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# FORMATION AND ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CORAL REEFS: A CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Coral and coral reefs represent the primitive group of animals from non-Chordata. Analysis of researches on coral reef and their development, diversity and survival threats globally have been carried out. We have identified various aspects of significant contributions these pretty animals ensure. Increased water temperature and mass bleaching events have also been extensively reviewed in relation to the survival of these coelenterates. The interactions between human beings and coral reefs have been thoroughly evaluated. The biological underpinnings and creation of coral reefs, their ecological and economic functions and the urgent issues they face are all deliberated here. This research article endeavours to discuss management plans of these corals in the changing environment and device new strategies for required conservation and restoration efforts.

**Keywords:** Coral and coral reefs, Origin and significance of coral reefs, Diversity, Survival threats, conservation efforts.

## INTRODUCTION

A common name for coral reefs is the "rainforests of the sea" because of their remarkable richness and appearance. They are home to almost 25% of all marine species, even though they make up less than 1% of the ocean floor (Spalding *et al.*, 2001). The most amazing underwater natural formation is a coral reef. In addition to provide the livelihood of millions of coastal communities worldwide, it improves marine biodiversity and ecological functioning. Regrettably, these are the delicate structures in the environment and the creatures that inhabit them are seriously threatened by marine garbage. Marine debris has drawn global scientific attention in the last 10 years as a significant human caused danger to marine ecosystems (Nama *et al.,* 2023). Around 500-million-year-old ecosystem, coral reefs are threatened by human activities such as overfishing, coastal building, invasive species and the climate change. Conservational efforts are essential because 26% of the world's reefs are threatened and 20% have vanished. However, legal systems and socioeconomic factors frequently impede practical deployment. The restoration of coral reefs and marine resources has been aided by effective conservation initiatives, like community and national enforced measures. In Florida, coral reefs generate more than $ 4 billion revenue annually (Riegl *et al.*, 2009).

Coral reefs are essential for maintaining the marine ecological balance and have a major positive impact on both the economic growth and coastal protection. Taxonomically, corals are known as the marine invertebrates of class Anthozoa and phylum Cnidaria. These are colonial animals consisting of thousands of individual polyps, in contrast to many other marine lives. Every polyp is a little, cylindrical creature with a diameter of only a few millimetres. The calcium carbonate skeleton secreted by these polyps forms the basis for reef growth and acts as a protective shell (Barnes *et al.,* 1999; Spalding *et al.*, 2001). Coral tissues are home to microscopic algae known as zooxanthellae, which live in a symbiotic relationship with corals. By engaging in photosynthesis, these algae give oxygen to the corals and organic nutrients they require to thrive, whereas these algae receive carbon dioxide and a safe haven from the corals in exchange. Coral life depends on this mutualistic interaction, particularly in tropical environment with low nutrient levels (Falkowski *et al.,* 1993). Coral reefs, rich in recreational opportunities, are often undervalued in conservation decisions due to their open-access nature. A meta-analysis of 166 valuation studies found that factors like dive site area and visitor numbers explain variation in recreational values, highlighting the need for more economic valuation of these ecosystems (Brander *et al.,* 2007).

**Fig. 1-** Showing the biodiversity of coral reefs. (Source@ Google)

The causes of striking changes in algal cover and biomass on coral reefs, especially in the Caribbean, have been examined in this special issue on Coral Reef Algal Community Dynamics. The impact of human activities like eutrophication and overfishing on algal competitiveness, the transition from coral to algal dominance over the past 20 years has sparked concerns about the long-term future of coral reefs (Szmant, 2001). For more than ten years, coral bleaching, a phenomenon largely ascribed to high temperatures, has been documented. This research communication focuses on the biological and physical aspects of the situation, the mechanisms underlying pigment loss, zooxanthellae and the ecological effects on coral communities. It raises the possibility that rising water temperatures, which expose corals to a harsher environment, are the cause of recurring bleaching occurrences. Zooxanthellae may have photo-protective defences that minimise the bleaching reaction (Brown**,** 1997). The longest-lasting worldwide bleaching events between 2014 and 2016 devastated coral in an unprecedented manner (Hooidonk *et al.,* 2020). From 29% and 50% of the Great Barrier Reef's, coral died in 2016 due to bleaching (Heyward *et al.*, 2013; Hughes *et al.,* 2017). During 1980 and 2016, the average time in bleaching occurrences was reduced to half (Hughes *et al.,* 2018). The most tolerant corals in the world are found in Southern Persian Gulf, however, some of these corals bleach only when the water temperature increases above 35 °C (Shuail *et al.*, 2016).


