

Editorial

THE CRY OF THE EARTH: Religious Perspectives

The commonsense view that there is human-induced climate change is confirmed by scientific evidence. The cry of the earth results in the cry of the poor – human beings and other species who are unable to adapt to the fast-changing climate. As the Earth is our only home, it is uniquely precious for all beings in the world – human, living, and non-living beings; but human beings, from a religious perspective, are *homo custos* with the additional responsibility of preserving and protecting this uniquely delicate and precious home. The disastrous effects of climate change and environmental degradation are not just scientific and economic problems but, more importantly, moral problems, and religions could contribute to promoting a sustainable planet for the benefit and well-being of all. It is a sad fact and an ethical issue that unjust inequalities exist within and among the nations between men and women, urban and rural, adults and children, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, netizens and non-netizens, etc. It is also true that disadvantaged groups suffer disproportionately from the disastrous effects of climate change, increasing subsequent inequalities in exposure, susceptibility, and ability to cope with the ill-effects of climate change and environmental pollution. We cannot lead a happy and prosperous life on a sick planet.

As rational beings, we know that we are part of the problem; as moral beings, we should take responsibility for our common home and be part of the solutions. It is, therefore, a moral imperative and religious responsibility that we develop an integral ecology, bringing together all the fields of knowledge, economic, and political powers protecting and promoting the integrity of creation as an antidote to the omnipresent technocratic economic paradigm with the 'use and throw away' culture driven by a market economy and short-term electoral goals of politics. The economics of more is detrimental to the well-being of the Earth and the earthlings, including human beings. As moral agents, we can no longer treat

the planet as a source of our consumeristic pleasure and sink for the waste we make through our unsustainable living. From a religious point of view, human beings are caretakers of the Earth and all who are living in this common home in collaboration and solidarity with all. We are responsible to God, fellow human beings and the creation. Our lives are rooted in nature, extended to the community, and guided by and oriented to God.

Our planet and the diversity of life it supports are under severe duress because of present consumption-driven lifestyles and various economic development projects. Focusing on the sustainability of the planet, the Preamble of the Global Agenda 2030 says: "We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations."

The Global Agenda 2030 is a response to the cry of the Earth, especially through the Goals – Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Life on Land (SDG 15). These are aspirations and action plans to mitigate the effect of anthropogenic impact on the planet, support the needs of the present and future generations, and keep People and the Planet alive and healthy. We are in an unenviable position where we can quickly destroy our planet through nuclear weapons and slowly through ever-increasing industrialisation processes.

Sharing the sentiments and commitment of many religious believers and all those who care for people and planet, Pope Francis wrote in his *Laudato Si – Care for the Common Home*: "our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother. ... This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her" (1-2). We cannot afford to leave the Earth's natural resources to those who have the technology to exploit them and the money and resources to purchase them. The unique position of the human species lies in the contested fact that only human beings contributed to climate

change and the certain fact that only they are capable of bringing positive changes. It is not only a matter of 'can' but also about responsibility. To this effect, only human beings can articulate an ethics of climate change and undertake obligations to act accordingly.

According to one Biblical tradition, the first human being is created from the Earth. The name of the first man, Adam is related to the Hebrew word for ground, *adamah*. Human beings are earthlings. As it is written in the book of *Genesis*, God formed Adam from *adamah* (2.7) and placed him on *adamah* "to work on it and take care of it" (2.15). Though human beings are from the nature, live by the fruits of nature and when we die, return to it, we carry within them the breath of God; that's what makes human beings living human beings (2.7), carrying the breath/spirit of God. That indicates that we are not merely products of nature; we are custodians of the Earth and other beings on it. In the Biblical story of the first sin, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and hid from him; they turned against each other (3.12), and the work on the ground became hard, and the Earth produced only thorns and thistles "thorns and thistles" (3.18). Instead of bringing blessings on one another and on the Earth, we brought curses. The story continues today; human beings turn away from and against God, fellow human beings, and other beings on Earth. Our common home is in danger, and we are responsible for it.

The Earth belongs to God, and we should "work and take care of it" according to God's plan. Our relationship to that nature is that of creative stewardship. It is given to us to work on it, maintain, and develop. To work for sustainability of the planet is a religious duty. We are called "to work on it and take care of it" for peace and prosperity of people and planet. That's God's Will for humanity.

