

**NATIVE AMERICAN CONCERN ON ENVIRONMENT
DURING THE 1990s**

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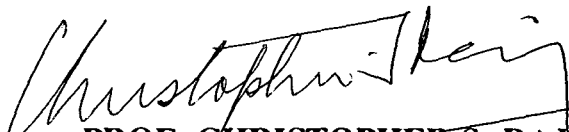
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**NATIVE AMERICAN CONCERN ON ENVIRONMENT DURING THE 1990s**" submitted by **IANOSHA MAJAW** in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is her original work. This has not been published or submitted to any other university for any other purpose.

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PROF. CHRISTOPHER S. RAJ
(SUPERVISOR)


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(CHAIRPERSON)

Empty Kettle

*I do not take what is wild
I only take what my cup
can hold.
When the black kettle gapes
empty
and children eat roasted acorns
only,
it is time to rise-up early
take no drink-eat no food
sing the song of the hunter.
I see the Buck- I chant
I chant the deer chant:
"He – hebah – Ah – kay – kee – no!"
My arrow no woman has ever touched,
find its mark.
I open the way for the blood to pour
back to Mother Earth
the debt I owe.
My soul rises – rapturous
and I sing a different song,
I sing
I sing.*

Louis (Little Coon) Oliver.

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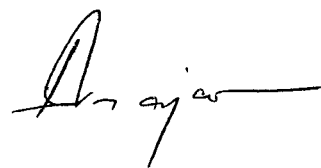
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anuj', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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INTRODUCTION

The earth is sick, poisoned many times over and in many ways too, by man. Doomsday predictions about acid rain, rising sea-water levels that are causing islands to sink, resource depletion, ozone depletion and the many other forms of environmental deterioration are increasingly and repeatedly made by environmentalists and conservationists. There is no doubt that man's reckless pursuit of technological and scientific development and progress has now brought him and the earth to the verge of destruction. In his quest for the highest possible development, man achieved new victories over the forces of nature,¹ engendering in him an unquestioning belief in his own superiority and domination over nature.

According to most environmentalists, the western man, to whom nature is but an instrument to be used for endless gain typifies the exploitative and domineering man.² Some writers, notably Lynn White³ attribute man's exploitative attitude towards nature, to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which accords to man the divine license to subjugate and subdue nature. In the book of Genesis of the Bible, God deliberates "to create man in his image and likeness to rule over fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."⁴After he did, God blessed man and commanded him to "be fruitful

¹ Indra Deva, "Towards a More Meaningful Study of Ecology, Society and Culture", *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 46, No. 1 (1997), p. 2.

² David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction*, [New York, 1996], p.10.

³ See Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis", *Science*, no. 125, (1967).

⁴ The Bible, Genesis, Chapter I, Verse 26.

and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it and also to rule over all the creatures of the land and the sea.⁵

This theory was however, disputed on the ground that pre-Christian civilizations like the Mesopotamian, Sumerian and Egyptian equaled, if not surpassed, Western society's capacity for exploiting and damaging their environment.⁶

Modern development has for long been identified with the development in western societies, defined in terms and categories of economic growth, technological and scientific progress, greater resource use etc. As Vandana Shiva writes; "Development, as the improved well-being of all was thus equated with the westernisation of economic categories -- of needs, productivity, of growth."⁷ Western culture has a "pernicious global influence"⁸, according to David Pepper, and before long these terms and categories "were raised to the level of universal assumptions and applicability in the entirely different context of the basic needs satisfaction for the people of the newly independent Third World countries."⁹ This, inevitably, increases the impact on the environment whether negative or positive. More often than not, it is the former, as the resource exploitation that modern development entails precludes environmental status quo.

The participation of developing countries, also called Third World countries, in large-scale exploitation of resources is decidedly more damaging

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rene Dubos (1901-1982), the eminent scholar and scientist was one such critic of this theory.

⁷ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive. Woman, Ecology and Development in India* (New Delhi, 1988) p.1.

⁸ Pepper, n. 2, p. 13.

⁹ Vandana Shiva, n.7

to the environment due to insufficient, if not total absence of, instruments to combat the environment-degrading consequences. The air pollution problem can be taken as an example. Developed countries are equipped not only with the funds to finance the enforcement of environmental regulations but also possess the technology to facilitate preservation and conservation practices. Sophisticated high technology ways are used in developed countries to monitor pollution levels in the air or in water. Developing countries, namely India, has only woken up to the fact that vehicular pollution is increasing at an alarming rate, thus making regulations necessary. However, the lack of proper measures to enforce such regulations makes any attempt at pollution control redundant.

Despite the detrimental consequences heaped on the environment by the western model of development, this model still seems to be the only one anyone or any country would take. Pepper is right in saying that western culture has a pernicious influence.

However, not all of mankind is exploitative and domineering towards nature. Not everyone in the world considers nature to be an instrument for material gain. These exceptional groups¹⁰ of people are the indigenous peoples of the world.

'Indigenous peoples' are loosely defined as the original inhabitants of their lands, who have been colonized by foreigners, distinguished from other

¹⁰ The indigenous peoples are exceptional because of their far-sightedness in their relationship with nature belying the common presumption that they are backward and primitive and at best retrogressive.

inhabitants by their long and unbroken historical association with a place.¹¹ Indigenous peoples around the world number about 300 million and constitute about 4 percent of the world's population.¹²

Throughout the world, indigenous peoples exhibit one universal commonality – their present (or very recent past) close dependence on local ecosystems for their survival and the struggle with the outside dominant societies keen on appropriating their lands for the exploitation of natural resources that lie abundant there.¹³

For centuries, indigenous cultures have survived in their habitats and continue to do so till the present day. Likewise, their habitats have suffered little or no impact from human activities and have remained so for millennia. This is so because of the symbiotic relationship between indigenous peoples and their habitats which arises from a worldview that sees nature not as an inanimate object but as a living, spiritual being. The earth is not just a planet but Mother Earth. Close dependency upon their environment for their survival breeds reverence and awe in indigenous peoples and inculcates the need for a harmonic living with nature.

¹¹ In 1972, UN Special Rapporteur defined Indigenous populations as those "composing" of the descendents of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them and by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial situation; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form a part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly the nation, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the populations which are predominant. See UN Document NO E/CN. 4/Sub. 2/L 566 of June 29, 1972.

¹² Brian Furze et al., *Culture, Conservation and Biodiversity : The Social Dimension of Linking Local Level Development and Conservation through Protected Areas,* (New York, 1997), p. 126.

¹³ Ibid.

The practice of subsistence economies characterized by deliberate underproduction and judicious use of resources is derived from this worldview. The belief that land is Mother Earth precludes any notion of private ownership of land or the buying and selling of it. Resources are for all to use albeit in sustainable and regenerative levels.

The relationship of indigenous peoples to their land is illustrated in the Adivasi belief that they “are not separate from the land ... The land is not ours to sell, it is only ours to honour, respect and protect our children and our children’s children.”¹⁴ However, some historical environmentalists disagree with this perception and hold that these communities did exploit the material resources of the earth to the extent that their technological capacities made possible. The Native Americans are the indigenous peoples of the United States of America and like other indigenous people groups possess a belief system that accrues from their close and intimate relationship with the environment and their land.

The personification of the earth as Mother Earth is universal among indigenous communities and this, to my mind, has more than anything else contributed to the lesser degree of exploitation of nature in these societies. The reverence and respect indigenous communities reserve for their Mother Earth stems from this perception.

The practice of the personification of natural formations by Native American have confounded and vexed non-Native Americans for centuries

¹⁴ S. Bosu Mullick, et al., *“Indigenous Identity : Crisis and Reawakening”* (Delhi, 1993), p. 35.

who not only scoff at them as being mere paganistic claptrap and nonsense,¹⁵ but also used them to assert their superiority as a more civilized people. Violent conflicts have ensued between the two groups due to these very differing notions of land, nature and the natural resources and the use of them.

The struggle for land dominated the Indian-white relationship for years. Present-day relationship is no different. However, genocidal extermination of Indians largely guaranteed the colonists' possession of Indian lands in the past, and with dubious treaties constitute the two predominant strategies employed to acquire them, present day strategies are more insidious although no less damaging and just as destructive.

Indian land is seen as ideal sites for waste disposal including lethal and hazardous wastes like nuclear waste, more so for the latter than the former considering the general American Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) attitude to disposal of waste.¹⁶ The lack of any viable regulating authority to monitor such activities makes Indian land even more vulnerable to waste dumping companies. Till 1986, Indian lands were quite literally, " the Lands the Feds Forgot" ¹⁷, when the environmental laws consequent of the environmental consciousness that swept America were passed in the 1960s and 70s failed to include Indian lands within their jurisdiction. The absence of the protective regulations that guaranteed states safety from environmentally hazardous activities of companies, from Indian land facilitated land abuse by private

¹⁵ See Environmental Values of Indigenous Peoples at <http://www.halcyon.com/FWDP/cwiscat.html>.

¹⁶ O.P. Kharbanda and E.A. Stallworthy, *Waste Management Towards a Sustainable Society*, (New York, 1990), p.46.

¹⁷ Marjane Ambler, "The Lands the Feds Forgot", *Sierra* vol.74, no.3, (1989), p. 44-48.

corporations and government agencies alike. By the time amendments were made to include Indian land, the damage was already done.

Indian land abuse continues in the 1990s. What is alarming in this period, however, is the increasing participation of yet another actor – Native American tribes themselves.

Out of the 565 federally recognized tribes of Native Americans, a few tribes like the Oneida Nation and the Choctaw have achieved economic development and prosperity through entrepreneurial activities on their land. Other tribes like the Zunis still follow their traditional agricultural system of livelihood. But there are others who are still steeped in poverty and under-development. For them the only way to acquire economic relief and monetary benefit is by allowing waste disposal companies on to their lands.

Such activities have led environmentalists and Native Americans themselves to accuse the federal government in particular of practicing environmental racism. Writers like Daniel Brook are more vehement and consider the federal government's neglect of protective measures for Indian land as deliberate and a genocidal strategy to eliminate Native Americans.

The 1990s are also witnessing a growth in Native American reaffirmation of their environmentalism. Not only have they organized themselves into a sustained opposition against environment-threatening activities and their land, but also any profit accruing from commercial activities are used in preserving the environment.

This study concerns itself with the subject of Native American relationship to their land with a special emphasis on the last decade of this

millennium. The reasons this decade was chosen are first; with the amendments in 1990 to the Clean Air Act, the inclusion of Indian land within the environmental laws is complete. This begs a comparative examination of pre- and post-amendments use of Indian land, which will be attempted here. Secondly, with the advent of the new millennium with its attendant environmental problems, the use of traditional environmental values in the preservation of the environment could provide an alternative approach.

This study is divided into three chapters. Chapter I will examine the concept of the environment and the role it plays in shaping the environmental values of people. The relationship of man to his environment is intrinsic in trying to understand man's approach to land and his environment. What are the factors that compel man to either be an exploiter of nature or a steward of the earth's biodiversity? Such questions will be dealt with in this chapter.

It would be an incomplete and shallow study of Native Americans, without an insight into their history, be it socio-cultural or political. Much of what Native Americans are today is the result of what had occurred in their history. From a free and independent people just over three centuries ago, Native Americans are now subdued, heavily dependent on welfare and federal handouts, and constantly caught between their traditional beliefs and modern demands. This chapter which is the second chapter will trace Native American history, the loss of their land, and the impact of such a history on modern day Indians.

The fourth chapter purports to study the various uses of Indian land in the present decade by Indians as well as non-Indians alike. Environmental

racism is significant by the very fact that in its extreme form could lead to the extermination of a large number of people, possibly an entire tribe or tribes in the case of Native Americans. This chapter will attempt to examine the environmental racism as practiced against Native Americans.

In conclusion, a recapitulation of Native American environmental values and the challenges confronting these values that have caused the degeneration of the Indian land will be attempted. It will posit the reassertion and acceptance of Native American environmental knowledge as a viable complement in the growth of a more holistic and nurturant ethos of environment protection and preservation not only in America but worldwide.

CHAPTER I

Man And The Environment

Introduction:

For centuries man has relentlessly pursued technological and Scientific progress and economic development and has achieved today what might have been unimaginable perhaps even fifty years ago. The quest for modern development was spurred by the Age of Enlightenment, which emphasized science and reason as the building blocks of modern technological and economic development.¹ Science and reason perpetuates the belief that every entity is an object that can be analyzed scientifically i.e., it can be reduced to its most basic components and then viewed objectively, and this extends even to nature. The power of man to reduce and deconstruct nature, obtained through the advances of sciences caused a shift in the balance of power in favour of humans against nature and created in him a feeling of superiority². Man then saw himself as separate from nature. The sanctity attached to nature was demolished by reason and rationality, and nature thence, became just another instrument man can use to further his own ambitions. The sacredness of nature is lost as man discovers his power over it.

Guided by such beliefs in the powers of science and reason and no longer fettered by notions of the sanctity of nature, man embarked upon a

¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, [New Delhi, 1988], p.xiv.

² Tim Hayward, *Ecological Thought: An Introduction*, [Cambridge, 1996], p. 12.

path of unbridled pursuit of progress. Nature and its resources were but instruments to be used to achieve maximum material gains.

