Sustainability and Social Change: A Paradigmatic Shift Redefining 'Growth' and 'Consciousness'

Dr Sujata Dutta Hazarika

NECRD (North East Centre for Research and Development)

Abstract

Contemporary society is increasingly grappling with the contradiction posed by a demanding and rapidly growing population and limited natural resources available for its sustenance. Responding to this context will require a paradigm shift. This paper tries to analyze this paradigm shift through the working of a society that is beginning to question the virtues of capitalist growth and how the realm of individual rights and ownership needs to be transformed into a universal and equitable right to live in a healthy biosphere through a redefinition of conventional ideas of growth and consciousness associated with capitalism. The paper focuses on three primary assertions: firstly, to re-evaluate the contemporary discourse of human sustainability and reinstate its claims of universal accountability; secondly, to attempt theorization through classical discourses of Durkheim and Marx using their categories to understand this paradigm shift; and finally, to mark the actual concretization of this new paradigm, the framework of Ecovillage initiatives in the West is utilized where radical initiatives like intentional community building point to evidence of this changing paradigm. Although it cannot be taken as a realistic model of emulation, one needs to understand the underlying forces that redefine the value system through social reconstruction in these microcosms which can be extrapolated in social situations of a much larger dimension.

Introduction

Post World War II, there has been a quantum leap in the population of the world, yet the consumption levels and the development models have remained the same. This has put a tremendous strain on earth's natural resources leading to an interlinked web of problems. Even with nature's tendency to always establish equilibrium, such a situation cannot be sustained forever. It is the need of the hour to adopt a societal model of cultural reconstruction which is more sustainable in an attempt to secure a brighter future and a future of hope. A shift in register in environmental discourses in the late 1980s from environmental threat to sustainable development marked an official recognition that environmental problems are not only fundamentally social problems, but also are simultaneously global problems too (Szerszynski, Lash and Wynne 1996; Beck 1999). The ascendance of the discourse of sustainable development thus promised a fundamental and qualitative shift in the relationship between human society and nature.

In perhaps the most recognizable formulation, sustainable development has been defined as: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs" ('Our Common Future', 1987). The definition goes on to point that sustainable development contains within it two major concepts: the concept of needs in particular: the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. The definition also implies several other parameters: firstly, to ensure achievement of economic and social development in ways that do not exhaust a country's natural resources; secondly, that the process of change need not always

involve exploitation of resources; and finally that the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change have to be made consistent with the future as well as present need. Since sustainable development implies economic growth together with the protection of environmental quality, each reinforcing the other, the essence of this form of development is a stable relationship between human activities and the natural world, which does not diminish the prospects for future generations to enjoy a quality of life at least as good as our own.

When Irwin pointed out that the concept of sustainable development was essentially the marriage of developmentalism (as a commitment to economic development) and environmentalism, it was seen as either straightforward nor without its critics such as Sachs (1999). Yet, the discourse of sustainable development is an actively created framework for understanding our period in history (Irwin, 2001). Sustainable development has been characterized as a latter day equivalent of a grand narrative "a way of seeing the present in the perspective of the future … with a societal storyline for justifying changes" (Myerson and Rydin, 1996). As Lafferty points out, a realization of sustainable development, particularly in the area of production and consumption and issues of global equity implies a transformative program - a reorientation of the basic tenets of Western liberal-pluralist capitalist society.

With such monumental claims invested in the concept, is it perhaps sociologically naïve to begin with a policy-oriented discourse? The focus of this study is to explore the idea put forward by Irwin that the policy discourse acts as a window on several central sociological themes such as the call for fundamental social and institutional change at all levels of society from the global to the local; a quasi-religious sense of togetherness and globality as the human family struggles to deal with its problems; the notion that democracy, participation and empowerment are seen integral to sustainable development; and so is the evocation of a shared crisis. It is from here that I would like to carry the 'grand narrative of our social era' and analyze it through the framework of a worldview that reinstates a paradigm of universality, continuity, shared living, natural capitalism and transcendental value system.

This paper is a reflection of the author's academic insights that culminated from a Fulbright research experience at UC Berkeley on ecovillage initiatives in US and the geopolitical locale of her academic pursuits in North East India. The word 'ecovillage' became prominent in 1991, when Robert Gilman, the president of Context Institute, a research organization that explores sustainable living, wrote an article entitled 'The Eco-village Challenge'. Gilman defined an ecovillage as a "human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future." Hildur Jackson, a popular proponent of the concept in her book 'Restoring the Earth and Her People' (London, Permanent Publications, 1998) puts forth a vision statement for a sustainable earth through deliberate revival of local forms of living through ecovillages. According to her, for millennia people have lived in communities close to nature. Many of these communities, or 'ecovillages', exist to this day and the ecovillage movement basically seeks to support their struggle for survival. In those parts of the world where the indigenous base has been destroyed, ecovillages are now being created intentionally so that people can live again in communities that are spiritually connected to the earth in a way that ensures the well-being of all life forms into the

indefinite future. She delineates three major features of ecovillages as community, ecology and spirituality with each having five definable features. Ecovillages are communities in which people feel supported by and responsible to those around them. They provide a deep sense of belonging to a group. They are small enough that everyone feels empowered, seen and heard. People are then able to participate in making decisions that affect their own lives and that of the community on a transparent basis. Following a similar line of conceptual social change Rob Hopkins unleashed the Transition Towns Totnes Energy Descent Action Plan in UK arguing that the end of cheap and easy energy means a shift of our focus from globalization to a world which is 'intensely and inherently local' and rebuilding an economy that can support local agriculture, through renewable energy systems that we own and benefit from, implement energy efficient housing that utilizes local materials, for more local and meaningful employment, these are not the things of some Luddite retreat to the caves, but the foundations of a resilient economy more adapted to the times. He proposed the implementation of his TTT (Totnes Transition Town) plan for Totnes in UK that can be emulated as a model that inspires the future direction of humanity. Concerns such as these are not unique in themselves and close reflections reveal how one could perceive a united world with geopolitical situations that are widely dispersed such as North East India.

North East India reflects an interesting dynamics of evolution for the world today. Like many other similar regions of the world, it has confronted issues of under-development and globalization simultaneously, responding either through violent ethnic assertion or subaltern claims to secession from the mainstream Indian nationhood. Neither coaxing voices of subsidies nor pampered reservations for positive discrimination nor violent means of military subversions through inhuman judicial acts like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) could evolve the region in directions beneficial for its own well-being. Here the word 'well-being' has been consciously substituted for 'growth' because an important part of the hypothetical assumption in this research is to try to analyze the concept of growth and its problematic manifestations within the conflicting dynamics of capitalism.

At the time of Independence, North East India prided itself on its high GDP contribution to the Indian economy. One of the most promising regions of India is basked under vast natural resources, rich mineral and oil deposits, advanced forms of local economy and market exchange, democratic institutions, diversity of cultural and traditional ethos, and progressive westernization compared to the other parts of the country. Twenty years hence, confronted with geographical isolation, degradation of environment, loss of habitat, cultural alienation, and underdevelopment, tables turned and the region is now branded by the rest of the country as a region of profound democratic deficit marked by insurgency and violent ethnic conflict.

