

ENGLISH
CLASS XI
TEXT BOOK: HORNBILL
LESSON 5 : THE AILING PLANET.....

The chapter, The Ailing Planet: the Green Movement's Role, comments on the deteriorating condition of our planet. It speaks about the problems faced by our planet and reasons for its poor condition and the changing view of the world for the planet.

Summary

The author begins by commenting on the great attention received by the Green Movement that began some 25 years ago. The world's first nationwide Green party was founded in New Zealand in the year 1972 and the movement has been a great success since then.

A revolutionary change has come in the perception of the human beings bringing in a "holistic and ecological view" of the world. There has been a shift from the understanding developed by Copernicus to the people's belief that the earth is a living organism whose needs must be respected and preserved by us. According to the writer, our earth is like a 'patient in declining health,'. Thus, we have to realise our ethical responsibility of guarding the planet.

The World Commission on Environment and Development propagated the concept of 'sustainable development' in 1987. Sustainable development calls for a well-balanced development, so as to meet the demands of the present and not to deprive our future generations from the natural world of resources.

Man has been considered as the most dangerous being on the planet. However, due to the efforts of a number of agencies all over the world, man is learning to live in harmony with the other living species on the planet. Man's existence is shifted from the system of domination to that of partnership.

There are still many millions of living species that have not been catalogued. The author mentions the ecological concern pointed out by Mr. Lester R. Brown in his

book 'The Golden Economic Prospect'. Mr. Brown points out four principal biological systems – fisheries, forests, grasslands and croplands. These form the foundation of the global economic system as they supply food and provide raw materials for industries except minerals and petroleum derived synthetics.

The demand of the human beings on these systems is increasing to such an 'unsustainable' extent that the productivity of these systems is being hampered. The excessive demand has resulted in deterioration and depletion of resources leading to the breakdown of fisheries, disappearance of forests, deterioration of croplands and turning of grasslands into barren lands.

The forests are being destroyed in large proportions to obtain firewood in poor countries. Depletion of tropical forests has led to the extinction of several species. In fact, the tropical forests or 'the powerhouse of evolution' are eroding at the rate of forty to fifty million acres per year. Besides, the increasing use of dung for burning deprives the soil of important natural fertilizers.

According to our Parliament's Estimates Committee, a near 'catastrophic depletion' has been marked in the number of the forests of India over the last four decades. Ironically, article 48 A of the Indian Constitution states that the state shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country. However, India is losing its forests at the rate of 3.7 million acres a year. The condition of the environment is 'critical' as per a study conducted by the United Nations.

One of the major factors adding to the deforming future of the human society is the fast-growing world's population. The present world's population is estimated at 5.7 billion. With this ever-increasing population, development seems a far-fetched dream.

As per the author, the best contraceptive to control the population is development. Voluntary family planning with an element of coercion is the only alternative. Rise in income, spread of education and improved health would lead to fall in fertility. Population and poverty are directly proportional to each other. Thus, control of the population should be our top-most priority.

The author now re-mentions the 'holistic view' of the basis of our existence. He points that it is an 'Era of Responsibility' that calls for 'seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts'. Industry plays an important role in this responsibility. Excellence in environmental performance is required for the manufacturers to continue their existence. Our earth belongs as

much to the future generation as much to us. We should soon realise our duty towards our planet and should not treat it solely as our property.

The chapter concludes with the beautiful lines of Mr. Lester Brown, "We have not inherited this earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children".