The result of the reckless use of nature and its resources by man is increasingly felt today, in rising temperatures, pollution of the air, land and sea, resource depletion and environmental deterioration.

However, the belief in science and development is not universal but is ascribed to western society and culture, where they originated. There are in the world, people whose deep-seated beliefs in the sanctity of nature, and the regenerative and sustainable use of natural resources, are most antithetical to the beliefs of the Western world. These are the indigenous peoples whose close relationship with nature have enabled them to survive for millennia even without the technological development that is indispensable to Western culture. These peoples, also called “native”, or “tribals” are rightly called the “stewards” and “guardians” of the earth and its biodiversity.

This chapter attempts to explore man-nature relationship in two perspectives -- the Western and the indigenous. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section I will examine man-nature relationship, whether it is one of domination with man as the despot or one of mutual inter-dependence with man as the steward. Section II will explore this relationship in the context of the traditional environmental values of Native Americans, their relevance in present-day America and their place in modern technocentric environmentalism.

Before embarking on this study, let us first look into the definition of environment.

1.1. Definition of Environment:

Commonsensically, environment would refer to the surroundings of an organism, both biological and social, and it includes the presence of other organisms as well. Therefore, environment can be defined as the sum total of all conditions and influences that affect the development and life of organisms. It, thus, includes conditions with which man and other living organisms interact. The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines environment as “comprising the whole range of external influence affecting the life and development of an organism.”³

Robert Paehlke gives a more descriptive definition of the environment – “In its most general sense, the word environment refers to the area that surrounds or circumscribes human or non-human beings.”⁴ According to Paehlke, the term environment used to mean different things to different people. To sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists, environment refers to the social milieu that surrounds and has an impact on human activity. Natural scientists on the other hand would use the term to signify natural ecosystems, independent of humans and surrounding a living being or an animal or plant population. Today a consensus exists as to the definition of environment and according to Paehlke, environment is now considered to be an “organized, dynamic, and evolving system of natural (i.e., biological, physical and chemical) and human (i.e. economic, political, social and

³ The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979, p. 912

⁴ Robert Paehlke ed., *Conservation and Environmentalism. An Encyclopaedia*, (New York, 1995), p. 217-218.

cultural) factors in which living organisms operate or human activities take place, and which has a direct or indirect, immediate or long-term effect or influence on these living beings or on human actions at a given time and in a circumscribed area.”⁵

John Passmore distinguishes three kinds of environment relating to human beings; social environment, which consists of the community he is born in and the social practices inherent within that community; Physical environment or the ‘built’ environment manifested in machines, roads, buildings and all the other objects deliberately designed to satisfy human needs and desires; and the natural environment which as the term implies, refer to the flora and fauna around the human being.⁶

Environments exist in terms of the organisms or the human beings that inhabit them. Therefore, environment can be natural or built, rural or urban, biotic or cultural. In this sense, environment is often used as a synonym for the word nature, or milieu or exosphere,⁷ inasmuch as they are influenced or threatened by human activity or have some impact on that activity. So just as man impacts on the environment, the environment affects man as well. A relationship between man and nature is one of constant and consistent interaction with each other. There are two dimensions to the man-nature relationship. ⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Passmore in Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit ed., *Blackwell companions to Philosophy. A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, [Oxford, 1993], p.472.

⁷ Environment has often replaced these terms, starting in the 1960s when problems of pollution and of resource scarcity began to appear.

⁸ See Charles L. Harper, *Environment and Society. Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues*, [Upper Sadd

1. 2. **Man – Nature Relationship:**

a.) Environment influence on Man:

Since the beginning of creation, man has been in close interaction with nature with the latter influencing all aspects of a man's life. Man himself adapted to his environment, whether in terms of shelter, food or clothing. Man was in awe of nature and did little to change it. The lack of technology limited man's scope to alter his environment.

Environment's influence on man is manifested most clearly in man's adaptive response through food habits and even economic systems. For example, centuries ago, the Plains Indians of the United States occupying the vast Prairies of America became a hunting tribe as game was plentiful and the terrain provided less scope for agriculture. Hunting and food gathering became the predominant socio-economic vocation of these peoples.⁹ On the other hand, the Cherokee and the Zunis occupied lands in close proximity to water systems. This facilitated the development of their horticultural and agricultural modes of economy.

The influence of the environment on man is also reflected in the life style of nomadic people or even people of the Polar Regions, in their clothing, in their food habits and in their habitations.

The interaction of man and his environment is a continuing process, and man more than any other being has developed the ability to modify the environment and thus to live under a wide range of physical and biological

⁹ See Charles L. Harper, *Environment and Societ: Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues*, (Upper Saddle River, 1996).

conditions. Over years of interaction with the environment, man has in fact created a new “biome” or ecological formation – the man-altered landscape, which is rapidly replacing other terrestrial landscapes as forests are cleared, grasslands ploughed and deserts irrigated.¹⁰ Within this ecological formation, man has assumed dominance over all other organisms much to his and his environment’s detriment.

b.) Man’s impact on the Environment:

The dawning of the Age of Enlightenment brought to an end, superstitions and the mythical beliefs in the sanctity of nature. Eighteenth century Europe saw a growth in knowledge and in the power to manipulate the natural world. It was a period of the advances of the sciences which became the “ cause and effect of a shift in the balance of power, apparently, in favour humans against nature—through technological applications”.¹¹As a result of man’s assumption of the dominant position nature became subjugated and its resources , mere raw materials to be used for man’s further quest for even greater and fuller development.

The proclamation that the scientific advances brought about by the Enlightenment, would emancipate humans from “the fetters of nature which had hitherto bound humanity in subjection and darkness...and promote liberation from prejudice and superstition, and, via their technological application, from helpless subjection to forces of nature...”, ¹²are now considered “premature and at worst arrogant “ by Tim Hayward in the light of

¹⁰ David Sills, ed, *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, volume I and II, (New York, 1968) p. 93.

¹¹ Hayward, n. 2.

¹² Ibid.

the kind of devastation that can be wrought by “technologically embodied science” as manifested in the ecological crises witnessed today.¹³

Nevertheless, the relationship between man and nature remains interactive with both continuously impacting upon each other.¹⁴ The contemporary world has now become both a symbol of man’s capacity for progress as well as his capacity to destroy.

Man’s domination over nature might not be a modern phenomenon that came with the scientific and industrial revolutions, but perhaps began with the discovery of fire itself. With fire, man found that he could burn the trees and the grass, scares animals away or kill them for food or in self- defense. Fire was the first deliberate tool man used although only to clear forests and thus, to affect the ecosystem. Detwyler writes that with “the attainment of capacity to use and to create fire the mischief-making capability of the species, and its tendency to embark upon the use of destructive instruments without understanding the necessary restraints, became manifest”.¹⁵ In the course of man’s evolution, he discovered more sophisticated ways to tame and subdue nature.

Man’s unquenchable thirst for development and modern progress arises from the exploitative and domineering facets of his personality. This is compounded by western culture, which sees nature as a non-living lifeless instrument that can be utilized by man to achieve his objectives. Non-Western cultures for the most part perceive nature differently. Nature is a

¹³

Ibid.

¹⁴

Sills, n.9.

¹⁵

Thomas r. Detwyler, *Man’s Impact on Environment*, [New York, 1971], p. 13.

sacred living entity, possessing a soul. This is manifested in rituals like tree worshipping, the preservation of sacred groves as abodes of gods etc., rituals, which Western culture could neither comprehend nor wish to pursue believing that they only hinder the paths of progress. These two divergent perceptions have influenced the notion that man in Western cultures play the despot in his relationship with nature quite unlike his counterpart in non-Western cultures who plays the role of a guardian of nature.

Some environmentalists have traced man's exploitative attitude towards nature to the Bible and the tradition that comes from it. The role of man as a subjugator of nature was divinely ordained through the biblical injunction that humans are to "subdue" the earth and exercise "dominion" over all other living things.¹⁶ The guardianship of nature by non-Western cultures, on the other hand, is traced to their roots in Animism, which perpetuates a belief in the sacredness and spirituality of all living beings believing that they are the abodes of gods and spirits. The roles of man as a despot and a steward will be discussed below.

c. Man as a Despot:

Man's relentless pursuit of progress and development and the resultant subjugation of nature is often perceived to have been derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition which bestows on man superiority over all natural beings, and priority over them in the Great Chain of Being (third only to God and the angels). Such perceptions find justification in the Bible, specifically the book of Genesis, where after having created man in his own likeness, God

¹⁶ Ernest L Fortin, "The Bible made Me Do It: Christianity, Science, and the Environment", *The Review of Politics*, [1995], vol.57 no.2.

authorized him "to have dominion over all the other living things"¹⁷. Therefore man is no ordinary being. Thus, God divinely ordained man's superiority over all other living beings himself. In Chapter I, verse 28 of Genesis¹⁸ is contained what Passmore calls the "charter" which granted man the right to subdue the earth and all its inhabitants.¹⁹ Thus, man received not just an order but a decree from God to use the earth.

Lynn White Jr made the contention that the Judeo-Christian tradition is responsible for the ecological crises afflicting the world today²⁰ in 1967. This has been strongly disputed by theologians and scholars, chief among them was the microbiologist Rene Dubos, who argue that White's "selective evidence" taken from the Bible to corroborate his theory, exaggerated the nuances and meanings of the verses. They maintain that there are other instances present in the Bible which just as strongly, expresses the importance of other living things. Psalms 104 for instance rejoices and admires God's creation "and express his care for various creatures and suggest that human's domination of nature means ruling it in a way consistent with being responsible to God for his realm. Moreover, other pre-Christian civilizations viz., Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations equaled if not surpassed the western societies in their impact on the environment.

There are those who contend that the triumph of Christianity over "paganism" or "pagan animism" led to the crumbling of old inhibitions man

¹⁷ Genesis 1:26, The Bible.

¹⁸ Genesis 1:28 says : "God blessed[man] and said to [man].Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

¹⁹ John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, [London, 1974], p.3.

²⁰ See Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crises", *Science*, [1967], vol.125.

possessed with regard to his use of nature and its resources. Pagan animism looked upon trees, rivers, fountains and various other natural sites as the dwelling place of divinities and accorded them respect. This functioned as a curb on the human propensity to ravage nature.²¹ Biblical monotheism and its teaching that time takes its course along a straight path rather than in cycles, laid the ground for the idea of the linear progression of development, thus accrediting one of the main presuppositions of modern science, “the tool par excellence of man’s subjugation of nature”.²²

Fortin, defending Christian environmental ethic, rejects the speculations of White considering them not only dated, but also that the attribution of feelings to inanimate objects in the contemporary period would in no way further the cause of science or the ecological movement.²³ Further, Fortin asserts that “one is at a loss to explain how the Biblical and medieval conception of the visible world as an elaborate system of symbols all pointing to the existence of an invisible and infinitely more beautiful reality” could send Christians systematically destroying nature, because “the image of creation as God’s handiwork calls for the exact opposite, to wit, a much higher regard for nature than one might otherwise have for it.”²⁴ Moreover, Fortin maintains that White’s thesis confuses the two meanings of “mastery” and “dominion” as the Bible uses the word “master” for one who rules the subordinate for the good of the whole rather than for his own private good.

²¹ Ernest L. Fortin, “The Bible Made Me Do It: Christianity, Science, And the Environment,” *The Review Of Politics*, vol. 57, no.2,[Spring, 1995], p.208.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.215

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.216

d. Man as a Steward:

With the increasing environmental degradation the world over, and the survival of indigenous peoples and their habitat; these people are seen as the rightful stewards of the earth's ecosystem. Indigenous people live in close dependence with their environment and depend on it for food, shelter, clothing and even medicines. They are self-sufficient communities, depending very much on the river, the jungle and land for their survival.²⁵ This dependence breeds a reverence and respect for nature like no other culture does.

Indigenous people and their cultures in contrast to Western culture do not perceive of resources as being limitless or that nature is only an instrument to be used for man's progress and development. Nature is powerful and she is the provider of man's necessities, and this is taken into cognizance by these cultures. They follow a judicious use of natural resources based on deliberate underproduction so as to leave enough not only for their children but also for their children's children. Interestingly this age-old approach to resource use by indigenous people find its modern Western parallel in the theory of intergenerational equity.

The indigenous approach to nature and the use of natural resources, some environmentalists opine, has its roots in Animism, which inculcates beliefs that all natural formations and every living thing are the abodes of spirits.²⁶ No entity is lifeless but all and everything have life, and is thus, accorded equal importance and status in the scheme of things. Man is no

²⁵ Noeleen Heyzer, "Rainforest Management and Indigenous Livelihoods: A Malaysian Case Study", *Development*, [1992:4], p.16.


²⁶ L. P. Vidyarthi and B. K. Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, New Delhi, 1976 p. 239

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different nor superior to any other object, be it animate or inanimate. This is in contradistinction to the western culture's perception of man as master, a domineering being who has the divine authorization to subdue nature and subjugate other living things.

This worldview which espouses beliefs in the spirituality of all things as being the abodes of gods and spirits naturally, imposes certain restrictions on the use of nature and its resources. These restrictions which are in the form of taboos function as a curb on the human propensity to ravage nature. Indigenous peoples still have their religion firmly rooted in these beliefs and therefore they and their habitat have been able to survive the environmental deterioration that is plaguing the western world. There can be no misuse of resources without risking the wrath of the spirits. Thus, members of these cultures have rites and rituals to propitiate the gods who reside within the natural objects, so as not to invite the ill will of the gods.

