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Green Politics: The Politics of the Environment and Its Global Governance

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to the environment and our lifestyle choices, all of us would choose to live the way we are even if it is to be at the expense of the environment. Humans are all aware of how destructive our activities have become for our very first home, the environment but is there enough being done to curb the issue? Is the arena of green politics shown interest in as much as other areas of politics? Has the Global North-South divide of the world caused any differences in opinions and demands on environmental conservation? But the major debate is about how difficult it is to stop globalisation since it has brought the world where it stands right now in various aspects of development and connectivity, and is stopping globalisation the only way forward? There are, obviously, two houses in this debate and somehow both of them agree on conserving the environment. This paper aims to understand how green politics works towards saving the environment and how far has global governance been successful in creating an arena for environment conservation.

Keywords: *Green Politics, Global Commons, Global Governance, Environment*

I. INTRODUCTION

The environment has been even before the advent of humankind. There was a harmonious relationship between the two but as the needs of humankind shot up the bar of what the environment could offer, the string attaching the two has been cut. The trends of growth and the development of communication and exchange channels have been the factor that has stomped on the breathing space of the environment itself. The global connections certainly led to growth in a variety of fields which benefited humankind immensely but there has been even more destruction that has been caused to the environment. When people from various continents and fields started exchanging ideas, goods, services and even cultures, a new world was created- the one which brought everyone so much closer despite the presence of vast continents and even borders. This process of exchange which caught momentum started when the first known exchange took place in the form of travel when Europeans started journeys in the search for the 'New World'. Exchanges, though, have been prevalent from the existence of

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the first-ever civilisation, Mesopotamia. And one of the most important ones is the example of the 'Silk Route' which led to the exchange of goods as well as of culture and religions, like Islam.

But that was not what globalisation is like today. Those were just exchanges carried out to live lives and there was very little harm caused to the environment in the process since there was no global race and greed amongst people. Now, it is way more complex and accelerated. It has been developed and modernised and this particularly started rising after the post-war era when the United States of America established itself as the world *hegemon*². And after that came globalisation.

Globalization is a phenomenon affecting all facets of the Earth System. Within the context of ecological systems, it is becoming increasingly apparent that global connectivity among terrestrial systems, the atmosphere, and oceans is driving many ecological dynamics at finer scales and pushing thresholds of change³. It reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market, both of which seem far more tangible and immediate than in earlier stages of modernity.

But it has been the cause of the disruption of the ecological balance since fresh water and clean air are under a serious threat right now.

Globalization has stimulated the relocation of industry, population movement away from the land, and ever-rising levels of consumption, in conjunction with associated emissions of effluents and waste gases. While often generating greater income for poorer countries exporting basic goods to developed country markets, ever-free trade can also have adverse environmental consequences, by disrupting local ecologies and livelihoods.

On the other hand, there is little evidence that globalization has stimulated a 'race to the bottom' in environmental standards, and it's even been argued that increasing levels of affluence have led to local environmental improvements, even as birth rates tend to fall as populations become wealthy.

The environment is often viewed as the archetypal example of a global issue. This is because environmental processes are no respecters of national borders; they have an intrinsically *transnational character*. As countries are peculiarly environmentally vulnerable to the activities that take place in other countries, meaningful progress on environmental issues can

² The associated term *hegemon* is used to identify the actor, group, class, or state that exercises hegemonic power or that is responsible for the dissemination of hegemonic ideas.

³ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/221914204_Globalization_Ecological_Consequences_of_Global-Scale_Connectivity_in_People_Resources_and_Information

often only be made at the international or even global level.⁴ But global participation on such matters has now and then been exceptionally hard to achieve. This has happened for various reasons. Differences have arisen about both the reality and nature of ecological issues and about how they can best be handled, not least on the grounds that natural needs will in a general clash with financial ones.

