

Editorial

ENVIRONMENT AND LITERATURE

In our days, even when we live and enjoy the benefits of science and technology, there is a growing awareness that the quality of life is progressively declining and the world peace and even the very existence of life on earth are threatened by lifestyles that lead to the plundering of natural resources for the benefit of the individual, society and humanity in general at the exclusion and exploitation of the rest of the reality, living and non-living. We cannot afford to forget the simple truth that we live, move and have our being in a network of relations with matter, microbes, plants, animals and other human beings and greater truth that the network of relations is constitutive of our forms of life. Though as human beings we have our unique identity, we form part of the universe with the rest of the world, who are not strangers or enemies but neighbours and partners without whom human life is impossible.

Ecological crisis is not just a scientific issue to be left only to scientific investigations for solutions. Both humanities and sciences should take into account the fundamental nature of ecology and accept the fact that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we had in the past. We need integrated and holistic visions involving the knowledge of the sciences, wisdom of the humanities and directives of religions. Ecology is to be seen from cosmic, human and religious perspectives. Volume 39 of *Journal of Dharma* is dedicated to Environment and investigates the interface between Environment and Literature, Law, Science and Philosophy in four issues.

This issue on “Environment and Literature” explores strategies through which authors have addressed environmental questions through both the form and content of their works, literary and cultural forms that shaped the ways we see and relate to the environment in which we live, move and have our being. The environmental discourse includes attempts to understand our place in the cosmic scheme and the pragmatic attempt to save the planet. In different historical periods, one or the other generic tendency has been in vogue. Critically examining distinctive literary forms that take an ecological approach to people and nature the workshop introduces a wide array of writers, themes and literary forms that have inspired greater attention to and respect for environment. Literary attention to the environment shows the interface and influence of gender, race, class,

politics, religion, etc. in the character, plot, and setting. How we represent environment can be as much a projection of our own “nature” or “culture” as a reflection of nature and the environment, so we have to explore those projections as we look critically and creatively at the interface of Environment and Literature.

“An Ecology Intervention in an English Studies Programme: Contexts, Complexities and Choices” by Padmakumar M. M. captures the designing of the course for an Honours in English Studies programme at the Department of English, Christ University. Over the past few decades, there has been a critical mass gained regarding the need to engage purposefully with Ecology. Unfortunately, this has not provoked any stimulating work within the Humanities and Social Sciences academia. In fact, alongside growing realisations about the necessity to address Ecology, there is a glaring absence of any significant engagement. In response to such a vexing reality, the Department of English at Christ University chose to initiate an ecological venture within its Honours programme. This paper captures – the vigorous debates it lit up, the tough choices that had to be made, and the promise it offers – that complex journey.

Mathew Chandrankunnel and Pranati Horijan, in their article “Buddhist Ecological Consciousness: A Holistic Continuum!” explore the ecologically significant statements in Buddhist doctrines. Long before environmental disasters made their diabolical appearances and thereby forced us to understand the inter-connection of things, Buddhist teachers knew very well that such insight was crucial for the welfare of humanity. Moreover, the Indian and Chinese Buddhist monks spoke much more than the mere interconnection of the natural world; they included the vital role of the mind too. The article provides an ecological vision based on early Buddhist literature.

In her article, “God Has Signed: Nature, Divinity and Mysticism in the Poetry of Kuvempu,” Abhaya N. B. examines Kuvempu and his poems on the mysteries of nature. Kuvempu hails from the heart of Western Ghats and he spent his childhood and youth exploring the forests around his house. Untrammelled nature was both mysterious and beautiful; hence nature turned out to be a primary inspiration to write poetry. Kuvempu looks outward, seeking to comprehend the oneness of all in nature through his senses. But he is also struck by the inability to comprehend and explain nature through senses. Often he expresses his awe at natural sights such as dawn (which appears to him as a God’s signature) or the greenery of Western Ghats (which seems to have painted everything

in nature in green, including poet’s soul and the blood in the stomach). This leads Kuvempu to resort to mysticism in order to relate, comprehend and sing about nature. He sees in nature the divine presence. The paper will analyze poems such as *Devaru Rujumadidanu*, *Ba Phalguna Ravidarshanake*, and *Prakriti Upasane*, and explore the poetic perception of nature as divine through mysticism.

“Green Writings of Arundhati Roy” by Jaison Jose P. provides an ecocritical reading of Arundhati Roy’s writings, especially, the novel *God of Small Things* and the non-fictional works *Broken Republic* and *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. Environmental concerns run parallel to, or are integrated with, other social and political implications in most of her writings. The paper identifies Roy as an environmental and literary activist who consistently stands for conservation along with her larger concerns of socio-political justice for the subaltern and she can be considered as an environmental justice activist. The paper also attempts to highlight the significance of environmentalism in literature against the backdrop of the enormous ecological threats that the planet earth faces at present.

Gaana Jayagopalan in her article, “Ec(h)o-Narrating Stories: Ecological Thought and Metanarrativity in Folktales,” investigates the ecological discourse constructed in folktales, looking at the relationship between folktales and the human-nature-culture paradigm. By closely examining select folktales collected by folklorist A. K. Ramanujan, this paper looks at the metanarrativity of tales and argues from a narratological perspective that folktales deploy nature metaphors to establish a close relationship between nature, women and culture. This, it is argued, is made possible only in the conservation of stories for, in conserving a story, the message of conserving cultures and their artefacts (an ecological metaphor) is spread. The story is conserved; however, not in hoarding it but quite contrarily in transmitting and letting it go. The paper also critically examines how female subjects, through the use of nature metaphors and symbols of fertility and femininity speak of their consciousness in these ‘woman-centred tales’ in a space characterized by the absence of the Phallic Other but inevitably speak the patriarchal language of feminine inscriptions. Using folkloric research of A. K. Ramanujan as well as ecocritical frameworks, this paper looks at the narratological dimensions of folklore to understand metanarration as a crucial aspect of folklore and ecological conservation. Therefore the lessons of conservation lie not only in the content of the folktales but also in their very *telling*. The ecological aspects in and of the

tale must necessarily be echoed multiple times to enable the tale's transmission, and in effect, their conservation.

“Justice as Cry of the Earth: *The Book of Revelation* in *Shin Megami Tensei – Devil Survivor 2*” by Jeane C. Peracullo explores the apocalyptic themes in a popular Japanese video game, *Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2* by juxtaposing it with *The Book of Revelation*. *The Book of Revelation* is the most widely held epitome of visions and dreams, which is paradoxically about the end, and hope for the salvation, of the world. *Devil Survivor 2* alludes to the biblical apocalypse through the preponderance of sevens. A close reading of both *The Book of Revelation* and *Devil Survivor 2* reveals that suffering is a result of believing that only ourselves matter, when we lack compassion towards other people, including earth, and when we do not hear the cries of those who have been robbed, and left to die, by the roadside. Justice for earth is construed as the end of suffering that marks a “new heaven and a new earth.”

The current issue of the *Journal of Dharma*, thus, presents a collection of articles that looks into the interface between “Environment and Literature” in a variety of literary works. Have an enjoyable and fruitful reading!

Jose Nandhikkara, *Chief Editor*