North East India gives enough food for thought on the region's political crisis and growing deficit of human development, a culture of violence among the youth who have traditionally taken to arms and organized insurgency rather than utilizing valuable resources on education (the ones who refused to be part of this structure leave the region). Misdirected youth finding no other alternative continue the legacy of violence, robbed of ideology and eventually contribute to the perpetuation of a Global Capitalist Terrorism. The author realized that the ideological movements that have transformed into a violent ethnic assertion in this region are a part of a global systemic crisis subject to world capitalism whose solutions have to be found at

the level of local restoration thereby opening up innumerable issues that are localized in context but extremely global in content. One noted how perceptions drawn from areas that are geographically fragmented in terms of stages of developmental growth, culture, political orientation are in fact in a continuum in the capitalist scale of evolution, many a times reflecting experiences and concerns that are identical in terms of its ultimate value. It will not be wrong to argue that Western quest towards rediscovering of 'self' through sacralization of nature and community as a response to 'disenchantment' with capitalist modernity is no different from the violent protests grounded in the marginalized communities of the developing world. The location of the voices varies but the essence of depravity and despair is the same. What appears to the North as an ideological worldview and a political agenda grounded in corporate interest and fund politics spearheaded by sophisticated Western science and technology and backed by research based on documentation of logical data is seen by the South as a proposed model for development. The apparently slower approach to growth is often seen as Western condescension when the developmental model is unable to deliver excess for the developing world.

Understanding sustainability and perceiving its presence began from the author's preliminary research on the Ecovillage initiatives in US, which took her around different missions in California some of which began at a personal level of interactions and others that just glared into the consciousness through modes of cultural reproduction such as media, advertisements, popular opinion and actions. Meeting people from different arenas just to be able to understand the degree of permeation of this belief system; experts and academicians dedicated to research in similar issues in management, business, manufacturing, energy research; and participating in academic life at Berkeley and Stanford revealed voices of concerns about the future of humanity with an unbalanced leaning towards over-consumption and energy dependence that created havoc with the prevailing bio-system and global geo-politics. Closer experiences of day to day activities like shopping, eating, traveling using public transport, visits as a tourist opened up a whole plethora of images and social conceptions that were focused, fragmented and diverse at one level but unified and cohesive at another. The fragments engaged with micro issues and thus became illusive while the cohesive voice reflected a macro vision that was all pervasive. It became evident that ecovillage initiatives which appear radical, elitist and unique steps of entrenched and isolated individuals could not be understood without taking the wider conceptions of sustainable living and its growing consciousness into account. In fact experiences of interacting under mundane situations pointed to the fact that while average Westerners were by and large in a state of denial about intentional community building and saw it as rather radical and out of the ordinary (in fact, quite a few denied ever having heard of 'Ecovillages'), however they mostly pointed out knowing someone or the other who actually lived that way. Thus other than an elaborate internet resource that pointed to their existence, recognition of 'secondary identities' reinstated the presence and validity of intentional communities in the world as a whole. Having said so, this paper tries to go beyond, onto the underlying structures pointing to a whole universe of changing consciousness and a paradigm shift driven at two fundamental levels: the systemic and the pragmatic level. The driving forces at the systemic level include: technology and entrepreneurship, a sophisticated scientific community of technical specialists, environmentalists and venture capitalists who argue the limited resources of energy and self-recovery capacity of earth based on rational logical data. It

is also driven by efforts of social reorganization which aim to redefine the focus of the existing value system and institutional frameworks upholding the merits of shared community building. At the more fundamental pragmatic level of praxis, it is driven by two mutually interdependent forces: firstly, individual claims to rights and privileges for a healthier ecosystem for basic self-sustenance through institutional structures of polity and governance; and secondly, individual questioning of the status-quo within institutional structures of the capitalist economy that breeds consumerism in its most damaging forms.

Locating the Worldview: Re-Defining Consciousness Underlying the Changing Worldview

The presence of a multitude of worldviews is a defining characteristic of contemporary culture. In a multicultural and pluralistic age, the wide range of cosmic perspectives on offer stands in contrast to the basic intellectual unity marked by classical thought that affirmed the existence of metaphysical and moral truth and the necessity of understanding and living in the world. In recent times, however, human beings have rejected any overarching epistemic authority and set themselves up autonomously as acknowledged legislators of the world. This burgeoning cultural phenomenon of intense philosophical and religious diversity can only be understood by the phenomenon of worldview. As David Naugle points out, even US Supreme Court echoes this pluralistic mindset, arguing in planned 'Parenthood vs. Casey' (1992) that each person possesses "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of universe, and of the mystery of human life."

This paper uses the framework of a worldview as a collective interpretation of and response to the natural and cultural environments in which a group of people live, their assumption of those environments and the values derived from those assumptions to define characteristics of contemporary society. Although I do not claim that this worldview predominates over every other, I do believe that contemporary discourse of sustainability is an indicator of a paradigm shift that encompasses the philosophical materiality of our scientific and technological consciousness. Let us try to arrive at the primary assumptions on which it finds its material grounding. Firstly, earth's limited resource and self recovery capacity; secondly, impending energy crisis; and thirdly, discrepancy of economic growth with personal happiness. These assumptions make it essential to adopt an overview of new concepts emerging in modern science, and analyze the implications that this emerging worldview may have upon how we live and work with the land, social and natural world. The author attempts to introduce the major principles and values of the emerging holistic paradigm and explore their practical applications in our lifestyles. The holistic nature of the worldview broadly encompasses an interwoven structure of the bio-centric perspective of Deep Ecology, the importance of wilderness for the planet and humanity, and the role of people in helping to heal Earth's degraded ecosystems with an aim of awakening and transforming consciousness.

In redefining the consciousness underlying the changing worldview, it is assumed that human consciousness is associated with the formation of reality and the act of observation is a process for collapsing the possible in the actual and ultimately committing to the power and influence of intention and motivation on living systems. If we believed that capitalism and its corresponding visions of growth reflected a consciousness of self largely embedded in individual

rights, property relations and exploitation of living systems, it will become clear to us that society in its present form whether in affinity or in denial is engaging in a dynamic dialogue about ascertaining the normative foundational principles of contemporary society rooted in sustainability. Amidst the welter of enthusiasm for lead free petrol and green consumerism, the foundational principle is the belief that finite earth places limits on industrial growth. This realization of the finitude and the implied scarcity questions the perpetuation of the growth model to eternity creating anxiousness very similar to that claimed by Max Weber in his analysis of the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. He mentions that when the anxiousness of the believer over his fate as the chosen-one did not find any worldly indicator in just devotion and ritual life, the protestant defined his worldly domain of religious activity to be capitalistic entrepreneurship. While this phase could be seen as a change to a radical world view driving capitalism as one of the most dynamic forms of economic acquisition, the concern for sustainability is far more gradual but no less encompassing, gradual because the driver is not just a metaphysical or a moral truth grounded on religious indoctrination but a rational discourse located at the intersection of society, technology and environment all of which claim a reality that can be worked upon.