But globalisation has also opened up a lot of NGOs and that has led to the effective dissemination of information and awareness about the ways to save and conserve the environment and they play a very important role in environmental politics. Global issues need global solutions and pose a fundamental requirement for global environmental governance yet local or regional action remains a vital aspect of responses to many problems; one of the defining characteristics of environmental politics is the awareness of such interconnections and of the need to 'think globally-act locally'⁵. In the realm of international politics which is made up of around 190 countries, there is a constant debate about whether the consequence of globalization has caused the present state of the environment and if so, then how.

II. BACKGROUND

Before the second world war, there were hardly any discussions or summits solely for discussing the environmental concerns. People and governments, leaders and policies were more bent towards the other issues of the world, like security and class divide and so on. There was no control on the carbon emission of countries and all that mattered was industrialisation and development. So rarely might this thought have occurred about looking at the environment in such a competitive haste. Until the 1960s-70s, the environment was not a major concern. When the world started healing from the destruction of WW2, the pollution levels shot up incredibly and so did the concern.

This happened through the development of a natural development that tried to feature the natural expenses of expanded development and rising opulence, at any rate in the West, attracting consideration additionally to a developing gap among mankind and nature. Impacted specifically by the possibility of nature, the spearheading works of early green governmental issues included Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962), a scrutinize of the harm done to natural life and the human world by the expanded utilization of pesticides and other farming synthetic compounds, and Murray Bookchin's *Our Synthetic Environment* (1975) which inspected how pesticides, food added substances cause a scope of human

⁴ Andrew Heywood, Chapter 16- Global Environmental issues, Global Politics

⁵ John Vogler, ch-22, Environmental issues, The globalisation of world politics

diseases, including malignant growth. This time of the 1960s and 1970s likewise saw the birth of another age of lobbyist NGOs crusading on issues like the perils of contamination, the decreasing stores of non-renewable energy sources, deforestation and creature tests. However, in 1968 the UNGA agreed to convene what became the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) to focus governments' attention and public opinion on the importance and urgency of the question'. This Conference led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)⁶ and the establishment of environment departments by many governments.⁷

But there was one important issue which was highlighted and that was of the '*North-South divide*' (which continues even today). The countries of the global South demanded resource assistance from the global North since they had abundant resources to help.

Another important point which they raised was '*Development*' and '*Ecological Footprint*.' Since the majority of the developmental activities were happening in the global North and not South, they had more responsibility to save the planet by reducing their ecological footprint and simultaneously providing resources to the countries of the global South to develop and modernize. This gave the political premise to the idea of an economical turn of events.

Before this was formed by the Brundtland commission in 1987 ⁸(WCED 1987), the climate had been edged off the worldwide plan by the worldwide financial plunge of the 1970s and afterward by the beginning of the second cold war.

Then slowly the issues of '*thinning of stratospheric ozone layer*'⁹ and '*acid rain*'¹⁰ caught the attention of a wider public and laid the foundation of an even wider scale of awareness in the next centuries.

An important aspect of the discussion here are the environmental movements. Each of the environmental movements addresses three general problems. These are:

Resource problems – Attempts to conserve natural materials through reducing the use of non-renewable resources (coal, oil, natural gas and so on), increasing the use of renewable resources

⁶ The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) was founded in June 1972 as a result of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The UNEP is the coordinating body for the United Nations' environmental activities. It was formed in Nairobi, Kenya on 5 June 1972.

⁷ John Vogler, ch-22, Environmental issues, The globalisation of world politics

⁸ The **Brundtland** Report stated that critical global environmental problems were primarily the result of the enormous poverty of the South and the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in the North

⁹ <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/ozone-hole-and-global-warming>.

¹⁰ **Acid rain**, or **acid deposition**, is a broad term that includes any form of **precipitation** with **acidic** components, such as sulfuric or nitric **acid** that fall to the ground from the atmosphere in wet or dry forms. This can include **rain**, snow, fog, hail or even dust that is **acidic**

(such as wind, wave and tidal power), and reducing population growth, thereby curtailing resource consumption.

