facing several environmental crises and striding fast into the destructive phase. The ultimate consequence of such exploitation will affect every single life and hence calls the attention of all those who occupy this place (Hellidie, 2014). Environmental problems have grown huge beyond individual capacities posing great threat to humanity and other forms of life on the planet (Haines, Kovats, Campbell-Lendum, & Corvalan, 2006). Though it has blown out of control, yet there are always rays of hope to rebuild it through corrective practices aimed at kindling its inherent resilient nature to replenish. This however, calls attention on every human on the planet for a moral obligation towards change in current patterns of consumption and living. The need to quickly transit to a simple, less consuming and sustainable eco-lifestyle become inevitable and is the only option at all levels to address the concerns of environmental crises. There are individuals who challenge the consumeristic society and have moved on to become less consuming, leading simple sustainable lifestyles (Jackson, 2005).

SUSTAINABILITY AND ECO-LIFESTYLE

Over the last few decades, there has been grabbing attention on sustainability as a key concept around all aspects of human living. Sustainable efforts in the realm of ecological concerns have also been growing a lot. The International panel on climate change (2007) reports an upsurge in research undertakings and

publications related to sustainability, environmental degradation and climate change. With increase in focus on the way humans are interacting with their environments, the field of sustainability has also grown in possible dimensions at a rapid pace (Clark W; Kates, R.W., Parris, T.M., Turner II, B.L. et al., 2003). The literal meaning of sustainability is the capacity to maintain some entity, process or outcome over a period of time (Jenkins, 2009). In the context of ecology sustainability is related to the perennial presence of resources in-spite of human activity on the globe. At the local and global levels, it calls for attention on the complex mutuality of human and ecological systems. The core of sustainability is linked up with what is left behind or sustained for the future generations. It is a moral obligation not just to humans but to all species on earth. This means the search for durable responses to global problems should be mitigated with contemporary global issues of development seeking a way to balance obligations of the present and the future. The way we live our life, demonstrates our contribution towards replenishing resources for the future. Hence, understanding practices and behaviour in the light of everyday living becomes essential aspect of study to comprehend more on ecology and sustainability.

Eco-conscious individuals focus on implementing pro-eco strategies of preservation and lead ecologically friendly lifestyles ensuring sustainability. Ecological lifestyle is the environmental consciousness among individuals that is reflected as their attitudes, values and practices related to their consolidated efforts taken to protect their environment (Fraj& Martinez,2007). Ecological lifestyle is also known as eco-lifestyle or ecological living. These terms have been interchangeably used by different authors (Haraldsson&Svensson, 2008) and mean more or less the same. Ecological lifestyle is a process of moving towards sustainable living by creating alternate forms of living patterns. The core idea underlying as a principle of eco-living is 'self-sufficiency'. Exploring and documenting sustainable models of eco-lifestyle is the need of the hour to ensure its replication. Such cumulative efforts on the long run would ensure concrete contribution to environmental protection. In this article the researcher explores the need for such practices and experiences that could be popularized and made available to the common man. This research paper examines the need for sustainable models of eco-lifestyle as a way forward to address global to local concerns on ecological stability. It explores the various initiatives taken on a day to day basis among those individuals who consciously have modified their lifestyle to be more eco-sensitive.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY:

The race of everyday living pushes individuals and societies to rationally think away from moral and ethical aspects of consumption. The ultimate consequence of such living, with least attention and care towards planet's resources has started to have implications on every being on the planet. The need to

sustain available resources on earth is the responsibility of every individual and society at large. Conscious and meticulous changes have to be made in the way each one consumes to materialize visual global changes. The excessive nature of global consumption calls in for immediate action as such practices have become unsustainable (Alexander, 2012). Whitmarsh and O'Neill (2011) point out that non-sustainable behaviours continue among the general public raising concerns over harmful global implications. They call in for immediate actions for environment education that would lead to creating will-intentioned individuals who would have the conviction for the cause of environmentally respectful behaviours. According to Haines, Kovats, Campbell-Lendum, and Corvalan (2006) within the socio-political and economic systems, families and individuals contribute intensively towards environmentally conscious lifestyles on a daily basis, and thus become crucial planes of intervention for environmental initiatives.