It then becomes essential to reflect on the thin line that separates the narrow vision of capitalistic ownership and individual rights from a worldview that envisions perpetuation of humanity and the planet we live in. Standing at the crossroads of a paradigm shift, it is important for a society that has begun questioning the virtues of the capitalist growth to understand how the realm of individual rights and ownership needs to be transformed into a universal and equitable right to live in a healthy biosphere. The narrow domain of 'property', 'rights' and 'duties' and the corresponding understanding of 'self' is redefined with a much broader understanding that cannot limit property and rights to the domain of individual but to entire communities, both human and animal that share existence on earth, claiming a universal and equitable right to live in a healthy biosphere.

At the level of an ideological worldview, this reflects a selfless altruism that encompasses the primacy of the world as a whole, 'our common future' as a global destiny instead of fragmented localized interests, an effort to optimize the present in order to salvage the future. However, it also becomes increasingly clear that if one has to transcend the ambiguous domain of human altruism or a calculative strategy for 'Greenwashing' and 'Greenhogging' and adopt a pragmatic way of life embedded in the collective conscience compatible with familiar structures of economy and polity, this is possible only by reinstating the essential essence of 'selfishness' underlying it. Humanity can thus survive by a total redefinition of the 'self' and reinstating 'selfishness' through structures that are 'selfless' and universal in nature. This follows with the realization that it is only in the perpetuation of the community that the 'self' flourishes.

For example, let us explore the ramifications of sustainability as a worldview on living systems, more specifically, personal health vis-à-vis planetary health. Conceiving health as a derivative of holism sees good nutritional practice as central to our health along with our relationship with our sense of purpose in the world, physical activity and spirit. From this perspective, individual well-being is in direct relation to the well-being of the planet. It thus begins with a simple curiosity about where the food we consume comes from. Is the economy oriented towards profitability and commercialization of food and health sectors committed

enough to providing healthy food? In no time we are looking for honesty and accountability in capitalist structures questioning the increased dependence of production unit on nonrenewable resources, chemical fertilizers and pollutants; and questioning what is really the meaning of growth, and how exactly it is to achieved, debating on externalities that may have got left out in the evaluation of growth and individual achievements.

The anxiety referred to earlier is ultimately driven by a consciousness that perceives human existence in a continuum with his external context of both natural environment and social systems. It would be pernicious to assume that this kind of an understanding is part of post modern epistemic vivacity, in fact traditional wisdom of non capitalistic societies and indigenous communities have often displaced this consciousness and evolved institutions that were compatible with maintaining socio-environmental balance in human consumption patterns. In fact, it is only with the emergence of capitalism in the developed economy of the Western world that we find a compromise made with a bend towards economic consumption. Understandably, then every rational scientific data that pointed towards energy crisis, toxicity, infinitude of earth's resources, incongruity of economic growth with personal happiness, climate change etc. played on the anxiety that pointed to the threat of human existence on earth and paved the way for the emergence of a holistic worldview that emphasized universality and democratic representation of rights and duties of every element, living system that share existence on earth. The paradigm shift is not of a violent revolutionary change of power structure through economic restructuring. It is more a fundamental social reconstruction at the level of human consciousness that engages in a dialogue with the 'self', looking for meaning, and derogating every factor that emerges from capitalist intervention as a risk to the survival of that 'self'. This 'self' exists in two definable forms, one that is rooted in the materiality of the body and the other that is rooted in the ambiguity of the philosophical and non-material consciousness of existence.

Metrics for Evaluating the Changing Consciousness

The presence of the consciousness is nothing new; it began with the evolution of traditional wisdom embedded in pre-capitalist community living and economic formations. However, the penetration of capitalism as a way of life and its corresponding ramifications on values of consumerism, individual rights, private ownership and large scale displacement of localism led to a systemic crisis that severely dented the prospects of community living and individual well-being. In order to trace the metrics of this paradigm shift, we need to thus look at subtle indicators such as changes in life styles, intentional communities, and eco-practices rather than a concrete representation of scientific data. While it is possible to provide anecdotes and somewhat arbitrary case studies or maybe definite markers in terms of websites, online communities and blogs committed to this worldview; it is indeed difficult to establish a concrete database that provides indicators on the intensity and range of changing behaviors. Instead, the author believes that such indicators are more ambiguous as exhibited by the growth in the proportion of produce and dry goods sold as organic, the mass organization and marketing of organic foods, the proliferation of community gardens, farmers markets, the increasing involvement of agricultural departments of universities and county and state governments with the technologies and marketing for small scale/truck farming, the growth in the number and

proliferation of food communities/co-operatives. Many of these changes are not unique to the current period, but they are growing and changing in the current period and emerge as an alternative to or sub-culture of routine consumerism. The indicators have to be traced not through the authenticity or the volume of the work of researchers, experts, policy planners, scientists, environmentalists, etc., but through the presence of 'secondary identities' that are invisible in terms of proximity, familiarity but visible in terms of periphery, unconventionality and distance.

This is the replay of the stories that so impressed De Tocqueville in the 19th Century and all over urban periphery we see a rise of community and collective activities that represent the third path between business and simple voluntary friendships and associations. It is not unique, neither can it be contained within the folds of developed and developing world or borders of nation states; it is much more authentic, universal and humane in terms of a pseudo religious calling that tries to envision a deeper meaning to well-being and affluence on one hand and provides respect for localism on the other hand. It involves a mix of co-operative responses to unmet needs and aspirations with getting ready for the future. Marginality of agriculture driven by the exploitative dynamics of market forces destroyed not only the traditional folk ways of life but also every other value associated with localism, e.g. for developing economies this has led to the destruction of indigenous knowledge, culture, ecology, expertise, self esteem, dignity, and other support systems like local economy and community. It is now desired that in order to value the universal tenets of globalism, localism may be strengthened which alone can provide the inner power to provide stability to the system. Grain and core food prices have increased more than 100% over the past three years, wrong fiscal and import policies have handicapped economies and their participants in developing world and developed world alike. People are responding to the canaries of scarcity with an aspiration for more self-sufficiency and more localism. This trend is also driven by the housing affordability crisis and the contraction of employment and local and state government services and supports.

In the West, the rise of the new intentional economies, communities and cooperatives is related to the actual or perceived fractures and breakdowns in the local quality of food; in problems of caring for elders and youth - the need for co-operative or fictive extended family relations; new ways of improving quality of life outside of or in addition to the cash economy; and new types of commerce which are co-operative and informal but provide for alternative methods of distribution and sharing of goods and services. The growth in work and labor exchanges and the increasing provision of quick speed consulting around construction or housing repairs and career/job related skills suggests a trend towards initiatives, intention and co-operation, even in the absence of eco-communities or other more full blown social arrangements that might be described as intentional or eco-communities.

Debating Sustainability: Issues and Paradoxes

Sustainability is by far the most often used term sometimes with casual abandon as though by repetition it can deliver green probity. When used in the form of Sustainable Development, it is often intended to put together two apparently irreconcilable principles: that of environmental sustainability and economic development. This leads to two interpretations of Sustainability: one eco-centric and the other anthropocentric which at most occasions appear

contradictory, one that puts global ecology first and the other that puts human well-being first. At the extreme, these two standpoints may rationalize different strategies: contrast, for example the priorities of eco-activists on one hand who fight for environmental justice manifested in the form of anti-deforestation, habitat and wildlife protection to opposing global warming; and on the other hand the attempts of local governance measures to give primary importance to human resource development even if it comes at the cost of natural resource exploitation. Both groups may appeal to sustainable development to justify their stance. This apparent contradiction many a time develops into fragmentation of interests for countries that are at different stages of capitalist growth. It is extremely challenging to level out the economic differences that exist at this level of fragmentation and rationally justify which of the principles should take precedence over the other.

