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## UNIT 4 SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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The modern world is marked by social and ecological crisis enveloping the individual, social, political and cultural lives of man. The pursuit of materialism with all its emphasis on growth and development has led neither to individual happiness nor to social harmony and peace. Man lives in a state of inner-contradictions and outer disconnections being placed against man, society and nature. The problem of poverty and hunger, unemployment, female foeticide, honour killings, racism and inflation etc. are assuming staggering proportions day by day. Threats of environmental pollution, depletion of scarce natural resources and deteriorating ecological balance loom wider than ever before. The world is today faced with catastrophic situation. Albert Schweitzer remarked, "It is clear now to every one that the suicide of civilisation is in progress." Some feel that if the present way continues, there may be no one to write our obituary. This Unit deals with some of these pressing social and ecological issues in the context of India.

## Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand:

- the social issues confronting our society
- the ecological issues the world is facing today.

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## 4.2 SOCIAL ISSUES

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Some of the current and prominent social problems are:

### 4.2.1 Female Foeticide

Foeticide or feticide is primarily a legal issue referring to illegal killing of a foetus. In medical terminology, foeticide is the termination of a foetus. It might occur during the initial stages of a legitimate induced abortion of a foetus of female gender as a result of a sex-determination test. Female foeticide (also referred to as sex-selective abortion) and sex-determination tests are illegal in India. Abortion is legal and is allowed if the pregnancy does not exceed 12 weeks (3 months), or exceeds 12 weeks but does not exceed 20 weeks under the conditions that:

- (1) the continuance of pregnancy would involve a risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of grave injury to her physical or mental health; or
- (2) there is a substantial risk that if child were born, it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities to be seriously handicapped ([http://www.countercurrents.org/gender-nair\\_0515005.html](http://www.countercurrents.org/gender-nair_0515005.html)).

Amniocentesis first started in India in 1974 as a part of a sample survey conducted at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, to detect foetal abnormalities. These tests were later stopped by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), but their value had leaked out by then and 1979 saw the first sex determination clinic opening in Amritsar, Punjab. Various women's organisations took up cudgels to put a stop to this menace but were helpless because of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act. This is because the amniocentesis test was claimed to be used for the detection of foetal abnormalities, which was permitted by the MTP Act.

The 2001 census of India reveals a decline in the overall child sex ratio for the age-group 0-6 years from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Contrary to the belief that the malaise is typical to rural backward areas, urban centres- more literate and liberal- have shown a drop from 935 in 1991 to 906 in 2001.

In Delhi, the national capital, the child sex ratio is an alarming 868. While the reasons for this vary from higher female mortality at a younger age as a result of neglect to infanticide and foeticide, the dismal numbers are a telling comment on the educated society that refuses to rid itself of its regressive male bias.

The Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Regulations and Prevention of Misuse Act came into force in 1994 to curb selective sex determination. With rapid improvements in diagnostic technology, the Act was amended in 2003 in order that it became more comprehensive and was renamed the Preconception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act.

To monitor the implementation of the PC & PNDT Act, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has set up a Central Supervisory Board as well as state-level supervisory committees. A ministry report indicates that there are 420 ongoing court/police cases for violations of the law. Of these only 65 cases relate to identification and revelation of the sex of the foetus, 43 are against people who have advertised facilities for sex selection and the rest are for non-registration of clinics/facilities.

The government's inaction in most cases is due to the fact that the patient, her family and the violators of the law are hand-in-glove. The Annual Report (2006) of the PC & PNDT division identifies the non-availability of evidence or witnesses as the chief hindrance to implementing the law. The unscrupulous doctors and patients have developed their own sex determination code language to circumvent the law. For an instance if a doctor says collect the report on Monday the family is meant to infer that the unborn child is a boy. Friday connotes the girl child. Signing a report in blue ink indicates a boy while red ink is meant for baby girls. The Annual Report mentions that the CMO or CS is usually not empowered enough to bring violators to book. Also abortions to limit family size add to the difficulty of nabbing the guilty.