The role that religion plays in the attainment of the SDGs lies in how it influences certain environmental actions and ethical choices. In their paper, "Nature-Based Religions, Plant Kinship, and Sustainability," Hazel T. Biana and Virgilio A. Rivas argue that modern nature-based religions, particularly, espouse the

interconnectedness of humanity and nature and reverence for Mother Earth. These revived nature belief systems are translated into practices and rituals where a type of familial or kin relationship between human beings and all their inhabitants is fostered. Human relationships with plants, for example, are venues where individuals may meld nature-based solutions and conservation practices. Plant kinship beliefs and plant caring are individual actions that may subsidise the agenda for peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

Word, whether it is known as *logos* or *Vak*, has been assumed by many religious traditions as the source and the agency unifying God, the human, and the world. Yet, the philosophical history that reached a high point with poststructuralism has come to view human language as separate from other realms jeopardising the sense of unity among these spheres. "Ecological Ethics: Language, Religion, and the Problem of the Real" by T J Abraham argues that an integral vision involving everyone is crucial for ecological ethics and a sustainable universe. Human attitude to the non-human realm, exploitative or benevolent, is predicated on the way they textualise the world. Such a textualising enterprise broadly has taken either the representationalist or the dissociative trajectories. Both the approaches fall short in terms of the ecological ethics geared toward a sustainable world. Studies in cognitive linguistics, the philosophical approach taken by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of language and ecological approaches seem to converge on an integral vision which is very close to the primaevial religious vision. Such a vision is germane to a sustainable eco-centred life, as much as it offers theoretical rigour for engaging the non-human sphere.

"Being One with the Planet: Experiencing the 'Sacred' in a 'Secular' Mind" by Hari Narayanan V. traces the current unprecedented climate crisis to human alienation from nature and argues that human/nature dichotomy is concomitant with the sharp psychological boundary between the self and the world. The ways of looking at nature and the world are a function of our attention, implying that it is possible to regain the lost connection with the planet by rewiring the ways of attention. At least some

mystic experiences can be understood in terms of different ways of attention, and this suggests that it is possible to experience unity with all that exists even without entertaining any supernatural beliefs.

Arya M. P. and Betsy Paul C. explore religious ecosophy as one of the viable reparative means to the present global environmental crisis in their paper, "Sustainable Development Through Religious Ecosophy: A Case Study of *Tau Kaavu*, Kerala." The paper critiques Lynn White's criticism of Western Christianity as bearing the moral burden of anthropocentrism, which led to the ecological emergency, and traces the ecologically-aligned history of Christianity, especially from the latter half of the twentieth century to the present. Guattari's and Naess' notion of "ecosophy," Thomas Berry's ideas on "eco-spirituality," and Madhav Gadgil's conception of the "sacred groves" are used to form the theoretical framework for the arguments put forth here. Locating the formative influences of *Tau Kaavu* in the inter-religious frameworks of Kerala, the paper projects it as an example of religious ecosophy and eco-spirituality that also caters to the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 envisioned by the United Nations in 2015. The significance and scope of the article lie in exploring the prospects of ecosophy in regard to global religions that can help produce ecologically allied ideologies and aid sustainable development.

"*Ahimsa* And *Ānṛśaṃsya* Dharma From The *Mahabharata* For A Sustainable Universe" by Bithika Gorai and Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi explores and elucidates two *parama* (greatest) dharmas from the *Mahabharata*, *Ānṛśaṃsya* (absence of cruelty, vileness, and treachery) and *Ahimsa* (non-violence), as means to promote the goal for a sustainable way of living in the world which faces the challenges of a narrow anthropocentric worldview. Having investigated the intricacies involved in violence, non-violence, and just violence with illustrations from the *Mahabharata*, the paper delves into the principle of *anṛśaṃsya* and its practical applicability in real life. The ethical practice of *Ānṛśaṃsya* in action, if transmitted from individuals to the community, can bring positive

changes in the functioning of the world, ensuring the welfare and sustainable prosperity for all.

Human beings' moral understandings and accepted social roles are located within a community's central epistemological, metaphysical, and cultural paradigms. "When the Ganga Descends: A Posthuman Exploration of a Religious Myth toward Planetary Sustainability" by Dona Soman and Renu Bhadola Dangwal explores the Ganga myth's trajectory from the ancient belief systems to its manifestations in the contemporary world of ecological catastrophe. The ancient myth of the river Ganga and her descent to the Earth's surface tends to overcome the human-nonhuman dichotomy underlining the posthuman idea of patterns of continuity. Through mythical representations, narratives like *Ma Ganga and the Razai Box* bring forward negotiations on species interconnection, environmental ethics, and sustainability issues. The paper examines how holistic worldviews propagated by Indian mythology inspire reverence, reciprocal partnership, sustainability, and responsibility towards planetary development and well-being.

Acknowledging with gratitude the researchers who responded to the vision of a sustainable world and investigated the interface of religion and development for the well-being of people and the planet, and sharing the hope that all of us will take decisions for a sustainable future for all, may I submit this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* on "Religion and Development for People" for your reading, reflection, and action.

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