**Fig. 2-** This photograph illustrates how, in the National Marine Sanctuary of America Samoa, a healthy coral reef turned into a lifeless one between 2014 and 2015. (Source@ Google)

**Procedure**

We performed extensive literature survey work on the topic selected by consulting various sources including journals, books, PDF files, review papers etc. These informations were gathered using various search engines like Google, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Google Chrome etc. Thus, sufficient information was collected on the topic of our concern and it helped lot in assessing and understanding the concept of this selected topic.

**Literature Review**

In terms of geology and biology, living reefs represent a prominent ecosystem that is unquestionably significant in terms of both quantity and quality. Reefs are only found in tropical and subtropical environment, mostly in the western portions of oceans or the eastern trunks of continents. They currently lie between 20° to 30° north and south of the equator. In fact, the term "reef" itself typically conjures up pictures of tropical coral oceans with coral sand islands, swaying palm trees, warm trade breezes and the sound of

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surf crashing against a rocky structure. Living reefs are large like the stony barriers they create. With a surface area of more than 600,000 km2, they currently make about 15% of the entire shallow sea floor of its basin. Reefs can be seen developing on top of volcanic islands and on the shallow shelf next to continents. They demand warm shallow water marine conditions (Stanley, 2001). Coral polyps (tiny structures) are soft-bodied marine creatures secreting calcium carbonate which helps in forming the coral reefs and these represents the intricate and dynamic marine ecosystems. Over generations, these polyps form enormous reef structures by forming massive colonies and drawing calcium and carbonate ions from sea water to form stiff exoskeletons. Reefs are common in tropical and subtropical oceans because of their great need on particular climatic factors, such as moderate temperatures, clear shallow water and enough sunlight (Spalding *et al.*, 2001). Pollution, habitat degradation, overfishing and climate change are all having an influence on coral reefs around the world. It is unknown how these effects will add up to influence the coral reef's ability to deliver ecosystem services globally (Eddy *et al.*, 2021). The idea of novel ecosystems emerged as a result of the shifting make up and roles of numerous ecosystems. Differential species reactions to climate change and other factors are the main cause of certain coral reefs becoming non-coral systems, although species range shifts at higher latitudes. Besides, occasionally introduced species are also contributory factors to the develop the novel coral dominated ecosystems (Graham *et al.,* 2014). Despite being productive and biodiverse ecosystems, coral reefs are under threat from both domestic and international pressures. Food and livelihoods along the sea shore are at danger due to the resultant destruction of coral reefs (Hoegh-Guldberg *et al.*, 2019).

Natural products made from plants have long been regarded as an important source of lead molecules for the development of new drugs. However, due to the intricate chemistry and the fact that the majority of secondary metabolites are present at very low concentrations, it is not always feasible to isolate every single component from a natural extract. Recent years have seen a paradigm shift in the study of natural products as drugs and metabolomics has become an essential technique for analysing hundreds of metabolites from unrefined natural extracts (Salem *et al.,* 2020). Due to their capacity to form distinctive and varied chemical structures, natural products have long been a valuable source of lead compounds in drug discovery. Most of the potentially bioactive natural compounds are lost because of large number of metabolites normally found in natural products and their enormous dynamic range. It works as an unavoidable barrier to drug development programme. In order to overcome the bottlenecks in natural product research, new tactics with holistic approach have recently been proposed, as opposed to the old reductionist methods used previously. The use of emerging technologies, such as metabolomics, is the foundation of this strategy. Without separating active ingredients, metabolomics enables a methodical investigation of a complex mixture, like a phytochemical preparation. This could bring natural product-based medication research back into the spotlight (Yuliana *et al.*, 2011).