However, western culture and western man, having what Pepper calls a "pernicious global influence" has not left even these cultures untouched. Christianity, a "western" religion dismisses beliefs in the sentience of natural objects as mere superstitions and paganistic in character. The result is monumental erosion of traditional values and beliefs. Not only do these people see nature as 'useable' but also exploitable for accruing economic benefits. This is manifested in the trading of natural resources i.e. their biodiversity and their potentialities (medicinal being pre-eminent), either for monetary benefits or for genetically engineered seeds etc. that might enhance

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their agricultural production and generate higher incomes but could damage their ecosystem forever.²⁷

Gadgil and Guha called the indigenous peoples the “ecosystem people”, and also imply the pre-eminence of these peoples as stewards of the ecosystem. This is because these peoples, “...have been in the business of extracting services from nature without large inputs (primarily because they had no access to them) for a very long time. Their practices have, therefore, been moulded to working largely with nature. This repertoire includes a great variety of land races of cultivated plants and domesticated animals adapted to particular environments which often are reservoirs of valuable genes conferring resistance to diseases, permitting salt or drought tolerance and so on.”²⁸

Writes Alan T. Durning, “Indigenous peoples... offer the world’s dominant culture a consumerist and individualist culture born in Europe and bred in the United States – living examples of ancient values that may be shared by everyone: devotion to future generations, ethical regard for nature, and commitment to community among people. Such examples are sorely needed, given the impact of the world’s materially successful cultures on indigenous peoples’ survival.”²⁹

²⁷ Rahmatullah Khan, “Development and Environment”, *World Focus*, vol. 13, no. 11-12, pp. 29.

²⁸ Ramchandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil, *Ecology and Equity. The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, [New Delhi, 1995], p.141.

²⁹ Alan T. Durning, “Guardians of the Land: Indigenous Peoples and the Health of the Earth- An Extract”, *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, vol.1, no. 3, [1993], p. 61-68.

1.5. Native Americans and the Environment

The Native Americans are the indigenous peoples of the United States of America. Also called American Indians or simply Indians [when not confused with Indians from the Indian sub-continent], they number about two million, constituting about 1 per cent of the total American population. The 1990 census counted 1, 959, 000 Native Americans (including Native Hawaiians, Inuits and Alaska Natives).³⁰

A Native American or American Indian is defined as “a person who is member of an Indian tribe. An Indian tribe means any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska native village, regional or village corporation as defined or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act 1971, which is recognized as eligible for the special programmes and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.”³¹

The term Native American gained currency in the 1970s, the years of the resurgence of American Indian power. However, there is no consensus as to the defining term with some groups still objecting to the term Indian as it was given to them by a lost Italian, a reference to Christopher Columbus who discovered them in 1492.³²

There are, at present 565 federally recognized tribes of Native Americans. These live in and around parcels of federally allotted land called

³⁰ World Dictionary of Minorities, 1997 p. 41.

³¹ This definition is according to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act 1975 [Public Law 93-638]. Cited in Gail E. Thomas ed, *U.S. Race Relations in the 80s and 90s: Challenges and Alternatives*, [New York, 1990], p.219.

³² Damon Dartin, “Rebellions on the reservations”, *Forbes*, vol. 159, no.10, [May 19, 1997], p.97.

rancherias, colonies, native villages or reservations³³. Urbanization, forced removals and economic opportunities have brought the Native American out of their lands. Thus, Hirschfelder and Montano recorded about 685,000 Indians i.e., 35%, who have chosen to remain on Indian land.

According to Robert Jarvenpa, the Native Americans at the time of contact possessed a cultural diversity that surpassed that of Renaissance Europe, yet this was dispassionately ignored by ethnocentric Europeans who chose to lump them together under the pejorative term "Indians".³⁴ For five centuries, Native Americans and non-Native Americans have remained largely strangers. Knowledge about American Indians was derived mainly from and confined to stereotypes of the Indian, that of a savage primitive and pagan, or of a noble savage, an "unspoiled child of nature". As Faherty, giving an overview of Indians writes; "The Indian was stereotyped as uncivilized, and mentally, culturally and religiously inferior to the white."³⁵ As a savage, therefore, he cannot be granted equal status as a person. Hence, he could be "converted, removed, exploited."³⁶ Present day stereotyping of Indians is that of a prototype environmentalist belonging "to a culture that could talk to trees and the animals and that protected nature. But sadly, a losing culture which has not kept up with the times".³⁷ The mystification of the

³³ In the states of California and Nevada, Indian land is referred to as rancherias and colonies where as the term reservations apply to others. See Arlene Hirschfelder and Martha Kriepe de Montano, *The Native American Almanac*, [New York, 1993], p. 40.

³⁴ Robert Jarvinpa, "The Political Economy and Political Ethnicity of American Indian Adaptions and Identities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, [January, 1985],p.30.

³⁵ Robert Faherty, "The American Indian: An Overview", *Current History*, vol. 67, no. 400, [December, 1974], p. 241.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred. The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, [San Francisco, 1991], p.208.

Native American as the original environmentalist is largely due to the concept of Mother Earth deeply entrenched in their worldview and the need for the western culture to personify the environmental movement. Hence the adoption of the Suquamish Chief Seattle as the patron saint of Earth Day celebrations in America for a speech he supposedly had made in 1853 wherein he extolled the virtues of a close and harmonic living with nature.

Such stereotyping have challenged the native Americans throughout their history and are perceived by Jerry Mander as harmful, as it tends to isolate one aspect of Indian life from another negating the interconnectedness of the physical, the spiritual, the cultural and the social spheres of Native American cosmovision.³⁸ Indian life is religion, individuality, tribalism, and the environment all fused together.³⁹

To the Native Americans, the environment is sacred, the earth a sacred entity and a haven for all forms of life and therefore it had to be protected, nourished and even worshipped. Chief Smohalla of the Wanapun tribe illustrated the Native American's reverence for the earth in 1885 when he said;

"You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again.

³⁸

Ibid.

³⁹

James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century*, [Urbana and Chicago, 1984], p. 218.

You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like white men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?"⁴⁰

Another illustration is provided by the patron saint Chief Seattle himself in his reply to an offer by the U.S. government to buy a large area of land and to set aside a reservation for them.

"How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can we buy them. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people...We are part of the earth and it is a part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters, the deer, the horse, the great eagle; these are our brothers.... The Earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth."⁴¹

When Native Americans call the earth "Mother Earth", they mean it literally. They believe that plants, animals in fact all life germinate within her and burst to life from her and nurtured at her bosom.⁴² Naturally, this kind of belief system imposes certain restrictions against the use of land or even individual owning of it, but encourages subsistence economies and communal ownership of property, both of which prevail in Indian life and absent from Western technological life styles.

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Verrier Elwin drew a parallel in his study of the cultivation practice of the Baiga tribe of India. Like the Indian the Baigas too, believe that ploughing the land causes distress to Mother Earth. See Ramchandra Guha, *Social Ecology*, [New Delhi, 1990], p.

⁴¹ Quoted in Olson and Wilson, n. 39, p. 17.

⁴² Mander, n. 37, p.212

Native Americans shared one common thing with indigenous peoples around the world – the close dependence on their local ecosystems for their survival.

1.6. Concept of Mother Earth

The concept of Mother Earth is not confined to Native Americans alone but to other indigenous peoples as well. In this, the earth is likened to a mother who gives birth, suckles her young and provides nourishment. In most indigenous communities, the earth is addressed to as Mother Earth or their linguistic equivalent. The Maoris call the earth Papatuanuku; the Khasis call her Ka Meiramew and the Andean Indians, Pacha Mama, all meaning Mother Earth.

Mother Earth is a natural, physical and spiritual being. She is kind and she is generous. She can create as well as destroy. Therefore, Mother Earth is worshipped and sometimes prayers, rites and rituals are performed to propitiate her. Since every object whether animate or inanimate is believed to have been created by Mother Earth in indigenous societies, man-nature relationship is distinctive in that there is an absence of a Chain of Being type of hierarchy. Every living thing is seen as an equal to each other. Man is no more or less superior or inferior to any other living or non-living thing.

The sanctity of nature and the inviolability of the environment pervade the entire spectrum of the way of life in indigenous societies. The concept of private ownership of property that characterizes Western liberal society is virtually alien to most indigenous peoples. The community usually holds property in land in these societies and individuals possess only the right to

use the land. Rights to property and land use are therefore based on the usufructory purposes rather than for profit.

The use was governed by traditional systems of resource use and conservation that involved a mix of religion, folklore and tradition that ensures judicious use at regenerative levels. This form relationship with nature is institutionalized through a variety of cultural and religious mechanisms namely, myths and folklore.

Myths and Legends:

Almost every indigenous community or tribal community possesses stories and accounts of their origin, woven into narratives and stories. These stories constitute the myths and legends. Myths and legends are narratives that stem from beliefs about transcendental powers, about the origins of the universe and of social institutions or about the history of the people. Their function for society's members is to record, present and allow a reflective exploration of the moral system and relational features therein presented. Myths play a great role in environment preservation in indigenous societies and form part of their collective ecological wisdom. Myths about the natural formations of a place breeds reverence for that place and sets in certain restrictions regarding the use of that particular area.

Native Americans did not possess a script or creed that provided a systematic exposition of their worldview. What they had was a language. They used this to create a religious ethos embedded in entities that could be interpreted in their cultural traditions and values. These are myths, legends and folklore. A myth is a narrative or story but with spiritual significance

attached to it. It tells stories of creation and origins, explains the power of supreme beings who reveals his or her mysteries through creation whether man or animal.

American Indians possess numerous myths and legends that tell of their origins. These myths form part of the oral tradition, which conveys the past to the newer generations. The origin of the Sioux (also known as the Lakota) is also narrated in the same way and constitutes one of the Native American myths. According to the Lakota, Wakan Tanka, their Great Spirit was walking through the Black Hills of South Dakota. Surveying the fruits of his creations, he was pleased. He gloried in the gifts he had given to the deer, perseverance to the turtle, and majesty to the eagle. He had but one more gift to impart, and that was love; so Wakan Tanka joined with Mother Earth and created the first man right there in the Black Hills. The Lakota was born. The Black Hills are sacred to the Lakota, and even to this day remain the prime sacred site of the Lakota.

The origins of the tribes are most often associated with particular geological spots, which might be a lake, a mountain or a forest, which generates a compelling religious loyalty to it. For the Taos of New Mexico, the Blue Lake in northwest New Mexico was an ancient holy place where Tao life has its source.

Myths and legends woven around a place be it a lake, forest or mountain have religious significance. Therefore, they are not free from taboos and restrictions, which govern the use of such places. Such restrictions are enforced usually by fear of the gods' wrath manifested in

“unwellness of being” which is “disharmony in the mind, body and spirit”⁴³ brought upon by unhappy spirits etc. These restrictions ensure the durability, judicious use and longevity of resources. The other practice followed by indigenous societies that has ecological significance is the preservation of sacred sites or sacred groves.

Sacred Sites

Every religion has its sacred site or sites where members gather to worship. Native Americans consider the whole earth sacred, but certain lakes, hot springs, and mountains more so. This concept of sacred site was expressed by Chief Seattle in 1887 when he that:

“Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe. Even the rocks, which seem to lie dumb as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore in solemn grandeur thrill with memories of past events connected with the fates of my people.”⁴⁴

In 1996, a Presidential Executive Order defined sacred site as “any specific, discrete, narrowly delineated location on Federal land that is identified by an Indian tribe or Indian individual determined to be an appropriately authoritative of an Indian religion, as sacred by virtue of its established religious significance to, or ceremonial use by, an Indian religion; provided that the tribe or appropriately authoritative representative of an Indian religion has informed the agency of the existence of such a tribe.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Carol Locust in Gail E. Thomas ed., n. 31, p. 225.

⁴⁴ Hirschfelder and Montano, n. 33, p.112

⁴⁵ Presidential order

It is to these sites that Indian individuals would go for their vision quests where the individual would isolate himself, where he would fast and pray for as many as four days and nights until he receives a vision whereby he would encounter a being who would then become his spiritual mentor for life. These vision quests and other spiritual practices must take place at sites, which have not been disturbed by mining, logging or any human activity that interferes with the environment of the place. Some sites have been destroyed and desecrated, e.g., Celilo Falls in Oregon, which was an ancient place of worship for the Umatilla, Nez Perce, Yakima and Warm Spring Indians. The San Francisco Peaks in Arizona was sacred to the Zunis, Apaches, Hopis and Navajos. These were desecrated and destroyed by the developments of the Snow Bowl, a portion of the peaks used for skiing. Two of the remaining sacred sites are Bear Butte in South Dakota and the Multnomah Falls in Oregon. Bear Butte has about 4,000 Indian visitors every year who come to pray as well as for vision quests. Legend has it that the Great Spirit created the Multnomah Falls for the chief's daughter who threw herself over a cliff top as a sacrifice to him to end an epidemic.⁴⁶

Today, because many tribes lost much of their land through treaties with the U.S. government, many traditional prayer sites are located on public domain lands controlled by agencies of the government like the U.S. Park Services and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. This being the case, Indian prayer sites have constantly been vulnerable to desecration by tourists or as is usually the case, construction of new roads.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See P.S. Ramkrishna et al ed., *Conserving the Sacred for Biodiversity Management*, [Delhi, 1998].

