

# ENVIRONMENT IS NOT JUST A SUBJECT, BUT A WAY OF LIFE?

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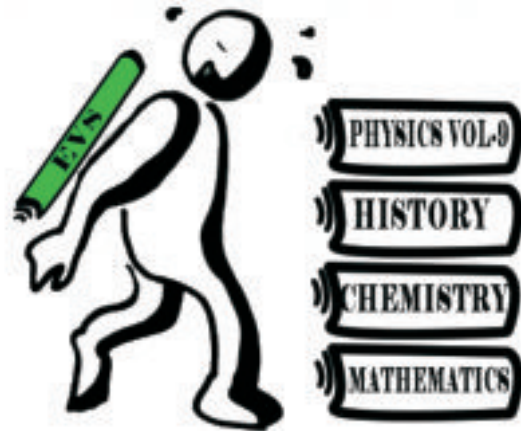
We start with a question- What is EVS? A subject to mug up notes and pour it on exam papers or planting a tree on 22nd April? From our bookish knowledge all we know is that polar ice caps are melting due to Global Warming, we need to stop cutting trees to save wildlife, population is increasing, resources are decreasing and we need to act. But our actions are highly restricted to getting marks in Environmental Studies exam and getting NSS credits. If we are not an activist or an environmentalist or an E.V.S professor, we hardly know about our planet. Apart from the rise and fall of the stock market or the glitz and glamour of media or the incessant fights between political parties we have no knowledge of our environment.

Is EVS a **burden**? The education system including certain aspects of environment has started in India as early as 1930. The aim was to encourage awareness of the environment, leading to informed concern for active participation in resolving environmental problems. The First Consultation on the academic aspects of Environmental Education (EE) in schools was organized by NCERT on 13-14 February 2004 in New Delhi. The second consultation on the implementation of EVS in schools was held on 13th March 2004. The main aim to introduce EVS was to remind our common

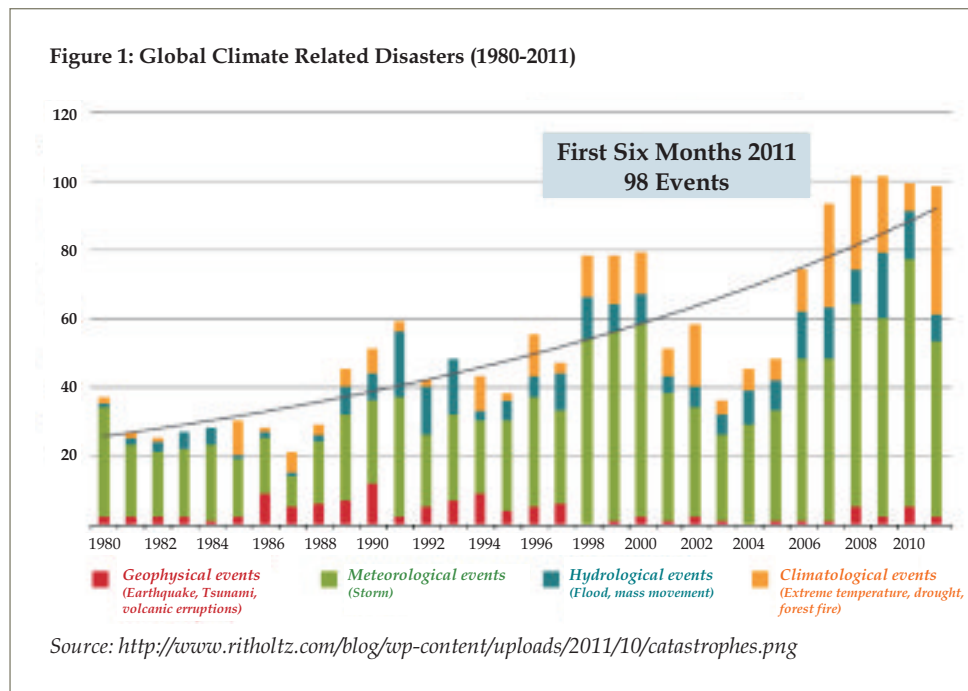
duty of maintaining, protecting & improving the quality of environment, as a contribution to the protection of human health and safeguarding the ecological balance. EVS also changed our attitude and concern for other living things on earth. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2012, NCERT said it plans to offer environmental studies in an "infused model" rather than as a distinct subject. "The idea is to not burden students with an additional subject," said Gagan Gupta, associate professor in the science department at NCERT. Thus we no longer have EVS as a so called "Burden" at school levels, but it will be included in our existing subjects. By including its components in existing subjects, not only has NCERT done away with a subject, but also tried to render EVS more important. Suffusing it with other subjects also means that the last-minute preparations that EVS was synonymous with, will no longer work. "Students can no longer take EVS lightly for it will now be a component of all the subjects that they are being marked for," said Jadhav, Environment Professor, Delhi University.