Over the last ten years, there has been a lot of interest in the tropical waters of the western Atlantic Ocean, which has led to many important discoveries about the coral reef communities in this area. As a result, certain widely accepted theories related to form and function of reefs require specific revisions, while others need to be supported whether they are useful in future. The studies on close to marginal limits of coral reef formation in the Bahamas and Florida have largely influenced the models of Atlantic coral reefs (Glynn *et al*., 1973). Despite the Great Barrier Reef's prominence, its biotic communities, especially the corals themselves, have not been thoroughly described. The coral taxonomy issues have been addressed reasonably, but very late, to unveil the first step of identifying the shortcomings. We have described here the seventeen coral assemblages that inhabit the main habitat types in and around the central Great Barrier Reef. This habitats under study include the slopes of small reefs that occupy sheltered muddy conditions close to the coast, as well as the wave-swept reef flats of Coral Sea atolls (Done, 1982). The controls of coral distributions and reef slope structures are the main topics of the review related to ecological studies conducted on corals on reef slopes during the past ten to fifteen years. Shallow, exposed, hermatypic, deep and cryptic habitats are identified in the study, with the region between the shallow and deep extremes receiving the majority of attention. Predation, sedimentation, water movement and other early life history techniques and controls are also included (Revie, 1982). In coastal waters, the experiment on effects of nutrient enrichment on coral reefs (ENCORE) was conducted and their degradation was observed due to nutrient enrichment. Similarly, nutrient dynamics and biotic responses on One Tree Island, Australia were studied with a focus on the effects of dissolved inorganic nitrogen and phosphorus (Koop *et al.,* 2001).

Although, growing evidence, related to the recent global destruction of coral reefs, is available, yet the underlying causes are still debatable. In order to separate confounding variables and pinpoint the causes of coral reef community change, we evaluated a sizeable database on the condition of coral reef communities in the Caribbean along with an extensive collection of socioeconomic and environmental databases. Findings showed that fish, corals and macro algae had developed autonomous and overpowering responses to human activities connected to agricultural land use, coastal expansion, overfishing and climate change (Mora, 2008). Recent management techniques urgently require their reassessment in the light of global collapse of coral reefs. Large-scale catastrophes necessitate a significant expansion of management initiatives grounded in a deeper comprehension of the ecological mechanisms behind reef resilience. A foundation for handling uncertainty, upcoming changes and ecological shocks is provided by managing for increased resilience, which takes into account how human activity shapes ecosystems. (Bellwood *et al.,* 2004).

**Coral reef formation**

Due to the combined biological activity of coral polyps and their symbiotic interaction with zooxanthellae (microscopic algae), coral reefs are among the most complex and varied ecosystems on Earth. The establishment of planulae (coral larvae) marks the start of reef formation process. Usually found in shallow, clear and warm tropical waters, these larvae are moved by ocean currents until they come upon an appropriate substrate, like a rocky surface or a submerged volcanic island. The larvae transform into individual coral polyps when they have settled and they start secreting a calcium carbonate skeleton that forms the foundation of reef (Spalding *et al.,* 2001).

The polyp from coral colonies proliferates as genetically identical offspring by asexual reproduction (budding). These colonies grow over time to create expansive and networked structures. The hard, calcium carbonate skeletons, that the dead polyps leave behind, aggregate and strengthen the reef's base. The living corals continuously build upon the dead ones in a process called biogenic accretion, which progressively expands the reef's size and complexity. Depending on the coral species and the surrounding conditions, this growth can be rather sluggish, frequently only a few millimetres to a few centimetres annually (Veron and Stafford, 2000). The reefs have the potential to grow into barrier reefs over time, which create a wall between the shore and the open ocean and are isolated from the land by a lagoon. When a reef grows around the edge of a submerged island, it creates an atoll. The reef keeps growing upward as the island collapses, eventually enclosing a lagoon in a circular configuration. Since these elements are essential to the coral's photosynthetic symbiotic interaction with zooxanthellae, environmental factors including water temperature, salinity and sunlight availability have a significant impact on the formation of these reefs (Darwin, 1889). The buildup of calcium carbonate is also necessary for coral reef formation. To make their calcium carbonate skeletons, coral polyps draw calcium and carbonates from the seawater. These deposits build up over time to create enormous reef structures. These reefs offer vital ecosystem services, such as resources for nearby communities, shoreline protection and habitat for marine life. However, variations in sea level, water temperature and water quality can hinder coral reef growth, making them especially susceptible to dangers like climate change and human activities (Wilkinson, 2004).