⁴⁷ Hirschfelder and Montana, n.33 p. 212.

The concept of sacred sites and sacred groves is unique to indigenous societies. Like sacred sites, sacred groves are forested tracts of land designated holy and therefore left untouched by humans. The preservation of these groves as a religious practice is still in existence in many parts of tribal India. These lands have survived for centuries and therefore contain vegetation in near-virgin condition.⁴⁸ Like the sacred sites these sacred groves are believed to be protected by the reigning deity of that grove and the removal of even deadwood is taboo. Gurdon studying the existence of the sacred groves in Meghalaya finds the basis for their existence in the "long tradition of environmental conservation based on sound ecological values and principles"⁴⁹ being practiced by the tribes of that region since time immemorial. Tripathi et al, opine that the concept of sacred groves and the various taboos around them arose from the foresightedness of the tribes' forefathers who knew that such beliefs would be more comprehensible and therefore a greater deterrent to their tribesmen than any talk on conservation and preservation could do. They write "the sacred groves with their attached religious beliefs and taboos, passed on from generation to generation have been instrumental in protecting these groves in the pristine form since ages."⁵⁰ Therefore these myths and legends alongwith the attendant taboos and restrictions could be only a human construct. Nevertheless, they exhibit the deep and sound ecological wisdom of indigenous peoples.

All this is not to say that indigenous communities are less prone to degrading their environment. Historical environmentalists are of the opinion

⁴⁸ Ramchandra Guha ed., *Social Ecology*, [New Delhi, 1994], p. 82.

⁴⁹ See P.R. Gurdon, *The Nature Races of India: The Khasis*. [New Delhi, 1975].

⁵⁰ Ramkrishna et al, n.36, p.

that traditional communities did indeed adversely affect their environment albeit only to the degree that their technology is capable of. The presumption held here is that technology, commensurate with environmental degradation, would have affected these communities had they been in possession of it. However one cannot discount the fact of the close interrelationship they share with nature.

The damaging consequences of man's activities on the environment have brought about a rethinking in the approaches of man towards his use of nature, which forms modern day environmentalism. Unlike classical environmentalism, environmentalism in the present-day connotes not just the socio-cultural dimensions of the effect of the environment on the human being, but also the political dimensions of such impact. Thus, environmentalism is now a "socio-political force" that finds expressions in political parties⁵¹ e.g., the Green Party in Germany.

Modern day environmentalism gave rise to the environmental movement that purports to strive for the preservation of the earth. The main concern of environmentalists is to restore degenerated natural areas, maintain wilderness areas and to restore the earth into something like its pristine form.

Conclusion:

The degradation of the earth and the environment is progressing at an alarming rate. There is a need to rethink our strategies and approaches to development and progress, as with the present strategies we are not only endangering the earth but also ourselves. The survival of the indigenous

⁵¹ Passmore, n. 5, .p. 471.

peoples in their own habitat for centuries stands to exemplify the need for the close interrelationship and the respect that ought to be accorded to the earth. The Earth does not belong to the present generation only, according to the Native American belief, a belief shared by almost all indigenous peoples the world over. It belongs to our one's children and to the children's children. The western world has only woken up to this fact. Prof. Weiss' theory of "intergenerational equity" echoes this very belief. The belief in the regenerative and sustainable use of natural resources by the indigenous peoples, their "deliberate underproduction", is part of the ancient environmental wisdom of the indigenous peoples. The western world incorporation of these values in the principles of "sustainable development" stands to testify the relevance of traditional ecological wisdom.

Indigenous peoples inhabit areas, which have been undisturbed for centuries by large-scale extractive activities. This makes them literally storehouses of mineral wealth. For the resources present on their land and also for the land itself, the indigenous peoples have been prime targets for genocidal activities by the dominant society. This abuse continues today and in many forms. The incursions of the dominant society into the societies of the indigenous communities is continuing unabated, posing grave dangers to these communities whose environment and land not only form the foundation of their identity but also constitute the keys to their very survival.

Like other indigenous communities, native Americans have also witnessed the degradation of their land and their environment caused by the dominant society. The use of Native Land for waste disposal and storage sites for nuclear waste in the contemporary period, are but the few of the injustices

meted out to the Native American throughout their history. The following chapters will attempt to examine the issues and problems that concern the Native American and the environment during this present decade.

CHAPTER II

The Native American – His Story.

Introduction:

When a lost Christopher Columbus landed in the Caribbean Islands in 1492, he was met by the Tainos tribe of American Indians, who as per custom of receiving strangers, welcomed him and gifted him and his entourage with presents and treated them with honour.¹ An impressed Columbus wrote to the King and Queen of Spain, his sponsors, that the people were "so tractable, so peaceful... there is not in the world a better nation. They love their neighbours as themselves, and their discourse is ever sweet and gentle, and accompanied with a smile; and though it is true that they are naked, yet their manners are decorous and praiseworthy".² However, not entirely free of ethnocentric bias, Columbus like his followers after him considered the natives he encountered as paganistic and desperately in need of Christianizing and civilizing. He noted in his journal; "They should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since I see that they very soon say all that is said to them, and I believe that they would easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no creed."³

Ethnocentrism has always governed white people's perception of native Americans throughout the centuries and has continued to the present day. The years of interaction between the Indians and the non-Indians, and in

¹ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, [New York, 1970], p.1.

² Ibid.

³ James Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century*, [Urbana and Chicago, 1984], p.29.

particular the whites, albeit in varying degrees, have done little to eradicate cultural and other stereotypes attached to the former. "The Indian," writes Faherty, "are stereotyped as uncivilized, and mentally, culturally, and religiously inferior to the white." As they were evidently unequal in status with the whites they could be converted, removed and exploited".⁴

Cultural superiority and ethnocentric bias permeated even literature on American Indians. Early writers would bluntly state that Indians are war-hungry, crude, lazy and unreliable. In conflicts and violent confrontations between the two, Indians would be depicted as having "massacred" the whites or "killed" them. The whites on their part only "fought" or "battled" the Indians.⁵ The bias is also evident in the fact that European Americans chose to view the various and diverse tribes as one composite whole unmindful of the myriad differences that distinguish one tribe from another. To the whites they were all "Indians".⁶ Early in time most Natives objected to this vague identification, as this would mean a loss of their basic individual tribal names and therefore, their identity. Moreover the clubbing of the various tribes together negates the socio-cultural, political, and even historical differences each tribe possessed.

Present day stereotyping of the Native Americans is that of "prototype environmentalists"⁷ who belong to a culture that can talk to the trees and to

⁴ Robert L. Faherty, "The American Indian: an Overview", *Current History*, vol. 67, no.400 [1974], p.241.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert Jarvenpa, "The Political Economy and Political Ethnicity of American Indian Adaptions and Identities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 8, no.1, [1985], p.30.

⁷ Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River. A Brief History of the US Environmental Movement*, [San Francisco, 1997], p.13.

the animals and who protected nature.⁸The Native American is a “noble savage in Rousseau’s state of nature”, writes Faherty.⁹

There are at present about 1 million Native Americans in the United States of America alone. The World Dictionary of Minorities counted 1,959,000 Native Americans in 1990¹⁰, and this included native Hawaiians, Inuits and Alaska Natives. But who exactly is a Native American. While opinions vary, the most accepted criterion is the one formulated by the federal government, i.e., any individual can be deemed to be an Indian if he is of one-fourth Indian ancestry. However this laid open many discrepancies. As Native Americans are recipients of many of the federal programs that aim to improve their lot, claims as to the Indian origin have been many. Many agree, though that Indian identification is as per the convenience of the individuals themselves. While in the cities, most Indians or claimants to Indian origin choose underplay if not totally shed their Indian identity whereas in the reservations they would still go by their tribal identity. This is one other reason for the difficulty Census taker face when trying to acquire the exact number of Native American population.

⁸ Mander gives two interesting instances of the adoption of the American media of the Indian stereotype; in the first portrayal, an Indian is seen looking over the vast wilderness of the Alaskan landscape. Quick cuts to the present show oil pipeline workers walking alongside the hot-oil pipelines seeming to protect against leaks and thereby protecting the environment. This depiction is meant to convey the message that the Indian has relinquished guardianship of the environment into the hands of the oil-company and that the trust has not been misplaced. In the second portrayal the Indian is a rain making shaman who was hired to bring the rains and having done that he leaves for home, happy and satisfied via United Airlines. See Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred. The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, [San Francisco, 1991], p.204.

⁹ Faherty, n.4.

¹⁰ World Dictionary of Minorities, [1997], p.41.

The Native Americans of the United States [which we will concern ourselves with], belong to about 565 tribes and they live on or around the parcels of land allotted to them by the federal government, called rancherias, communities or reservations. The tribes are known by their names such as Navajo, Lakota [called Sioux by the French], Cherokee [who along with the Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creeks and Seminoles were known as the Five Civilized Tribes], etc. These tribes are distinct from each other not only in language but also in the political and socio-cultural practices they follow. While the debates about the structure of Indian languages still persist, many now agree that there are thirteen major Native language groups in what is now the United States.

Native Americans continue to remain as distinct from non-Indians i.e. White in contemporary America. While part of the reason is the failure of the dominant society to integrate Native Americans into its fold, much of it is the effort of the Indians themselves to adhere to their own culture and identity and resist any form of acculturation or assimilation.

To understand Native Americans and to comprehend their worldview it is imperative to examine the various factors and linkages that continue to shape and mould the various aspects of their life. These linkages exist in the form of religion and history, both social and political. This chapter aims to study such linkages and their role in the concern of Native Americans on the environment in the present decade.

2.1. Origin:

The people who now make up the Native Americans are believed to have arrived on American soil from Asia in circa 40,000 – 15,000 B. C., when a temporary land bridge formed across the Bering Strait during the last Ice Age.¹¹ By 5000 B.C., civilizations marked by sophisticated social systems and complex religious, agricultural, and trading patterns were present throughout the continent. In 1500 A.D., there were between 10 and 20 million people in over 300 nations.¹²

Native Americans are often referred to as First Nations or First Peoples in reference to historical findings that they were the first to reach the vast empty wilderness that is now the Americas.¹³ These people were big game hunters whose lives were organised around the bison, caribou, mammoth and moose. Depletion of game on their land brought them to the New World in search of these animals.

The first people quickly adapted themselves to the terrain showing a remarkable capacity for adjusting with the habitat. Hence, it is seen that while the Lakotas continued game hunting facilitated by the presence of game in plenty on their land other tribes like the Zunis adopted agriculture.

By the time of the first contact with White settlers, most tribes have already formed cohesive groups and having given up hunting either partially

¹¹ Kline, n. 7, p. 14

¹² Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, And Work: A multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, [Boston, 1991], p. 32.

¹³ However the claim that they were the first ever peoples to have reached the American land is disputed by recent discoveries of an altogether different racial people who had occupied the land much before the First Peoples did. See Sharon Begley and Andrew Murr, "The First Americans", *Newsweek*, vol. CXXXIII, no. 23, [June 7, 1999], p. 38-45.

or totally were leading sedentary lives and even having some form of government. Therefore the Europeans did not encounter so primitive a people but in fact a richly diverse indigenous population made up of different nations with distinct languages, cultures, and histories. ¹⁴

2.2. A Socio- cultural Profile

It is not difficult to succumb to the tendency of stereotyping Native Americans. To most non-Native Americans these tribes seem most homogenous and dissimilarities if they exist are not distinct enough to be discerned. But juxtaposed with one another, the tribes exhibit striking and remarkable differences and diversity. The diversity manifests itself in several aspects, chief of which is language. Native American languages are not homogenous but belong to distinct language families, some of which are Algonquian, Shoshonean, Iroquoian, Sioun etc. Within these families different groups speak variations or dialects. Diversity is also traced to the differences in geographical location—in climate, in topography, and in natural resources--and these dictate the economy of the tribe. Therefore a tribe is either hunter-gatherer or agricultural according to the geography of their settlements. Thus, not all of them are hunter-gatherers nor are they all agriculturists as their socio-economic patterns are shaped and defined by their environment and the resources present therein. Although there was significant variation among the groups living in a region, Native American peoples are generally grouped into six cultural areas, according to the specific region in which they lived:

¹⁴ Amott and Matthaei, n. 12.

Northwest Coast, Plains, Plateau, eastern Woodlands, Northern, and Southwest.¹⁵

These differences constitute a cultural diversity that surpassed the cultural diversity of Renaissance Europe, but are often dismissed by European-Americans, who driven by ethnocentric bias, subsumed the tribes under one collective but pejorative term, "Indian".

Nevertheless, when compared to European-American societies, Native Americans display a commonality that far outweighs their distinctions. Religious practices and beliefs that stem from a shared worldview, the notions of time and its circular movement etc are shared by most if not all tribes. The one definite thread that binds all tribes together, however is their worldview and cosmovision where the universe constitutes the world of natural and spiritual beings and the earth is a living entity. The earth and the land and all in it are the abodes of spirits and gods. Therefore, they are accorded reverence and respect. Wrongful use of land and disrespect for the earth put the individual at risk of offending the gods whose wrath could destroy him. Taboos or superstitions restrain anyone from overstepping the mark.¹⁶ The consequences of violating a taboo, whether it was done intentionally or unintentionally is "natural unwellness", and can affect the offender or his or her family.¹⁷ These beliefs subscribe to the religious beliefs inherent in animism.