In 1981, Freer Spreckley first articulated the triple bottom line in a publication called 'Social Audit - A Management Tool for Co-operative Working' as he described what social enterprises should include in their performance measurement. The phrase was coined by John Elkington. In 1987, sustainability itself was first defined by the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations. 1988 marked the foundation of the *Triple Bottom Line Investing* group by Robert J. Rubinstein, a group advocating and publicizing these principles. As such, therefore, the broader sustainability reporting framework is centered on three dimensions of performance – economic, social, and environmental – and that is why it is widely known as the *triple bottom line* (TBL or 3BL) or the *people, planet, profit* (PPP) principle. "Triple Bottom Line" was coined by John Elkington in his 1998 book Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business (Brown, Dillard and Marshall 2006). Societies in rapidly developing countries that are yet to taste the full potential of capitalist growth many a times find it difficult to practically implement the TBL concerns of sustainability [Society (people), economy (profit), environment (planet)] as a fundamental model of development.In fact, most of them are already rich in this tripartite vision in their existing traditional structures but because those structures do not fit into the logic of capitalist growth, most of these societies are in dire straits of eroded socio-cultural values, economic insecurity, environmental degradation and a breakdown of local community support structures. They are scarred by the infusion of global capitalist market values that challenge their existence and local interests. Most traditional social structures are familiar to strengths inbuilt in community network and bonding. In fact, most of them are in a process of transition where these ties are being broken in favor of commercialization and specialization of roles very often at the cost of nature and community building. The international pressure on the governments of these countries works as a double edged sword where on one hand sustainable development schemes are seen as viable means of importing international aids and subsidies and on the other as a result of being at an experimental stage lead to large scale human degradation (e.g. farmers suicide, toxic salinity, soil degradation, large scale conflict etc.) and alienation of local knowledge within their own countries.

The author argues that the project of sustainability from the conventional tripartite vision is idealistic and since proposals for what we ought to do must be practicable, the question arises as to what are the prospects of feasibly constructing this wide plethora of concerns that contribute to a holistic realization of sustainable life on earth in 21st century when most of us have ceased to live sustainably.

Currently the discourse of sustainability, its corresponding settlements, strategies, negotiations begin from the idealism underlying the TBL model which brings us to the widely accepted dominant categories of developing vs. developed, nature (eco-centrism) vs. mankind (anthropocentrism) which we commonly encounter around us (see Table 1). This is primarily a narrow purview driven by the challenges confronted by Western societies. For example, global challenges like climate change, global warming and the corresponding regulation of cap and trade, reduction in carbon emissions, etc. are seen as conflict in interest between the developed and developing. Corporates vs. NGOs (Shell vs. Greenpeace issue over Brent Spar oil rig) is a classic example of contrasting stands over eco-centrism (nature) vs. mankind (anthropocentric). The Copenhagen 2009 Summit on Global Warming ended in a failure when the African nations walked out over a row of increase in global temperature from 1.5 to 2°C. All these incidents point towards a growing fissure in interests that is impeding the growth of a universal consciousness of sustainable living. The myopic comprehension of sustainability is currently narrowly focused on the challenges presented by two dominant categories namely developing and developed, nature (eco-centrism) and humanity (anthropocentrism). The author believes that in order to make sustainability an all-encompassing global world view, we need to address the unified challenges that confront the world as a whole.

Table 1: Conventional Categories Analyzed Through Various Lenses of Sustainability

	Developing world	**Developed world**		**Nature** (Fauna/Flora)	**Mankind**
Resource	Labor, local governance, Less efficient energy sources, community formations, Informal economy,	Advanced Technology, Democratic planning, governance, Rational bureaucracy steering maximum efficiency; Renewable Energy		Ecosystem, Biosphere	Manpower, Intellect and ingenuity, Human resource
Knowledge Base	Traditional knowledge	Modern science, technology		Genetics & Memetics	All inclusive
Specialization	Indigenous Technology, Cheap labor	Trained workforce, Technology mediated consciousness		Earth's self- restoration & balancing capacity	Altruism, social living, Language, Highly developed mental faculties
Challenges to sustenance	Equity, stable political systems, corruption, poverty, overpopulation, literacy, health, conflict	Environmental pollution, global warming, toxicity		Environmental degradation, species extinction, global warming etc.	Greed above need, selfishness, endless aspirations

In this work, it is proposed that in addition to the idealism of aiming for equity, livability and eco-efficiency as a top-down idealistic model, we need to adopt a bottom-up approach. One such way could be to identify polarized interests of multiple dichotomies (local vs. global, individual vs. society, private vs. public, rural vs. urban) that are equally pervasive in all societies and then unearth challenges in each one of them by evaluating them through lenses of Resource, Knowledge-Base and Specialization and how these mediate with other social forces like political ideology, technology and institution building for specific situations (see Table 2). Resource refers to the economic or productive factor required to accomplish an activity, or as means to undertake an enterprise and achieve desired outcome. Three most basic resources are land, labor, and capital; other resources include energy, entrepreneurship, information, expertise, management, and time (http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/resource.html). Knowledge Base is the information source which direct future actions and is thus a centralized repository for information like a public library, a database of related information about a particular subject, person or activity (http://searchcrm.techtarget.com/definition/knowledge-base). Specializations refers to expertise and skills as an arrangement within an alliance wherein a member or group of members most suited by virtue of technical skills, location, or other qualifications assume greater responsibility for a specific task or significant portion thereof for one or more other members (Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,US Department of Defense, 2005).

Table 2. Multiple Dichotomies Analyzed Through Various Lenses of Sustainability

Lenses	Resource	KnowledgeBase	Specialization	Challenge
Local	Community linkages, communal resources	Shared culture	Ownership, accountability, and stake holding	Rural-Urban migration, Internal displacement, conflict over limited resources
Global	Multi-culturality, rhetorics of shared destiny based on co-habitation	Science and technology	Globally trained multicultural workforce	Immigration, Brain-drain, unbridled consumerism
Rural	IK&IT, Agrarian Community bonds	Indigenous knowledge, folk tradition	Traditional skills, artisanship,	Forced migration, illicit trafficking, cheap labor, lack of political representation and access to national resources, e.g. Casteism
Urban	Industrialization, infrastructure	Multicultural values, Science and Technology	Specialized roles, Specialized training and education	Inequalities of class/gender/race, Unemployment, poverty
Individual	Ingenuity and talent, Altruism, Commitment, ambition, Sociological imagination	Education, Cultural Representation	Freedom to make positive contribution to society	Incongruency b/w aspirations and opportunities, disenchantment, alienation
Society	Tradition, culture, Value-system	Ideology, Value system, Oral & written tradition	Division of labor, Allocation of roles	Breakdown of joint family, cultural value system
Private	Family, Religion	Education, Acculturation	Socialization	Delinquency, negative indoctrination
Public	Political ideology, economic institutions, sports	Legal system	Polity, Media, Corporatization, Rational bureaucracy	Racism, Sexism, fundamentalism,

Once the universally pervasive challenges are glimpsed and evaluated through the generic lens of Resources, Knowledge Base, and Specialization, we need to prioritize and set up standards that are achievable in the three major domains i.e., economy, society and environment.This evaluation process will then prioritize and set up standards that are achievable in the three major domains i.e., economy, society and environment.

