

Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Native Peoples

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The great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy once said: "Humanity cannot and must not alter that which had been formed by life; it would be senseless, absolutely senseless, to attempt the correction of nature."

In actual life, the connections between "humankind and nature" appear as "humankind, society, and nature." But harmony between humans and nature can only be established within the scope of "society and nature." This means that the problem is an intensely sociological and ecological one, which may be resolved with improvements in socio-cultural, economic and axiological (moral aesthetics) aspects of knowledge.

Today the issue of an ecological approach to identifying and confirming human needs has become imminent. History is full of bitter lessons in which "egotistical" people, in seeking their own advantage, have wrought destruction upon other living things; in the end, this sort of behaviour turned on people themselves.

The role of society in protecting nature must grow daily. There is an ecological renaissance that is based upon establishing cultivated economic complexes that respond to the requirements of the surrounding environment. There is a connection between people and their relation with nature. To understand this connection is to acquire new possibilities for coordination between human

activity and nature.

The ecology of rural areas and the culture of ecology among rural inhabitants is becoming a specialized subject. In our times, individual or private sense of ecology is linked to societal adaptations to market practices as they are reflected in family economy. From the point of view of ecology, relations between rural inhabitants and primal nature reflect a more natural ecological contact. A rural inhabitant, whose actions are commensurate with his attitudes towards nature, and who is concerned how his actions will affect other people and future generations, contributes a human element to the value of nature that is based on traditional, ecological knowledge of native peoples. Such an inhabitant is not acting in a chaotic fashion but in a cultivated manner, consciously and creatively. This is why today rural people are a factor in the transformation not only of the environment, but in the transformation of themselves; their human nature; in fact, their biology is being transformed.

For example, to expand and promote the development of multi-cultivation (ecology) and a system of rotation for pastures and preserving silage, it would be possible to advertise among urban dwellers a visit to rural areas during hay-making in the summer. During summer holidays, students and their parents could spend a family vacation working in some ensilage enterprise. We could call this "recreational family relaxation." The word "recreation" is more precise than "relaxation." In the V. Dal' dictionary, to rest means "to be at peace after some toil, to do nothing, to lie or to stand gathering one's strength." The Latin term "recreation means, first of all, renewal, expansion, or to reproduce one's physical and spiritual strength," in other words, this applies to our activities.

In the extreme conditions of the North, native peoples who are occupied with breeding stock, horses, and reindeer have come to personify centuries-old ecological experience of prudent relations with nature and with one another. In

rural settings, traditional lifestyles with their own peculiarities, have actually dictated the degree to which civilization developed at the fringe of cold.

As far as the matter concerning standard means by which northern peoples have adapted to universal issues like ecology is concerned, there is the prime effect of solar activity. Thus, the theme of hay-making is that during hay-making and the labours of making silage there follows an accumulation of bio-energies in the alass¹ depression from the following sources:

- a) abundant solar energy enters the biosphere, and is conditioned by natural climatic situation of the given bioregion;
- b) energetic effectiveness of the alass ecosystem, that is distinguished by locale and isolation of the covered soil (an effect of permafrost in summertime); and
- c) release of energy by plants during hay-making, like a fast-flowing “shedding” during the completion of a biological cycle of selecting species that comprise the actual area of the alass.

All these effects serve to complement and support individual ecology and tradition ecological knowledge of northern people (Natives) who occupy rural areas and live in the extremely severe natural conditions of the arctic zones of the globe.

In this manner, traditional conduct of economy represents historical prerequisites realized by a cultural and creative approach of people in a social group to primal nature.

Note

1. An alas (or alas) is “a thermokarst depression with relatively steep sides and a flat floor, which may be occupied by a lake. Alases are well developed in Siberia (the word ‘alas’ is of Yakutian origin) where they can occupy 40-50% of the land surface.” Source: *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Earth Sciences*, edited by Ailsa Allaby & Michael Allaby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

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