To opt out of the normal 'use and misuse attitude' requires a lot of sensitization, attitudinal change and practical efforts of implementation. The challenge becomes even harder when these practices have to be sustained on the long run. For many, the strong intention to opt for eco-sustainable efforts does not materialize as routine practice due to the challenges it incurs. Thus, resulting in a gap between intention and practice. In spite of all these struggles, individuals and societies, who harness on pertinent aspects that drive them to sustain eco-friendly initiatives do exist across the globe and they become real sources of inspiration to be showcased to the general public as successful models. Replicating such models of practices would contribute largely towards environment education. Small steps add to the large journey and each individual change can contribute towards the great cause of protecting our ecology. Thus, the need to undertake research explorations to collate experiences of intentional individuals who are consciously engaged in environmentally friendly sustainable initiatives comes to be the need of the hour. Such wealth of knowledge has to be showcased as collective community efforts for environmental actions of sustainability to be replicated by many more. The study will also explore to identify requisite competencies essential to collectively adopt a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

The study was conducted among individuals who have consciously adopted and modified their living patterns that are more eco-sensitive for at least a period of five years and more. Adopting a quantitative inquiry approach, the study aims to understand the practices and challenges related to eco-sensitive lifestyle. Exploratory research design was adopted for the study to explore the respondents' experiences related to eco-living and sustainability. The main focus of the study is to identify conscious individuals

and collate their practice experiences that are contributing towards eco- sustainable efforts. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify the samples across Tamilnadu. A self-prepared interview schedule was used for the purpose of data collection. The collected data was analysed and interpreted using statistical tables and figures.

Findings of the study: The major findings of the study are presented below:

Profile of the Respondents: In this study, around, 71.7% were male and 28.3 % were female. About 32% belonged to the age category of 31 to 40 years and 23% each in the category of 21 to 30 years and 41 to 50 Years. It is found that 50% of the respondents come from nuclear family, 45% from joint family system and 5% have chosen to live as a commune. The data also reveals that 78.3% of the respondents are married and 20% are unmarried. About 63.3% live in urban settings and 31.7% are based in rural settings.

Social Position of the Respondents: The data shows that 40% of the respondents are graduates and 28.3% had completed post-graduation and 20% were diploma holders. About 46.7% percent belong to Hindu Religion and 41.7% expressed that they do not follow any religion. It is also found that 55% of the respondents hail from rural areas and 36.7 % are from urban dwellings.

Economic Status of the Respondents: The data shows that 55% of the respondents are self-employed and 23.3% are involved in a variety of seasonal work related to agriculture. The data reveals that 52.5% of the respondents' monthly income is upto Rs. 20,000/- per month.

Motivational Foundations for Adopting Eco-sustainable Life Style: About 26.7% of the respondents got motivated to adopt eco-sustainable initiatives by working with similar interest groups. For 21.7% the motivation came after participating in an environment awareness related event. About 18.3% had been exposed to environmental issues by parents, grand-parents and significant others in life and thus got motivated to this life-style. The inspirational role model for many (45%) were their own Grand-Parents, Parents and family members. About 30% of the respondents were inspired by the work of Nammalvar.

Table No.1

Eco-sensitive Practices Adopted by the Respondents

Green Consumption	50% of the respondents adopted the Philosophy of Minimalism
Renewable Energy Use	43.3% often use products that are energy efficient
Water Consumption	55% always engaged in judicious use water

Transportation	48.3% often used common transports for their travel
Waste Management	26.7% of the respondents always engaged in source segregation and waste management
Food Consumption	30% of the respondents always are mindful of consuming foods grown and available within the locality
Health-Seeking Practices	65% are mostly involved in self-healing practices and if required seek help from indigenous systems of medicine

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR ADOPTING ECO-SUSTAINABLE LIFE STYLE:

The data shows that 50% of the respondents strongly agree on adaptability as an essential requisite for sustaining eco-lifestyle. About 45% agree that creativity as an essential competency, 56.7% agreed that skills for exploring alternatives as a requirement and 48.3% and 35% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed that constant up-dation of adequate knowledge related to eco-lifestyle is essential. About 46.3% and 36.7% of the respondents agree and strongly agree that an appropriate attitude is essential for eco-lifestyle.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADOPTING ECO-SUSTAINABLE LIFE STYLE:

About 45% and 43.3% strongly agree and agree that will power to sustain eco-living is required; 46.7% and 43.3% strongly agree and agree that desire to embrace eco-living is needed; 58.3% and 30% agree and strongly agree that value addition in all efforts as a suggestions for sustaining eco-living; 51.7% & 46.7% agree and strongly agree on the creation of alliance with similar interest groups as a suggestion; 50% strongly disagree on showcasing success stories and 45% agree on showcasing success stories as a suggestion. About 55% of the respondents strongly agree that challenges are opportunities to sustain eco-lifestyle.

