

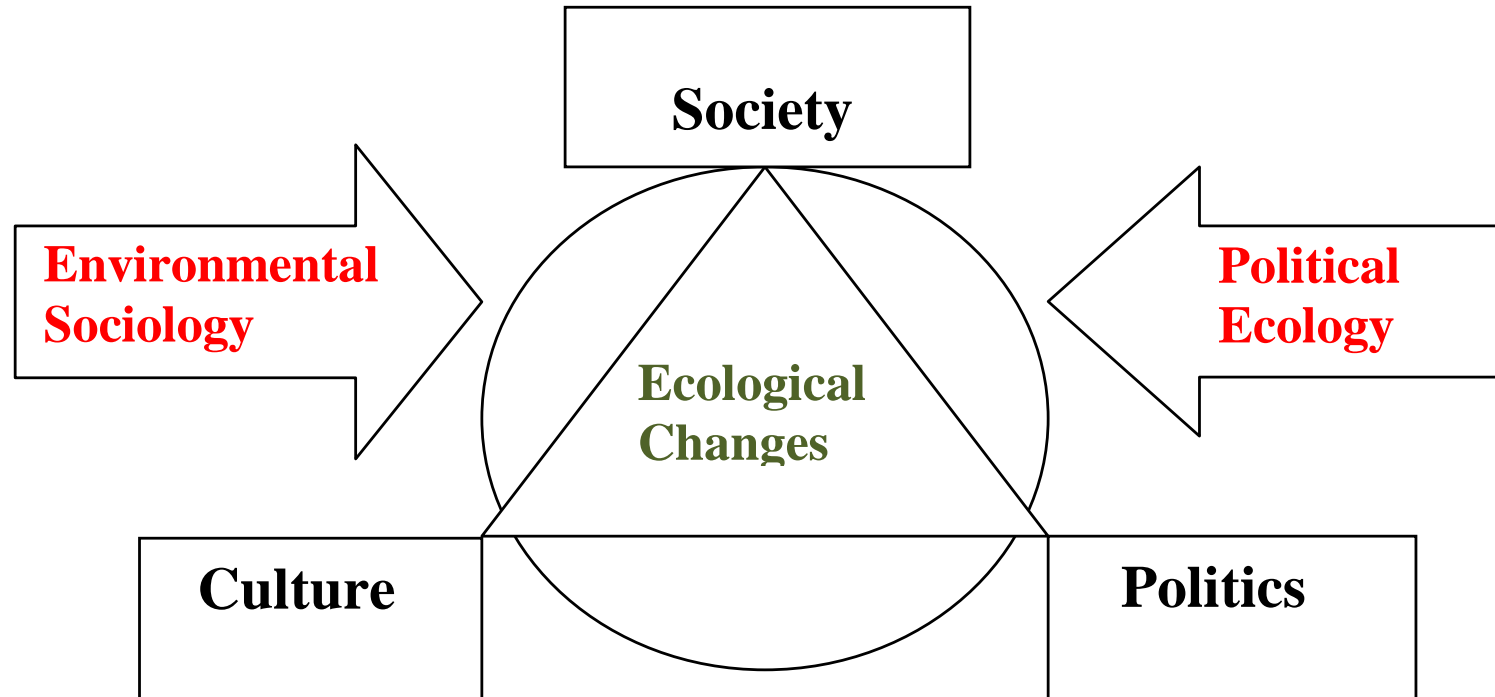
# Socio-Cultural and Political Aspects of Environmental Changes



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# Socio-Cultural & Political Approach to Environmental Changes