When we use the generic lenses of Resource, Knowledge Base, Specialization, Challenges to sustenance etc. for an insightful understanding of the deeper roots underlying the contradictions between different interest groups, we are actually rationalizing the understanding of sustainable living from the most basic assumption that every society irrespective of its stage of economic growth charted out by capitalism has certain foundational tenets for its existence i.e. resources, knowledge base, and the resulting specialization. These aspects are also most vulnerable in terms of being the first targets of destruction when we perpetuate unsustainable ways of living on Earth and thus can be seen as major indicators of sustainability when evaluating the primary challenges to sustenance for societies and life on Earth. For example, referring to Table 1, if we focus on the resources available under the categories of developed and the developing world, nature and the human world, it will become clear that what we see as strict compartments are in reality pervasive and in a continuum, in a constant flow of exchange and interaction between the categories that appear as unbridgeable dichotomies. Labor, local governance, less efficient energy sources, community formation, informal economy etc. that appear as resource primarily for the developing world deriving its identity from a knowledge base that is traditional and focuses on a specialization in indigenous technology and cheap labor, is in reality not an unbridgeable boundary but an interactive border that is both fluid and flexible between smaller units of collective living i.e. societies that exist within the conceptual framework of a developing or a developed world. In that sense, the developing world in fact has units or pockets of societies that reflect characteristics closer to developed world and vice versa. In this sense, challenges to sustenance also cannot be compartmentalized and need to be viewed in a universal framework rather than a narrow perspective of interest groups.

Taking this argument further, the author tries to unearth other universal dichotomies like Local-Global, Rural-Urban, Individual-Society, Private-Public that can transcend the narrow purview of a world dominated by the nation states claiming status of developed and developing in a chronological sequence when in reality nation states in no way reflect a standardized concept for development but are composed of micro structures or collectivities that display a complex mix of these multiple dichotomies. These dichotomies are equally pervasive irrespective of the stage of economic growth and the utilization and exploitation of natural and human resource. When each of these is viewed through the generic lens of Resource, Knowledge Base and Specialization, we will arrive at a more holistic analysis of the real challenges to sustenance.

Quest For A Theoretical Framework

Humanity in its very essence has been designed to live a shared life close to nature. Most traditional so called backward societies in the capitalist ordering will show that man in shared existence not only sustained through subsistence economy but also created valuable institutions that were capable of performing functions that benefited the survival of the systemic whole. For example, impoverishment never took the form of homelessness or destitution, aging and delinquency was treated as social responsibility rather than individual concern, totemic relations between animals and human beings marked many social worldview, etc.

The survival of the systemic whole depends on the inter-related structures whose functions are equally divided in terms of its normative value. For example, every institutional structure say economy, polity, culture, religion within the systemic whole contribute equally to the maintenance of the whole which is always more than the sum of its parts, without ever being able to outdo each other. It is not as if all the parts always work in harmony, and in most cases disturbances and conflicts lead to either a pathogenic cleansing of the ailing structure from within or a drastic breakaway from the earlier structure to a new structure with redefined roles for its functionality. The significant element here is that the structures rather than being in a hierarchy are equal in its functional value for the social system. Since the main focus of operation of the social system is the nucleus composed of individuals existing in a relationship with one another, it is this what forms the most powerful part capable of dictating the composition, transformation, change, replication, substitution of every structure and their corresponding function.

The fundamental difference in the capitalist social structure is the imbalance in the distribution of functional value attached to the different structures. Capitalist economy and corporations are perched at the highest peak of the hierarchy followed by a political structure of governance subservient to corporate whims. This also leads to the shifting of the power nucleus from the systemic whole to a single structure of economy driven by inanimate values of increasing profit through technology and corporations rather than human values of altruism, meaning, joyful living through justice and shared life which in fact have the sole power to sustain social systems.

The prevailing worldview encompasses a consciousness that is a response to this systemic crisis, an adjustment of internal structures aimed at better compatibility of functions for sustenance. The systemic crisis that arose from fractures in the epistemic ordering of the capitalist society gives rise to an understanding of the worldview of sustainability in ways that can be derived from classical works of both Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) coined the terms mechanical and organic solidarity to describe two types of social organization, that is, ways in which individuals are connected to each other and how they identify with the groups and societies in which they live. Social solidarity is a state of unity or cohesion that exists when people are integrated by strong social bonds and shared beliefs and also are regulated by well-developed guidelines for action (values and norms that suggest worthy goals and how people should attain them). In his first book, The Division of Labor in Society (1893), Durkheim argued that social solidarity takes different forms in different historical periods and varies in strength among groups in the same society. However, reflecting

the popularity of social evolutionary thought in the late nineteenth century, Durkheim summarized all historical forms of solidarity into a traditional-modern dichotomy. Mechanical solidarity as a simple, pre-industrial form of social cohesion where interdependence and solidarity is based on 'agreement of similarities' and organic solidarity as a more complex form that evolves in modern societies where interdependence and solidarity is based on the 'agreement of differences'. The author would like to argue here that to understand the present worldview, we need to go beyond the dichotomy of mechanical and organic solidarity on to a situation where both 'agreements' take primacy.

The modern capitalist economy with its characteristic contradictions of the free market value system leads to emergence of contractual 'agreements based on differences' that breed impersonality, individualism and economic growth with a deficit in both natural and social capital. The means thus adopted by the capitalist order for its logic of growth seldom justify the end it meets. As the effects of economic policies that ignore needs of people and the planet become glaringly apparent, rebuilding communities with interpersonal bonds and local exchange becomes more and more urgent. The need to complement organic solidarity valuing individualism and democratic values of cooperation for self-perpetuation, with mechanical solidarity valuing interpersonal bonds transcending consanguinity and ethnicity to relationships more humane, ethical and thus universal as a result of co-habitation in the same planet through rhetorics of 'common future' and 'shared destiny' becomes more pronounced.

The 'similarities' that lead to interdependence in community life are embedded in the reciprocal relationship of rights and duties: firstly towards the planet and its natural elements that provide for sustenance, and secondly towards other fellow beings with whom these resources of sustenance have to be shared. Let us take the example of the cap and trade approach of legislation for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions where private companies are permitted to sell their right to pollute to other companies. Viewing pollution as a right rather than a crime reflects the collective conscience of a social organization that increasingly permits violations through legislative restoration or restitution. The amalgamation of both forms of solidarity is also reflected in the way concern for pollution which can be seen as transcending individual interest into the larger realm of humanity comes together with the spirit of individual perpetuation that is evident in viewing pollution as a right that can be solved by the market forces.

