

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENT?

1.1. Definition-Environment

The word Environment is derived from the French word “Environ” which means “surrounding”. Our surrounding includes biotic factors like human beings, Plants, animals, microbes, etc and abiotic factors such as light, air, water, soil, etc. Environment is a complex of many variables, which surrounds man as well as the living organisms. Environment includes water, air and land and the interrelationships which exist among and between water, air and land and human beings and other living creatures such as plants, animals and micro organisms (Kalavathy, 2004). She suggested that environment consists of an inseparable whole system constituted by physical, chemical, biological, social and cultural elements, which are interlinked individually and collectively in myriad ways. The natural environment consists of four interlinking systems namely, the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the lithosphere and the biosphere. These four systems are in constant change and such changes are affected by human activities and vice versa (Kumarasamy *et al.*, 2004).

Components of Environment

Our environment has been classified into four major components: 1.Hydrosphere, 2.Lithosphere, 3.Atmosphere, 4.Biosphere.

Hydrosphere

Hydrosphere includes all water bodies such as lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and ocean etc. Hydrosphere functions in a cyclic nature, which is termed as hydrological cycle or water cycle.

Lithosphere

Lithosphere means the mantle of rocks constituting the earth's crust. The earth is a cold spherical solid planet of the solar system, which spins in its axis and revolves around the sun at a certain constant distance. Lithosphere mainly, contains soil, earth rocks, mountain etc. Lithosphere is divided into three layers-crusts, mantle and core (outer and inner).

Atmosphere

The cover of the air, that envelopes the earth is known as the atmosphere. Atmosphere is a thin layer which contains gases like oxygen, carbon dioxide etc. and which protects the solid earth

and human beings from the harmful radiations of the sun. There are five concentric layers within the atmosphere, which can be differentiated on the basis of temperature and each layer has its own characteristics. These include the troposphere, the stratosphere, the mesosphere, the thermosphere and the exosphere (Kalavathy, 2004).

Biosphere

It is otherwise known as the life layer, it refers to all organisms on the earth's surface and their interaction with water and air. It consists of plants, animals and micro-organisms, ranging from the tiniest microscopic organism to the largest whales in the sea. Biology is concerned with how millions of species of animals, plants and other organisms grow, feed, move, reproduce and evolve over long periods of time in different environments. Its subject matter is useful to other sciences and professions that deal with life, such as agriculture, forestry and medicine. The richness of biosphere depends upon a number of factors like rainfall, temperature, geographical reference etc. Apart from the physical environmental factors, the man made environment includes human groups, the material infrastructures built by man, the production relationships and institutional systems that he has devised. The social environment shows the way in which human societies have organized themselves and how they function in order to satisfy their needs (Kumarasamy *et al.*, 2004).