1. Sink problems – Attempts to reduce the damage done by the waste products of economic activity, though, for example, reducing pollution levels, increasing recycling, and developing greener (less polluting) technologies.
2. Ethical problems – Attempts to restore the balance between humankind and nature through wildlife and wilderness conservation, respect for other species (animal rights and animal welfare), and changed agricultural practices (organic farming). During the 1970s, environmental politics focused particularly on resource issues.

This reflected a growing awareness that humankind lives in a world of ‘global finiteness’, an awareness reinforced by the oil crisis of 1973.¹¹

From the 1980s onwards, natural inquiries were kept high on the political plan by green factions, which currently exist in most industrialized nations, frequently displaying themselves on the spearheading endeavours of the German Greens.

Then in 1992, the UN conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or the ‘Earth Summit’ where it was accepted that the special needs of the developing countries must be taken under consideration within the development and interpretation of rules of international environmental law.

The 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹² also provides that the parties should act on the basis of equity.

It was accepted that a large amount of greenhouse emission has originated in developed countries and per capita emissions in developing countries are relatively low.

Developing countries like India and China were exempted from the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol. It is a world agreement setting targets for industrialised countries to reduce their greenhouse emission emissions. The UN also created a process at the UN to review the implementation of its agreements. The Commission on Sustainable Development was to meet at intervals and there were follow-up UNGA Special Sessions and full-scale conferences. On UNCED's tenth anniversary in 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) met at Johannesburg¹³.

¹¹ Andrew Heywood, Chapter 16- Global Environmental issues, Global Politics

¹² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

¹³ John Vogler, ch-22, Environmental issues, The globalisation of world politics

The demand at all these summits and conferences were two- environmental preservation and of development.

Methodology

For the purpose of writing this research paper, primary research was conducted by watching a television series that was the biggest inspiration which is called 'OUR PLANET' narrated by Emmy winning narrator, David Attenborough. A series of research papers and books were referred to by renowned environmental authors as part of the secondary research. Furthermore, internet sites, links and Portable Document Formats were referred to.

III. GREEN POLITICS, THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW?

Concern for the impact on human life of problems like air and pollution dates to Roman times. Pollution was related to the spread of infectious disease in Europe between the late 14th century and therefore the mid-16th century, and conservation was practised in China, India, and Peru as early as 2,000 years ago. Generally, however, such concerns didn't produce public activism. As we are well aware of the efforts made by the international community in safeguarding the environment, we must also take into consideration the fact that this environmental degradation has in fact become one of the factors for bringing the entire world together- with small differences- but still together. So, when we talk about green politics, it is not equivalent to just any other branch of politics in the international arena, it is the one that binds all the realms of politics together or it *should be* the one that does so.

