

Article

Acharya Prashant on Wayanad: Unveiling the True Cost of Environmental Neglect



by **NE NOW NEWS**

August 7, 2024 8:45 pm



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On July 30, 2024, Wayanad, a picturesque region in Kerala, was struck by the worst landslide in its history, resulting in over 340 deaths and more than 240 people still missing. The disaster, exacerbated by the failure of AI-based early warning systems, underscores a deeper, systemic crisis that goes beyond immediate tragedy.

Acharya Prashant, a renowned Indian philosopher and Advaita teacher, offers critical insights into the underlying causes of this catastrophe. His reflections reveal that the Wayanad tragedy is not an isolated event but part of a larger, ongoing process of environmental degradation and climate injustice.

A Continuous Crisis

Acharya Prashant argues that the landslide in Wayanad should be seen not as a singular incident but as part of a continuous and escalating environmental crisis. “Was what happened on July 30th not happening before?” he questions. “It’s not a single episode; rather, it is a process,” he states. This process has been marked by relentless deforestation and irresponsible construction practices that have significantly increased the region’s vulnerability to landslides.

Deforestation in Wayanad has been significant over the decades, leading to destabilized soil and increased landslide risk. During the same period, tea plantation areas have also expanded. Acharya Prashant highlights that such environmental degradation is a gradual process, not a sudden occurrence, and has been ongoing for decades.

The Climate Crisis as a Lifestyle Disease

Drawing an analogy between climate change and cardiac diseases, Acharya Prashant emphasizes that both are the result of prolonged poor choices. “Cardiac disease and climate change, both are lifestyle diseases,” he explains. Just as heart disease results from years of unhealthy living, climate change is the outcome of prolonged environmental exploitation. The landslide’s severity, with body parts found scattered and evidence of significant force, underscores the impact of extreme weather exacerbated by climate change.

Disproportionate Impact on the Poor

A significant aspect of Acharya Prashant’s argument is the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities. “The climate crisis disproportionately hits the poor,” he asserts. The Wayanad landslide primarily affected impoverished tea plantation workers and other marginalized groups who have contributed minimally to the climate crisis but suffer immensely from its consequences.

Acharya Prashant points out that the wealthiest 1 percent of the global population is responsible for the majority of carbon emissions, while the poorest 66 percent contribute significantly less. Despite their minimal

contribution, the poor are most affected by climate-related disasters. This discrepancy highlights a severe case of climate injustice, where those least responsible for environmental damage bear the greatest burden.

Flaws in the Current Model of Development

Acharya Prashant criticizes the current economic model that prioritizes GDP growth over environmental sustainability. “Our philosophy is that life is for consumption, and from that comes the thought that GDP is god,” he argues. The obsession with economic growth has led to widespread environmental destruction and societal inequities. This model equates progress solely with increased economic output, disregarding the long-term consequences for both people and the planet.

Spiritual and Ideological Dimensions of the Crisis

Acharya Prashant adds a profound layer to our understanding of the climate crisis by framing it as a spiritual issue. He contends that the climate crisis reflects a deeper existential and spiritual void within humanity. “Climate change is a crisis of human desire to consume,” he asserts. This relentless pursuit of consumption, fueled by a lack of self-knowledge and spiritual fulfillment, exacerbates environmental degradation.

Acharya Prashant argues that true progress involves more than just economic growth; it requires a shift towards self-knowledge and a more harmonious relationship with nature. Addressing this crisis necessitates a transformation in both individual and collective consciousness, integrating scientific education with spiritual self-awareness. “If we want to address the issue effectively, we must combine scientific education with self-knowledge,” he emphasizes.

The Role of Media and Ideological Manipulation

Acharya Prashant also critiques the role of media in perpetuating the cycle of consumption and environmental degradation. He notes that media controlled by affluent interests often promotes consumption as a means to happiness while obscuring the root causes of environmental issues. “The rich have the media in their hands,” he states, pointing out that the media’s focus on consumption and material success obscures the true nature of the climate crisis.

Furthermore, Acharya Prashant argues that a dangerous consensus is developing between billionaires and politicians, who accept climate change as inevitable and see the suffering of the poor as collateral damage. This hidden belief drives a reluctance to address the root causes of environmental degradation and climate injustice.

The Path Forward

To address the climate crisis effectively, Acharya Prashant advocates for a dual approach involving both scientific education and spiritual self-awareness. This holistic approach is essential for correcting our trajectory and achieving a more sustainable and equitable future.

Conclusion

The Wayanad landslide serves as a poignant reminder of the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, economic inequality, and spiritual emptiness. [Acharya Prashant](#)'s reflections highlight that the crisis is not merely a series of isolated incidents but a manifestation of deeper systemic issues. Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental shift in both our economic models and our understanding of progress. Only through a comprehensive approach that integrates environmental, economic, and spiritual dimensions can we hope to mitigate such tragedies and move towards a more just and sustainable world.