**Coral Biodiversity**

The coral biodiversity is being primarily exhibited by its two forms i.e., Hermatypic (hard corals) and Ahermatypic (soft corals). These are essential for varied ecosystems. The fundamental building blocks of reefs are hard corals and these are mostly found in the order Scleractinia. Over the time, their hard exterior skeleton of calcium carbonate (CaCO3) creates the structural underpinnings of coral reefs. As the polyps procreate, these corals gradually but steadily build up new skeletal material. The elkhorn corals (*Acropora palmata*), staghorn corals (*Acropora* spp.) and brain corals (*Diploria* spp.) are the examples essentially required in building the reef and coastal defence (Veron and Stafford, 2000). On the contrary, soft corals including sea whips and sea fans (*Gorgonia* spp.) do not have a hard limestone skeleton, rather, they have leathery and flexible bodies that are held up by gorgonian based internal structures. Despite their ecological significance for biodiversity, soft corals do not play a major role in reef construction, where as hard corals might find it difficult to grow. Further, they frequently flourish in deeper or murkier environments. Although hard corals predominate in reef ecosystems, soft corals give a variety of marine species more habitats and complexity. For coral reef ecosystems to be resilient and healthy overall, hard and soft variety of corals' balance are crucial (Fabricius and Alderslade, 2001; San Mauro, 2010). One of the planet's most productive and biologically varied ecosystems is the coral reef. Sea level fluctuations, geological processes and environmental factors all have a significant impact on their formation and structure. Coral reefs are divided into three main categories: fringing, barrier and atolls.

- **Fringing Reefs**
  The newest coral reefs are known as fringe reefs and they are formed when coral larvae adhere to rough surfaces. They have a shallow lagoon, a narrow flat close to the beach and are impacted by freshwater runoff and sedimentation. They sustain tourism, fishing and coastline erosion prevention (Spalding *et al.*, 2001).
- **Barrier Reefs**
  Older and more established formations, known as barrier reefs, exist by land subsidence or rising sea levels. These are divided by a deep lagoon. They have an offshore distinct lagoon and frequently are included as intricate structures with a high level of biodiversity. They serve as breakwaters, offer home for marine animals and signal changes in the environment (Hopley *et al.,* 2007).
- **Atolls**
  Atolls are made up of coral reefs that border volcanic islands and create a ring around the central lagoon. Due to their low elevation and remote location from continental landmasses, they are susceptible to sea level

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rise. Further, they provide seabird breeding grounds, act as naval habitats and sustain distinctive biodiversity (Abbey *et al.*, 2011).