# What is Environmental Sociology

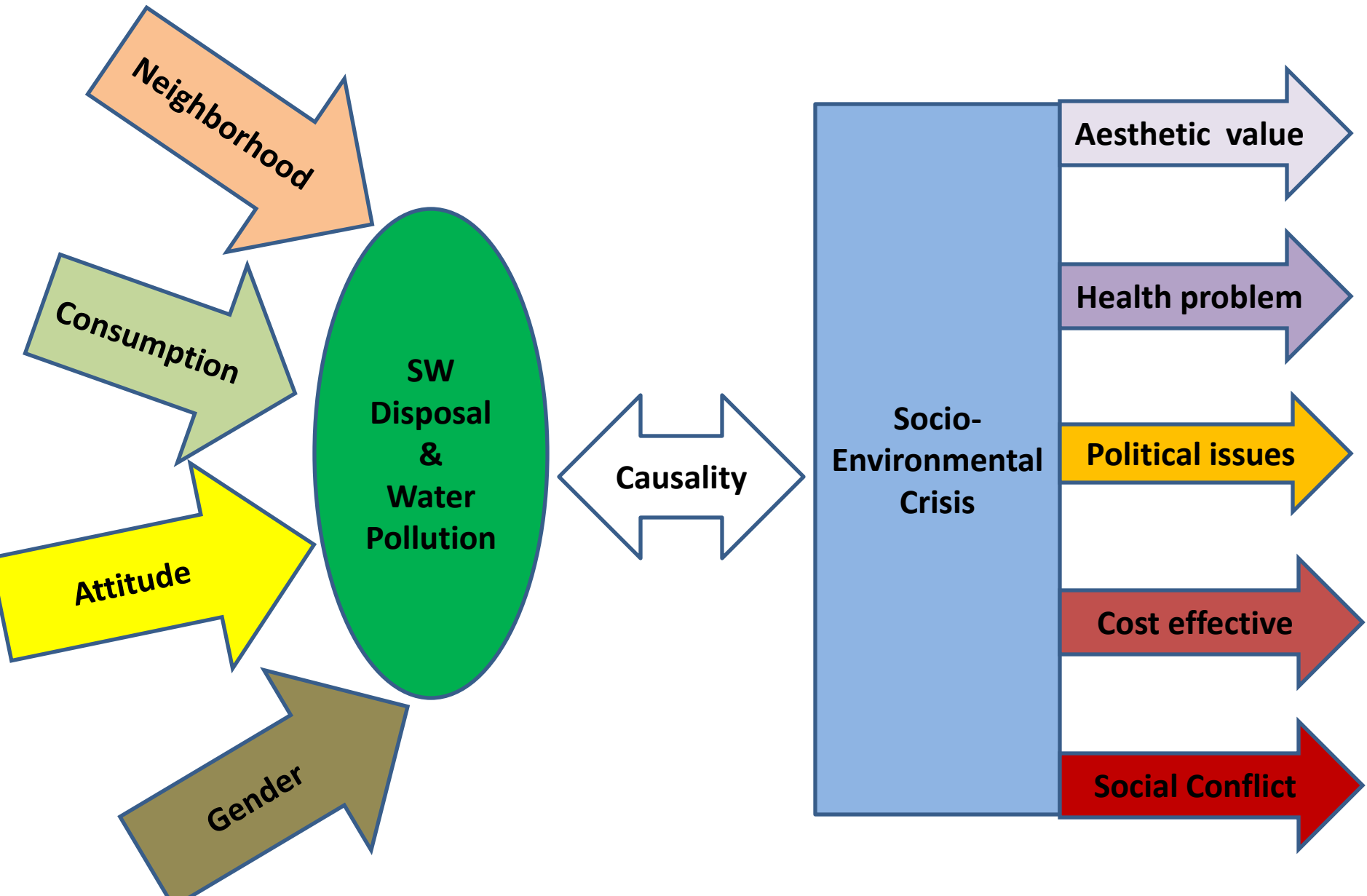
- **Environmental Sociology** basically focuses on the interaction between environment and society (Dunlap & Catton, 1996)
- It attempts to analyse the environmental changes or problems by the socio-cultural process.
- Environmental sociologists are concerned about social constructivism of environmental discourses, environmental risk and environmental health crises (Hanigan, 2006).
- For example: the sociological perspectives such as consumption pattern, class, poverty, socialization, culture and gender relations are used to understand environmental changes in Sri Lanka.