Despite the loopholes the government has exerted itself to advocate the girl child's right to live. A new website has been launched ([www.pndt.gov.in](http://www.pndt.gov.in)) with the facility to file a complaint online against doctors, maternity homes and clinics. The organisations like Sonological Society of India are supporting the government initiatives.

#### **4.2.2 Honour Killings**

An honour killing (also called a customary killing) is the murder of a family or clan members, where the murderers (and potentially the wider community) believe the victim to have brought dishonour upon the family, clan or community. This perceived dishonour is normally the result of (a) utilising dress codes unacceptable to the family or (b) engaging in certain sexual acts. These killings result from the perception that defence of honour justifies killing a person whose behaviour dishonours their clan or family.

According to Human Rights Watch, "Honor crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members, female family members, who are held to have brought dishonor upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce – even from an abusive husband – or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that "dishonours" her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life". (Human Rights Watch, <http://unfpa.org/swp/2000/English/ch03.html>)

In many parts of North India, when the young boys and girls belonging to different communities show mutual interest and affection, an intolerant and bigoted society refuses to accept any violation of its rigid code of decorum in such cases, especially when it comes to women. Many such killings are happening with regularity in Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh. These are socially sanctioned by caste panchayats and carried out by mobs with the connivance of family members.

The usual remedy lies in suggesting to society to be more gender-sensitive, shed prejudices of caste and class and sensitise people on the need to do away with social biases. Since there is no specific law to deal with honour killings, it should be made clear that there is no escape for those who take justice into their own hands. The murders

come under the general categories of homicide or manslaughter. In case of mob attacks, it becomes difficult to pinpoint a culprit and the collection of evidence becomes tricky; the eyewitnesses too are never forthcoming.

Like the case of Sati and dowry where there are specific laws with maximum and minimum terms of punishment, honour killings, too, merit a second look under the law. In many cases, the victims who run away with 'unsuitable' partners are lured back home after the First Information Reports (FIRs) are filed by their families. Though the police are aware of the dangers involved in the return that might even lead to death at the hands of their relatives and fellow villagers, no pre-emptive action to protect them is taken. Active policing and serious penal sanctions is the only antidote to this most dishonourable practice.

### **4.2.3 Plight of Women Victims of NRI Marriages**

The search for resources for a better life has been the human endeavour throughout history, and man has always been moving out in search of livelihood or better prospects. The migration to foreign countries is nothing new for the Punjabis who began migrating to foreign countries since the late nineteenth century. While some of them migrated to North America and South Asian countries, many were in the forefront of the struggle to liberate India from British imperialism and took an active part in the national liberation movement suffering innumerable hardships.

In the past, the changing socio-economic conditions of Punjab forced many of its inhabitants to go out to foreign lands because agriculture, the peasants' traditional base, did not remain economically viable. Punjab had had more than 65.5 percent people living in the rural areas and depending directly or indirectly on agriculture. This forced the Punjabis to go abroad for better livelihood. But in course of time it became a craze to go abroad, and thus began the exploitation of many social ties under the influence of a money-minded culture. Today this badly affects the social relations in Punjab.

However, now under the changed scenario, influenced by the globalisation policies adopted by the Indian government, the problem of NRI boys marrying girls and to flee away is becoming a menace. Punjab is becoming a source state as well as a transit state for the trafficking and/or forced migration of young women. Not only has the government (in its hunger of the dollars and pounds coming from the NRIs) failed to check such marriages but it also failed to pass a law enforcing compulsory registration of NRI marriages.

There are hundreds of such instances in which teenage girls were married to NRI grooms, many of whom were of their fathers' ages, with the only intention that their girls' sacrifice would pave the way for other family members to go abroad and improve their economic conditions. Due to this mentality, parents from middle class strata go ahead to arrange their daughters' marriages with NRI youth without even verifying the background and antecedents of the latter.