Every human being on earth is fighting for their survival. Poor are aspiring to become rich and the rich are becoming richer whipping the backs of the poor. In this scenario nobody cares about the amount of damage happening to our mother earth. Now, the question lies, if planting trees, reading articles on environment aren't sufficient.... what should we do?

**ONLY EVS THE BURDEN ???**



We should change our mind. We need to think as a whole. Apart from "I, me and myself", think in terms of "US". Planet earth is the only thing we all have in common; it's a mutual friend to all. Earth, our mother is a part of us, and so is EVS. We are interdependent. We should be the changed one and set the example how to bring about the change. We know that Drops of water makes an ocean, similarly drops of concern can make an eco-friendly survival. The fundamental beliefs of our culture about environment are quite self-centered. No amount of environmentalism can resist demolition if a culture took the world for granted. We should learn from other cultures and communities and even non-humans on how to participate in an ecosystem without destroying it. Their practice of environment does not include recycling or buying hybrid cars but considering the environment as



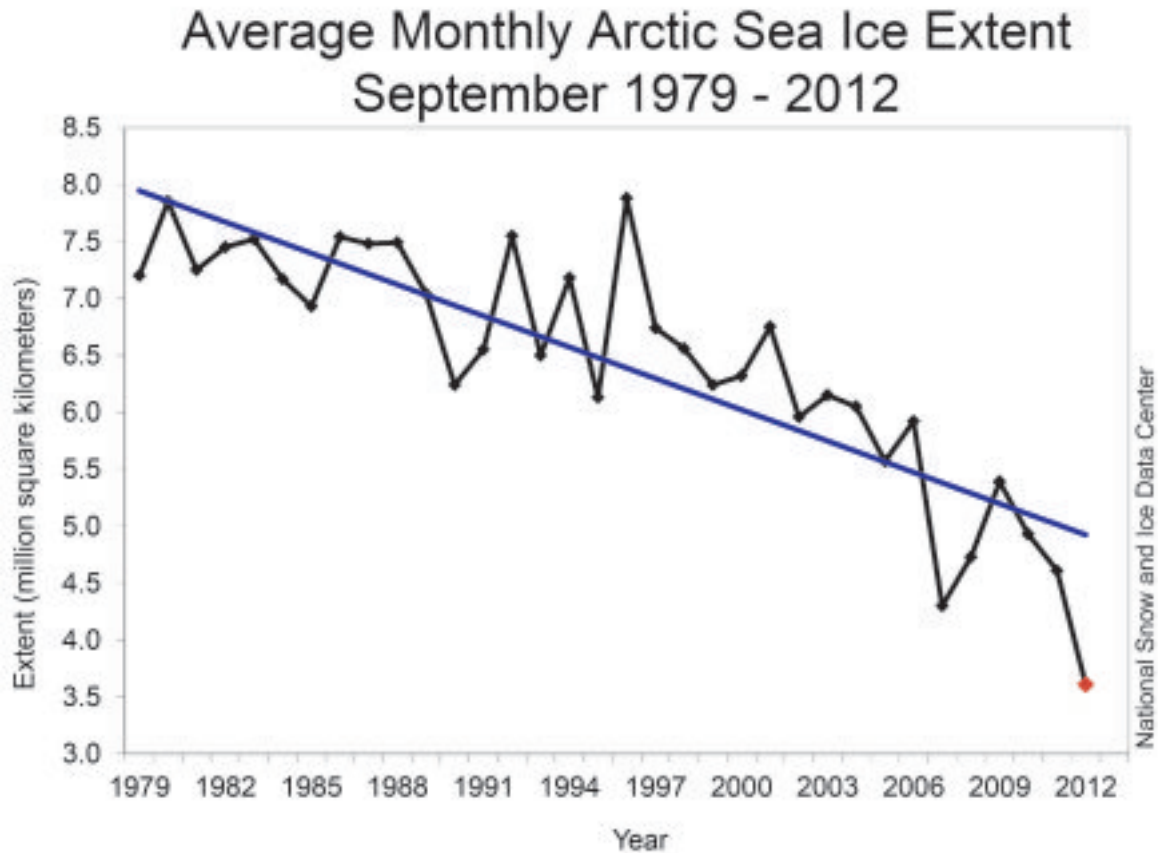
their own family. Their actions can lead us to a whole new mindset and a cultural vision where there is no place for *marks, jobs, fame and money* but a deep enlightenment which cannot be seen **but can be felt.**