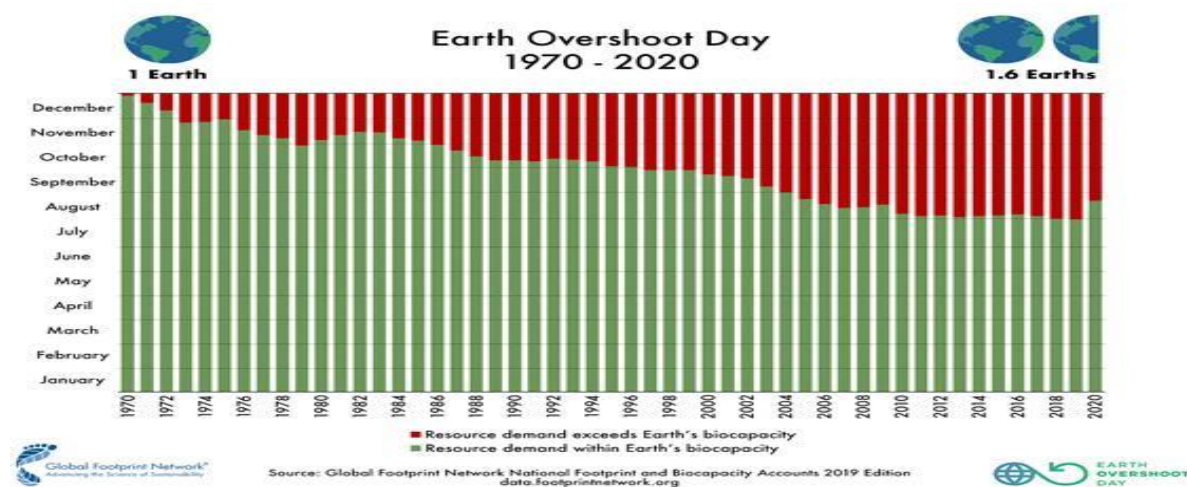
*Environmental governance refers to any institutional arrangement that attempts to control individual or organizational use of natural resources, ecological systems, and sinks for wastes in order to meet objectives such as sustainable use, protection of public health, and protection of valued species or places. Societies have developed many institutional structures for environmental governance, all of which are effective in some circumstances, but none of which is universally successful.*¹⁴

But there are not one but many problems in the governance. The quest for influence, status, and abundance is infrequently missing from global consultations. This is frequently disregarded in conversations of worldwide ecological collaboration, despite the fact that a significant number of the incredible global social occasions, and even a portion of the more regular ones, obviously reflect battles for public and hierarchical benefit. Associations try to

¹⁴<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/11186/decision-making-for-the-environment-social-and-behavioral-science-research> , Decision Making for the environment, Ch 3

keep up their monetary and staff assets just as their place inside the UN framework. UNEP, for instance, regardless of broad discussions over allowing it the higher and more self-ruling status of a UN Specialized Agency, stays a simple program. Some speculate that a significant part of the action at global ecological gatherings is just to give assertions persuading homegrown publics that something is being done, regardless of natural conditions crumbling. Another very important issue which yet again banks on the divide between north and south is the fact that all the main headquarters of various UN agencies and committees are in the United States of America so even though the second-highest carbon emissions¹⁵ Many countries feel that there is a certain level of favouritism regarding the US.

Furthermore, according to a research conducted by the *Ecological footprint- Global footprint network*, today humanity uses the equivalent of 1.6 Earths to provide the resources we use and absorb our waste. This means it now takes the Earth one year and eight months to regenerate what we use in a year. We use more ecological resources and services than nature can regenerate through overfishing, overharvesting forests, and emitting more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than forests can sequester.



Every year Global Footprint Network raises awareness about global ecological overshoot with our Earth Overshoot Day campaign, which attracts media attention around the world. Earth Overshoot Day marks the date we (all of humanity) have used more from nature than our planet can regenerate in the entire year. Earth Overshoot Day has moved from late September in 2000 to August 22 in 2020.¹⁶

According to one popular heuristic measure of the state of the environment – the ecological footprint – things are bad and getting steadily worse. It is a measure of the amount of nature it takes to sustain

¹⁵ <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/each-countrys-share-co2-emissions>

¹⁶ <https://www.footprintnetwork.org/our-work/ecological-footprint>

a given population over the course of a year. The footprint of humanity is a measure of the amount of nature it takes to sustain a given population over the course of a year. This global footprint first exceeded the Earth's biological capacity in the late 1970s, since then it has risen steadily, overshooting by almost 40 per cent in 2005. Moreover, this alarming figure disguises huge disparities among the nations; for example, the per capita footprint (in global hectares) of the USA (108.95) is about seventy times that of Ethiopia (1.56) It would be wrong, however, to draw the conclusion that nothing has changed over the last forty years; in practice.¹⁷