DISCUSSIONS:

The findings of the study bring out the practice experiences of intentional individuals who have consciously engaged in eco-sensitive efforts for over five years. This study brings out key factors that helped these individuals bridge gaps between their intentions and efforts for implementing eco-

sustainable. Kaiser and Wilson (2004) bring out the fact that family values and childhood influence play an important role in the choice of acting environmentally or not. In this study also, the factors of motivation to adopt eco-sustainable practices among the respondents were as a result of early stimulus from family members and inspirational personalities.

Spangenberg & Lorek (2002) categorize routine resource consumption as ten groups or 'consumption clusters' such as clothing, education/training, food, health care, housing, hygiene, laundry and cleaning, recreation, social life, and transport. They consider these to be essential aspects related to sustainable practices. In this study the practices related to being eco-sensitive range from switching to minimalism and green consumption, maximum use of renewable source of energy options, conscious water consumption and use of common transportation, intentional food choices that are locally grown and available, adopting simple self-healing practices and judicious use of indigenous health systems when required.

Negev et al. 2008; Erdogan et al. (2009); McBeath and Volk (2010) point out that environmental awareness requires elements of adequate knowledge, attitude, behaviour, awareness and desire for environmental involvement. This study also points out that those individuals who had made conscious and intentional choices based on their environmental awareness and desire were able to sustain in practices that are eco-friendly. Acquisition of essential competencies is seen as an underlying factor for environmental action (Léger & Pruneau, 2011). The essential competencies expressed by the respondents of this study include adaptability, creativity, skills for exploring alternatives, constant knowledge updation and inculcating appropriate attitude. Research studies show that mindful consumption can lead to better life for individuals (Jackson 2005, Jenkins 2006 in Iyer & Muncy 2009).

Research studies (Black & Cherrier, 2010; Banbury et al 2012) point out that both personal and social needs have to be fulfilled in a sustainable lifestyle. The present study brings out nuances for an efficient model of engaging oneself in sustainable eco-lifestyle practice. Getting connected and being part of environmentally conscious groups that actively engage in such efforts is seen to be crucial to help individuals sustain. The right source of motivation propels individuals to proactively decide to move away from being a consumerist to live accordingly to live in harmony with nature. The desire to achieve better quality of life underlies the sustainable models of consumption and the same is reflected in this study as well.

CONCLUSION:

The extensive research studies by UN bodies and other reputed sources point out the fact that climate change is real and is affecting all inhabitants of the planet. Hence, corrective action from all quarters is required to address it. The great ecologist of our times, Nammalvar would often quote *one who consumes less should be adored*. Changes incurred at an individual level influences their boundaries and beyond. Eco-sensitive practices effected at individual levels should diversify as community level changes. This transformation is the essence of the ecological model, that is very much needed to sustain life on planet earth. This research study replicates such ideas of transformation at an individual level to societal conversions. To sum up in the words of Pope Francis, *To Change Everything We need everybody*. Thus, propagating Models of Eco-sustainable lifestyles are the need of the hour.

REFERENCES:

- Elena Fraj& Eva Martinez, 2007, Ecological consumer behavior: an empirical analysis, International journal of consumer studies, Volume 31, Issue 1, pg. 26-33.
- Haines, A., Kovats, R. S., Campbell-Lendum, D. &Corvalan, C. (2006). Climate change and human health: impacts, vulnerability, and mitigation. The Lancet, 367(9528), 21012109.
- Iyer, R. & Muncy J.A. (2009). Purpose and Object of Anti-Consumption. Journal of Business Research. Vol. 62, pp. 160–168
- Jackson, T. (2005). Motivating Sustainable Consumption. A review of evidence on consumer behaviour and behavioural change. Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey.
- Léger, M. T. &Pruneau, D. (2011). A grounded theory perspective on eco-sustainable change in families. Ecopsychology, 3(4), 237-247.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Whitmarsh, L. & O'Neill, S. (2011). Introduction: Opportunities for and barriers to engaging individuals with climate change. In L. Whitmarsh, S. O'Neill et I. Lorenzoni(Eds.) Engaging the public with climate change: behaviour change and communication. Washington: Earthscan.
- Wills Jerkins, 2009, Sustainability Theory, Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability: The Spiritof Sustainability, pg. 380-384.

World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). (1987). Our common future.
Oxford, U.K.; New York: Oxford University Press.