¹⁵

Ibid.

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L. P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, *The Tribal Culture of India*, [New Delhi, 1976], p.243.

¹⁷

Carol Locust in Gail E. Thomas, *U.S Race Relations in the 80s and 90s: Challenges and Alternatives*, [New York, 1990], p. 226.

Another common factor among the Native American tribes is the belief in Mother Earth. The earth is no lifeless object as is perceived by Western cultures, but a sacred entity. Writes Mander, "we have germinated from her, we are part of her, we burst into life from her and we dissolve into her to become new life."¹⁸ This concept of Mother Earth is found to be shared by indigenous communities around the world.

The concept of Mother Earth, Brother Eagle, Sister Sky was most perplexing to the white settlers for whom the land was only an instrument to be utilised for economic gain. They saw in such personifications of natural formations as not only paganistic and primitive but also retrogressive and mere hindrances along the path of progress. It was thought that conversion of Indians to Christianity would turn these primitive pagans into civilized farmers who would forsake their beliefs in the spirituality of the land and all other natural formations and would then want to own the land, till it to produce crops he can sell, even for profit.¹⁹ This was the reason behind the enthusiasm the missionaries and the early settlers displayed in converting the Native Americans.

Conversion of the Indians largely failed as the Indians would neither relinquish their ties to the land, nor the religious beliefs. Even the converts were found much to the consternation of the Missionaries to be still practising traditional tribal rites and rituals, in spite of having converted.²⁰ Part of the reason for the failure of the Missionaries in converting the Indians according

¹⁸ Mander, n.8, p.212.

¹⁹ Olson and Wilson, n.3, p.18

²⁰ Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, "Religion Among American Indians," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 436, [March, 1978], p.31-32.

to Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, was the display of ethnic self-confidence and arrogance by the missionaries who presumed that they were dealing with a people so pagan and inferior that they can be transformed. This superior attitude of the missionaries was illustrated by the fact that no missionary made any effort at learning the tribal language in spite of working for years among them.

The colonists brought along with them the concepts of land ownership and land use to the New World. In eighteenth century Europe, land ownership was a mark of gentility, prosperity and respect, and a key to power and wealth and dominated by the nobility. America presented the colonists with vast stretches of land, and ownership was not dependent upon one's birth. As Kline writes, "Colonists brought the ambitions from the Old World, they fulfilled them in the New World where they could seek nobility without having to meet the birth qualification. Land ownership became the recognized path to riches and high office – creating the New World mobility."²¹

To the White settlers, ownership meant not just occupation but having a permanent claim to the land. In contrast, Native Americans viewed the earth, sky, and waters as communal possessions, precluding the right to individually own or trade them. They measure the land's worth by its usefulness rather than the material value of personal ownership.²² While they do possess rights to land, this right was more in terms of usufructory rights and not rights for private ownership. The only kind of ownership they enjoyed

²¹ Kline, n. 7, p.
²² Ibid.

was use ownership.²³ It is this fundamental difference which became the core area of conflict between Native Americans and the European settlers that led to the violent conflicts and wars that scarred Native American history.

The history of Indian-White relations centred broadly on land. It was generally loss of land by the Natives gained by the Whites. An examination of the loss of land by the Native Americans will be attempted in the following paragraphs.

2.3 Political History and the Loss of Land:

The history of the Native Americans since contact with the White settlers, is a painful history of struggle and violent conflicts over land. The loss of land has been mainly through two ways; wars and federal legislations that forced the cession of Indian lands to White settlers. The loss of land through wars and treaties is illustrated below through the narration of a few cases. The examples are taken at random and no reason is offered for electing them.

a. Conquests and Treaties

The settlers landed on American soil with the expressed desire to settle, grow and multiply. But much of the land was occupied by various tribes of Native Americans. The only way to get at the land was by exercising the doctrine of "terra nullius", i.e. a land without recognisable pattern of government, and no recognisable commerce, therefore, a land that belonged

²³ Harold Driver, *Indians of North America*, [Chicago, 1961], p. 270. According to Driver, "ownership", may be regarded as having three main aspects: privilege of use, privilege of disposal and privilege of destruction. For Native Americans, the privilege of destruction was rare where as the privilege of use was the most frequent.

to no one.²⁴ Therefore, it was assumed that “civilized peoples” had a right to occupy them. Indian occupancy rights i.e. prior right of Indians to the soil were recognised, and in some instances, good partnerships and alliances with the tribes were maintained.

Intrigue and manipulation were the two primary tools inquiring land from the Indians, the most violent and the most devastating method was wars, and violent conflicts. The first violent conflict that resulted in the loss of Indian lands and extermination of thousands of Indians occurred in the eastern reaches of America comprising modern Virginia. Initial relations of the settlers with the indigenous tribe the Powhatans were friendly, with the settlers even crowning the chief Wahunsonacock, King Powhatan. The cordial relations were further cemented by the marriage of Powhatan’s daughter, Pocahontas with John Rolfe, an English colonist. Things changed when Powhatan’s successor Opechacanough, realizing the insidious incursions of the settlers into Powhatan territory attacked them in 1622, killing 350 of the approximately 1200 settlers. The settlers retaliated in kind and the early 1620s and 1630s were marked by methodical attacks on the Natives. Peace returned in the mid-1630s, only to evaporate when in 1644, Opechacanough struck the settlers again. In the ensuing war, the Powhatans were defeated and were moved north of the York River to lands promised by a treaty to be their permanent lands. This treaty according to Olson and Wilson created the first reservation system.²⁵ By this time, the English settlers had devised a

²⁴ S: Bosu Mullick et al, *Indigenous identity. Crisis and Reawakening*, [New Delhi, 1993], p.15.

²⁵ Olson and Wilson, n.3, p.35

strategy by which to get Indians to move out of their lands – encroachment (which would inevitably cause ethnic tensions) that would culminate in a war where the English with their superior firepower were assured success.

The Puritans arrived in New England at the beginning of the winter of 1620, and owed their survival to three Indians who helped them get through the harsh New England winter. The Puritans settled in New England. However, when more settlers arrived, the Puritans asked for more land. Seamiest, the Pemaquid chief who along with Massasoit, the Wampanoag chief had helped the stranded Puritans, content in his belief and knowledge that the land given by the Great Spirit is as endless as the sky, and cannot be owned by anyone, made a mark on a paper, albeit only to humour the Puritans. This paper was to become the first deed of Indian land to the settlers.

Another Eastern tribe, the Wampanoags fared no better. Constant incursions by the settlers forced Metacom, Massasoit's son, to form a confederacy with the Naragansetts to protect themselves against the settlers. In 1675, he led the confederacy in attacking 52 settlements belonging to the settlers. In the conflict that followed, the Wampanoags along with the Naragansetts were virtually eliminated. This devastating defeat brought an end to Native American power in the East, established English supremacy and the loss of millions of acres of Indian land to the English. For two or more centuries, such events were repeated again and again as European colonists, emboldened by their victories, continued to move inwards and downwards into the interior of the American mainland.

In the north, a worse fate befell the Iroquois Nation. In a war that culminated in 1754, the Iroquois were defeated and forced to flee. Iroquois land then fell into the English hands. The tribe degenerated rapidly after this event.

The Ottawa, led by their chief Pontiac, along with the Huron, Chippewa, Shawnees, Erie, Potawatomis and Wyandots revolted against the English killing some 1000 settlers. Unable to contain the uprising Pontiac agreed to peace relinquishing control of thousands of Indian land which strengthened English power and supremacy in the East and Northern territory.

To protect Indian land and to avoid further conflict, the British crown passed a proclamation forbidding White settlers to move west of the Appalachians. In spite of this, Indian land continued to be purchased through treaties or grabbed by force.

During the Revolution, most tribes chose to join the English in the mistaken hope that only the English would help defend the Indian land. In the Treaty of Paris that ended the American War of Independence, the British granted America, title to the entire North West territory, disregarding the tribal peoples who lived there and made no provisions for the Indian allies who supported the British cause.

For a brief period after the American Revolution, the United States adopted a policy toward Native Americans known as the "conquest theory".²⁶ Having defeated the English, Americans believed they had defeated their Native American allies. Although many tribes were not convinced of their

²⁶ Ibid. p.37.

defeat, the government dictated rather than negotiated several treaties. Many tribes were forced to cede their lands this way, e.g. the Iroquois in the Treaty of Stanwix, were forced to cede lands in western New York and Pennsylvania. With the loss of their land, the tribe disintegrated.

The interests of the settlers seemed to have been paramount to the US government when in 1790 it sent in its troops to subdue Indian confederacies that were attacking the White settlements in the Ohio valley. Upon their defeat, the confederacies had to cede land comprising present-day Ohio and some of Indiana. This time however, the federal government adopting a more liberal approach abandoned the conquest theory and reverted to compensating Native Americans for their legitimate claims.

It was around this time that the talk of assimilation gained support by many prominent Americans like Thomas Jefferson, and others who believed that if Native Americans were to be made more like the Whites, there would be no more conflict between the two groups. A transformation of Native Americans into individualistic, success-oriented Christian farmers anxious to participate in a democratic society was thought to be imperative. The Congress who allocated federal funds to educate Native Americans toward the values of a Christian, materialistic society supported this move, and many missionaries responded to the call. This arrogance was deeply resented by the Native Americans who stubbornly resisted the assimilation strategies.

In 1813, a war erupted between the Shawnees and the American government. Unhappy with the land cessions made under the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 which disadvantaged them, the Shawnee chief Tecumseh

set about forming a confederacy to present a united front to fight American encroachment. In the battle that ensued, Tecumseh and his allies were defeated bringing an end to another era in Native American history. Following the victory over the Shawnees, the American military under Andrew Jackson headed south to level Creek Towns. The Creeks suffered defeat by the American troops resulting in the cession of 23 million acres, i.e. nearly all of Creek lands in Alabama. Likewise, tribes of the Northeast and the Southeast were coerced into signing a series of treaties extinguishing their title to large areas of land.

Treaty making with the Indians was not always honest, although the word "treaty" seems to imply an equal bargaining position to the Native Americans.²⁷ The Indians who almost always at a disadvantage were negotiating such agreements. For one thing, the actual documents were always written in English and were generally interpreted by people who had a stake in a successful outcome of the proceedings, so the Indians were not always told the truth during these sessions.²⁸

While most of the cession of Indian land was done through wars concluded with lopsided treaties, legislation arising out of the federal Indian policy also served to deprive the Indians of their land.

b. The Acts of Congress:

The notion that the Native Americans were war-like and prone to violence was deeply ingrained in the minds of the colonists who saw most

²⁷ Vine Deloria Jr., *American Indians, American Justice*, [Austin, 1983], p.5.

²⁸ Ibid.

conflicts of having been Indian-caused. Christianizing the Indians was seen as the remedy as it would transform them from paganistic, primitive warmongers to god-fearing, peace-loving Christian individuals. But wide cultural gaps between the groups hindered the growth of trust and confidence that could help prevent hostility.

It was with this background that rumblings about removal of Indians from the lands favoured by settlers were heard. During the administration of Thomas Jefferson, a preview of future Indian policy was revealed where Jefferson proposed to move the Cherokee-Indians out of lands obtained under the Louisiana Purchase.²⁹

The removal was finally carried out during the time of President Andrew Jackson by the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830. The infamous Trail of Tears was consequent to this act.³⁰

In 1831 and 1832, Chief Justice Marshall of the United States Supreme Court decided two landmark cases that characterized Indian nations as "domestic dependent nations", affording the Indian tribes a certain amount of sovereignty and independence. These judgements did little to prevent states from passing laws imposing jurisdiction over Indian territory. Despite the Court mandate, recognizing Cherokee territory as a self-government entity, state interference continued. It finally culminated in the forced removal of the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The Trail of Tears was the name given to the journey undertaken by the Cherokee in 1836, when they were forcefully removed from their lands and relocated elsewhere. The journey was made in winter and, compounded by bad planning by federal authorities, about 4000 Cherokee died out of diseases and the cold.

Cherokees. Cherokee land was then divided through lottery for slave plantations by the government.

In the Great Lakes area, settlers hungry for land overran tribal territory. Removal of Indians was seen as the solution to the problem of any competition or conflict between the settlers and the Indians. According to Hirschfelder and Montana's Almanac, over fifty tribes including the Delaware, Ottawa, Miami and Illinois were forced out of Mississippi. The removal process that began in 1830 was completed in 1840, with the establishment of a large unorganized "permanent " Indian country west of Arkansas, Missouri and Iowa. About a hundred thousand Native Americans were removed forcibly or voluntarily from their ancestral homes in the North east and the South east and isolated in enclaves west of the Mississippi where missionaries and government officials pursued their goals of educating Indians. The removal policy did not receive a blanket approval from the White lawmakers even at the beginning. Deloria cites the objections made by eastern senators and representatives who deplored the policy as a violation of American honour.