When we talk about environmental concerns and their governance on a global level, we know that there would not be leaders of just any one country or a group of countries. What we often take the case to be like is that we imagine a setting where there is no bar of race, colour and gender when we envision the panel for global governance. To put it in another way, we practice transboundary governance. *It simply means a government, the rule of whom surpasses each and every boundary.*

As environmental degradation courtesy of globalisation surpasses boundaries and breaks into all the arenas of life, a transboundary government or *the global government* controls the transboundary environmental concerns. This is reflected in a lot of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) which are signed among countries for the preservation of the environment. *The primary instruments accessible under worldwide law for nations to work together on a wide scope of worldwide ecological difficulties are global shows and settlements on the climate and normal assets otherwise called Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).* MEAs are agreements between states which may take the form of “soft-law”, setting out non-legally-binding principles that parties are obligated to consider when taking actions to address a particular environmental issue or “hard-law” which specify legally binding actions to be undertaken toward an environmental objective.¹⁸ Among the worldwide natural issues that MEAs are intended to react to include: loss of organic variety, unfriendly effects of Climate Change, exhaustion of the ozone layer, unsafe waste, natural contaminations, marine contamination, exchange of imperilled species, obliteration of wetlands, and so on.

One of the most important ones is the 1979 Long Range transboundary Air Pollution convention and its various protocols. The 1979 Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), the first multilateral agreement addressing transboundary air pollution, created a regional framework applicable to Europe, North America and Russia and former East Bloc countries for

¹⁷ Moreover, this alarming figure disguises huge disparities among the nations; for example, the per capita footprint (in global hectares) of the USA (108.95) is about seventy times that of Ethiopia (1.56) It would be wrong, however, to draw the conclusion that nothing has changed over the last forty years; in practice.

¹⁸ <https://www.eac.int/environment/multilateral-environmental-agreements>

reducing transboundary air pollution and better understanding air pollution science. LRTAP has contributed to a dramatic decline in air pollution emissions in the region, particularly for sulphur, and economic growth and air pollution trends have been progressively decoupled. The Convention has 51 Parties and eight protocols, most of which address specific pollutants.¹⁹

There are over 250 MEAs as of right now as per the data of the WTO²⁰ (World Trade Organisation). The issue of the relationship between trade and environmental degradation is much broader than disputes over the relationship between the World Trade Organization (WTO) and particular multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).²¹

This shows how important global governance actually is when it comes to catering to the needs of the environment. It has 4 important components:

- Over the last thirty years, the development of international environmental law and associated norms of acceptable behaviours has been both rapid and innovative over the last 30 years. Originally coined by German policy-makers, this principle states that where there is a likelihood of environmental damage, banning an activity should not require full and definitive scientific proof. This process is called *Norm Creation*.
- Most environmental conventions now aim at *Capacity Building* through arrangements for the transfer of funds, technology, and expertise, because many of their member states simply lack the resources to participate fully in international agreements.
- International environmental cooperation relies on shared *Scientific Understanding*, as reflected in the form of some important contemporary environmental regimes. An initial framework convention will signal concern and establish mechanisms for developing and sharing new scientific data, thereby providing the basis for taking action in a control protocol.
- *Global commons* are the resources that do not fall under the jurisdiction of any one particular country. Their preservation is an issue at hand. Garrett Hardin put it, 'Freedom in a common brings ruin to all. The idea of the 'tragedy of the commons' draws attention to the importance of the 'global commons', sometimes seen as 'common pool resources, and of threats posed to these by overpopulation, pollution, resource depletion, habitat destruction and over-

¹⁹ <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-environmental-quality-and-transboundary-issues/convention-on-long-range-transboundary-air-pollution/>

²⁰ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e/envir_neg_mea_e.htm

²¹ Globalization is partly shaped by the efforts of the GATT /WTO to open up protected markets and expand world trade. Many green activists argue that trade itself damages the environment by destroying local sustainable agriculture and by encouraging the environmentally damaging long-range transport of goods

fishing.