The author would also like to draw from familiar categories reflected in Marx's work, use the same categories to understand the ways capitalist logic of growth can be redefined for the benefit of humanity and contribute to its sustenance. In the present form, Marxian understanding of social life through historical materialism locates every explanation for human consciousness in the material world around us. The traditional econometric model values money as the ultimate fruition primarily by eliminating certain major externalities as metrics for the consciousness of 'growth' for example human wellbeing, leisure, meaningful exchange, creativity, justice and nature. The world view of sustainable living thus appears as though it challenges the conventional ideas of growth. In fact what it really does is translates those externalities into systemic internalities with an aim to augment the concept of growth with ethical justice, responsibility and joy for living. The genesis of the worldview begins with a redefinition of the economic substructure and ultimately leads to an ideological superstructure that determines the nature of relations of production.

The author argues that all the three major elements of the substructure i.e. Means of Production, Forces of Production and Relations of Production undergo structural metamorphosis in response to certain irrevocable material conditions. First, condition points to the limitations of earth's resources and self-recovery capacity. Secondly, the realization that technology which is the major driving force for capitalist business economy is a mechanical, manipulable and neutral agency that can sometimes optimize efficiency in ways detrimental to human interests in the long run and also fall victim in the hands of capitalist forces that controls it. Thirdly, the daunting realization holds that the real dynamic controlling power is equally shared between the capitalists and the consumers in specific intersection i.e. community. While capitalists can exert power that is top-down, hegemonic and thus transient, consumers on the other hand exercise authority that is bottom-up, democratic, participatory, legitimate and capable of providing impetus to major changes within a social system through articulation and mobilization of community.

This leads us to the understanding of the changes in the economic substructure in the prevailing worldview: the means of production or resources available for the production system. Resources are redefined primarily in terms of Common Property Resources (CPR) at two parallel levels: firstly, the local resources that are used within the local limits of consumption; and secondly, the global commons like biodiversity, water, climate, land etc. The forces of production or the technology that drives production also operates at two levels: at the first level is the indigenous technology adapted to local conditions and driven by traditional knowledge and local expertise. Extraction and exploitation of local resources are optimized to sustain wellbeing, health and happiness and environmental concerns of local communities. At the second level is the technology that controls common property resources globally as a guardian that values earth's limited resource and envisions capitalist growth within a 'selfless' vision that reinstates firstly the primacy of the world as a whole using rhetorics such as 'our common future' as a global destiny instead of fragmented localized interests; and secondly optimizes the present in order to salvage the future. The most significant element that marks this worldview is the amicable relations of production between the classes. A burgeoning middle class: enlightened, motivated, socialized and pro-active in the main tenets of the new worldview plays a moderating and balancing role between the two polarized classes. It is the middle class that reorients consciousness of 'growth' towards positive action, action that regards the path to growth as equally important towards the end in itself. The philosophical essence of such a growth is "meeting everyone's basic needs and creating healthier communities with greater equality, cleaner energy, humane technology, sturdier infrastructure and more vibrant culture."

Intentional Community Living in the West within the Parameters
of this Changing Worldview: Ecovillage Living

To mark the actual concretization of this new paradigm, the author uses the framework of Ecovillage initiatives in the West where radical initiatives like intentional community building point to evidence of this changing paradigm. The systemic crisis that was pointed out earlier can be successfully addressed by creating empowered communities, social reorganization of values with strong interpersonal bonds derived from the rhetoric of 'our common future' on Earth. It is only in strengthening communities, that the vicious unbalanced power of bloated social institutions of economy and polity can be countered. It was in the quest for unearthing the tenets of community bonding in western living amidst prevailing norms of individualism and perpetuation of self that the author tried to understand the underpinnings of Ecovillage initiatives. It must be emphasized that the case study does not promote ecovillage way of living as an ideal case but is just an instructional medium to understand the specific drivers and motivators that characterize intentional community building even when the society is increasingly dominated by a web of non-localizing forces of modernity. In this section, the author tries to understand how the traditional structures of 'Gram Swaraj' or village autonomy, as were envisioned by the Indian political messiah Mahatma Gandhi, are reviving their significance once again when sustenance of the existing social order is challenged by the impending contradictions underlying capitalism.

Hildur Jackson and Ross Jackson argue that the global ecovillage is a concept that transcends the urban/rural dichotomy and is basically a post industrial way of organizing society. It can be established from the grass roots level based on a circular 'bottom up' paradigm. Ideally, everything is organized first in terms of relevance to a local and regional area, but always with a consciousness of a planetary 'eco-vision'. For example, food has to be grown locally, waste is composted and wastewater re-circulated locally. Since distinction between urban ecology as opposed to rural ecology doesn't make any sense because the ecological systems based on permaculture design will be the same in both contexts, what is important is that the design and lifestyle is decided by the people who live in each community, locally as participants. This type of ecovillage living reduces the ecological footprint, i.e. the impact of the consumption and lifestyle patterns upon other parts of the world and encourages city people to move back on the land because rural communities are both more efficient and require fewer resources than cities. In a decentralized society operating at the human rather than the global scale, energy needs can be met using resources and technologies appropriate to the local environment. Transport networks do not need to be as extensive or traversed, as most essential goods are produced and consumed within a relatively short distance, and the 'commute' to work does not require a long trip by car. Smaller communities are also seen as more likely to engage in a more rigorous form of participatory democracy - one that is truly representative and responds to real human needs. Locally based economies confine their ecological footprint to the immediate vicinity encouraging stewardship for the environment and a much more ecologically sensitive and efficient model of development. By living in more decentralized settlements with strong local economies, people can reconnect to the land and help to breed a healthier, more diversified human environment and also generate local alternatives to over-consumption and ecological

degradation, which currently afflicts much of the planet. Mostly seen as an ongoing process while there may never be an authorized definition, it is seen by the proponents as a move to create a more sustainable culture. While ecovillage and the associated localism trend may simply imply a form of myth or idealism/romantic movement, the author would like to acknowledge that this idealism is linked to the introduction of a variety of types of new social practices and relationships. Further, the acts related to idealism of these radical initiatives are in a large part response to fractures, strains and breakdown in dominant social institutions and organizations, or changes in climate, nature, and agriculture.

The proposal for ecovillages primarily emerged from two assumptions: firstly, our current concern with ecological damage being done to the planet and our corresponding concern to construct environmentally sustainable ways of living; and secondly concern with breakdown of traditional ties with nature ('alienation') and community ('disenchantment') as a prerequisite for the capitalist order of life resulting in loss of meaning and happiness and our corresponding concern to reconstruct meaningful bonds and relationships. However, the author fears that given the increasing dominance of the 'non-localizing forces of modernity' rooted in technology, transportation, communication which have not only fragmented local community but also local forms of life, ecovillage living can only survive if it uncouples the project of working at the local level for environmental sustainability from the project of creating local communities or of trying to plan for life to be lived more locally. Local communities seldom grow from physical planning, and the main factors that give rise to them are mainly social: firstly, where inhabitants of a area lack any real choice to move away from their locality and thus come to form bonds based on long-term acquaintance; secondly where inhabitants share similar interest, attitudes and values; and thirdly where inhabitants face similar constraints, economic and other, and cooperate to combat adversity. Most of these reasons are undermined by the dominance of non-localizing forces of modern living. Urban life in developed industrialized societies has increasingly adopted spatially extensive ways of life which have loosened people's ties to localities in which they reside. As Melvin Webber puts it 'non-place urban realm', in this sense ecovillage can no longer exert its appeal of community formations based on local ways of life on a large scale, what it can do however is propose a framework for a 'non-place community' that transcends geographical or territorial connotation based on interpersonal bonds derived from living a sustainable way of life.

