

Editorial

Ecosophy, the wisdom of the household, it seems to me, must vary within the limits of human capabilities, from household to household. Thus, while Gaia has overarching wisdom and laws (*nomos*) that pertain throughout the greater household, each division of the greater household has subsets of laws and concomitant wisdom. Each ecosystem has its own wisdom contained within the greater wisdom.

Forests, parklands, jungles, deserts (both hot and cold), estuaries, littoral areas, etc. all have inherent laws and wisdom. Traditionally, humans living in ecosystems learned, to some extent or other, how to accommodate the limits and changes of that place and time.

Others before me have commented that the monotheistic religions seem to arise in desert areas. Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism all emerged in the great Gangetic Plain of India (Bharat). Oddly, China gave humans the only godless religion (Chan) which, in Japan, became Zen. Traditional societies have variations, ecologically correct for the ecosystem that we group as shamanism. The Mahabharata (Great India) is the collected household wisdom (ecosophy) of Bharat.

In this issue and following in Vol. 25(2), we (my co-editor Swarnalatha Rangarajan) and I present the best ecosophical work emerging from the great traditions of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and other traditional sources of wisdom.

Swarna and I have been working on these issues for almost a year. I am personally delighted with the diversity and quality of the materials submitted. In reading and editing, I have learned more about this continuing tradition than I would have thought possible. I am also delighted to have acquired a new colleague and friend in Swarna. She is a consummate scholar and is much more diplomatic than I in dealing with questionable submissions. She has a keen eye for helping edit materials that aren't quite up to snuff when received.

I suspect that Arne Naess, who read Sanskrit in the original, would be quite pleased with these special issues.

The remainder of this editorial is in Swarna's words. Heed them well.

Michael T. Caley, Associate Editor
TrumpeterAE@shaw.ca

"Let noble thoughts come to us from every side"- The Rig Veda 1-89-i

The seer of the Rig Veda, the oldest wisdom text of India, recognized the need to invite and integrate the flow of wisdom from all corners of the globe. This *Trumpeter* special issue was likewise willed and welcomed into being by my friend and colleague, Michael Caley.

The ancient Indian worldview conceived of all life on earth as belonging to one extended family; "Vasudeva Kudumbakam." The earth was personified and revered in the Vedas as the benevolent Mother, Devi Vasundhara, the source of sustenance and the ground of all being. Hymns like the Prithvi Sukta from the Atharva Veda extol this sacred and primary bond between the earth and her inhabitants that is manifest in the cycles of birth and death. In addition to the religious significance, these texts clearly emphasized the interconnectedness of all life and the striving towards a greater common good; "sarva bhuta hita" (welfare of all beings). The concepts of *dharmā* (which can be loosely translated to mean both personal and social responsibility and the righteous path which upholds the social and moral fabric) and *karma* (action which unfailingly leaves a consequence in its wake) find a place in all major Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

Today, India's environmental concerns mirror the worldwide crisis — deforestation, polluted water sources, displacement of tribal peoples by dams and mines, climate change, increasing population to name a few. Gadgil and Guha comment on the internal fissures in the Indian society and assign the entire population to three categories namely omnivores, ecosystem people, and ecological refugees.¹ Hence an adequate

response on the part of religions, namely the articulation of a clear code of environmental ethics, is one of the greatest challenges of the times.

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who coordinated a series of conferences and publications exploring the relationship between world religions and ecology note, “The world’s religions in all their complexity and variety remain one of the principal resources for symbolic ideas, spiritual inspiration and ethical principles. Indeed, despite their limitations, historically they have provided comprehensive cosmologies for interpretive direction, moral foundations for social cohesion, spiritual guidance for cultural expression, and ritual celebrations for meaningful life.”²

Movements like the Chipko Resistance have successfully affirmed the spiritual value of nature and made use of religious songs and epic narratives to emphasize the value of the forest. Arne Naess was inspired by the ecologically aware life of M.K. Gandhi who showed an untiring adherence to *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence), *niyama* (rules of right conduct) and the spirit of Hinduism’s *Sanatana Dharma* (The Eternal Law). Gandhi’s sensitivity to the environment stemmed from his spirituality as this small anecdote illustrates. A close disciple who merely needed three to four neem leaves was in the habit of breaking off the entire twig. Pained to see this Gandhi remarked: “This is violence. We should pluck the required number of leaves after offering an apology to the tree for doing so. But you broke off the whole twig, which is wasteful and wrong.”³

India’s sprawling, diverse geography has brought forth vibrant ecosophies. A fine example of this is the Bishnoi tribal community of the Thar desert of Rajasthan, which aggressively fights for wildlife and environment protection. Nearly two centuries ago, a woman from the community, Amrita Devi, along with 366 men died while protecting the Khejda trees (*Prosopis Specigera*) which were ordered to be felled by the Maharaja of Johdhpur for the construction of his new palace. The dharmic codes of this community were laid out by the 15th century reformer Guru, Jambeshwar Bhagwan, who was disillusioned by the communal riots that erupted between Hindu communities and Muslim invaders. The community buries its dead (in sharp contrast to mainstream Hindu tradition of cremation in order to prevent unnecessary felling of trees to provide wood). The Bishnois regard the antelopes and the black bucks that abound in the region as their own children and game hunters are severely punished. In the water-starved deserts of Rajasthan they create tanks in their fields during the hot summer months to provide water for the deer. The Bishnois are a

vibrant example of how man can live in harmonious terms of non-exploitative existence with the most demanding aspects of nature.

