

## **DOES IT MATTER?**

'Does It Matter' is a chapter from Richard Leakey's famous text "The Sixth Extinction". The lesson mainly speaks about a very serious environmental issue i.e , sixth extinction. According to the writer five extinctions are already over and now we are going through the most dangerous one which is caused by human beings/ Homo sapiens.

Richard Leakey begins the essay with a wager(bet) between the famous American biologist Paul Ehrlich and an American professor Julian Simon. Both of them have difference of opinion in preserving the bio-diversity. Ehrlich was in favour of considering the biota(bio-diversity) whereas the latter was against it.

Ehrlich says since we are having incorrect judgements about species matter that is its mass destruction and regeneration we need not have to be worried about it. It is exactly like saying people are less interested about a fire catastrophe that happens in the world's only genetic library as they are unaware about its mysterious treasures. Whereas scientists will keep checking its intensity and duration where how the fire works out there.

If an asteroid comes on a course with Earth, people would definitely be worried as they already heard of such asteroid impacts on Earth. But according to Simon such fears are human guess work and there should not be any worry. But Leakey disagree with it and argue that if there is any means to divert its path, it should be done to prevent any extinctions. It arouses various questions which are to be answered.

Leakey introduces three main areas: economic, eco-system services and aesthetic.

1. Economic- some species may be used for medicines, food etc.. and the loss of such species may affect this value system. 2. Eco system services - a proper balance between plants and animals is needed. If any species lost it would affect this value system. 3. Aesthetics - if the rich bio-diversity pleases our senses, the loss of any would affect this value system. So, the normal question is , for human welfare whether we have to protect the entire species or some of them only?

According to Simon, the answer to the above question is not a serious matter of concern as it doesn't cause any harm to humanity and it is foolish to protect the entire biota. But Leakey disagree with Simon's viewpoint and accepts what the famous ecologist Les Kaufman says. According to Kaufman, destruction of one species may lead to the wiping away off a whole kingdom of plants, birds or animals thereby humans too.

Simon's point of view is that using artificial methods and latest technologies humans can derive things which we get from the natural world. But Leakey is doubtful about it. Simon also have an opinion that nature has ceaseless treasure of resources which can continue for millions of

years. History can be used as a guide but at the same time it can blind us. Science, technology and urban environments may blind us about the input –output relationship of natural Earth.

The eco system services are starting from smallest living organisms like fungi till the complex ones like humans. Earth consists of a complex dynamic system and the answer to many questions about it are not clearly known to us. But the rules existing in the universe should be obeyed by the entire species even we that is Homo sapiens. Eventhough we are unaware of how much species is needed for existence, we are the agents and victims of sixth extinction. Using modern technologies like considering fossil records of carbon dating or radiometric age dating etc.. we can have a faultless picture of the dynamism of living systems.

The entire species on earth is vulnerable to destruction and the history shows various reasons for mass extinctions in the past. But we can't put the entire blame on extra terrestrial objects for such extinctions. We are also responsible for it by cutting away the tropical forests and encroachment on wild habitats. Nature can withstand any such destructions, but it is our peril.

The fossil records says life on earth is a dynamic process where cleansing and regeneration phenomenon are spontaneous necessity of the eco system. Due to humans' careless actions many species are disappearing which are the unique genetic packages in the universe.

Anti- alarmists will never support this 'save species' campaign as they find it completely a waste of time, money and effort. Their opinion is based on the scientific fact that the average lifespan of a species is about 1to 10 million years. But their argument is so foolish as Jay Gould says in a satiric way that we do not treat a curable childhood disease by saying that we are mortal.

The second message of fossil records is that evolution is a wonderful and powerful process, which fills the void after each mass extinction. After each extinction, nature endowed species with more mental capabilities especially with humans. Sixth extinction may witness unpredictable changes in the universe, the most important may be the extinction of Homo sapiens.

Mass extinctions are sudden processes whatever may be the reason, whereas recovery is a slow process as per human scale. In the coming future too asteroid impacts or anything like that might happen. If any humans saved from such peril, they won't exist and the nature will go on without us.

Many people find it difficult to imagine a world without us. Such people are expecting a golden future in which they can inhabit other planets if the Earth is destroyed anyhow. The writer is urging us to protect the present bio- diversity for our future generations and we have the right to do it.

All extinctions have a general characteristic including the sixth that is the most vulnerable are whose geographical distribution is limited or those in and near the tropic and those with large body size. Leakey expresses the hope by referring to Gould that nature itself will clear the human impacts.

As we came to earth as an accident of history, we have no right to act as we wish. We have an ethical responsibility to protect earth's biota as we and other species are on an equal level that is we are not a privileged species who have an license to do whatever he likes until he lives here.

Leakey concludes the essay by advising us not to exploit the natural resources as it may lead to a difficult time in the coming years. There can be a mutual help between richer and poor nations to reduce such issues. For the past few years men were negligent about the subject, extinction as it was a mystery. We have no correct explanations for the past five extinctions; only theories are there. But the agent of sixth extinction is clearly evident that is humans.