

Editorial

PLANETARY ETHICS DURING ANTHROPOCENE

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Greta Thunberg dared the world leaders at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York on 23 September 2019, "People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight." This is a wakeup call for all: the "fairy tales" actually result in the cries of the poor People and the sick Planet Earth. The Earth, the common home for all humans and other living beings, is in danger due to the anthropogenic Great Acceleration during the industrial revolutions. Driven by the powers of science and technology, human interventions and innovations in the last century paved the way for the extinction of many species, and put into jeopardy the very survival of the Planet. Paradoxically the very human beings who strive for the advancement and betterment in everything are also capable of destroying fully their common home, the Earth.

As a result of the tripling of human population post World War II and the exponential growth of human needs fed by fossil fuels, neoliberal market economy, international trade and travel, and electronic media, increasing number of people and species suffer and die. Many species are extinct and many others are on the verge of extinction, and we are entering into the Anthropocene era. Consumption driven production lifestyles of human beings results in over harvesting, habitat loss, desertification, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, etc. Human consumption of goods and resources of the Planet and the dumping of anthropogenic wastes are beyond the capacity of ecosystems. This is not only a scientific and economic problem but more importantly a moral problem – a matter of intra-generational, inter-generational, and intra-species injustice. Human beings as moral beings must take innovative steps for a vision and mission of a planetary ethics – an ethics that cater for the well being of all human beings, other living beings, and future generations.

We need a planetary ethics for sustainable development promoting prosperity and peace of the People and the Planet.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 Targets with 232 indicators adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 is a response to the cry of the people and planet for prosperity and peace. The UN Resolution notes that “We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives” (United Nations, 50). The Resolution calls for a Planetary Management to end poverty and to save the planet from extinction and to promote intra-generational and intergenerational justice: “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” (United Nations, “Preamble”).

The purpose of the proposed Planetary Management is basically for the prosperity and peace of the People and the Planet is considered our common home and we need to effectively manage it basically for the survival and well-being of human beings. The Planetary Management mission is envisioned especially through the five SDGs – 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 ensure intra-generational and inter-generational justice, mitigate anthropogenic impact on the Planet, support the needs of the present and future generations, and keep People and Planet prosperous and peaceful. Setting limits to our greed and considering the needs of our fellow human beings, other living beings, and ecosystems, let us live sustainably individually and globally remembering the ancient wisdom that our Planet is on loan from our children, rather than a gift from our ancestors.

Anthropocentric worldviews place the material wealth and biodiversity for human utility and pleasure. According to a Theanthropocosmic vision God created the cosmos and all the beings in it, and human beings are entrusted with the care for the earth, the common home for all earthlings, who are inextricably interconnected and interdependent (Nandhikkara). A Planetary Ethics that follows the Theanthropocosmic vision values the material world and the biotic

community having intrinsic values and moral rights as they are created by God. Human beings with moral rights and responsibilities are entrusted with the care of the species, especially those who suffer the most and are in the danger of extinction because of the actions of human beings. As the Earth is our only common home, it is uniquely precious for all beings in the world – human, living, and non-living beings; but human beings as *homo custos* have the additional responsibility of peace and prosperity of this uniquely delicate and precious home. The fact that the damage is done by the human forms of living, and only we have the knowledge of the workings of the Planet and means of sustaining the planet, we are morally responsible for correcting our ways of living with a Planetary Ethics.

According to this vision, climate is a good that is common to all common good, and the disastrous effects of climate change are not just scientific and economic problems, but more importantly a moral problem. It is not only a sad fact but also a persistent 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. Moreover, the disadvantaged groups suffer disproportionately from the disastrous effects of climate change, increasing subsequent inequalities in exposure, susceptibility, and abilities to cope up with the ill-effects of climate change. As rational beings we know that we are part and cause of the problems and as moral beings we should accept the responsibilities and be part of the solutions. It is therefore a moral imperative that we develop an integral ecology and planetary ethics, bringing together all the fields of knowledge, economic, and political powers as an antidote to the omnipresent technocratic paradigm and the 'use and throw away' culture. As moral agents, human beings are caretakers of the earth (*homo custos*) and all those who live in this common home, in collaboration and solidarity with all. We are morally responsible to God, fellow human beings, and to the creation as such. From the Theanthropocosmic vision and the ensuing Planetary Ethics the option for the poor People and the poor Planet is an ethical demand.

COVID-19 has given us a clear indication of the vulnerability and fragility of modern life and the modern world; it has also taught that we can overcome planetary challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst –

one Earth and one health. The global pandemic and climate change cannot be separated from hunger, health, education, migration, war, employment, and development. Though as human beings we have our unique identity, we also form part of the universe with the rest of the world, who are neither strangers to us nor our enemies but actually our neighbours and fellow partners on this planet without whom the sustenance of human life is impossible. We need a Theanthropocosmic vision to embrace and expand our worldviews to include more and more the natural world. We cannot afford to leave the natural resources of the earth to those who have the technology to exploit them, and money to purchase them. Together with science and technology, humanities, social sciences, traditional knowledge, philosophical wisdom, and religious traditions contribute to the prosperity and peace for People and Planet. Investigating these sources of knowledge, this issue of the *Journal of Dharma* includes eight articles that show case the inter-connections of the prosperity and peace of People and Planet.