**Fig. 3-**The largest coral located near the Pacific's Solomon Islands was recorded in 2024 (Source@ Google)

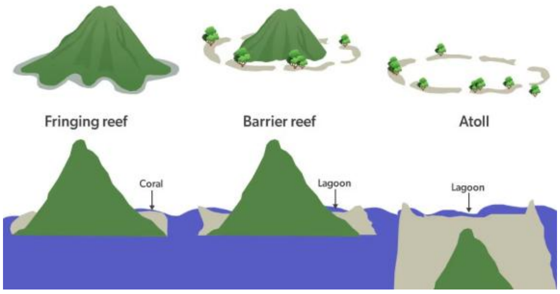


**Fig. 4-** Figure shows the three different types of coral reefs. (Source@ Google)

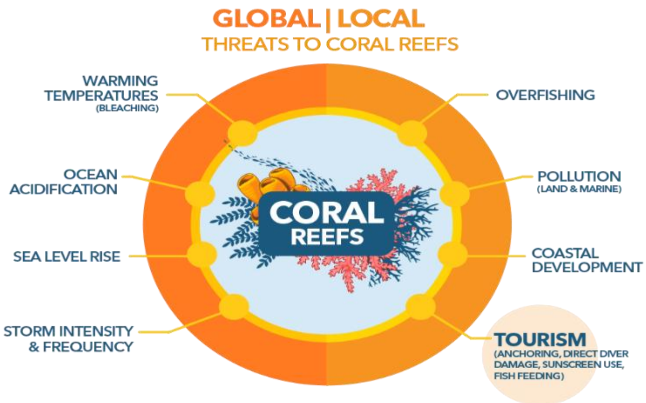


**Fig. 5-** showing various threats to coral reefs. (Source @ Google)

**Fig. 6-** showing corals reefs impacted before and after bleaching (Source@ Google).

**Significance of Coral and Coral Reef**

Coral reefs are of immense ecological, economic and social significance, and form complex, biologically rich ecosystems that support a disproportionately large share of marine biodiversity. Although coral reefs cover less than 1% of the ocean floor, they provide habitat for about 25% of all marine species, serving as critical breeding grounds, nurseries and feeding zones for a vast array of fish, invertebrates and other marine organisms (Plaisance *et al*., 2011). Their intricate three-dimensional structures, formed by coral polyps secreting calcium-carbonate skeletons, makes the physical framework that enables this biodiversity to thrive. Beyond biodiversity, coral reefs deliver vital ecosystem services namely- they act as natural breakwaters that absorb wave energy, protect coastlines from erosion, storm surges, flooding and safeguard human communities living nearby coastal areas (Franklin *et al.,* 2018). Further, coral reefs also underpin global fisheries and food security by supporting fish populations that many coastal communities depend on proteins and livelihoods. Moreover, they hold significant economic value — through fisheries, tourism and recreation and potential biomedical applications from reef-derived organisms. Nevertheless, they contribute substantially to human well-being. Given their outsized role in marine ecology and human economies, modern research in the area of coral reef formation, resilience and decline is essential to devise conservation strategies, understand ecosystem responses to environmental change and safeguard the services these reefs provide for present and future generations (Yuan *et al.,* 2024).

**Interactions between human beings and the coral reefs**

Several assessments on how climate change affects coral reefs address the consequences of ocean acidification and temperature separately. Less attention is being paid on how these interact with one another and with immediate local stressors. The projected synergistic interactions between coral bleaching, acidification and diseases are known to adversely affect the coral survival including growth, reproduction, larval development, settlement and post-settlement development. It is anticipated that interactions with regional stressors including pollution, sedimentation and overfishing would exacerbate the effects of climate change (Ateweberhan *et al.,* 2013). Due to significant fluctuations in sea-level and climatic shifts, coral reefs are seen to get reformed. Reef growth has been uninterrupted for the last 6000 years due to abnormally constant sea levels. However, increasing strains in recent decades have put many reefs at risk of localised destruction. The increase in greenhouse gases, due to anthropogenic interventions, are triggering a new era of global climate change. Reef islands will not be able to withstand the anticipated 4.5 cm rise in sea level every decade, however, coral reefs may continue to stand. Corals will have more space to develop across reef flats as sea levels rise, but as there are no predictable processes for reef island growth to keep up with sea level rise, many low islands may eventually become uninhabitable (Wilkinson, 1996). Over 500 million people depend on coral reef ecosystems, though these ecosystems are quickly disappearing as a result of both local and global issues. With mass coral bleaching documented in 1979, coral dominated reef loss was anticipated at atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations of 450 parts per million. Coral reef systems are extremely unlikely to survive in future oceans, while the precise response of coral reefs is still unknown (Hoegh-Guldberg, 2011). Ecosystems may become homogenised as a result of human activity, favouring groups that are no longer innately linked to their surroundings. A vital starting point for investigating natural biophysical linkages and assessing for human induced decoupling is provided by coral reefs free of local human influences. In order to investigate natural biophysical linkages and identify evidence of human induced decoupling, researchers examined 39 Pacific island and 24 of which were uninhabited while 15 of which were inhabited (Williams *et al.,* 2015). A mix of local and global stresses is thought to be the cause of the global decline of reef-building corals. Nonetheless, many reef scientists believe that isolated reefs, located far from human activity, are typically healthier and more resilient due to local variables. The density of the human population has no bearing on the destruction of coral reefs (Bruno and Valdivia, 2016). Marine ecosystems formed by coral reefs blend the permanent and transient elements of the planet's natural systems. Since, society demands that anthropogenic changes in the earth's ecosystems be predicted and controlled, scientists are very interested in the intricacies of ecosystem structure and function. Political, resource and environmental objectives now place a high premium on ecosystem management. However, as our concept of coral