The most important issue that has been hindering the very existence of life on earth is the extreme climatic change. The reason behind the catastrophic change are the prolong activities of human race for the past 100 years. Climatic change will wreak havoc on us by restricting our access to the basics of life which include food, water, land and energy. Rising sea levels will in the next half-century erase many coastal areas, destroying large cities, railroads, ports etc. Diminished rainfall and prolonged droughts will turn once-verdant croplands into dust bowls, reducing food output. More severe storms and intense heat waves will kill crops, trigger forest fires and cause floods. No one can predict how much food, land and energy will be lost as a result of this onslaught. Though the destruction has already been started with the increase in world temperature which resulted in melting of Arctic ice and rising of sea levels we on the contrary are very reluctant to take any step. 2013 has been considered as the warmest year by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) chief Michel Jarraud.

Few disasters that took place in 2013 due to drastic climatic change and environmental degradation are: Cyclone Phailin in Orissa, India, Flood Disaster in Uttarakhand, India, Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines, Hurricanes Manuel and Ingrid, Mexico, Tornadoes in Oklahoma, Colorado, US Floods. Year by year the amount of Arctic sea ice expands and contracts in the summer and winter months.

What can we do? We can be a concerned drop and bring about the desired change.

Fig.2 : Arctic Glacier Melt (1979-2012)



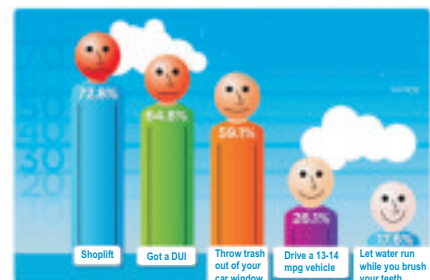
Source: <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/files/2000/09/Figure3.png>

Figure 1.3 shows how much we do care about our environment and the daily minimal crimes. We get embarrassed when a person is shoplifting but we behave casually when we let water run while brushing our teeth. It's just the concern and attitude for the environment, which can be achieved through sustainable mentalities and not marks.

(<http://agentnunn.blogspot.in/2012/11/is-failing-to-be-green-same-as-smoking.html>)

EVS has never been boring, but we have made it so by considering it as a subject. EVS gives us a chance to understand our mother earth and become a part of it. To conclude we say, we should feed our mother (Earth) so that we are saved.

Fig.3 : How embarrassed would you be if someone you admire found out that you...



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# TOWARDS ECO-SPIRITUALITY; (GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR'S: GIVE TO EARTH, WHAT IS GOD'S)

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## 1. Nature's Fury on God

On 14th June, 2013, millions of people across India watched in stunned disbelief as the primetime airwaves were filled with the shocking images of the river Mandakini, in raging spate, lashed against a larger than life idol of Lord Shiva. By the time dawn broke out, the statue of the Lord was conspicuous in its absence and the Nation watched in numb disbelief as the magnitude of the disaster that had struck unveiled itself.

This particular footage was symbolic and will continue to haunt devout Indians and everyone who had sampled a piece of Nature's fury from the safe confines of their drawing rooms, for a long time to come. For, it was, as if nature was literally taunting man's so-called "progress", choosing to prove as she has been doing since the time of Noah, how puny we humans actually are by unleashing her wrath on the Gods of our creation. "You think you have harnessed me to turn the wheels of your developmental agenda? You think you have put me on leash and can force me to do your bidding? You think your knowledge has mastered the wisdom that I have taken eons to create?" she seemed to be asking rhetorically, even as a wall of water rushed down the slopes, carrying boulders of destruction, sweeping everything on the way like autumn leaves.

## 2. The Untold Misery

The scientific meteorological explanation was simple: from 14th to 17th June 2013, a multi-day cloudburst centered on the North Indian state of Uttarakhand caused devastating floods and landslides as Uttarakhand and adjoining areas received heavy rainfall, which was about 375 percent more than the benchmark rainfall during a normal monsoon. This caused the melting of Chorabari Glacier at the height of 3800 metres, and eruption of the Mandakini River which led to heavy floods near Gobindghat, Kedar Dome, Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Western Nepal, and torrential rainfall in other nearby regions of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Tibet. Official postmortem reports too were equally callous in their characteristic manner - warnings were not sufficiently sounded which led to the people getting caught unawares, leading to the comparatively high loss of life, limb and property. The Breaking News brigade soon moved on to the next sensation, the wailing tears of those bereaved dried up, the Mandakini went back to her placid meandering self and normalcy returned, for all practical purposes. But has Nature, really made her point? Or, did her fury fall on deaf ears? Either way, was it a one-off event, or is there more to come?