In the first article, "Exploring Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-Caring in *Uttararāmacarita*," Praha Shankar Dwivedi analyses and appreciates the skilful use of ethics and aesthetics as tools for prompting the care and concern in humans for non-humans and their surrounding environment in an eighth-century Sanskrit play *Uttararāmacarita* composed by Bhavabhūti. The playwright, having known the fact that Rāma and Sītā are immensely revered, deftly appeals to the ethos of the reader and audience for respecting the ecosystems. Bhavabhūti portrays Rāma and Sītā worshipping various phenomena of nature with a motive of creating equal reverence in the heart of people worshipping Rāma and Sītā towards nature so that a sustainable society could be created where nature remains revered and consequently unharmed.

In "Beyond Nationalism in This 'Era of Disaster': Setting a New Relationship for a Sustainable Future," Yi-jin Park and Byeongjin Kim analyse the post-apocalyptic narratives in general and Kōbō Abe's *The Ark Sakura* in particular as environmental crisis discourses and suggest a vision of SDGs from the standpoint of ecological criticism. This literary imagination of apocalypse and disaster plays a role as a tool for self-reflection and warning against the absurdities of reality, while at the same time presents alternatives and solutions for a new vision for the future. This is a strategic worldview that deals with the

disasters and the destruction of people and planet, as well as a lesson to be taught by ecological writing for a new future society.

The paper "Affective Geographies and the Anthropocene: Reading Shubhangi Swarup's *Latitudes of Longing*" by Gaana Jayagopalan is a critical reading of the affective and emotional geographies imagined in the "Islands" plot-line of Shubhangi Swarup's novel *Latitudes of Longing* (2018). By creating an ambient poetics to negotiate human and non-human interconnectedness, the paper demonstrates the strength of novelistic traditions and their potential to generate an idea of affect that is transcorporeal. Swarup's use of fiction is critically used to generate an ecoaesthetics that leads to a more informed ethical action towards recognizing the interconnectedness of living and non-living forms that create sustainable ecologies.

In "Intersectional Environmentalism: Toward an Indigenous Peoples-Inspired Planetary Ethics" Hazel T. Biana and Virgilio A. Rivas look at the Indigenous Peoples' agenda through the lens of intersectional environmentalism and its underlying ethics of transcorporeality, broadly reflecting an ecofeminist disposition. With 85% of the Philippines' key biodiversity areas located within ancestral domains, the country's IPs' struggles exemplify a more balanced and sensitive approach to planetary sustainability, thus the need to support and expand IPs' planetary ethics.

Lekshmi Ramakrishna Iyer analyses the significance of a cross-cultural dialogue in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030, specifically SDG 6 and SDG 12-15 which directly aim at sustainability of nature and the planet in "A Cross-Cultural Dialogue to Save the Planet: Realizing Sustainable Development Goals 2030." The long tradition of cultural and ethico-religious values, typified as Earth Values, help in fostering global-local relations and the transformation of a political community around global ethics. The paper investigates how value systems can give a good ethical momentum in ethical decision-making and sustainable action plans.

The purpose of the paper, "Gaia and Earth Justice: Earth as a Natureculture for 'Harmony with Nature'" by Ji-Yeon Im and Yunho Seo is to explore the possibility of a sustainable earth of the UN SDGs Planet agenda through Gaia theory, and to criticize and supplement the theoretical foundation of earth jurisprudence from the secularized Gaia perspective. The ethical direction of earth justice for 'Harmony

with Nature' can be found through the combination of Gaia theory and earth jurisprudence.

The SDG 14 of the United Nations underlines the urgent need to conserve marine resources and give equal rights to people in all countries to enjoy these resources. The essay, "Sustainable Approach to Life in Water: Science and Ethics of the Oceans" by Suma Sarojini and Saranya Jayaram highlights the enormous number of ways in which oceans have helped humankind, the serious threats the oceans are facing now, and how best we can have a sustainable approach to halt the total crashing of our great ocean systems.

The final essay, "Environmental Sustainability and Christian Theology" by Fuxing Ren, Jun Wang, and Rohin Vijayakumar investigates the ecological interface of Christian religion as an example and uses deep ecology and similar views to explore a new relationship between human and nature. In today's world, where human beings as a society are moving towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, religious ecological care takes prominence to understand the way human ethical values and beliefs affect the way we approach problems as serious as the ecological crisis, and to observe the concatenation between the People and Planet aspects of the SDGs.

Acknowledging profound gratitude to all the scholars and researchers who investigated the SDGs in relation to the Planet and with 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 "Towards Sustainable Societies: Planet, Ethics, and Development" for your reading and reflection.

References

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