In many cases, these NRIs are already married and have children. In some cases, there is a considerable age gap. They make short visits to India, and allure and exploit young girls through matrimony. Such grooms not only sexually exploit the girls but also demand handsome amounts from their families. After the marriage has been solemnised, such an NRI husband proceeds back to his adopted country, leaving behind his newly-wed wife on the pretext of calling her to the foreign country after making the necessary arrangements.

In most cases, after waiting for years together, the girl finds that her 'husband' has only exploited her sexually and left her to her miserable destiny for the whole life. In some cases, where the girl accompanies the groom, she is often subjected to physical and mental harassment, confiscation of passport and other official documents. She is beaten, tortured and humiliated. With no considerable support in an alien country, the girls are forced to lead miserable lives.

In Punjab, incidents of such exploitation are on the rise at an alarming rate, especially in districts like Ludhiana, Nawan Sahar, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala and Moga, from where very large numbers of Punjabis are settled in foreign countries. These frauds are perpetrated by those living in the USA, Canada, UK and other European countries, and also by those working in the Gulf countries and other Arabian countries. Districts of Ludhiana, Nawan Sahar, Hoshiarpur and Jalandhar have maximum number of such heinous incidents.

This exploitation is facilitated by many factors. More than 50 percent cases are reported by the peasantry, and some 25 percent by middle class families. The main reasons are the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry in Punjab, the ever-rising level of unemployment and the westernisation of social relations, which together provide a fertile ground for such incidents. Gujarat, with a substantial NRI population, also has such cases. Women are especially vulnerable in the foreign country often without any financial support. They have no one to turn to at the time of crisis.

Besides the lack of a strong law and of awareness among the young girls, which makes it easier for the NRIs to perpetrate the fraud, such cases are also kept hidden from others for fear of being stigmatised.

The decision of the Ministry of Overseas Affairs to appoint volunteers in countries with a high density of NRIs and PIOs to carry out check of the grooms abroad has remained superficial. With the number of NRI-Indian marriages on the rise, it is impossible for the bride's parents in India to verify the credentials of the NRI grooms. Institutional mechanisms are needed for getting authentic information before these so called NRI marriages are finalised. The Indian Missions should help out with the task in conjunction with local NGOs and even come to the rescue of victims of these fraudulent marriages. Police and law enforcing agencies in India need to be more sympathetic in dealing with them. Filing of FIR should be made possible for the victims. The government needs to ensure that a comprehensive regulation that enables protection accorded by the law to the Indian women with regard to marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance and custody of children should also apply to victims of fraudulent NRI marriages.

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### **4.3 ECOLOGICAL ISSUES**

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Ecological problems are becoming more and more public and this is the reason why ecology has become a much general term despite its originally scientific character. Modern ecology is generally connected with Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution and natural selection where he pointed on firm connection between animals and their natural habitats. But this firm connection often gets ruined because in general, people think that Earth has just one purpose- i.e., to satisfy their needs, and their plans do not usually include concern for plants and animals that lived on their habitats thousands of years before humans came along. Unfortunately homocentric system by which all natural goods are used just for human exploit is still very much present in world's philosophy, although

it has to be said that ecocentric system, based on ecosystem, has seen rising number of supporters as well. The lack of concern has resulted in many species becoming endangered animals and the increasing pollution all over the world.

To understand ecology, we need to think in terms of the healthy interplay of man and his total environment. What are the limits, quantitative and qualitative, within which we can interfere with an inherited natural environment without dire consequences? How far can these safe limits eventually be stretched, given more knowledge and understanding, and more time? What are the penalties of overstepping them, as we have and will, and how can these be mitigated and injuries checked or healed? What is the relation between pressure of human population and the carrying capacity of the earth? How far can practicable corrections of the needless extravagances and wastes of our present economy and technology move toward a new equilibrium?