Given that these modern forces and lifestyles would undermine the likelihood of realizing ecovillages on a significant scale should we discard the project totally, the author would argue that even if non-localizing forces and lifestyles continue to predominate, if these tendencies are damaging to ecological sustainability, and if too it is shown that more local-based lifestyles would be environmentally beneficial, then there remain good environmental reasons for trying to do whatever can be done to resist the non-localizing trends of modernity.

Case Study: Avalon Springs Ecovillage

Avalon Springs is redeveloping a historic hot springs resort, located North of Napa County, California, to be a world-class destination for healing, and the demonstration of life as it can be: ecology/permaculture, organic farming, holistic health, conscious relating, and sustainable business, embodied in a beautiful hot springs eco-resort development.

Permitted, approved plans for all 318 acres weaves a profitable eco- hot springs retreat center, a healing center, and an experiential sustainability studies program with its community spirit and a 30-home fractional and seasonal ecovillage with permaculture food forest and farms, all just 2 hours from the Bay Area.

A dedicated circle of experienced successful business people and talented healing professionals dedicated to intentional community are creating Avalon Springs as a model for sustainable living in light of a changing global economic, environmental and societal landscape. The official website of Avalon Springs invites visitors not only to "immerse themselves not only in the healing waters bubbling forth from the Earth, but also in the spirit, intention, and intelligence of a unique business model that demonstrates a way to live in harmony with the Earth and also enjoy abundant prosperity."

Let us glance at some of the proposing values that guide the spirit of Avalon Springs:

1. Regenerative Sustainability that claims to give back more than they take from all natural systems, dedicating themselves to utilizing renewable energy resources, waste systems, practicing informed stewardship of the land and community for the benefit of the next seven generations.

2. Permaculture as a practical way of life that honors the whole ecosystem one lives in, learn from and work with the natural systems in organic gardening, landscaping, and harvesting of plants and animals for food, medicine, and other uses. Emulate natural systems through observation and replication.

3. Holistic health and Self healing that offer healing methods that empower and discover the healing power by evoking natural healing process through massage, aquatic bodywork, acupuncture, craniosacral therapy, nutritional and naturopathic consulting, energy medicine, herbal treatments and shamanic healing. And finally train and educate others to balance the body/mind/spirit connection.

4. Intentional Design where architecture, landscaping, and décor was consciously designed for deeper experience in harmony with the land and its ecosystem.

5. Sustainable Business philosophy based on cooperation and communication rather than competition. Openness and honesty are reflected in the financial transparency and engaging in business as a life-enhancing enterprise, bridging the gap between the worlds of business and spiritual evolution.

6. Spirituality that is not devoted to any particular spiritual path or religion, but by providing a space that inspires each person to feel his/her own connection with the source that is alive and present in all of life.

7. Creativity dedicated to artistic expression and honoring the creative process, allowing imagination the power to reinvent the world.

8. Community diversity honor and recognize the gift of life at every age and create a culture where everyone is honored, supported and celebrated.

9. Embodied education aims to offer a living example of how to live in sustainability, spirituality, and integrity in this changing world through direct embodied experience out into the world, transforming communities, businesses, families, and ultimately healing Mother Earth.

Every tenet upheld within the cosmology of Avalon Springs thus stated clearly points to a total reorganization of value system. It aims to recreate a culture of sustainability not by a top-down intervention at the level of macro super structures but by reconstruction at the fundamental level of human consciousness that redefines the value system. How far this can be achieved in societies in the West that are far gone in limiting consumption is questionable because of the predominance of non-localizing forces of modernization driven by technology and communication that have already been mentioned but for societies that are half way can check their advances by limiting it within the folds of a restricted value system that was so erroneously imposed by capitalist formations.

Despite the stated urgency, post industrial ways of re-organizing society and its value systems is practically impossible to conceive through drastic, cataclysmic breaks from existing values upholding prosperity and affluence. In fact, redefinition of 'growth' with a viable business model at the level of value systems can lead to significant changes that are both achievable and conducive with sustainable forms of living as human being on the planet. Avalon Springs can be a useful case study which without contesting the existing model of growth-for prosperity and achievement redefines the same growth by instilling values that were otherwise absent in ideas of 'consumption' and 'commodification'. For example, entrepreneurial initiatives related to health retreat, educational centre, and hot springs is not just commodification of healing, knowledge and natural resource at Avalon. It is complemented by a more holistic vision of health, augmenting medicine with spiritual healing for psychosomatic well being, education with knowledge derived from cognizance of lived-in experience close to nature and community, and natural resource as a gift to be nurtured and valued, and all these with an effort to revive bonds with nature and community.

Gandhi's '*Gram Swaraj*' and Village Autonomy:
Western Manifestations in 'Ecovillage' Initiatives

This finally brings us to the question of whether we can establish a continuum with the Gandhian philosophy of '*Gram Swara*j' or village autonomy and the western manifestation of intentional living as exemplified by the emergence of ecovillage movement in the West.

Community formations exemplified by the village republic in India has a very long historical background. They survived the wreck of dynasties and downfall of empires till the advent of the East India Company. In his famous minute of 1830, Sir Charles Metcalfe, the then acting Governor-General of India wrote: "The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts… This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the peoples of India… I wish, therefore, that the village constitutions may never be disturbed and I dread everything that has a tendency to break them up."

Colonialism and western capitalism eroded the resilience of these village communities, their economic, political and cultural alienation led to disempowerment and downfall of the Indian Nation under the colonial rule. It was Mahatma Gandhi, the iconic Indian Political Messiah, who revived the idea of 'Gram Swaraj' or village autonomy as a bottom-up approach of development. Conceptualizing the decentralized system of rule he saw the building blocks of democracy to be 'villages', an entity that was both autonomous yet independent. He argued that 'village' is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity. Gandhi's idea of '*Gram Swara*j' can be broken into two main domains, the first '*Gram*' which can be translated into village has a territorial connotation with a reference to local forms of community living while the second part '*Swaraj*' or autonomy operates at different levels of understanding, constantly negotiating between domains of self and society, private and public.

So what is '*Swaraj*'? Although the word Swaraj means self-rule, Gandhi gave it the content of an integral revolution that encompasses all spheres of life. At the individual level, Swaraj is vitally connected with the capacity for dispassionate self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing *Swadeshi* or self-reliance. Politically *Swara*j is self-government and not good government (for Gandhi, good government is no substitute for self government) and it means continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. In the other words, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority. Economically, '*Poorna Swara*j' means full economic freedom for the toiling millions. For Gandhi, *Swaraj* of the people meant the sum total of the *Swaraj* (self-rule) of individuals and so he clarified that for him Swaraj meant freedom for the meanest of his countrymen. And in its fullest sense*, Swaraj* is much more than freedom from all restraints, it is self-rule, self-restraint and could be equated with *Moksha* or salvation.