Clearly, White greed motivated Indian removal but other arguments prevailed too. Removals were the outcome of the altruistic zeal of the Whites to spare the Indians from their corrupting influence. President Jackson was himself in favour of such an argument.

The worst assault on tribal land was perhaps the General Allotment Act. The relocation of Indians to federally-allocated lands called reservations were initially supported by most whites, especially the settlers who are now

free to proceed about settling down. Rampant poverty, illnesses, alcoholism and the tenacious loyalty to tribal religions of the Indians drew objections from reformers who now wish for the breakup of the reservation system and encourage assimilation of Indians into the mainstream white culture. Land-hungry speculators and cattle ranchers who viewed the reservation system as a big hindrance to their entrepreneurial expansion supported them.

In 1887, the general allotment act also called the Dawes Act after its sponsor Congressman Henry L. Dawns was passed. Indians were to receive allotments of 160 – acre lands broken from reservation land. Ignoring ancient Indian land use patterns, this law purported to make Indians civilized farmers by embracing white agrarian values and by being individual landowners.

The federal government retained trusteeship over the individual allotment for twenty-five years, protecting land from taxation during that time, while Indians established their competency. After the trust period ended, the land became taxable and the allottee became a citizen. If an allottee died within the twenty-five year period, the act required division of land, which meant that Indians of future generations were landless except for property acquired through heirs.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (created in 1824 to oversee Indian affairs) was authorized in 1891 to lease the land (mostly to non-Indians) of those unable because of old age or infirmity to work their land. An act in 1902 authorised the sale of land belonging to heirs of allottees, and in 1907, a Congressional Act provided that the BIA could sell land belonging to the original allottees. These were wholesale efforts to breakup Indian land as

much as possible. Although the Act's apparent aim was to better the conditions of the Indian tribe, it failed to do so largely because it neglected to take into cognisance the structural cultural dynamics inherent within the Indian system. For instance, for some tribes, farming was fundamentally a woman's work while the man, hunts. Forcing farming on man thus needed certain adjustments. Also the lands allotted were far from fertile and many Indians could not farm because they lacked equipment. Therefore, when the Burke Act was passed in 1906, authorizing Indians who were judged competent to sell their land, although the twenty-five year trust period had now expired, many Indians sold it. By the end of 1934, 100, 000 Indians were landless, deprived of over 90 million acres of Native American land. Further loss of land was halted by the Indian Reorganization Act, which was passed in 1934. This Act not only repealed the allotment system but also forbade further allotment of Indian land to Whites. Also, this act restored tribal government, according to them the responsibility of developing their own tribal and economic resources.

However, what this Act also provided for the Native Americans was the self-determination of the tribes with regard to the economic development on Indian land. Under the IRA, the Secretary of the Interior, upon receiving a petition from at least one third of the adult reservation Indians could issue a charter of incorporation to the tribe. The chartered corporation "was permitted to engage for the first time in a number of business enterprises. The corporation could obtain loans, acquire and manage property, issue certificates of interest in the corporate property, transfer land, and exercise

other powers that were incidental to the conduct of corporate business".³¹ For all intents and purposes, this Act was to enable Indians to develop economically in competition with its neighbours and to control their own economic destiny.

Some writers are of the opinion that the IRA and its provision for economic self-determinism are the cause and effect of the economic underdevelopment, raging poverty and environmental deterioration in Indian reservations today. With the freedom to develop their land and its resources, Native Americans undertook several entrepreneurial ventures that involved outside agencies. The business ventures largely involved the extraction of minerals and energy fuels. However, these extractive activities were, for the most part unmonitored, thereby, causing large-scale damage to the Indian land. The devastation of Indian land was worsened by the lack of any enforcement agency that could bring to book environment threatening companies. The exclusion of Indian land from the jurisdiction of the environmental laws further led to the deterioration of the reservations' environment.

The ostensible aim of most of the federal legislation was the integration and the assimilation of American Indians into the larger fold of mainstream America. However, the underlying motive was invariably to alienate Indians from their land through processes of assimilation and acculturation.

³¹ Vine Deloria Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within. The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, [New York, 1984], p.144.

Conclusion:

Native American history is a painful history of struggle to retain their land and thereby to ensure their own survival. The struggle almost always involved land. The acquisition of Indian land by White Americans were done through means both fair and foul that resulted in bloody confrontations between the two groups. The result of these conflicts were devastating to the Indians as they cost them not only their land but also their lives.

The advent of the Whites also impacted in other ways as well. Traditional values gave way to influences percolating from the dominant society. This was most evident in the erosion of firmly held environmental values and the shifts in the approach to the use of their land, repercussions of which are seen to this day. Indians are now involved in commercial ventures which are not so much traditional than capitalistic, and which are, inevitably, detrimental to the environment. The shifts in the approach to land use, and the consequences of which will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

Native American Concern on The Environment

Introduction :

The two previous chapters have dealt with various aspects of the Native American relationship with the environment. Their ancient environmental wisdom has encountered many challenges, both internal as well as external; internal, through the pushes and pulls of the pressure for modern economic progress built on the western model of capitalist development motivated in part by the poverty and underdevelopment in the reservations; external through the socio-cultural influences, as well as economic which a dominant society exerts on a minority society.

Native American poverty and economic underdevelopment has always put the relevance of the traditional ecological wisdom into question. For those to whom poverty is the order of his existence, the attachment to land and the sanctity of the environment only serves to impede his path to economic advancement. Scientific development that could aid prosperity certainly seemed more preferable to the poverty and its attendant ills, regardless of the consequences on the environment.

Native American land today are like little third worlds dotting the rural American landscape because of the destitution and rampant degrading conditions that has characterized Indian land for decades now. Most tribes still rely on federal handouts and welfare thus sustaining the dependence on the federal government and at times quelling any attempt to economic self-determination and independence.

Many tribes then turn to their land for the alleviation of their socio-economic ills. Therein lies the tragedy as the use of Indian land particularly in the present day impacts most adversely on the environment. The environmentally degrading activities include strip-mining for coal and uranium, extraction of oil and gas and the hazardous storing of nuclear waste. This chapter aims to study the various challenges faced by Native Americans vis-à-vis their environment. Presently, Native Americans are subjected to the worst kind of racism, the environmental racism, often with the tacit approval and the involvement of the federal government. This form of racism also manifests itself in the exclusion of Native Americans and their issues from the arena of the environmental movement in the United States of America. The traditional Indian environmental wisdom has plenty to offer the environmental movement by way of values and approaches. 'Modern' approaches like sustainable development and intergenerational equity constitute the core of the ecological value system of indigenous communities and the keys to their very survival even in the harshest of habitats. This chapter will also attempt to bring about a meeting ground between traditional environmental values and modern techno-centric environmentalism. The growing awareness and activism on Indian land has been triggered by the abuse and misuse of the reservation land for purposes that are not only environment threatening but also threaten the lives of the Native peoples themselves. The following section will examine the present use of Indian land and the issues that emerge subsequent to it.

3.1. Use of Indian Land

The abuse of Indian land is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, Indian land was grabbed from the Natives, mined for coal, uranium and other minerals, waters diverted to serve white townships or white-controlled factories and manufacturing plants and treated with the greatest dishonour irreverence and disrespect. The Native Americans could only watch, mutely. In the present day, abuse of Indian land has taken more dangerous forms, some which could even endanger the very existence of the Indians themselves. The abuse of land however, is done not only by outside agencies, but one sees the participation of Native American tribes themselves, for instance, the Mescalero White Apache in 1991 became the first tribe to file an application for US Energy Department Grant to study the possibility of building a storage facility for highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel.¹

The vulnerability of Indian land to abuse started with the first contact with the white settlers who had come to the American continent to prosper and multiply. Deprived of land in their homelands, the apparent empty wilderness of America provided them with endless possibilities for prosperity. Thus started the methodical assault on Indian land. It began with the use of the land for agriculture. Before long, minerals were discovered, and the reckless extraction consequent of the discovery assured the degradation and spoliation of the land and the environment.

¹ Daniel Brook, "Environmental Genocide: Native Americans and Toxic Waste", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol.57, no.1 [January, 1998] p.106.

The designation of lands as exclusively Indian land offered little protection from the incursions into Indian land by developers and speculators. With the tacit support of the federal government, business corporations negotiated lop-sided deals, which are, more often than not, disadvantageous to the tribes. When the world suffered natural resource crises, particularly energy resources, in the 1960s and 1970s, pressure for the accelerated development of the resources on Indian land became intense.² The pressure to develop Indian land also came from the state governments who stand to gain from development, primarily via taxes on extractive industry and from the local non-Indian population who looked to development to stimulate local economies. Both sought greater access to Indian resources thereby increasing the exploitation of the land³.

A little over a decade ago, Indian lands contained approximately 3 percent of total reserves of oil and gas in the United States⁴ and uranium reserves of about 55 percent of the national total which made Indian land potentially the fourth leading producer of uranium in the world.⁵ The presence of minerals on Indian land brought newer problems on the Native Americans and added to the pressure to develop their land in such a way as to accrue the highest benefits. Indians were then, and till now, made to choose between

² Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Resurgence*, [New York, 1988], p.199.

³ Ibid. p. 200.

⁴ The present figures are just as fantastic. Hirschfelder and Montano cites that Indian land has about 6 percent of proven reserve of oil and gas, 30 percent of strippable low-sulphur coal, and 50 to 60 percent of uranium. See Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *Indians of the Americas, Human Rights and Self-Determination*, [London, 1984], p. 129.

⁵ Ibid.

economic benefits and their traditions which disallows any wrongful use of land.

The greatest concern on environment the Native Americans face today, is the reckless use of Indian lands for waste disposal, especially toxic waste, even with the concurrence of the tribes themselves. Rampant poverty and economic underdevelopment provide the incentives for such steps even at the cost of traditional beliefs and values and perhaps their own lives.

“The Cold War’s legacy is an enduring pile of toxic waste”, according to Randel Hanson⁶, and the US government is hardpressed to find solutions to the disposal of the growing stockpiles of high-level nuclear waste overflowing at 110 nuclear reactors across the United States. The states have fiercely resisted any move to use their land as nuclear waste sites and protected as they are by the environmental laws, little can be done by the federal government to persuade them otherwise. That leaves only Native American land to assume the burden of storing toxic waste. To get the communities to accept the nuclear waste dumps David Leroy, the head of the US Office of the Nuclear Waste Negotiator came up with a package deal which most tribes under the groaning weight of underdevelopment and poverty find it extremely difficulty to refuse—money along with community facilities to any tribe that would accept a waste dump.⁷

The use of Indian land in the present decade however, is accompanied by certain practices, which environmentalists and Native Americans

⁶ Randel D. Hanson, “ Native Americans and Toxic waste”, at <http://www.halcyon.com/FWDP/cwisinfo.html>. This article also appears in the *Multinational Monitor*, vol. xvi, no. 9.

⁷ Ibid.

themselves view as environmental racism. Environmental racism as applicable to the Native Americans will be examined in another section of this chapter.

According to Daniel Brook, what the federal government and the waste industry are practicing is "environmental genocide" which has replaced the physical and cultural genocide of the past.⁸ This is a more destructive form of genocide because of the insidiousness of its method made worse by the vulnerabilities inherent in the Native American life viz., poverty, illiteracy, but most importantly, the heavy dependence of these people on their environment.

The long-term dangers of high-level nuclear waste are downplayed and given the low literacy and awareness of ecological consequences of such activities on the part of the tribe members, these dangers may not even become known. Bradley Angel remarks that the pervasive poverty and devastating chronic unemployment were used by the waste disposal companies and the US government to persuade the tribes to site incinerators, landfills, nuclear waste storage facilities and similar polluting industries on tribal land.⁹

The blatant disregard for the risks posed to the Native Americans by the storage of nuclear waste belie the egalitarian principles of the American political ethos. Unlike the dominant society, Native Americans are at greater peril of the hazards of the environmental degradation. This is so because of

⁸ Brook n. 1, p. 105.

⁹ Bradley Angel, *The Toxic Threat to Indian Lands: A Greenpeace Report*, [San Fransisco,1991], p.1.

the poverty that precludes the availability of sophisticated means of pollution control. Moreover, while tribes like the Choctaw and the Oneida have achieved considerable economic development through entrepreneurial activities like manufacturing etc., most tribes still rely heavily on the land for resources and for food. Therefore, the slightest deterioration of the land could lead to monumental dislocation and even extermination of the entire tribe.

Devastation of the Native American land poses many dangers and not all of them health. Native American identity is deeply entrenched in the land. As they would so often say, Native Americans belong to the land. Identity constructs like religion, economic patterns, societal patterns are all derivatives from land and therefore deeply rooted in it. The loss of land would eventually lead to the loss of identity.