Environmentalists like Anil Agarwal recognize the immense potential in religions like Hinduism but at the same time call for a reform within mainstream traditions.⁴ In most Indian religions the duties and obligations of the private sphere are very clearly demarked whereas in the public domain these lines get blurred and are often chaotic. Hence Ganga, the holiest of rivers, also remains the most polluted holy river in the country which today carries household and city waste in addition to uncremated bodies. Hence an imaginative revisiting of the country's rich cultural resources in the areas of literature, art, medicine, religion, philosophy to formulate a holistic Ecodharma is the need of the hour. Swami Vivekananda, who brought about a renaissance in Hinduism proclaimed, "The gift of India is the gift of religion and philosophy, and wisdom and spirituality."

We invited submissions from a diverse spectrum of writers with the hope of capturing the kaleidoscope of India's cultural traditions and philosophies.

The major objective of this special issue of the *Trumpeter* was to arrive at a deep understanding of:

1. Dharmic Ecology: the Indian environmental ethic that emerges from the mythological diversity of Indian religious traditions and the darsanas (systems/schools of philosophy) of various orders which contemplate the relationship of man with his universe.
2. The understanding of Prakriti (nature) in the Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain traditions and the representations of the five basic elements (the Panchamahabhutas) in Indian art and aesthetics.
3. Rituals of embedded ecologies which explore the complex relationship between the natural and cultural world.
4. Oral traditions of tribal communities and the ecological consciousness embodied in their primary myths and rituals.
5. Gandhian philosophy and the implications it has for an ecologically sustainable world.

The responses are so encouraging that we are planning to bring out an additional special India issue sometime later this year.

The cover page of this issue was painted by artist Jyoti Sahi who connects the mystic and esoteric symbols of art drawn from various wisdom traditions to the concept of the Thirta Yatra (Holy Pilgrimage). Sahi forges a significant link between biodiversity and cultural diversity and identifies Marga (the way) as an inner place of meeting where traditions flow and fuse into a sacred space where the universe is perennially recreated.

The theme of the pilgrimage is continued in Satish Kumar's *Earth Pilgrim*. This poignant and powerful narrative drawn from the author's personal experience reminds the reader that "every journey is a journey to connect with people, to connect with the planet and to connect with oneself." The essay offers a spiritual perspective on sustainability and brings home the truth of the Upanishadic maxim, "Isa vasyam Idam Sarvam" (Everything is pervaded by the Divine).

Ananda Wood's essay calls for an investigation of the ancient sciences of India like Ayurveda, which conceive of the environment as a living energy. These sciences offer a non-dual perspective in which all nature's energy is seen as expressing consciousness. These old sciences question the very notion of individual separate existence and point towards a knowing that is free from "the bias and distortion of our physical and mental partialities."

Klaus Klostermaier's essay also emphasizes the need to formulate a new science which does not mechanically apply its laws to a nature that is assumed to be inert, but a "... science with a conscience; a science that is not the thoughtless and soulless application of mechanical laws on a supposedly inert nature, but a science that has become sensitized to the reality of a living nature, aware of non-material dimensions of reality, and conscious of consciousness." The essay identifies the sources of the new ecological dharma as a continuation of the Indian notion of dharma and hails self-finding and self-expansion as the core of a sound ecological dharma that can uphold a sound society.

Kerry Little's essay explores the various dimensions between religion, politics, and ecology and the complex arguments about social justice and sustainable development in the case of dams being built on sacred rivers. Drawing on religion and mythology of the Lepchas, the narrative is a vivid description of how "the intimacy the Lepcha activists share with nature forms the context for their protest." As in the

Narmada controversy, the damming of the sacred river Teesta in Sikkim involves domination and modification of nature and governmental exercise of power on nature and people. The essay offers interesting insights into “the sacred as a political narrative.”

According to ancient Sanskrit poetics, for a work of literature to qualify as an epic (a Mahakavya), it must describe nature in great detail. Not surprising the major Indian epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are closely associated with the forests. Paula Richman in her interview talks extensively about the ecological dimensions of the *Ramayana*, the multiple depiction of the forest in these epics and the complex ways in which the wilderness trope is presented in the epics. The interview offers perspectives on the ecofeministic retellings of the epic and the interpretation of prakriti (nature) in these new stories which affirm the woman-nature connection.

Swarnalatha Rangarajan’s paper on mandalic consciousness also re-emphasizes the Indian worldview of the non-divisiveness between the perceiver and phenomenal world. Using the Sri Chakra as example, the paper discusses the deep experience of relational fields and higher gestalt perceptions which open up when the relationship to the centre is grasped: “The return to wholeness heals the mind and is mirrored macroscopically in healing the planet.”

Srinivas Reddy’s poem uses the metaphors of music and painting to invoke the concept of lila (divine play) arising out of bliss. The *Demiurges* in this case are the five elements who work tirelessly to fashion the raga of the universe. I quote, “Space is the canvas, / Water, Air, Fire and Earth the colors/ for the painting of the world.” Fullness and harmony inform the gestalt of web of inter-being.

Michael Caley and I are delighted to present this rich selection of environment-centric writings about India. I would like to thank my friend Michael for his unflagging encouragement regarding this special issue. We enjoyed working on it together and hope that the insights of this issue will trigger its own set of positive karmic reactions in the oikic self and the larger home of the earth in which we all dwell.

Swarnalatha Rangarajan
Guest Editor

Notes

¹ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha. 2007. *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. London: Routledge, 4.

² Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. 2000. Series Forward. *Hinduism and Ecology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, xviii.

³ Vinay Lal. 2000. "Too Deep for Deep Ecology," in *Hinduism and Ecology*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 204.

⁴ Anil Agarwal. "Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet Its Ecological Crisis?" in *Hinduism and Ecology*, ed. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 165-179.