In order to realize *Swaraj,* Gandhi proposed vast organizing ability, activism and penetration into the villages solely for the services of the villagers through education of masses. In the Gandhian discourse, education of the masses means conscientization, mobilisation and empowerment, making people capable and determined to stand up to the powers whatever that

was. He said: "Real *Swaraj* will come not by the acquisition of authority but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." In other words, *Swaraj* is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority. He wanted India to develop socially and politically first, so as to be in a position of power to exercise options in the face of technological and market pressures coming from the industrialized West and from the capitalist lobby within Indian society.

His program can be understood as a chronological ordering of priorities in which the consolidation of a viable political system would come first, and the development of productive processes through the use of machines would come second. His educational plan fits nicely in this ordering of priorities. More specifically, if purposeful industrialization meant protecting the right of villages to produce what they could without competition with large-scale mechanized establishments, basic education could enhance the productive capacities of villages under such a plan.

His activism was visible not just in his acts of active nonviolence against the British but in simultaneous economic regeneration of rural India through programs like the revival and propagation of *Khadi* (small scale local industry) and other related villages industries. Since Indian National Congress was chiefly concerned with the question of political independence and believed in mobilizing the people politically for it, it was not prepared to take up constructive work. Therefore, Gandhi founded voluntary organizations to carry out his constructive program. The All India Spinners Association (AISA) and All India Village Industries Association (AIVIA), the *Harijan Sewak Sangh*, the Leprosy foundation, etc. are examples. Through the instrumentality of these organizations, Gandhi launched a massive program of rural reconstruction and of empowering the marginalized sections of people. As these organizations were primarily meant for social transformation through voluntary action at the grassroots level, their thrust was mainly social and later came to be labeled peoples' politics and basic politics, which in turn helped in the consolidation of lok-shakti or peoples' power.

It is evident from here the underlying continuum between Gandhian idea of '*Gram Swaraj*' and its Western manifestation in ecovillage at a time when contemporary society is increasingly getting grappled by the contradiction of nurturing a demanding and rapidly growing population with the limited natural resources available for its sustenance. Standing at the crossroads of a paradigm shift, marked by the growing incongruency of economic growth and personal happiness, ecovillage initiatives can be seen as a culmination of ecological sustainability and community, a holistic approach to reviving bonds with both nature and other human beings to create a sustainable way of life. Ecovillage movement was primarily based on two assumptions: firstly, our current concern with ecological damage being done to the planet and our corresponding concern to construct environmentally sustainable ways of living; and secondly concern with breakdown of traditional ties with nature ('alienation') and community ('disenchantment') as a prerequisite for the capitalist order of life resulting in loss of meaning and happiness and our corresponding concern to reconstruct meaningful bonds and relationships.

The word 'ecovillage' can thus be broken in two parts. The concept of 'eco' arises out of the concern for breaking of ties with nature and environmental degradation and the concept of 'village' arises out of a concern for breakdown of community bondings and inconsistencies of modern living. The ecological perspective includes an element of praxis, a tangible space to

work out real action or activism which Gandhi in his endeavors of organized action clearly displays, while 'village' refers to a utopian traditional nostalgia of reviving local forms of life, an abstraction seeking community, very often with a spiritual content of self-realization that we find in Gandhi's vision too. Moreover the concept of self-sustenance of villages as independent entities dependent only on things that are not important for subsistence is also inbuilt in the vision of ecovillages.

Inferences from the Case Study

The case study on ecovillage contains answers to several such key questions pertaining to the limitations of the existing social order and although it cannot be taken as a realistic model of emulation, one needs to understand the underlying forces that aim to redefine the value system through the social reconstruction in these microcosms and give us a useful extrapolation on the changes needed for a larger social reorganization for a holistic sustainable growth in social situations of a much larger dimension. The author came across interesting web materials in ecovillage living contributed by a diverse group of people; practitioners, intellectuals, analysts and researchers who are committed to the project of creating ecovillages in order to create low impact, environmentally harmonious living situations as well as businesses and education centers. While all these innovations, projects, businesses and other initiatives are positive and provide for the growth and expansion of the ecovillage community, there are many setbacks and challenges for such alternative lifestyles. The ecovillagers from this case study pointed to large problem areas, such as not having enough funding to start large projects. Another challenge is working within the legal system of the United States. There are regulations that inhibit alternative energy conservation such as composting human waste and grey water rejuvenation, as well as limiting building codes and property laws. Moreover the structure of the community itself and the challenge of communicating with so many people in a cooperative setting can give rise to decision-making problems, e.g. conflicts arising among participants who stated an intention to live more ecologically and cooperatively but failed to demonstrate commitment. The other big hurdle is the fund-crisis and a committed superstructure to ensure a steady flow of participants, patronage and sponsorship. One of the primary reasons for the peripheral nature of intentional community living in Western societies is the basic contradiction between theory and practice, a theoretical paradigm of sustenance vis-a-vis the domain of praxis driven by maximization of capitalist consumption. This underlying contradiction causes most discrepancies in trying to create a way of living outside of the system, while still depending on the system in place. For example, at Earthaven ecovillage, most members earn money outside of the village in order to have money and acquire the materials to build the ecovillage. For Thomas Kortkamp from Dancing Rabbit, the biggest disparity is one of culture and consciousness. We cannot create the sustainable world we wish to live in using the inappropriate bunk tools of consumer/industrial civilization. Ecovillages simultaneously benefit and suffer from the technologies and structures of the mainstream society because they are given little from the mainstream world on which to base their own infrastructures and contradict mainstream society. However, there are many ways in which the two worlds are still intertwined. At this point in time, it is impossible to live completely sustainably: everything we do, or have, or eat, are designed to make the maximum impact both socio-culturally and environmentally. Every basic element of human

consumption is fundamentally drawn from nature: lead in pencil, the plastic in ID card, or the cadmium in a computer, for instance. And yet, if one foreswear all of that, one gives up their status as a battleship in the war of ideas and relegates oneself to one more bailer in the sinking lifeboat.

Conclusion

The research here points to a Western cognizance of the need to redefine the intrinsic value of Modern Capitalist society. From cultural reproduction to technological innovation to governmentality to political agenda, all reflect intersections of a philosophical and ideological commitment with rational and scientific research aimed at sustenance of human existence in its natural environment. Most of the vision that steers the worldview encompasses a number of changes in contemporary living that stretches from a scale of radical breakthrough to gradual and simple wedges rooted in both technology and individual commitment. For example, efforts in directions of community building through radical initiatives like ecovillages, eco-city building through futuristic architectural innovations, urban agriculture, community supported local agriculture, permaculture and earth restoration techniques, green manufacturing, exploration of renewable sources of energy, eco-business, etc. are all ways of redefining the intrinsic value of modern capitalist growth by reconnecting with nature and its elements for meaningful existence. It is significant to realize that communities that focus on human networks have the capacity to co-exist, transform, disseminate, and enhance individual faculties. By reorganization of values at the level of community living, one can envision tremendous change at the structural level of technology, economy, polity and ideology. It needs to be argued here that the apparent diversity in the concerns that ultimately contribute to the understanding of sustainability of humanity lead to fragmentation of interest areas. For the full realization of this world view, it is important to have an adequate system that could effectively monitor, co-ordinate, regulate all the interest areas towards one common objective.

Ecovillage initiatives that appear elitist, episodic and fragmented in the new economy of localism may be a beginning of a fracture in the epistemic basis of the capitalist ordering of contemporary society.

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