## 3. Human Actions Warming the Nations

"Tsunamis, Hurricanes, Cloudbursts ... the terms are not new. It is not that these natural calamities are striking us suddenly as they have been there since time immemorial", However, what is really



frightening is the way their frequency is increasing and the intensity with which they are baring their destructive fangs. If these are the effects of man's desire to play God with Nature, then the causes leading to global warming and climate change too are known to us all. What however, is the real clincher is that fact that if Hurricane Katrina, Uttarakhand or the Tsunami in Japan are the result of 400 ppm (as on 2nd April, 2014, 399.47 ppm) of carbon dioxide in the air, what will happen when we, in our wisdom pollute the atmosphere further to doubled level of 800 ppm by the end of this century? Is that the goal that we set for our future generation?

#### **4. Environmental Education to become Eco-conscious Citizens**

To the wide majority of the world's population, forced to fight for their very survival, and doomed to the darkness induced by illiteracy, such questions are but esoteric and have no real meaning. To the select few who are both educated and whose quest for conspicuous consumption has brought the world to this precipice, the matter is equally irrelevant. "It is the making of the lunatic fringe of science – people seeking to play on the inherent fear psychosis of the population to fund their fantastic theories. Surely, all those Cassandra's yelling about the imminent end of the world down the ages have proved them wrong and the Earth that has survived catastrophes in the past will surely heal itself out in the future as well?" they point out in complacent superiority. And it is exactly this misplaced confidence that we have to address, if we were to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children.

Today, global warming, climate change, extreme weather patterns, natural disasters ... are all terms that not only enjoy top of the mind recall but are well ingrained into the global consciousness to the point of losing their edge and becoming irrelevant, like sub-Saharan poverty and malnutrition. Science with its clinical precision has floated them, engaged the "minds" and typically turned them into right brain concerns that neither touch the hearts, nor motivate people to mould themselves to reverse the action that they themselves have set into motion.

#### **5. Reducing our Greed to Plunder the Earth**

And, this is precisely why the need of the hour is to take a holistic approach to the problem: to address the burning issues of the day, from a spiritual plane. It is an approach that is much easier done than said, for all major religions are unanimous in their basic teachings about being conscientious about the environment – about living responsibly, about taking from Mother Earth only what is needed as opposed to being wanton pillagers driven by greed to plunder.

#### **6. Awe and Wonder God's Creation**

At the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 Emperor Constantine saw the "sign" which led humanity to take the course to where we are today. Such signs are everywhere now – and it is up to us to read them and to do the bidding of our faith for the ultimate triumph of mankind. "God" they say, "is in small everyday things". Being faithful, walking the path of Godliness, is not about building cathedrals that mock time, it is about invoking His name in every breath we take, every move we make. It is about being His pencil, so that our lives can be the instruments of His eternal writing. Similarly, responding to the twin menace of Global warming and Climate Change is not so much about Earth shattering events that will change the course of Nature, but about changing the course of

our natural instincts so that we too may be parts of the change that we seek. Remember, Science built the Titanic, but Noah, paying heed to God's will, built the Ark. God does not want us to be the Ocean – let us be the individual drops that will join to make His “seas of change”.

## **7. Repent and Act Now**

And when we do that we will only be playing out History. The “brash and the insolent” prodigal son, who had forsaken the Father and is today faced with hunger brought about by a famine that is the result of his creation has returned home. Jesus Christ had told us the Parable of the Prodigal Son, where the repenting younger son had cried:

“I have recklessly forgotten Your glory, O Father;  
And among sinners I have scattered the riches which You gave to me.  
And now I cry to You as the Prodigal:  
I have sinned before You, O merciful Father;  
Receive me as a penitent and make me as one of Your hired servants.”

We all know what the father had done: despite the grumblings of the faithful older son, He had embraced the one who had deviated and led him on the path of righteousness. It is time for us, the prodigal sons to understand our environmental sins, abhor our high carbon lifestyles of moral and ecological corrosion and return back within the folds of God's family so that we may live a Sustainable life, be a part of His grand design and seek our redemption. For it is in our individual redemptions that the Earth will be redeemed and the our collective sins that pollute the atmosphere today will be cleansed.

Science has taught us the why, when, what and where of life. But Science alas, does not have all the answers. If it is answers that we seek, if it is the “How” of life's mysteries that we want to address, we have to look within our souls where the Lord resides and follow our conscience which is but His silent commands bidding us, so that we too may leave behind for our children and their children a world that is cleaner, greener and more prosperous than what we had inherited. Call that God's will, eco-spirituality or environmental stewardship if you may, call that by another any other name if that makes you happy, BUT, JUST DO IT NOW. For, even if we do not pay heed to the signs now, history will not treat us kindly. Worse, there may not humans either to read or write the history.