The term ecology, in its broad sense, means scientific study of plants, animals, or people and institutions in relation to the environment. The main basis of the ecology in environment and the related components are plants, animals, peoples and institutions. There is ecological balance when all the components harmonize with each other and nothing occurs that is detrimental to one or more components. An ecological crisis occurs when this equilibrium is disturbed by nature and by man. (Chauhan, I. S. and Arun Chauhan, 1998, p. 39)

Environment is the whole system of biosphere consisting of both biotic and abiotic components interacting with each other and involving a series of cyclic balances. In this system land, water, plants, animals, worms and humans are linked by a complicated cobweb of interconnections and interdependence. So much so that the entire world and all the living system within it can be looked as one "living organism" (Chaudhuri, B. D. N., 1976, p. ix).

Humanity, along with all species is dependent on our habitat. Degradation of our environment not only affects the carrying capacity of life on the planet but also affects the number of people that the planet can support. Many of the natural resources of the planet, when degraded, have impacts far beyond what is commonly perceived.

Today we can see significant impact on many ecosystems in all parts of the globe. The resilience of many ecosystems is likely to be exceeded this century by an unprecedented combination of climate change associated disturbances (eg. flooding, drought, wildfire, insects, ocean acidification), and other global change drivers (e.g. land use change, pollution, over-exploitation of resources). (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, 2007)

It is generally recognised that ecosystems are degraded or destroyed when the productivity of the biosphere is not able to keep pace with human consumption and waste generation. This is intimately related to the human population of the planet.

Human consumption is now 23% larger than nature's capacity to regenerate or to absorb our ecological footprint (Millennium Project State of the Future Report, 2006).

"... we are using the planet's resources faster than they can be renewed – the latest data available indicates that humanity's Ecological Footprint, our imprint upon the planet, has more than tripled since 1961. Our footprint now exceeds the world's ability to regenerate by about 25%" (Living Planet Report, 2006).

### 4.3.1 The Air Pollution

Air is one of the most important constituents of the environment. It is calculated that a man breathes about 22000 times a day inhaling about 16 Kg of air by weight. Therefore, clean and pure air is necessary for survival and good health. But due to the Air Pollution our health and survival have been endangered. A complete definition of air pollution, according to India Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act, 1981 is – “air pollution means any solid, liquid and gaseous substance (including noise) present in the atmosphere in such concentrations that may tend to be injurious to human beings or other living creatures or plants or property of environment.” Major pollutants of air are carbon compounds (CO<sub>2</sub>, CO) Carbon monoxide, Sulphur Compounds, Nitrogen Dioxide, Acid Rains, Oxygen difluoride (Of<sub>2</sub>), Mercury, lead, Green House Gases (GHG) and others (Agarwal, K. C., 1996, p. 264).

Industrialisation everywhere has polluted the air. Toxic fumes are emitted into the air from factories and transportation system. A large number of people become ill or die because of the toxic gases in the air they breathe. In 1984 an accidental release of toxic gas from an American owned chemical plant in Bhopal, killed more than two thousand people and injured more than two lakh.

#### 4.3.1.1 Airborne Lead

The story of airborne lead well establishes the connection between industrialisation and air pollution. Scientists estimate the amount of lead in the world’s air by taking core samples of the ice in the Greenland icecap. From 800 BC to the beginning of Industrial Revolution around 1750, the amount of lead in the air was low. There was a major increase after 1750 and a massive increase after Second World War when the use of leaded gasoline rose sharply (Seitz, John, L., 1990, p. 120).

#### 4.3.1.2 Depletion of Ozone Layer

The ozone layer in the atmosphere protects the earth from harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. That layer is now being reduced by Chloro fluorocarbons (CFC), used as a propellant in aerosol spray cans, as a fluid in refrigerators and air conditioners and for other industrial purposes, as exhaust gases from supersonic transport planes. Ozone may also be destroyed by gases which are released when nitrogen fertilizer is extensively used and when nuclear bombs are exploded. German scientists were the first to notice ozone holes in the Antarctica atmosphere. The British scientists in the mid 1980’s discovered that the hole over the south pole was growing each year and in 1985 it was about the size equivalent to the area of the U.S.A. (Ibid., p. 123).