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reefs frequently concentrates on boundaries and sizes, establishing an ecosystem approach is essential prior to conducting research and managing coral reefs (Hatcher, 1997). Through protective measures, the marine protected areas (MPAs) manage marine ecosystems, especially coral reefs, which are particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change. Although, MPA networks are thought to be better than individual MPAs, stressors may get worse as climate change intensifies. MPAs should be used in conjunction with other tactics, such as nutrient reduction and fishing regulations, to preserve marine biodiversity (Keller *et al.,* 2009). The loss of live coral cover and fish assemblages, which are the most species-dense vertebrate populations on earth, make coral reefs extremely sensitive to climate change. The global bleaching event of Indian Ocean in 1998 impacted the fish populations, coral cover and reef structural complexity across seven nations and 26 latitudes. Coral reductions were followed by changes in the size, variety and trophic composition of the reef fish community. Geographical factors influence the effects but management regime has little effect (Hopkins *et al.,* 2016).

## Threats for survival and sustenance to coral reef

Numerous human activities are endangering coral reefs- the home for a wide variety of creatures. High coral mortality has been caused by natural occurrences like hurricanes and predator outbreaks, as well as by pollution and sewage that contain too many nutrients. Another hazard is the rise in sea levels and greater temperature stress caused by global warming. While human activities led by the greater recreational and commercial use cause major harms, the coral bleaching in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific is because of the global warming (Castro and Pires, 2001). When coral reefs sustain a multilevel trophic structure and grow in favourable water quality conditions such as high light levels, rapid water flow and low nutrient levels, they flourish and offer the best ecosystem services. In recent decades, occurrence of coral mortality due to poor water quality and other man-made stresses has resulted in trophic downgrading and the loss of biological complexity on many reefs (Baer *et al.,* 2023).

Coral reefs exhibit the most amazing and varied marine ecosystem in the world and serve as a vital source of income for millions of people. Surprisingly, the human interventions have adversely impacted the health of reef and add fuel to fire for their global destruction. Sheppard (2021) reported that large number of publications appeared on biology of coral reefs and their capacity to adopt the warming and acidification environment of ocean. Coral reefs, about 500 million years old ecosystem, are seriously threatened by human interventions including overfishing, coastal building, invasive species and climate change. Conservation efforts are urgently required because of the fact that 26% of the world's reefs are threatened to survive and 20% have been vanished. Regardless of the immense need of this ecosystem and its conservation, legal systems and socioeconomic factors frequently impede the practical deployment. The effective conservation initiatives, including community and national enforced measures, have synergised the restoration of coral reefs and marine resources. In Florida, coral reefs generate more than $4 billion annually (Riegl *et al.,* 2009). The future sustenance of coral reefs has been questioned in light of the types of phase changes from coral-dominated to algal-dominated coral reefs that have been observed worldwide during the past 20 years. The coral bleaching is known for large number of coral deaths in a comparable period of time, however, it is not clear how much of the shift in algal dominance is attributable to algae occupying abandoned real estate as opposed to increased algal competitiveness brought on by human activities like overfishing and eutrophication (Szmant, 2001).

## Temperature and mass bleaching effects

The mass bleaching is mainly caused by high temperatures and it then evaporates the water from tissues of reef-building corals and other invertebrates. Thus, lesser zooxanthellae are left in the tissues of the host. Variations in Photosynthetically Active Radiation (PAR) and Ultraviolet Radiations (UVR) worsen this effect. These alterations do not alter the traits of coral gathered during mass bleaching events. Besides, the loss of photosynthetic pigments, the immensely increased PAR and UVR levels can also cause mass bleaching. The corals become decolourised due to decreased salinity.

Further, the lack of widespread bleaching occurrences in the presence of high UVR intensity and typical temperatures raises the possibility that both UVR and high temperatures are at play. Coral bleaching is now a widespread occurrence on coral reefs around the world due to warm thermal disturbances (Donner, 2011).

Coral reefs and the people depending on them are at risk from coral bleaching caused by environmental and thermal stress. This episode has been closely monitored by McClanahan *et al.,* (2007) who examined the bleaching trends and mortality in corals in East Africa between 1998 to 2005, a location where distinct thermal and physicochemical conditions were produced by the interaction of the Madagascar island effect and the equatorial current. The majority of bleaching phenomena occur due to high temperatures, however, sun irradiations are also known to cause bleaching. While reviewing this aspect in global perspective, it is imperative to understand the biological and physical components of bleaching, the underlying mechanisms of pigment loss and zooxanthellae and the ecological effects on coral ecosystems. The assessment of newly collected data on bleaching caused by temperature and irradiance, including long-term data sets that imply the recurrence of bleaching events which could be the result of a steadily increasing background sea temperature. Subsequently, the corals are exposed to an increasingly harsh environment (Brown, 1997).

