

Why the Mountains

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Mountains have gained global recognition for their sacredness and biodiversity. Over the years, scientists, researchers, local bodies and states have made efforts to protect and preserve the mountains. Perrigo, Hoorn and Antonelli call them the cradles of diversity, which need to be studied in order to understand nature and mountain biodiversity. (2019).

Earth Consciousness

The growing work on the mountains can be located in the awakening of earth consciousness in the world. Earth consciousness or what may also be called the universal respect for nature and all of its forms is manifesting in different ways.

The multidisciplinary approaches that build the idea of earth consciousness have added much weight to the end outcomes in the forms of frameworks for protection and preservation. One can see an influence of cultural, ethical, legal, philosophical, religious, and spiritual perspectives in the realization of a deep and meaningful relationship between humans with nature.

In the sphere of law and policy, normative frameworks identify and define the scope of relatability between nature and humans and the responsibilities arising therefrom. The legal landscape on the subject has grown significantly at the domestic and international level. [e.g. The Multilateral Biodiversity Framework focusses on the relationship between nature and people- Convention on Biodiversity, CBD].

Mountain jurisprudence has grown as an integral part of earth consciousness.

A Framework for Mountains

The United Nations has adopted a series of instruments identifying the commitments to protection and preservation of mountains. In 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development signed a plan for action, Agenda 21, which included the agenda Managing Fragile Ecosystems: Sustainable Mountain Development.

The aim was to involve stakeholders to commit to;

- Maintain and enhance the conservation, health, vitality and stewardship of mountain ecosystems for their inherent value...
- Improve the social and economic well-being and livelihoods of, and opportunities for, both mountain people...

- Empower and enable mountain people to be fully engaged in the decision-making processes that determine the future of mountain communities and ecosystems, particularly in light of global climate change and globalization processes.

The international framework adopts an inclusive approach by establishing the inherent relationship between the mountains, mountain people and mountain biodiversity. The Sustainable Mountain Development Report of 2019 states “mountains are key ecosystems, providing goods and services to the entire planet and supporting the livelihoods of a vast number of people” [Sustainable Mountain Development [UN GA Report, 2019]

Further, the 2019 Ranikhet Declaration adopted on the Mountain Partnership Products initiative includes the following commitments;

- Sustain production systems that safeguard the health of ecosystems and humans, and provide safe food for people;

- Work towards the conservation of traditional practices and embrace the whole basket of products coming from mountain farms [FAO-Mountain Partnership Secretariat]

Rights of the Mountains

A framework for the mountains primarily focusses on the mountains and the people of the mountains. Mountains need to be preserved to cater to their life and

existence. Mountain rights have been advocated in this regard including freedom from excessive and destructive human influence, right to its own ecosystem, the right to progress and evolve naturally, the right to human stewardship, and the right to sustainable human treatment and recreation. (Where there be Dragons.com)

People and the Mountains

It would come as a surprise that almost 12% of the world's human population live in the mountains. People who live near the mountains make up for another 14%. In light of the number of people that call mountains their home, the intricate ties between the two is inevitable. But, what we need to understand is the relationship between locals and tourism and the need to find a balance between the two. Resources in mountain towns are limited and every year that tourism grows, there is a direct impact on the environment, land and local livelihoods. A conscious effort has to be made to ensure that a balance is first discovered and then maintained. The movement for protecting the people including their skills, culture and status as beneficiaries is the most notable of interventions being made by stakeholders.

About the authors

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