3.2. Environmental Inequities and the Native American:

Environmental racism is but one of what David Newton calls “environmental inequities”. By environmental inequity, Newton refers “to a pattern in which hazardous waste sites, polluting industries, nuclear waste dumps, and other environmental threats are more likely to be located within or adjacent to communities of colour or poor communities”¹⁰. The term environmental racism was first used by Benjamin Chavis in 1982, and testifying before the U.S. House Of Representatives Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights on 3rd March 1993, provided this definition: “Environmental racism is defined as racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and the unequal enforcement of environmental laws and

¹⁰ David E. Newton, *Environmental Justice. A Reference Handbook*, [Santa Barbara, 1996], p.3.

regulations. It is the deliberate targeting of people of colour communities for toxic waste facilities and the official sanctioning of a life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in people of colour communities. It is also manifested in the history of excluding people of colour from the leadership of the environmental movement.”¹¹

The environmental movement in the United States came to its own in the 1960s, yet even in the present day, the movement exhibits a distinct ethnocentrism and racism in the lack of membership of coloured peoples. Mainstream environmentalist groups tend to be largely white and middle- or upper-class.¹² In addition, most environmentalist groups had little or no interest in issues faced by the poor, minority, urban people. This has led to scathing criticism of mainstream environmentalism as “ a deliberate attempt by a bigoted and selfish white middle-class society to perpetuate its own values and protect its own lifestyle at the expense of the poor and underprivileged”.¹³

The term environmental racism according to Paehlke’s encyclopaedia,” refers to any policy, practice or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages individuals, groups or communities based on race or colour.”¹⁴Environmental racism combines with public policies and industry practices to provide benefits for whites while shifting costs to people of colour. Paehlke takes the case of the Native Americans as an example of the practice

¹¹ Ibid., p.4.

¹² Newton writes that in one study on mainstream environmental groups in the 1940s, it was found that 96 percent of the 1,468 respondents classified themselves as Caucasian/European. Almost half had a total family income of more than \$10,000, and 15 percent had a total family income of more than \$25,000, p.17.

¹³ James Noel Smith quoted in Newton, n. 15, p. 17.

¹⁴ Robert Paehlke, p. 252.

of environmental racism. The first environmental law that was purported to regulate environmentally degrading activities was the Solid Waste Disposal Act passed in 1965. This was the first legislation dealing with the solid waste and was aimed primarily at establishing a national research and development programme for new and better methods to properly dispose of solid waste. These laws did in no way include reservation lands thereby throwing them open to polluting agencies both public and private, consequently making the reservations the most environmentally-degraded land anywhere in rural America.¹⁵ The absence of any regulating mechanism on Indian lands assured their vulnerability to any scheme that would bring them monetary relief but permanently damage the environment. Hence, a few tribes laid aside their ecological beliefs and embraced schemes and programmes that might, in the long run or even in the short, prove to be detrimental to the existence of the peoples themselves. The Goshute tribe, because of its decision to store nuclear fuel rods on its lands have been castigated by environmentalists as “no longer a protector of the earth but a keeper of its poisons”.¹⁶

The emergence of an environmental consciousness in the United States of America in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the environmental laws that were aimed to create a better environment, which included cleaner water, air etc. The Clean Air Act passed in 1970 had as its primary objective the protection and enhancement of the quality of America’s air resources in order “to promote the public health and welfare and the productivity capacity of its

¹⁵ Margaret Knox, “Their mother’s Keepers”, *Sierra*, [March 1993], vol.78, Iss.2, p.54.
¹⁶ New York Times, March 8, 1998.

population".¹⁷ The Clean Water Act, also known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, originally enacted in 1972, had as its principal objective the restoration and the maintenance of the biological, physical and the chemical integrity directly with of the nation's waters. To monitor the implementation of this Act, the Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1971. These laws were conspicuous by the exclusion of Indian lands from their jurisdiction. It inevitably follows that for any activity that might adversely affect the environment, which a state might resist, could be brought on to Indian lands. This is attested by the waste dumping methodically carried out by the waste disposal industry and federal agencies alike over the years. This is but one instance of environmental racism targeted against native Americans. The other is the negation of Native Americans, and their environmental problems, by the environmental movement.

The marginalising of minority groups in mainstream environmentalism has led to the emergence and growth of a parallel environmentalism composed of these marginalised groups. African-Americans and Native Americans alike are organizing themselves to serve as an opposition to any activity that impacts adversely on their environment. Jo Ann Tall is an Indian environmental activist who has been organizing efforts to stop toxic waste dumps and nuclear weapons testing on Indian lands. She helped cofound the Native Resource Coalition; an environmental group aimed at combating environment-threatening activities on native land.

¹⁷ Sidney M. Wolf, *Pollution Law Handbook. A Guide to Federal Environment Laws*, [New York, 1988]. P.51.

Environmental racism is also evident in the insidious methods of the waste industry to gain entry into Indian land. According to Valerie Taliman, the sovereign status of the reservations has often been exploited by the waste industry through deals disguised as "economic development" to poverty-stricken tribes desperately in need of employment.¹⁸ In addition, the waste industry would usually choose communities where language barriers exist. In many Native languages, there are no words for dioxins, PCBs [Polychlorinated Biphenyls], or other poisons, making the task of explaining the inherent dangers of such chemicals difficult.¹⁹

The majority of the nation's citizenry are unfavourably disposed towards disposal of toxic waste in their neighbourhood and with good reason. The life-threatening effects of waste disposal is eternally exemplified by the Love Canal incident and despite the protective measures undertaken in hazardous waste disposal, scientists have admitted that leakage can still occur. Daniel Brook remarks that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has conceded that landfills will eventually leak poisons into the environment regardless of the protective systems formulated.

According to Jim Haughton, leader of the African-American community group Fight Back, the racism in the ecology movement is a reflection of the history of racism inherent in the American social system²⁰. The movement while one-sidedly challenging society's destructiveness towards nature has ignored its ongoing and direct degradation of human beings, particularly poor

¹⁸ Valerie Taliman, "Saving Native Lands. One Woman's Crusade against Environmental Racism", *Ms*, vol.4, no.4,[Jan/Feb,1994],p.29.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ In Steve Chase ed., *Defending the Earth. A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman*, [Boston, 1991], p. 88.

people of colour who are among the most victimized. Haughton points out that “the movement has all too often developed its programme in ways that stand in conflict with the short- and long-term needs of poor people of colour all over the world”. The negation of the environmental problems of the poor and the minority impoverishes rather than enrich the movement as it remains in ignorance of the methods employed by these groups in battling environmental problems. Moreover, the movement is denied completeness by the exclusion of these peoples and their ecological problems. Reinforcing this opinion, Haughton comments that “...because of its history as a predominantly white middle-class movement, the environmental movement’s vision has been incomplete, and important alliances have not been made “²¹

The concern for the state of the environment is not confined to the present day or the present generation, with the Native Americans. They believe that resources must be used judiciously and therefore they follow what Jerry Mander calls “deliberate underproduction”. This is to allow enough to remain for the next generation. This also happens to be the underlying principle behind the theory of intergenerational equity as propounded by Prof. Edith Brown Weiss. Intergenerational equity holds that the natural environment belongs not to the present generation alone but also to the future generations as well. “As members of the present generation, we hold the earth in trust for future generations”. At the same time, we are beneficiaries entitled to use and benefit from it.²²

²¹

Ibid.

²²

Edith Brown Weiss, “Our Rights and Obligations to Future Generations for the Environment”, *American Journal Of International Law*, vol.84, no.1,[January, 1990],p.199.

That the earth belongs not to man but rather the man belongs to the earth is inherent in the Native American's worldview. This infers that future generations as well, belong to the earth and are equally, if not more entitled, to the earth and its resources. Therefore, this precludes the possession of the exclusive right by the present generation to the use of the earth and the exploitation of its resources, as enough should remain for future generations. "We did not inherit the Earth from our parents. We have borrowed it from our children", is one of the environmental movement's more popular slogans which had its origin in Native American ecological value system. This belief however, is held not only by the Native Americans but also by all the indigenous peoples of the world. It is this ecological ethic that has enabled them to survive for millennia, and for their habitats to be preserved in their almost virgin condition for centuries.

The environmental movement of Western societies has largely ignored the ecological wisdom of indigenous communities. Likewise, the American mainstream environmental movement excluded Native Americans from their environmentalism. Jim Hauton points out that "racism" is the foundation of the American social system.²³ The ecology movement has reflected this history more often than it has broken with it. The movement has often one-sidedly challenged our society's destructiveness towards non-human nature, but ignored its ongoing and direct degradation of human beings, particularly poor people of colour who are the most victimised. The movement has all too often developed its programme in ways that stand in conflict with the short-and long-term needs of poor people of colour all over the world. Because of its

²³ Steve Chase ed., n.120, p.88.

history as a predominantly white and middle-class movement, the environmental movement's vision has been incomplete and important alliances have not been made.

One of the forefront environmental groups on the reservations is the Native Resource Coalition working on the Pine Ridge [Lakota] reservation. Although the work is heavy and the task is daunting, the group is run through a trailer, which functions as an office. Infrastructure problems are compounded by the severe lack of funds. The environmental laws of the '60s and the '70s not only provided the states with environment protection regulations, they also granted funds for the enforcement of these regulations. Native American reservations, although included within these laws since the late '80s and early '90s, lack even the basic funds to organize an environmental office, much less comprehensive regulations for such an office to enforce.²⁴ Such stark differences between the workings of the two groups bring to the fore the lacunae and the discrepancies present in their individual approaches to environmentalism. It is not too difficult to surmise then that each side would benefit from a union, thus, presenting a more complete and holistic approach to American environmentalism on the whole.

3.3. Other Concerns.

Environment and Tribal sovereignty:

One of the most crucial issues concerning the overall status of Native American life is the issue of tribal sovereignty. Writes Margaret Knox that " to the Native Americans, sovereignty is the Emancipation Proclamation and the

²⁴ Knox, n. 16.

Bill of Rights rolled into one, the well-spring of their political will and the ultimate weapon of resistance, harking back to the days when the tribes had the strength and stature of truly independent nations...".²⁵ The limited sovereignty that Indian tribes possess has ensured the enduring survival of the tribes as they are, and the continuity of their tribal customs and traditions. Moreover, tribal sovereignty has provided them with an instrument of identification. By this I mean that unlike other racial groups in the United States, Native Americans, not only identify themselves as Americans belonging to the United States of America but also as American Indians belonging to "sovereign" tribes or "Indian nations". However, in the past, Congress through several legislation has sought the erosion if not the total destruction of tribal sovereignty in its various attempts to assimilate the Native Americans with varying results. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was a watershed law that was aimed at restoring the sovereignty the tribal institutions had lost in the previous years particularly through the General Allotment Act of 1871.

In 1871, the General Allotment Act was passed that would divide tribal land into individual allotments and the surplus sold to the government. The superficial objective was to give the Indians the opportunity to assimilate into the White society. There were even arguments that the fragmentation of their land "was for their own good".²⁶ Nevertheless, this Act was the first step by the federal government to destroy the reservation system and undermine what little tribal sovereignty that existed. Through this Act, Congress stated its de-

²⁵ Knox , n. 16, p.57.

²⁶ Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race , Gender, and Work. A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*, [Boston, 1991], p.45.

recognition of the Indian nation as “an independent power with whom the United States may contract a treaty”. Writes Amott and Matthaei, that this Act meant “...the nations and all their lands were to be liquidated, nation by nation, their governments dismantled and their members ‘integrated’ into U.S. society as individual citizens....²⁷” The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 was in effect to rectify the distortions created by the Allotment Act. That this law proved to be the root cause of the contemporary environmental problems of the Indians is a different matter.

In 1831, Chief Justice John Marshall characterized Indian nations as “domestic dependent nations”. Though subject to the guardianship protection and superior political power of the federal government, Indian nations did possess some degree of sovereignty. Although the tribes did not fall within the category of “foreign nations” that possessed full sovereignty they did constitute legitimate legal and political entities that could manage their own affairs, govern themselves internally, and engage in legal and political relations with the federal government and its sub-divisions²⁸. Marshall stated that “the Indian nations had always been considered as distinct independent political communities,

Retaining their original natural rights, as the undisputed possessors of the soil, from time immemorial, with the single exception imposed by irresistible power, which excluded them from intercourse with any other European potentate than the first discoverer of the coast of the particular

²⁷ Ibid. , p. 46.

²⁸ Vine Deloria Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians , American Justice* .[Austin, 1983], p. 4.

region claimed....²⁹ Tribal sovereignty was guaranteed, albeit not always protected by Marshall's decision and a good deal of the subsequent history of the conflict between the United States and the Indian states has revolved around the question of preserving the right to self-government and the attributes of Indian sovereignty as suggested by him. The sovereignty the tribes enjoy, has over the years, been subjected to pendulum swings wherein at times enhanced and at other times diminished, by the federal legislation programmes and policies that were passed with regard to American Indians.

The Indian Reorganisation Act was passed in 1934. The Indian Reorganization Act [hereinafter the IRA] permitted Indian tribes to organize local governments to provide for the general welfare of the tribal community. It replaced traditional, consensual forms of tribal government with constitutions and councils overseen by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Then on, some tribes are governed by tribal councils elected by the tribes themselves but subjected to the supervision of the BIA. The Indian Reorganization Act specified a number of powers that tribal governments could exercise without first seeking secretarial approval. They could for instance negotiate with federal, state and local government. They could exercise veto power over the sale, lease, or encumbrance of tribal property and assets.³⁰ The Act also provided upon an issuance of a charter of incorporation, permission to engage in a number of business enterprises. With this the corporation could obtain loans, acquire and manage property, issue certificates of interest in the corporate property, transfer land, and exercise other powers that were

²⁹ Vine Deloria Jr., and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within. The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, [New York, 1984], p. 17.

