

# *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement*

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Oriama, gives a critical and vivid account of John McCormick view on environmental movements based on historical and 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, as well as a summary of a gradual phenomenon and challenges of organizations in their quest for environmental diplomacy.

John McCormick is a well versed with environmental issues and fronting the global environmental movement. In his book *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement* he analyses keenly the roots, growth, environmental concepts and the history behind the environmental movements. The book is written with concepts and landmark events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Chapter one of the book examines the roots of environmentalism or rather the history of environmental movements. These movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century were not well organized and sophisticated. The first observation is the title *Reclaiming Paradise* and its link to the first chapter where he gives an exemplary introduction to the title by giving a history of where the movements began, what triggered the movements and the shortcomings and successes of the movements in advancing environmental conservation and preservation. McCormick acknowledges the fact that there is no clear beginning of the movement because there is no single event that sparked mass movements on environmental issues.

For McCormick, there are several stimuli and responses which exerted influence on the growth of environmental movements: mainly progress in scientific research, growth in personal mobility, intensification of industry, spread of human settlement and broad changes in social and economic relationships. In Victorian British, Charles Darwin's work played a major role in exerting pressure on the formation and spread of environmental movements due to his theoretical concept that man was and is one with all other species hence distancing himself from nature is at his own peril.

"Wherever man appears with his tools, deformity follows his steps his spade and his plough, his hedge and his furrow, making shocking encroachments on the simplicity and elegance of landscape".<sup>[1]</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis though was in wilderness protection and preservation.

Chapter two evaluates protection, conservation and the role of United Nations (UN) in environmentalism in 1945-1961. The onset and end of the Second World War transformed values and attitudes towards internationalism, hence transforming and altering the agenda of environmentalism. He highlights two environmental initiatives predating the Second World War. Firstly, the convening of an international conference on conservation of natural resources and secondly, the establishment of an international organization for the protection of nature. Wrangles in the United States were visible with a disparity of values and attitudes with regards to environmentalism between conservatives of the environment and the preservationists. This brought about a clear cut ideological and theoretical difference between the preservationists whose main is to preserve the environment from all but recreational and educational use and the conservatives whose main tenets were to exploit the continent's natural resources, but to do so rationally and sustain-ably.

He also engages us in the activities of the United Nations within the same period of time and the role of organizations and agencies in the UN system in environmentalism. Economic And Social Council (ECOSOC) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s intention to make conservation part of post war economic policy planning. He also highlights the efforts of two main activists. Pinchot's efforts in America in conservation, John Muir in preservation in 1890 where he campaigned for Yosemite National Park which became the first preserve to protect wilderness. His giving the history of International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUPN) is also key to the history of environmental movements since it's important to highlight that contrary to belief, IUPN was not a product of a popular movement but a creation of a few enthusiasts. Also important is the clarification with UN system and due to its holding International Technical Conference on the Protection of Nature (ITC) separately, it distanced itself from the UN system. IUPN hence became an activist kind of organization.

Chapter four of the book looks at the challenges that the growing movement faced in the wake of environmentalism. The main challenge was from philosophers and scholars who came out as critics to the movement on the basis of contradicting theories, philosophies and ideologies- The Prophets of Doom. The book highlights collisions in concept with the environmental movement as The Ehrlich-Commoner Debate which consisted of two biologists with differing opinions on the growth of the economy. It also highlights *The Tragedy of the Commons*- a doomsday essay written by Garret Hardin. Another important highlight is the *Apocalypse Tomorrow Syndrome* which he captures as the attitudes and values of the Europeans then on issues of the environment.

This chapter is of much importance today as it is the basis of understanding with regards to the current challenges of climate change and environmental security. "Multiple disasters serve to destroy the commonly held theories that have served sufficiently well in the past and the response to such stress is the rise of charismatic leaders who offer ideas and a philosophy that can be interpreted in a Salvationist manner".[\[2\]](#)

The modern era of environmental diplomacy can be traced back to the 1972 U.N. Conference in the human environment held in Stockholm, Sweden. In this conference UNEP was established as an International entity for environmental action in the UN system.

In the late 1970's, through both the broad dissemination of scientific findings and the vociferous complaint of the people of Sweden, Canada and other nations of the world first became aware of the acid rain concept. This concept would then becloud already battered International diplomatic relationships. Environmental diplomacy took the center stage when environmental problems took a security turn and hence arousing national security concerns.

The UN conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as Earth Summit held in Rio DE Janeiro 1992 gave a new impetus to environmental diplomacy. New Multilateral Environmental Agreements were born, the United Nations Framework Convention in Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Convention on Bio-diversity (CBD). A new political institution, the commission on sustainable development was also established. This he exemplary covers in chapter five hence giving rise to the debate in modern environmental diplomacy which is mainly carried out under the auspices of UNFCCC.

In addressing UNEP in chapter six, the writer basically delves into the achievements and challenges of UNEP with regards to the growing need of environmental movements. His first assessment is with regards to implementation and adoption of the Stockholm declaration and other treaties thereafter. This was quite commendable of him to have tackled this because of the current criticisms of UNEP's under-performance by specific countries.

Chapter seven and eight looks at the disparities between the North and the South-The North-South debate with regards to environmental issues. While the developed north faces criticisms in pollution indexes due to industrialization, the South is paving its way up the ladder of development through industrialization. The book addresses these issues of disparities from a checks and balances point of view, where it is evident with his analysis that the environment is a question of the global commons which cannot be ignored on the

basis of development and underdevelopment. It is therefore clear that the question of environmental issues requires individual responsibility and accountability for the sake of the next generations.

It is also clear that the environment being an issue majorly categorized as low politics makes it difficult to be accorded an audience within the context of international and individual state politics. The North-South debate is still evident in international environmental negotiations even today and it has turned out to cripple the processes that are meant for the common good of the whole world evident in all attempts towards attaining a global environmental regime.

In conclusion, "Environmentalists argue that we can no longer take the environment for granted. It is already too late to save many species and habitats, and more will undoubtedly suffer through ill-advised development. Pollution has been curbed or reduced in some parts of the world, but it is worsening in others. Forests and fertile land is being lost in some parts, and restored in others. Sooner or later, a workable balance must be achieved between the needs of humanity and the needs of nature. However long this takes, the rise of the environmental movements in the form of non-state actors has made sure that the relationship between humans and their environment will never be quite the same again".<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> G. William (1973), *Observations on the Highlands of Scotland*, Richmond surrey, Richmond, p.112.

<sup>[2]</sup> Michael Burkun (1974), *Disaster and the Millennium*, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp 74-89.

<sup>[3]</sup> J. McCormick (1992), *The Global Environmental Movement: Reclaiming Paradise*, CBS Publishers, India, p. 203

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