**Coral reef management**

Sea level rise, floods, droughts and other climate change related events are seriously endangering the lives and livelihoods and causing many people to flee their homes. Even though environmental migration is a global phenomenon, there is a lack of direction on how to handle it under international legal instruments, which puts individuals impacted in precarious situations (Karnicar, 2023). Coral reefs are directly impacted by human activity and climate change, which also has an effect on social systems, ecosystem functioning, populations and individuals as well. Populations, communities and ecosystem functioning are impacted by species-specific reactions as well as changes in physiology, behaviour and reproduction. The goals of management techniques are to minimize the adverse effects, encourage constructive reactions and preserve community resilience. It is well known that they give other organisms a place to live. Further, corals are known as the vital ecosystem engineers. Frequent bleaching and coral reef collapse can alter reef function and decrease fish biomass, abundance and species prevalence (Harvey *et al.,* 2018). Individual performance, trophic linkages, recruitment dynamics, population connectedness and other ecosystem processes will all be impacted by climate change for coral-reef fishes. The most direct effects of coral bleaching will be a reduction in variety and modifications to the makeup of fish communities. While many other species will show long-term decrease due to loss of settlement habitat and erosion of habitat structural complexity, fishes that depend on coral face the fastest population declines on removal of coral. The physiological function and behaviour of coral reef, fishes will be impacted by rising ocean temperatures, particularly in their early life stages. (Munday *et al.,* 2009). Both direct human stress and climate change pose a hazardous effect on coral reef ecosystems. The physicochemical environment that reefs currently occupy will change due to climate change, leaving only a small number of areas suitable for reef settlement. Early detection of these areas could support conservation initiatives and guide the transplantation of specific coral species or groups (Freeman *et al.,* 2013).

Conservation and restoration of coral reef

Due to the difficulty of natural reef recovery from anthropogenic stress, active restoration of denuded coral reef regions has received a lot of interest in the last decade. The restoration activities globally are considered as a significant tool for reef rehabilitation. Direct coral transplantation, in situ and ex situ coral nurseries and the use of nubbins for mass coral colony formation are examples of advancements in coral reef restoration. Molecular biochemical instruments, 3-D structural consideration and substrate stabilisation are examples of novel technological techniques (Rinkevich, 2005).

Climate change, overfishing, pollution, coastal development, coral bleaching and diseases are all contributory factors for the degradation of coral reefs around the world. Active restoration becomes crucial in places where an ecosystem's natural recovery is minimal or if management actions are insufficient to protect it. More than 400 reef restoration specialists, companies and civil organisations came together in 2018 for the Reef Futures conference, which inspired them to either find alternative solutions or restore coral reefs (Bayraktarov *et al.,* 2020).

For conservation and restoration initiatives, it is essential to comprehend their formation. Important services that coral reefs offer include habitat for commercially valuable fish species, protection of the coast from erosion and storm surges and revenue streams from tourism and fishing. Additionally, because many reef creatures produce chemicals with anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and anticancer characteristics, they offer potential biomedical resources. However, in addition to local stressors like pollution, overfishing and harmful land-use practices, coral reefs are experiencing increasing risks from global climate change, which includes rising sea temperatures and its acidification. Reef damage and coral bleaching are caused by these processes at a startling rate. To lessen damage and encourage recovery, initiatives like the creation of marine protected zones, coral restoration initiatives and developments in coral resilience research are being undertaken. In the end, local conservation efforts and extensive global action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and fight climate change are necessary for the survival of coral reefs. Millions of people throughout the world rely on healthy reefs for their livelihoods, food security and coastal safety, so protecting these special ecosystems is essential for marine biodiversity as well.