#### 4.3.1.3 The Green House Effect

The release of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels coal, oil and natural gas causes the warming of the earth’s climate. Scientists agree that CO<sub>2</sub> has increased significantly since the Industrial Revolution, by about 15-25 per cent between 1800 and 1980 (Council on Environment Quality, 1981, p. 1). This increase will cause a warming of the earth’s surface “the green house effect” since CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere allows sunlight to reach the earth, but traps some of the earth’s heat, preventing it from radiating back into space.

It is estimated that a doubling of the Co<sub>2</sub> level (anticipated in the middle of the next century) could lead to an average global warming of about five degrees Fahrenheit (Ibid.,

p.56). Though 5 degrees does not appear alarming, it would bring a significant climatic change. There would be major changes in the amount of rainfall and its location, with some areas getting more rainfall than at present and some less. Scientists are unable to predict reliably which areas would be hurt and which would gain, but there is speculation that the Central and Western U.S.A. would be seriously harmed by the climatic changes. India, the Middle East and some parts of Africa would have better climate for agriculture than they have now (Ibid., pp. 15-18).

Another possible effect is that the level of the seas might rise by as much as 15-25 feet especially if the West Antarctic ice sheet melts. Such a rising of water level could lead to the evacuation of many coastal cities around the world.

### **4.3.2 The Water Pollution**

Water, like air, is an indispensable and precious natural resource on this planet. But due to industrialisation, urbanisation and other development-related activities, resources of water (river, pond, lake, streams, and seas) have become highly polluted.

Development has tended to turn clean water into dirty water, as it has turned fresh air into dirty air. Water pollution of river take place from sewage produced by cities and wastes released by factories. During floods and heavy rains, huge amount of polluted water rushes into rivers and lakes and huge amount of water drain laden with pesticides, herbicides and excess fertilizers (UNI, The Hindustan Times, Patna edn. 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1995).

#### **4.3.2.1 Lack of Fresh Water**

Water is a renewable but finite resource. We are now using about half of the fresh water available on the planet. Many nations now have water shortages that threaten the health and economics of these nations.

In recent years the world has seen catastrophic damage and loss of life from an excess of water – monsoons, tsunamis and floods. Ironically, at the same time, “millions of people live without access to adequate or clean water, with little hope their situation will improve as the global water-shortage crisis escalates.” (IRIN, 2007)

“By 2050, as much as 40% of the world’s population may have to live in countries with insufficient freshwater stocks to meet the combined needs of agriculture, industry, and domestic use.” (GBN, 2007, p. 9). “Many major rivers now run dry during part of the year. Water withdrawal from lakes and rivers has doubled in the last 40 years. UN agencies estimate that without major changes, by 2050 more than 2 billion people will live in water scarce areas. Agriculture accounts for 70% of all human usage of fresh water” (Falk, Richard, 1975, p.108).

As populations grow and cities increase in size, industrial, agricultural and individual water demands are rising. According to the World Bank, world-wide demand for water is doubling every 21 years. However, population growth alone does not account for increased water demand. Since 1900, there has been a six-fold increase in water use for only a four-fold increase in population. This reflects greater water use associated with rising standards of living.

#### **4.3.2.2 Depletion of Wetlands**

Millions of species of plants, animals and other organisms enrich our environment.



Awareness of the importance of this biological diversity has grown in recent years along with concern that more effective action is needed to preserve it. There is urgency because destruction of ecosystems and species extinction entails irreversible losses. Ecological degradation of wetlands together with pollution has resulted in the loss of flora and fauna. The high amount of fertilizers and other inputs required in agriculture for increasing the productivity has led to the degradation of the environment. Coral reefs and mangroves are threatened by increasing discharge from industrial establishments along the coastal belt. The mangroves of Sunderbans delta have been reduced to half (Kumar, A. Biju, Science Reporter, December 1999, pp. 10-15).

