

# Energy Crisis - A Result of Human Overconsumption?

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**Abstract-** Energy crisis is defined as the situation that would arise when energy demands exceed energy supply. The world has witnessed a number of energy crises in the past. Different factors have contributed to world energy crisis at different times. Some contributing factors were wars, union strikes, government regulations and extreme weather conditions. Those were short-term emergency situations that got resolved once the underlying temporary cause was fixed.

This article aims to explore human overconsumption as the root cause of all the energy crises. Factors like wastage, consumerism, overindulgence and materialism result in overconsumption. Human overconsumption or in layman terms human greed if not controlled would result in a long-term energy crisis. It would also lead to environment degradation and disturb planet earth's carrying capacity.

The need of the hour is simple living. Finite energy sources should be used minimally and only for necessities. People should start giving back to the nature rather than just taking from it.

**Index Terms-** Energy Crisis, Energy sources, Fossil fuels, Human overconsumption, Consumerism, Materialism, Self sufficiency

## INTRODUCTION

Energy is the life-giving blood of human civilization. It helps keep the economic and industrial machinery of the society running. Many things that humans take for granted like transportation and food production would come to a standstill in the absence of energy and its sources.

Though there are numerous sources of energy, humans are still largely dependent upon the finite sources of energy. These sources are coal, natural gas and oil, collectively called fossil fuel sources.

According to the latest Global Status Report 2015[1], 78.4% world energy needs were met by the fossil fuel sources. These sources are formed by the deposits of

decaying plants and animals that take over millions of years to get converted into gas and oils. It is obviously clear that if these sources get depleted, they cannot be replenished in the average human life span. Looking at the current consumption rate a time might come when there would no longer be enough supply of these resources to meet the world demands. The energy crisis prediction by the famous astrologer Nostradamus would then become true.

## *Factors responsible for Energy Crisis:*

The fossil fuel consumption has increased by 1300 times in the last 200 years [2]. This overconsumption by humans is the leading cause of imminent energy crisis. Some cite market manipulation, wars and government regulation as the causes of the gap between the supply and demand of energy. These factors might affect the market supply for a short duration but in the long term the demand statistics have a major role in widening this gap.

It is important to note that demand here is not equivalent to population demand. Though world's population has been increasing at a high rate, it has very little to do with the fossil fuel demand statistics. If you think this is hard to believe, look at the statistics below:

United States of America account for 5% of total world population. But it uses 25% of world's oil and 23% of world's coal [3].

According to famous American biologist Paul R. Ehrlich if all the people in the world consumed at a rate similar to the United States then we would need 4-5 earths to sustain ourselves.

What are the reasons that make people consume more? Some factors leading to overconsumption are:

### 1. Consumerism

The love of vehicles is making people use public transportation less and less. Vehicle ownership has

increased from 122 vehicles per thousand people to 144 vehicles per thousand people in the last 20 years [4]. The tendency to show off and an urge to acquire better goods and services than your neighbor are resulting in people buying more. Industrialists also make products that become obsolete or out of fashion soon. Once a product goes out of fashion people no longer want to use it.

## 2. Wastage

In order to remain up-to-date people throw things that become out of fashion. Consumer goods and clothes get wasted because of changing fashion trends. Another type of wastage that is rampant everywhere is food wastage. People buy perishable food produce more than they need. This leads to spoiling and wastage.

## 3. Materialism

The perfect example of materialism leading to resource exploitation is the Amazon deforestation study [5]. People of Amazon forest, particularly Brazil cleared a large part of their forest for the sole purpose of cattle farming. Since the cost of transportation from these countries to countries in North America is quite low, such kind of rampant deforestation was encouraged. In order to earn huge margins in the meat processing industry, forests were sacrificed.

## 4. Overindulgence

People like to buy whatever is latest in the market. They would do so even if it leads to overindulgence. They do not mind buying a vehicle when they already have one in the garage. Electronic goods are acquired in plenty just because one sounds a little better or looks a little better. Overuse of heaters and air conditioners is another example of over indulgence. Overuse of electronic items also leads to carbon footprint or CO<sub>2</sub> gas emissions. Carbon footprints cause environment degradation.

USA is the leader of this overconsumption mentality. With developing nations becoming richer, the purchasing power per person also increases. Walking in the footsteps of America, the consumerism mentality is fast gaining popularity among other nations too. If this trend continues, then finite resources will end soon.

Even today, BP one of the leading oil and gas company claims that proved reserves of fossil fuels have only enough oil to last just another 50 years at the current rate of consumption [5]. Similar kinds of figures apply to coal and natural gas too.

How much of the world population would be able to sustain without fossil fuels is the big question. Also known as the carrying capacity of earth, it is claimed by some to be 8 billion [6] the figure the world is fast approaching (current world population is 7.6 billion) [7]. Though there have been counter claims that state that with improvements in technology more reserves of oil can be drilled and oil tapped. What BP's claim has brought into the open is the vulnerability and dependency of the world on this limited amount of resource.

## CONCLUSION

People need to rise above the consumerism and materialism state of mind. Rather than just thinking about acquiring goods and then wasting most of it, people need to improve their life styles. The improvement here would not be in buying better clothes and shoes, but in trying to lead a life that is self-sufficient or minimalistic in approach. It would mean reducing dependency upon money. It would include growing your own food, choosing simple diet options and reducing overall expenses.

As the famous Indian political leader Mahatma Gandhi once said—Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed. If people start taking from nature only that much they need then resources will be enough for everyone. Otherwise there will be a constant fight for the largest slice of pie leading to not only destruction of the pie but also of the plate holding the pie.

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