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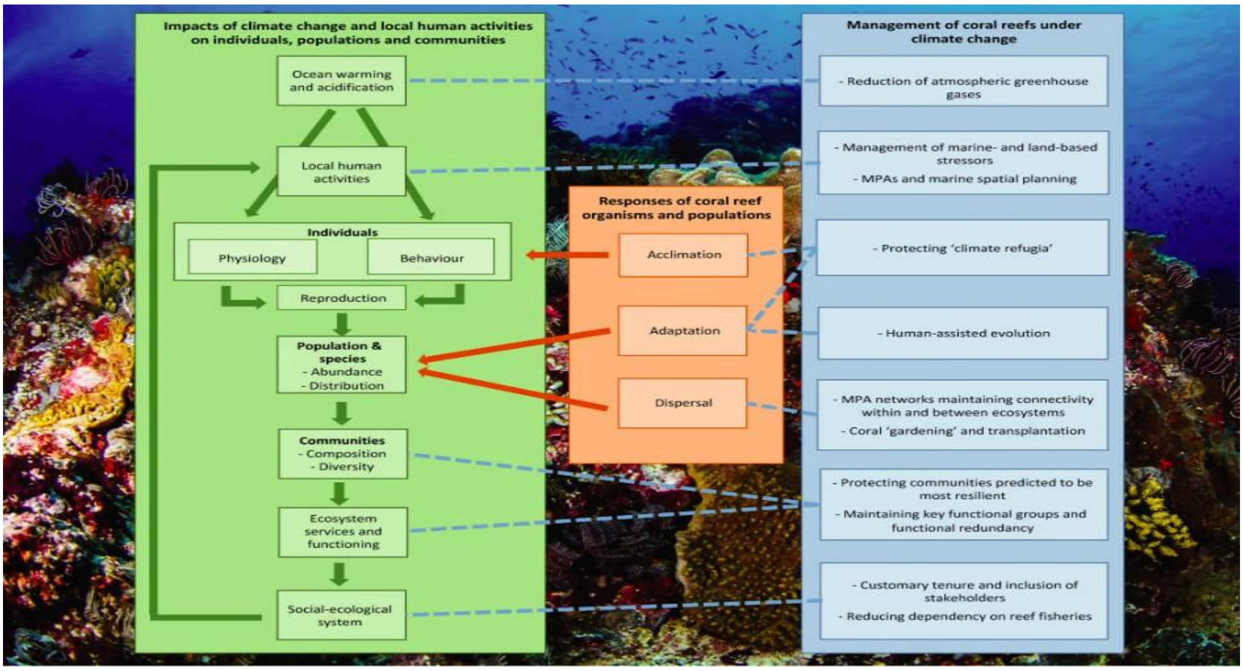


**Fig. 7-** Figure shows the impact of climate change on the coral reefs. (Source@ Google)

**Fig. 8-** Conservation and restoration of coral reefs. (Source@ Google)*

**Concluding remarks**

The vital symbiotic relationship between the corals and zooxanthellae algae sustains the formation of coral reefs and the environmental factors like light, temperature and water quality significantly affect to them. These factors enrich the biodiversity of reef ecosystems. Regardless of making up to less than 1% of the ocean floor, coral reefs are one of the planet's most productive and diversified natural systems serving as home to about 25% of all marine life. Their socio-economic worth is comparable to their ecological significance. Coral polyps and zooxanthellae form coral reefs, which are essential ecosystems that flourish in tropical marine conditions with low nutrient levels. They safeguard the coast, promote marine biodiversity and present chances for medical research.

Pollution, human exploitation and climate change pose risks to them. Despite their significance, pollution, ocean acidification, climate change, and unsustainable human activity pose existential risks to coral reefs. A thorough understanding of coral reef formation and their biological roles is crucial for successful conservation and restoration. Additionally, they act as natural breakwaters, safeguarding coastal areas by reducing wave energy by up to 97%. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that 70% to 90% of coral reefs may vanish if global temperature increases by 1.5°C. Coral reefs, rich in calcium carbonate, sustain 25% of marine life and generate $375 billion annually. They lower coastal wave energy by up to 97% and serve as breeding sites for hundreds of marine species. Coordinated initiatives bridging scientific innovation, environmental policy and community involvement are essential to the conservation of coral reefs. Over 70% of the world's reefs are in danger of collapsing due to climate change, coral bleaching, ocean acidification and human activity; 90% are at risk of doing so if global warming rises above 1.5°C. To protect these important marine ecosystems, international conservation efforts are urgently needed.

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