Organic pollution of water is the most serious problem in most of the developing countries. There has been a marked increase in the surface water pollution caused by the use of Chemical fertilizers, pesticides, acid rain and excessive use of ground water and other natural resources (ARRO, Environmental Degradation and Its Implication on Rural Development, Report of International Workshop, Cairo, 1996).

#### **4.3.2.3 Ocean Pollution**

It has been estimated that the world's merchant ships dump 6,39,000 plastic containers into the seas everyday. On a large scale the world's oceans and seas are being affected by plastic nets and bags that kill sea birds and turtles. The oil leakages from the tankers also harm sea birds and fishes. There is also dumping of nuclear wastes in the sea.

#### **4.3.3 The Land Pollution**

Whenever development takes place, its effect on the land has had been profound. More natural resources from the land are required for the production of goods and services and their extraction disturbs the land greatly. But even more widespread are the changes to the land which come with the disposal of the goods after they are no longer of use and of the wastes which are created in the manufactures of the goods. Many of these wastes are artificial substances which never existed before in the nature. Besides bringing ugliness to the land, the wastes affect the health of the people who come into contact with them.

##### **4.3.3.1 Plastic Panacea**

The plastics industry is jumping on the "green" bandwagon with a new line of "environmentally safe" products. In reality, these products are no friend of the environment.

Plastics are synthetic substances produced by chemical reactions. Almost all plastics are made from petroleum, save a few experimental resins derived from corn and other organic substances. "Plastics" earned their name because they can be molded, cast, extruded or processed into a variety of forms, including solid objects, films and filaments. These properties arise from their molecular structure. Plastics are polymers, very long chain molecules that consist of subunits (monomers) linked together by chemical bonds. The monomers of petrochemical plastics are inorganic materials (such as styrene) and are therefore not biodegradable.

According to the Federal Environment Authority of Germany, the production of 50 thousand polythene bags releases 17 kg of sulphur dioxide. A study of F.A.C. revealed that the production of one tonne of synthetic fibre based on refined natural gases releases at least 13 kg of nitrogen oxide and 12 kg of sulphur dioxide. The production of one tonne of synthetic material leaves behind 5.5 tonnes of solid waste which further adds to pollution of air and water. The processing of plastic also causes emission of Monoxide,

Nitrogen and Hydro carbons in the air and toxic substances into the waste water (may be called “Plastic Pollution”) (Seitz, John, L., p. 122).

In 1989, the U.S. used over twelve billion pounds of plastic for packaging designed to be thrown away as soon as the package is opened. At present this figure is expected to nearly double. Fortunately, more and more people are becoming aware of the damage plastic does to the environment. They are speaking out against it, protesting irresponsible industries and getting laws passed banning polystyrene and other plastics but much remains to be done in terms of not using this material.

The plastic industry is fighting back, using advertisements to promote what they call “environmentally sound” plastic packaging and products. By comparing the breakdown of “degradable” plastics to the familiar, natural decay of living things, manufacturers imply that their products are not harmful and may even benefit the environment. In order to support their claims, plastic producers have used two techniques. The first technique involves linguistic manipulation. According to industry, a plastic product can be called “biodegradable” if a small amount of starch, a legitimately biodegradable material, is added to the plastic.

However, the plastic itself, which generally comprises over 90 percent of the material, is not biodegradable. Although so-called “biodegradable” plastic products typically contain chemicals that help them fragment, the additives do not render the plastic biodegradable.

The second technique is simply bad science. Manufacturers conclude from poorly designed tests that the actual plastic in a “degradable” plastic product is converted to fragments that can be consumed by microorganisms. Having examined data from actual tests of biodegradability, we only find evidence that plastics are not fully metabolised by micro-organisms. Therefore they are not legitimately entitled to the term “biodegradable” and may leave behind harmful fragments of plastic and plastic additives.

While the plastic industry promotes its new “environmentally friendly” products, they deliberately ignore the highly toxic nature of plastic production, whether the product is called “degradable,” “recyclable” or any other “green marketing” catchword.