# What is Political Ecology

- Political ecology examines the political dynamics surrounding material world and unequal power relations in constituting a politicized environment (Bryant, 1992)
- It is the power that determines the nature of environmental discourse and collective actions & environmentalism (Foucault, 1980)
- For example, the patron client political relationship have severe impact on illegal construction, land reclamation, capturing lands and discharging waste at environmentally sensitive areas such as rivers, wetlands, forests, coastal belt and landslide prone areas of Sri Lanka

# Causes and Effects of Environmental Problems

(Solid waste disposal & River water pollution in Sri Lanka)



# Consumption and Environmental Change

- The consumption pattern of people very crucial in determining environmental changes in Sri Lanka eg; building luxury houses & purchasing luxury vehicles.
- A positive link of employment, livelihood and income with solid waste generation (Mahees, Sivayoganathan & Basnayaka, 2010)
- The poor and rich life style always threaten the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental equilibrium (Jayakodi, 2000)
- Economically rich cause more damage to eco-system of rivers (Mahaweli) and Wetlands (Mahees, Sivayoganathan & Basnayaka, 2010 & Mahees, 2013)

# **Social Construction of Environmental Problems**

- The environmental discourses and environmental movements are based on socio-economic and political aspects of a society (Dwivedi, 2001)
- Environmental risk & crisis are socially constructed mainly by scientists, media and politicians (Haningan, 2006).
- Even Sri Lankan environmentalism and grass roots environmental actions are influenced by livelihood, cultural identity and local knowledge of people (Mahees, 2010)
- Environmental Black Magic, Environmental Priests and livelihood environmentalism of Sri Lankan environmental movements are crucial in the future environmental changes of Sri Lanka (Mahees, 2010)

# Cultural & Environmental Problems

- It is the culture that determines the nature at present rather than the nature determined the culture in the past (Beck, 1992)
- Importance of cultural notion of dirt or pollution in solid waste disposal & water pollution in upper Mahaweli catchment areas (Mahees & Silva, 2011)
- Endogamous marriage, dowry house & extended family & culturally and religiously sensitive urban neighborhood affect the ecological system
- Environmental awareness and attitude which are based socio-economic factors of a society are influential on the positive and negative change of environment (Mahees & Silva, 2011)



# Gender and Environment

- Women have become the guardian of the environmental movement all over the world (Mies & Shiva, 1996)
- Women are influential in determining and consuming goods which indirectly have impact on environmental change in Sri Lanka, (Mahees, Sivayoganathan, Basnayaka, & Silva, 2008).
- It is the women who hold higher degree of environmental attitude and engage in environmental socialization process and control the environmental behaviour of children (Mahees & Silva, 2011)

## **Politics and Environmental Change**

- More political influence on construction which is found to be directly linked with many ecological crisis. Political favoritism and corruption disturbs proper SWM & conservation of Mahaweli River (Mahees, Sivayoganathan & Basnayaka, 2009)
- Conflicts among the institutes and legal barriers to protect environment. And informal mechanisms are powerful than formal institutes in Sri Lanka
- Water politics and ethnicization of environmental problems in Sri Lanka (ecological terrorism, environmental discrimination)
- The patron client political power relationship based on democracy is found to be a leading factor in violating environmental rules and regulations against protecting natural resources in Sri Lanka (Mahees, 2012 & 2013)

# Concluding Remarks

- Awareness, attitude and collective actions in terms of environmental change is significant
- Social classes and life style of people crucial in determining environmental change.
- The consumer cultural including symbolic consumerism is influential on the future environmental crisis.
- The factor of gender has to be fully utilized for sustainable environmental management
- The political power relationship from local to global context play vital in determining the environmental change

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