

## Editorial Volume 25 2 – The Trumpeter

This is the second of two special issues about deep ecology and ecosophy in India (Bharat). I am delighted, once again, to share the editorial duties with Swarnalatha Rangarajan of the Indian Institute of Technology Madras.

“Ecologically, it is the ongoing investment of each participant in the process that sustains the habitat, with often the failure of any one element being significant enough to threaten the symbiosis of the system. The habitat facilitates the process only by deferring to the importance of each element within it. From this perspective, the system is merely a function of the flourishing of each participant, with the importance residing in these constituents. In fact, with each participant being a holograph of the system, there is no super-ordinated system at all, but only the associated living of the participants.

On the other hand, the thriving of each participant is dependent upon a conducive (rather than a controlling) environment that allows for uninterrupted growth. It is this positive absence of control that is vital to sustaining the system. Less is indeed more”. [Roger T. Ames & David L. Hall DaoDeJing *Ballantine* 2003]

I quote Ames & Hall to show that the submissions in these two issues are part of a millennium old tradition that was developing in many parts of Asia and has developed in other areas of the world, as well. In the West, we seem to have lost the traditions of ‘enough is enough’ and ‘less is more’. Perhaps these submissions will help some of us regain those precepts.

My good friend Swarna has the last say, in this editorial.

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*“Contests over water and fisheries, grazing lands and commons, city spaces and mountains are a feature of twenty-first century India, as much as if not more than they were of the century just past. Often there is disagreement on what constitutes a resource and for whom... By 2025, if not a little later than that, more Indians will reside in town, city and megalopolis than in the countryside for the first time ever in any millennium of history. The planet may be at a turning point in human-nature relations. What happens in India will have deep, long-range consequences for the entire planet. These will concern all who breathe air on the earth and walk its lands. The sheer biological endowment of India and the numbers of people in it would count in any environmental audit”<sup>1</sup>*

This apocalyptic forecast points a warning finger at a hoary civilization which has lost sight of its traditional oikonomics- the household wisdom which taught the art of living harmoniously in this world. The ancient Indian vision of geopiety envisaged a cosmos governed by *Rta*, the law of harmony, which subtly balances the dynamic holarchy of the universe right from the vast galaxies to the tiniest atom. In this world-view man does not stand apart but is yoked by *Rta* in a relationship of inter-dependence and inter-relationship with nature. *Rta*, as an impersonal underlying order and regulator of all life on earth, is the animating principle in the network of connections between the various species that constitute the biotic community. Neglect of the smallest link in this intricate network was believed to cause untold damage to the collective fabric of Prithvi, the Earth Mother. The integral bond between humans and Nature, embedded in the *Ritu Chakra Mandala* - the flux of seasons, the alternating wet and dry spells, and regularity of the cosmic order - is celebrated and emphasized through sacred ritual, art and architecture. *Rta*, which literally meant “the course of things,” spelt out the right path for all things from the natural to the moral order and laid the foundation for the concept of Dharma. Obedience to the natural laws was seen as sacred duty in the geographically diverse subcontinent which offered all types of ecosystems. Conservation, therefore would mean “a state of harmony (*rtam*) with land, forest, waters and natural environment.”<sup>2</sup> The balance of the five primary elements was considered indispensable for the correct functioning of nature and the world. The *Divyavadana*, a

compendium of Indian Buddhist narratives written in Sanskrit, proclaims that there are *devatas* (divine beings) for everything: gardens, forests and jungles, trees, river *sangams* and everything else; but the deva's main duty is to see that the laws of Rta are not broken.<sup>3</sup>

The cosmocentric tribal traditions of India also exhibit an intuitive awareness of this underlying order of harmony. Humans are considered to be an integral part of nature because these tribal traditions believe that there is no ontological difference between man and the rest of creation. Man's superior claim to knowledge is not accepted since primordial knowledge is believed to be transmitted to man from birds and animals.<sup>4</sup> Tribal groups claim their origin from one specific element of the *panchamahabutas*. For instance, the Bhuiyans (derived from *bhumi*, land) associate themselves with earth and the Birhors (derived from *bir*, forest) with forest elements. The representation of the *panchamahabhutas* in oral traditions of India has shown that, "different categories of people- the hunter-gatherer, the fisher, the farmer, and the pastoral transhuman- visualize, more or less, the same basic pattern of the universe."<sup>5</sup>