Among the 47 chemical plants ranked highest in carcinogenic emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 35 are involved in plastic production. Certain plastics such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), used for indoor and outdoor plumbing, electrical cables and countless other products, are potential sources of highly toxic dioxins when burned in municipal incinerators or in accidental fires. Polystyrene foam products are often made with chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), both of which are ozone-destroying chemicals.

#### **4.3.3.2 Deforestation and Desertification**

Over the past several centuries the world’s forests have declined one fifth, from 5 to 4 billion hectares of areas. When forests are cleared, their capacity to withhold carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is lost. Due to vanishing of Flora and Fauna and deforestation, over 3000 plant species are endangered in our country. As useful medicines can be prepared from *Rauwolfia serpentina* (Sarpagandha), it has been intensively exploited and has become rare. The tuber of *Dioscorea deltoidea* commonly known as ‘kins’, used to cure rheumatic illness and ophthalmic problems, is facing extinction because of over-collection.

Development projects, construction of big dams, heavy industrialisation, urbanisation and growing population involve deforestation. Research into the mysterious collapse of the Mayan Civilisation in Central America suggests that an exponentially growing population may have put pressures on the environment which led to the collapse (Deevey, E. S., et. al., October 19, 1979, pp. 298-306 ).

Deforestation is a serious problem because it leads to erosion of the land, can cause the soil to harden and can lead to significant changes in the climate. These changes usually mean less rainfall. Sometimes deforestation leads to too much water in the wrong place. Now severe floods are occurring in our country, never witnessed before. It is believed that the destruction of forest cover in the Himalayas, is causing the flooding. The forest cover in the Himalayas which was estimated to be 60 per cent in beginning of this century, now has been reduced to around 12 per cent (Sabri, M. A., 1999, pp. 37-39).

#### **4.3.4 Noise Pollution and Electronic Pollution**

Due to auto horns and noise from loudspeakers, blood pressure and heart beats rise. This noise pollution impairs ear drums also. Radiation from T.V, V.C.R, Mobiles and other electronic gadgets not only affect the atmosphere and mind but also the health of the mankind.

#### **4.3.5 Thermo-Nuclear Pollution**

The greatest pollution today is radioactive fallout from nuclear testing or from storage and disposal of nuclear wastes. When in 1954, a Hydrogen bomb was tested by the United States in the pacific area, it caused widespread radiation sickness among a large number of Japanese fishermen and about 80 per cent of the children on the Island of Rongelap developed Thyroid growth of an intractable nature.<sup>33</sup> And as the tests continue (with the Chinese and the French still conducting them in atmosphere, underground nuclear explosion by India and Pakistan) an increasing number of children (born in the test areas), according to the noted British marine biologist, Arthur Bourne, are likely to die of cancer, and leukemia induced by radiation from them (Isachs, Ignancy, 1977, p. 281).

The testing of atomic weapons and the continued development of nuclear power even for peaceful uses (energy generation) adds on a global scale man made radio activity. Apart from this, the selective destruction of atomic weapons and also, the nuclear waste disposal causes greater problems to such an extent that the polar ice caps may melt and lead to massive flooding by the middle of this century, or even earlier.

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## **4.4 SUMMARY**

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The present social and ecological issues are a direct consequence of man's inability to rise to the level of understanding and responsibility as demanded by his new power role in the world. The problem is within man, not outside him, and so is any solution. Human beings will have to realise that a way of life that rapidly depletes the power of earth can only be called violent. Man's urgent task is to follow a non violent way of life that needs to be widened to combat human dealing with living nature around him and with the limited and finite resources of nature.

There is no other avenue but to explore his goals and values as much as he seeks the world to change. An unending commitment would ensure that man will survive without falling into a state of worthless existence. More and more people all over the world

should look for the ways to redirect ecological system “as if people mattered” (Schumacher, E.F., 1989, p. 139).

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## **4.5 TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

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1. Discuss the various social problems India is facing today.
2. Discuss the different ecological issues that are affecting the mankind today.
3. What do you understand by pollution? What are its kinds and damages?

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## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

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