Dr Kanchan Singh (Paper- Environmental Sciences (AECC-I)

Lecture-1

(For B.Sc. (H) Physical Science, Computer Science, Electronics, and Anthropology)

Chapter 3: Natural Resources

Topics to cover

WATER RESOURCES

The water cycle, through evaporation and precipitation, maintains hydrological systems which form rivers and lakes and support in a variety of aquatic ecosystems. All aquatic ecosystems are used by a large number of people for their daily needs such as drinking water, washing, cooking, watering animals, and irrigating fields. The world depends on a limited quantity of fresh water. Water covers 70% of the earth's surface but only 3% of this is fresh water. Of this, 2% is in polar ice caps and only 1% is usable water in rivers, lakes and subsoil aquifers. Only a fraction of this can be actually used. At a global level 70% of water is used for agriculture about 25% for industry and only 5% for domestic use. However this varies in different countries and industrialized countries use a greater percentage for industry. India uses 90% for agriculture, 7% for industry and 3% for domestic use. One of the greatest challenges facing the world in this century is the need to rethink the overall management of water resources. The world population has passed the 6 billion mark. Based on the proportion of young people in developing countries, this will continue to increase significantly during the next few decades. This places enormous demands on the world's limited freshwater supply. The total annual freshwater

withdrawals today are estimated at 3800 cubic kilometers, twice as much as just 50 years ago (World Commission on Dams, 2000). Studies indicate that a person needs a minimum of 20 to 40 liters of water per day for drinking and sanitation. More than one billion people worldwide have no access to clean water, and to many more, supplies are unreliable. Local conflicts are already spreading to states. Eg. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the waters of the Krishna. India is expected to face critical levels of water stress by 2025. At the global level 31 countries are already short of water and by 2025 there will be 48 countries facing serious water shortages. The UN has estimated that by the year 2050, 4 billion people will be seriously affected by water shortages. This will lead to multiple conflicts between countries over the sharing of water. Around 20 major cities in India face chronic or interrupted water shortages. There are 100 countries that share the waters of 13 large rivers and lakes. The upstream countries could starve the downstream nations leading to political unstable areas across the world. Examples are Ethopia, which is upstream on the Nile and Egypt, which is downstream and highly dependent on the Nile. International accords that will look at a fair distribution of water in such areas will become critical to world peace. India and Bangladesh already have a negotiated agreement on the water use of the Ganges.

Overutilization and pollution of surface and groundwater

With the growth of human population there is an increasing need for larger amounts of water to fulfill a variety of basic needs. Overutilization of water occurs at various levels. Most people use more water than they really need. Most of us waste water during a bath by using a shower or during washing of clothes. Many agriculturists use more water than necessary to grow crops. There are many ways in which farmers can use less water without reducing yields such as the use of drip irrigation systems. Agriculture also pollutes

surface water and underground water stores by the excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Methods such as the use of biomass as fertilizer and non toxic pesticides such as neem products and using integrated pest management systems reduces the agricultural pollution of surface and ground water. Industry tends to maximise short-term economic gains by not bothering about its liquid waste and releasing it into streams, rivers and the sea. In the longer term, as people become more conscious of using ‘green products’ made by eco cssensitive industries, the polluter’s products may not be used. The polluting industry that does not care for the environment and pays off bribes to get away from the cost needed to use effluent treatment plants may eventually be caught, punished and even closed down. Public awareness may increasingly put pressures on industry to produce only eco-friendly products which are already gaining in popularity. As people begin to learn about the serious health hazards caused by pesticides in their food, public awareness can begin putting pressures on farmers to reduce the use of chemicals that are injurious to health.

Floods

Floods have been a serious environmental hazard for centuries. However, the havoc raised by rivers overflowing their banks has become progressively more damaging, as people have deforested catchments and intensified use of river flood plains that once acted as safety valves. Wetlands in flood plains are nature’s flood control systems into which overfilled rivers could spill and act like a temporary sponge holding the water, and preventing fast flowing water from damaging surrounding land. Deforestation in the Himalayas causes floods that year after year kill people, damage crops and destroy homes in the Ganges and its tributaries and the Bramhaputra. Rivers change their course during floods and tons of valuable soil is lost to the sea. As the forests are degraded, rainwater no longer percolates slowly into the subsoil but runs off down the

mountainside bearing large amounts of topsoil. This blocks rivers temporarily but gives way as the pressure mounts allowing enormous quantities of water to wash suddenly down into the plains below. There, rivers swell, burst their banks and flood waters spread to engulf peoples' farms and homes.

Drought

In most arid regions of the world the rains are unpredictable. This leads to periods when there is a serious scarcity of water to drink, use in farms, or provide for urban and industrial use. Drought prone areas are thus faced with irregular periods of famine. Agriculturists have no income in these bad years, and as they have no steady income, they have a constant fear of droughts. India has 'Drought Prone Areas Development Programs', which are used in such areas to buffer the effects of droughts. Under these schemes, people are given wages in bad years to build roads, minor irrigation works and plantation programs. Drought has been a major problem in our country especially in arid regions. It is an unpredictable climatic condition and occurs due to the failure of one or more monsoons. It varies in frequency in different parts of our country.