Awareness of the sacramental aspect of all life forms was the distinguishing feature of ancient Indian culture. Austerity was seen as a supreme virtue and the less one possessed, the greater was the respect accorded. Sundarlal Bahuguna, a pioneering leader of the Chipko movement and an ardent Gandhian, used to point out that *sadhus* and renunciates were given greater respect than the rich and the powerful in the ancient Indian society. "Why is it that hermits were respected in our society while kings were not? " Because one whose material needs

are less will take less from nature.”<sup>6</sup> Three major ecological principles from the Indian tradition that will help to replenish the ravaged, weary earth are *yagna* (sacrifice), *dana* (giving) and *tapas*(self- control).<sup>7</sup> These principles found expression in Gandhi’s life and philosophy which deeply emphasized the connection between the environment and the individual’s way of life. Gandhi’s concept for *swaraj* was a clarion call for greater self-rule and self-restraint which he believed would pave the way for a non-violent economy. “It is a fundamental law of Nature,” he wrote, “that Nature produces enough for our wants from day to day; and if only everyone took enough for their own needs and nothing more, there would be no poverty in this world.”<sup>8</sup>

The second special issue on Indian ecosophy presents a variegated mosaic of the dynamics of *Rta* in the diverse philosophical traditions and cultures of India. It has been a great pleasure for me and my friend, Michael Caley to bring them together.

P.Kanagaraj’s essay drives home the point made by environmental thinkers like Vandana Shiva about the importance of preserving local knowledge systems “which have been conquered through the politics of disappearance, not the politics of debate and dialogue”<sup>9</sup> by the globalizing dominant system. The essay studies the religious practices of tribal communities like Todas and Badagas which help in floral, faunal and habitat preservation and highlights how the traditional local communities of Western Tamil Nadu “by promoting nature worship have promoted an ecologically sustainable livelihood model all over the world.”

Aidan Rankin's essay on Karmic ecology explicates how "the Jain view of karma, and karmic reduction, is a spiritual counterpart to the Platform principles that form the basis of modern ecosophy or Deep Ecology." The essay offers a nuanced reading of the concept of karma from the Jain point of view to explain how consciousness of the subtle power of karma opens to us a range of choices about how we organize our lives. It offers an interesting introduction to common concerns between Jainism and environmentalism by highlighting the Jain theory of many-sidedness (*Anekantavada*) which is an antidote to the one-theory approach of the conventional either/or western paradigms and the ensuing development machines that have led to the present day environmental degradation.

Sachchidanand Mishra's essay on *Advaita Vedanta* illustrates the truth of the ancient Sanskrit saying, " *Ekam Sad Vipraa Bahudhaa Vadanti*"- " Truth is one, the learned call it by various names." The essay explores the various facets of the philosophy of non-duality and offers insights into how *Advaita Vedanta* "may provide a beautiful and firm ground to the eco-philosophical thoughts" by comparing the concept of *Sarvatmata* with Naess's larger ecological Self.

Kiyokazu Okita's essay on Vaishnava Vedanta proposes another philosophical model from the Vedanta schools. The essay provides an in depth perspective of the concept of Prakriti (nature) as a potency of *Brahman* (the infinite, transcendent reality), thereby providing an ecosophical view that is both "world-affirming and non-dual." The paper argues that the metaphysical

understanding of nature offered by the Vaishnava Vedanta School is closer to the non-dualist thinking of Gandhi, which later inspired Arne Naess.

Murali Sivaramakrishnan's essay on the integral philosophy of Sri Aurobindo gives a comprehensive picture of the holistic view of the Vedic vision that recognizes difference and unity at the same time. The essay resonantly illustrates that "we continue to exist in a million dimensions all at once, here and now, It is the consciousness that would make all the difference." It brings home to the reader the wide span of the Vedic vision where a harmony is forever maintained by the play of complementarities in which the spiritual is not prioritized at the expense of evading the material.