Table 21.1: Major Federal Environmental Laws

| Table 21.1 Major Federal Environmental Laws | | | |
|---|--|------|---|
| 1963 | Clean Air Act | 1977 | Clean Air Act Amendments |
| 1964 | Wilderness Act | | Clean Water Act |
| 1965 | Highway Beautification Act | | Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act |
| | Water Quality Act | 1978 | Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act Amendments |
| 1967 | Air Quality Act | 1980 | Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act ("Superfund") |
| 1968 | Wild and Scenic Rivers Act | | Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act |
| 1969 | National Environmental Policy Act | 1984 | Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments |
| | Endangered Species Conservation Act | 1986 | Safe Drinking Water Amendments |
| 1970 | Clean Air Amendments | | Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act |
| | Water Quality Improvement Act | 1987 | Water Quality Act |
| 1972 | Federal Water Pollution Control Act | 1988 | Endangered Species Act Reauthorization |
| | Marine Mammal Protection Act | | Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act Amendments |
| | Marine Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act | 1990 | Clean Air Act Amendments |
| | Coastal Zone Management Act | | Pollution Prevention Act |
| | Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act | | |
| | Noise Control Act | | |
| 1973 | Endangered Species Act | | |
| 1974 | Safe Drinking Water Act | | |
| 1976 | Federal Land Policy and Management Act | | |
| | National Forest Management Act | | |
| | Resource Conservation and Recovery Act | | |
| | Toxic Substances Control Act | | |

Source: Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (January 20, 1990): 154.

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This table shows all the acts and summits held for the purpose of environmental conservation. But in today's time, a lot more is required to match the level of developmental oppositions happening all around the world.

IV. ANALYSIS

From what I understand the case to be, factual inaccuracies might be very much a part of green politics because of two major factors. Firstly, the countries of the global North, as aforementioned, have way more carbon emissions than the countries in the global South but that is so due to the fast-paced developmental activities which have been adopted by the former. Secondly, the latter wants the same level of development and hence their rates of emission are increasing as well. The environment of both sides has been accustomed to a gigantic amount of destruction but still the environment holds little importance in front of the hunger for power which is shared by a number of states. Currently as the world battles with the corona virus which was a result of an Anthropocene, the intake of animal flesh, we cannot be any more aware of the depth of the issue at hand. Apart from that, climate change is another battle yet to be won but as countries march towards richer and better ways of leading lives, the whole concept of sustainable development seems to be an age-old theory. The environmentalists are yet massively outrun by the non-greenies.

An observation I made while researching was of the numbers of chapters denoted to the environmental issues in each and every book I referred to. They were all chapters towards the later ends of the books. From Heywood to Carter to Owens, they all either seemed to have followed some chronology of events that occurred in the international realm but if that were the case then wouldn't environment be amongst the first chapters of any book or is its sheer ignorance on their parts still about environmental issues?

There is a lot of research that has yet to be done on this issue considering the upscale of events that are leading to environmental degradation on an everyday basis. What we truly want right now in the world is a sense of strong identification of the destruction done and of finding ways to make this planet a better place and not a feeding ground for another virus.

V. CONCLUSION

Through its global activism, ecological development has affected the plan of worldwide legislative issues. In the 21st century, the environmental movement has combined the traditional concerns of conservation, safeguarding, and contamination with more contemporary worries with the ecological outcomes of monetary practices as assorted as the travel industry, exchange, monetary speculation, and the directness of war. Preservationists are probably going to heighten the patterns of the late twentieth century, during which some ecological gatherings progressively worked in alliance not simply with other emancipatory associations, for example, basic freedoms and native people groups gatherings, yet in addition with companies and different organizations.

The global ecology movement has reached every corner of the planet, with thousands of groups arising to defend the environment. Meanwhile, the challenges facing us grow ever more daunting. The subsequent half-century will test whether or not humanity can answer the challenge.

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For further reading:

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