While it is not feasible to prevent the failure of the monsoon, good environmental management can reduce its ill effects. The scarcity of water during drought years affects homes, agriculture and industry. It also leads to food shortages and malnutrition which especially affects children. Several measures can be taken to minimise the serious impacts of a drought. However this must be done as a preventive measure so that if the monsoons fail its impact on local people's lives is minimised. In years when the monsoon is adequate, we use up the good supply of water without trying to conserve it and use the water judiciously. Thus during a year when the rains are poor, there is no water even for drinking in the drought area. One of the factors that worsens the effect of drought is deforestation. Once hill slopes are denuded of forest cover the

rainwater rushes down the rivers and is lost. Forest cover permits water to be held in the area permitting it to seep into the ground. This charges the underground stores of water in natural aquifers. This can be used in drought years if the stores have been filled during a good monsoon. If water from the underground stores is overused, the water table drops and vegetation suffers. This soil and water management and afforestation are long-term measures that reduce the impact of droughts.

Lecture-2

Topics to cover

USES OF WATER

Water for Agriculture and Power Generation

India's increasing demand for water for intensive irrigated agriculture, for generating electricity, and for consumption in urban and industrial centers, has been met by creating large dams. Irrigated areas increased from 40 million ha. in 1900 to 100 million ha. in 1950 and to 271 million ha. by 1998. Dams support 30 to 40% of this area. Although dams ensure a year round supply of water for domestic use, provide extra water for agriculture, industry, hydropower generation, they have several serious environmental problems. They alter river flows, change nature's flood control mechanisms such as wetlands and flood plains, and destroy the lives of local people and the habitats of wild plant and animal species. Irrigation to support cash crops like sugarcane produces an unequal distribution of water. Large landholders on the canals get the lion's share of water, while poor, small farmers get less and are seriously affected.

Sustainable water management

'Save water' campaigns are essential to make people everywhere aware of the dangers of water scarcity. A number of measures need to be taken for the better management of the world's water resources.

These include measures such as:

• Building several small reservoirs instead of few mega projects.

• Develop small catchment dams and protect wetlands. Soil management, micro catchment development and afforestation permits recharging of underground aquifers thus reducing the need for large dams.

• Treating and recycling municipal waste water for agricultural use.

• Preventing leakages from dams and canals.

• Preventing loss in Municipal pipes.
• Effective rain water harvesting in urban environments.
• Water conservation measures in agriculture such as using drip irrigation.
• Pricing water at its real value makes people use it more responsibly and efficiently and reduces water wasting.
• In deforested areas where land has been degraded, soil management by bunding along the hill slopes and making 'nala' plugs, can help retain moisture and make it possible to re-vegetate degraded areas.

Managing a river system is best done by leaving its course as undisturbed as possible. Dams and canals lead to major floods in the monsoon and the drainage of wetlands seriously affects areas that get flooded when there is high rainfall.

Dams

Today there are more than 45,000 large dams around the world, which play an important role in communities and economies that harness these water resources for their economic development. Current estimates suggest some 30-40% of irrigated land worldwide relies on dams. Hydropower, another contender for the use of stored water, currently supplies 19% of the world's total electric power supply and is used in over 150 countries. The world's two most populous countries – China and India –have built around 57% of the world's large dams.

Dams problems

• Fragmentation and physical transformation of rivers.
• Serious impacts on riverine ecosystems.
• Social consequences of large dams due to displacement of people.
• Water logging and salinisation of surrounding lands.
• Dislodging animal populations, damaging their habitat and cutting off their migration routes.
• Fishing and travel by boat disrupted.

• The emission of green house gases from reservoirs due to rotting vegetation and carbon inflows from the catchment is a recently identified impact.

Large dams have had serious impacts on the lives, livelihoods, cultures and spiritual existence of indigenous and tribal peoples. They have suffered disproportionately from the negative impacts of dams and often been excluded from sharing the benefits. In India, of the 16 to 18 million people displaced by dams, 40 to 50% were tribal people, who account for only 8% of our nation's one billion people. Conflicts over dams have heightened in the last two decades because of their social and environmental impacts and failure to achieve targets for sticking to their costs as well as achieving promised benefits. Recent examples show how failure to provide a transparent process that includes effective participation of local people has prevented affected people from playing anactive role in debating the pros and cons of the project and its alternatives. The loss of traditional, local controls over equitable distribution remains a major source of conflict.

Sardar Sarovar Project

The World Bank's withdrawal from the Sardar Sarovar Project in India in 1993 was a result of the demands of local people threatened with the loss of their livelihoods and homes in the submergence area. This dam in Gujarat on the Narmada has displaced thousands of tribal folk, whose lives and livelihoods were linked to the river, the forests and their agricultural lands. While they and the fishermen at the estuary, have lost their homeland, rich farmers downstream will get water for agriculture. The question is why should the local tribals be made homeless, displaced and relocated to benefit other people? Why should the less fortunate be made to bear the costs of development for better off farmers? It is a question of social and economic equity as well as the enormous environmental losses, including loss of the biological diversity of the inundated forests in the Narmada valley.

References

Bharucha, E.; Kumar, S.; Nair, S. and Foulger, S. "Text book of Environmental Studies for Undergraduate Courses" University press (India) private Limited 3-6-747/1/A&3-6-754/1 Hyderabad 500029,Telangana, India ISBN:978-81-7371-862-5