Kalpana RJ's essay discusses the non-violent, compassionate ecology of Gandhi as a "practical expression of both political and economic mode of living that can co-exist harmoniously." Gandhi had a multifaceted understanding of the term "environment" and believed that a healthy ecology requires one to respect the homologous web of relationships between religious, socio-economic and natural processes. The essay situates the Gandhian values of *satya (truth)*, *ahimsa (non-violence)*, *swaraj (self-rule)* as the essential building blocks of an ecologically sustainable world which would reduce the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots."

Kamesh Aiyer's essay on dharmic issues in the *Mahabharata* reinterprets the events of the epic using an ecological lens. The essay look at the various social policies embedded in the text of the epic ranging from male infanticide, irrigation-based agriculture, and cow protection to caste and

the rights of forest-dwellers. The essay argues that “the Hindu religion, whether it evolved gradually or developed in response to crises embodies practices that made for cultural survival for three to four thousand years and overcome many crises.” The essay calls for the formulation of a new dharmic code, in response to India’s present environmental crisis, which would address the long-term problem and the short-term urgency as well. The author notes that these new codes of action would make the success of the long Indian religious experience relevant to the Deep Ecology enterprise.

Pushpa Naidu Parekh’s poem weaves together a tapestry of images which explore the rhythm of subtle and complex relationships between the cultural and natural worlds. The rice flour designs of the kolam art which adorn the thresholds of temples and homes in India are designed to invite Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, into the households. However, there is also a more significant purpose to this art - providing sustenance to the birds, ants and insects in the neighbourhood. “One of the purposes of the kolam is to fulfill the dharmic code, to feed one thousand souls every day.”<sup>10</sup> Parekh’s poem traces the contours of a personal memory through the vistas of time and these luminous lines remind the reader of the vital earth-human connection:

a white shadow  
of ancestral song  
scripted on earth

like footsteps  
of gods  
stepping  
through her threshold.”

Healing the planet involves a course correction at many levels, both gross and subtle. Ancient texts and sutras in the Vedas and the Buddhist wisdom literature speak of a trichiliocosm- a three-fold universe comprised of the universe of matter, the universe of mind and ideas and the even vaster universe of spirit and unmanifest potentialities.<sup>11</sup>

These contributors to the two special issues have taken into account the vast inscapes of the trichiliocosm and have offered what the Buddhists refer to as *upaya-kausalyas* (skillful means) to redress environmental harm. I thank them all.

I would like to specially thank my friend Michael Caley for inviting me to guest edit these two special issues for the Trumpeter. His steady encouragement and vision helped the issues to flow in an unbroken *Rta*.

Swarnalatha Rangarajan

Guest Editor

## References:

<sup>1</sup>Mahesh Rangarajan. 2007. *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*. New Delhi: Pearson Longman, xx-xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Madhu Khanna. 1995. "Nature as Feminine: Ancient Vision of Geopietty and Goddess Ecology." In *Man in Nature*: Vol. 5. Ed. Baidyanath Saraswati. New Delhi: D.K.Print World, 104-116.

<sup>3</sup> M. Vannucci. 1995. " Common Roots for Transfer of Culture." In *Man in Nature*: Vol. 5. Ed. Baidyanath Saraswati. New Delhi: D.K.Print World, 225-243.

<sup>4</sup> Baidyanath Saraswathi. 1995. Introduction. In *Prakrti: The Integral Vision* Vol.1  
New Delhi: D.K.Printworld, 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> qtd. in Ranchor Prime. 1994. *Hinduism and Ecology*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p.96.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.72.

<sup>8</sup> *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*. 1935. New Delhi: G.A. Natesan & Co., p. 384.

<sup>9</sup> Vandana Shiva. 1993. *Monocultures of the Mind*. Penang: Zed Books, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Vijaya Nagarajan. 2000. “Rituals of Embedded Ecologies: Drawing Kolams, Marrying Trees, and Generating Auspiciousness.” In *Hinduism and Ecology*. Eds. Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 453-468.

<sup>11</sup> Dean Brown and Wenden Wiegand. 2002. *Cosmic Laws: Patterns in the Universe*.

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