³⁰ Deloria and Lytle, n.26, p. 142.

incidental to the conduct of corporate houses. The only limitation that this law imposed on tribal businesses was that the corporation could not lease or mortgage reservation land for a period exceeding ten years. This limitation was to ensure that tribal land remained under Indian control³¹.

To Margaret Knox the poverty, underdevelopment and the environment-degradation on Indian land resulted consequent to these Acts. The IRA in particular left the Indian reservations semi-autonomous and provided freedom for tribal governments from state regulations.³² This made it easier for outside agencies to negotiate with the tribal leaders. Often these outside agencies consisted of extractive companies speculating for minerals and oil. The discovery of the mineral wealth on Indian lands brought about an influx of extracting companies into Indian land with the increasing involvement of the tribes themselves. Cornell writes that by the 1970s, 45 percent of Navajo tribal revenues came from mineral leasing and extraction and by 1975 the figure had risen to 70 percent.³³ While earlier actors in the mineral development on Indian land consisted mainly of federal agencies including the BIA, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Department of Energy, contemporary actors constituted largely of multinational corporations and since the early 1980s replaced the federal government as primary development sponsors on many reservations.³⁴ The impact was not so much constructive as destructive because of the randomly monitored extraction of minerals and energy fuels needed to push the American economy forward.

³¹ Ibid. , p.144.

³² Knox, n.16, p. 54.

³³ Cornell, n.3, p. 200.

³⁴ Ibid.

But it is the activity of the waste industry on Indian land that is now causing the gravest concern. As discussed earlier, the resultant impact on the environment by the disposal of waste is monumental. Possessing neither the infrastructure nor funds to orchestrate viable cleanup programmes³⁵, Native American tribes would have to depend on the federal government to initiate and fund clean-ups or environment restoration programs. Therefore, intervention from the federal government becomes not only necessary, but eventually, inevitable, resulting in the erosion of tribal sovereignty.

Tribal sovereignty has more than political connotations to the Native Americans. It is intrinsically linked to their identity and offers them freedom to self-determine even in socio-cultural spheres. With the growing intervention and interference of the federal government in the affairs of the Indian reservations, many Indians fear, this freedom would be lost to them forever. The fears are genuine, examined in the light of the historical evidences of the systematic destruction of Native America by sundry agencies.

However, tribal sovereignty, is perceived differently by different tribes. While to some sovereignty is almost a sacred entity and therefore non-negotiable. To tribes riddled with poverty, it could be traded for economic opportunities. The case of the Lower Brule reservation in South Dakota can be cited as a case in point. Lower Brule's only economic assets are a gambling casino and tribally owned farmland. A Denver-based garbage

³⁵ Cleanups of abandoned hazardous waste sites is regulated by the Superfund, established in 1980, as part of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act [CERCLA], commonly called the Superfund Act. Amendments in 1986 increased available funds for cleanup to \$ 9.6 billion but more than \$ 100 billion may be needed. The cost of cleanup often runs between \$21 million and \$30 million.

company called the South Dakota Disposal Systems[SDDS] plans a landfill on its own land situated in the state of South Dakota, for garbage brought from as far as Chicago. South Dakota environmentalists, strongly opposed to it, have used state courts and referenda to block the scheme. So SDDS wants to sell the land to Lower Brule as SDDS president was reported to have said; "If we can't operate in the jurisdiction of the state, we would add it to reservation land and then operate under Indian jurisdiction".³⁶ The scheme was proposed to bring about \$4.5 million to the Lower Brule, a much-needed amount of money. Opposition from certain quarters of Lower Brule Indians is strongly vehement as they feel that tribal sovereignty is being sold at a price.

Native American tribes, presently, are taking a different approach to the question of tribal sovereignty and that is through economic development via their own efforts. The Cherokee tribe is one such example. The tribal members have developed a systematic human resources programme that would encourage and ensure employment and to realize the long-term tribal self-governance.³⁷

Environment and the Native American Poverty:

The greatest dilemma faced by the Native Americans has always been over the question of reconciling development with their traditional values. As discussed in the previous chapters, Native Americans have traditionally followed a subsistence pattern of economy based on the judicious use of natural resources. Unlike in Western capitalistic socio-economic systems,

³⁶ This case featured in Margaret Knox's article. See Knox, n.16, p. 81.

³⁷ Brenda Paik Sunoo, "When Native Values Drive Survival", *Workforce*, vol. 76, no.2, [February, 1997], p. 60.

natural resources were not considered "raw materials" for the production of material goods. Resources were seen as things provided by nature i.e., Mother Earth, for subsistence and not to be used for profits.

Native American subsistence economy and communal ownership of property reflect this belief system. However, Native Americans are increasingly seen as poor and destitute, deprived of even the basic amenities of daily existence. Poverty, therefore, has become an issue area that calls for redressal. Federal policies and development programmes formulated, have tried to address Native American poverty and the attendant problems of alcoholism, high level of suicide rate etc. .

The effort to combat poverty has also been taken up by tribes themselves through strategies like gambling³⁸, and leasing of land for sitings of waste including hazardous waste.

Indian poverty is a relatively new phenomenon,³⁹ and "was caused by the destruction of the economic base of the 'primitive Indian culture', irrelevance of the Indian's social systems to modern economic and social conditions, and poor or damaging government policies."⁴⁰

According to Vandana Shiva, there are two kinds of poverty; first, poverty as subsistence and secondly, poverty as deprivation. Subsistence

³⁸ According to David Vinje, gambling appears to be the economic development strategy of the 1990s. Since the passage of the Indian Gambling Regulatory Act of 1988, Native American gambling has grown from a few small bingo parlours to an estimated 200 Indian owned full scale casino gaming establishments. See David L. Vinje, " Native American Economic Development on Selected Reservations: A Comparative Analysis," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol.55, no. 4, [October , 1996], p. 427.

³⁹ To my mind, Indian poverty is relatively new as it did not exist prior to the advent of the White capitalist culture.

⁴⁰ Gerald S. Nagel, " Economics of the Reservation", *Current History*, vol.67, no. 400, [December, 1978], p.247.

poverty is a “culturally perceived “ poverty and need not be real poverty. But the development ideology founded on the market economy, declares them so because of their lack of participation in the market economy and distinct lack of consumption “...even though they might be satisfying those needs through self-provisioning mechanisms.”⁴¹

The Native American poverty corresponds to this criterion. Native Americans traditionally followed a subsistence economy characterized by the absence of private ownership of natural resources and the concept of profit motive, and a collective and cooperative production with little or no surplus.⁴² Therefore, there existed no deprivation that could be considered a measurement of poverty. With the advent of the Europeans and their concepts of private property, market economy and consumerism, Native American economy appeared deprived and poor. This perception of subsistence living as poverty runs across the development strategies formulated by the federal government giving them legitimacy as poverty removal projects that inevitably results in the destruction of traditional systems. Writes Shiva, “as a culturally biased project it destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and creates real material poverty, or misery, by the denial of survival needs themselves, through the diversion of resource intensive commodity production”.⁴³

⁴¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive. Women, Ecology and Development in India*, [New Delhi, 1988], p. 10.

⁴² Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred. The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*, [San Francisco, 1991], p. 215-216.

⁴³ Shiva, n. 42.

Poverty presents a host of problems not least of which is connected to the environment. It is often seen especially with regard to indigenous peoples bearing in mind their dependency upon their habitat that the greater the level of poverty, the heavier the pressure on the land, and therefore the greater the exploitation. The leasing of reservation land for nuclear waste disposal by the Mescalero Apache tribe serves as an example. On the other hand, better placed tribes like the Choctaw or the Cherokee find lesser need to venture into activities that might endanger their environment.

Conclusion:

Native Americans are increasingly making their voice heard in the cultural and political arena of America. Having long suffered discrimination, overt and covert racism, they are now, more than ever, organized into a sustained opposition against the varied forms of injustices they have suffered in the past and continue to be subjected to in the present. Their land and their environment is sacred to them, yet the predominant white American society persists in its assault of tribal land, through means that could even exterminate the Indian society itself.

The blatant disregard of the rights of the Native Americans manifested in the role of the government and the private agencies to use Indian land for ecologically hazardous activities constitute acts of violence on a people ill-equipped to retaliate.

Native American environmental values have endured despite numerous challenges both from within and without the traditional American Indian society. With the increasing awareness of the pernicious assault of

their lands, these values have gained even greater ground. Unlike mainstream American environmentalism, Indian ecological consciousness is unrestricted by the scientific sophistication that oftentimes prove ineffective. The most important instrument in sustaining a movement is communication. Western environmentalism with its emphasis in jargon and scientific terms, encourages elitism, while marginalizing the grassroots. The apparent failure of the mainstream environmentalism in the United States of America is due in part to this reason.

Therefore, the time has come perhaps, for a more holistic and inclusive environmental consciousness in America, provided by the scientific knowledge of the techno-centric Western model of environmentalism and Native American ancient environmental wisdom.

CONCLUSION

The world today is witnessing unprecedented deterioration of the environment manifested in high pollution levels, depletion of the ozone layer, and an increasing scarcity of natural resources. The havoc that man has wreaked upon the earth through his own recklessness has resulted in immense dislocation of climatic situations. The recent heat wave in the United States of America is believed by environmentalists and meteorologists to have been the fallout of global warming. While America was experiencing soaring temperatures, Philippines suffered from the worst floods ever.

Since the beginning of history man has impacted on the environment in many ways and not all of them destructive. Likewise, the environment has acted upon man inculcating in him the ability to adapt. Thus, a nomad of Africa can withstand intense heat while an Eskimo can survive sub-zero temperatures. However, much of what man has done, appears to have had an adverse effect on the environment.

The deterioration of the environment has been ascribed to the selfish and domineering attitude of man towards nature. This domineering attitude of man towards nature, is believed by a few scholars, as having its roots in the Bible and the Judeo-Christian tradition that arises from it. This opinion is based on the biblical injunction that man is to subdue the earth and to exercise his dominion over all that is in it. This is disputed by the historical fact that pre-Christian civilizations did adversely affect the environment which then led to their very own destruction.

Nevertheless, agreement prevails that Western culture with its emphasis on scientific advancement and economic development has been the worst perpetrator of the assault on the environment. The material development of the Western societies have set the standards for development that are followed in the world engendering the fear in environmentalists of the greater spoliation of the earth and its natural resources.

While the Western culture is considered to have given rise to the exploitation of nature and its worst enemy, the indigenous peoples, on the other hand are increasingly recognized as the rightful guardians and stewards of the earth. This is because of the relationship they have with nature as defined by their worldview, which fosters a close and non-exploitative relationship with nature. Their survival in what might have been their original habitats for millennia yet causing negligible destruction to their environment testifies to the enduring viability of their ancient environmental wisdom. The environmental movement in the world is founded on techno-centric principles of utilizing science to counter environmental degradation, and have largely ignored the potential of the ecological values of these communities.

The Native Americans constitute the indigenous peoples of the United States of America. Like most indigenous groups around the world, the Native Americans have also been subjected to the various injustices meted out by the dominant society through forced alienation of land, forced acculturation and assimilation that eventually led to the loss of traditional ways of life. Throughout their history Native Americans have had to struggle bitterly to retain their lands. From over a billion acres just over three centuries ago, Indian land now stands at roughly fifty-four million acres scattered over the

entire American rural landscape and are called by names like reservations, rancherias, etc.. These lands are held in trust by the federal government albeit tribes possess limited sovereignty over their jurisdiction. Tribal sovereignty, presently constitute the most contentious issue in the light of recent events on Indian land.

While the transfer of Indian land in the past was done mainly through treaties of dubious intent which concluded wars, present alienation of tribal land is sought through its use as dumping sites for waste matter, which include nuclear waste, non-Indian neighbourhoods do not wish to have in their backyard.

Taking advantage of the poverty and economic underdevelopment on Indian land, the American waste industry sought Indian tribes with lucrative monetary offers, which these tribes, too riddled with poverty find difficult to resist.

The involvement of the federal government in the abuse of Indian land reinforced the notion that Native Americans are being subjected to the latest form of racism, i.e., environmental racism. The risks which storage and disposal of waste pose to the Native Americans are either underplayed or ignored. It is indeed paradoxical, that a nation that ostensibly upholds democratic principles of equality and justice, would participate in the practical decimation of its people and violating their basic rights.

The impact of environmental racism is tremendous on poor people but it is devastating on nature-dependent and land-based peoples like the Native Americans. The degradation of land and environment threatens not only their

livelihoods but also their lives. The trust status of Indian land, makes them liable to vulnerable to government interference in the event of ecological disasters thus, threatening even their identity base. Hence, environmental racism corresponds to the worst violation of human rights that can be wrought on a people.

Native Americans , like most indigenous peoples, share a close relationship with nature and like them, also revere the earth as Mother Earth. Through this relationship, stemmed sound ecological values that precludes exploitative attitudes towards nature, and natural resources.

These ecological values have a great potential in contributing to mainstream American environmentalism based as the latter is on a technocentric approach to the solution of the environmental problem. Unfettered by scientific jargon as Western environmentalism is, Native American environmentalism which is almost spiritual in its approach to nature, could provide a complement if not an alternative to the mainstream environmental movement dominated by the white middle class Americans.

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