

***Editorial***

**ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS**

**Adverse Impact of Religion, Economy, and Politics**

*Journal of Dharma* is published from Bangalore, a city located in south India. Bangalore was known as the Garden City of India, both for its salubrious climate and an abundance of trees and large stretches of gardens maintained within the city limits. I arrived in this city, as a university student, in 1985, and had the fortune of experiencing the glories associated with the Garden City. Over the last 20 years, Bangalore has undergone a sea-change by the migration of millions of people from different parts of India and abroad. As more and more people are flowing in, as more and more employment opportunities are generated, especially in the IT-related segments, the city also has become quite different from what it used to be. More and more water-bodies are vanishing everyday; in fact, the handful of water-bodies that still remain face extinction in the context of rapid developmental activities. Gone are the days when you would see varieties of magnificent trees on both sides of every road; though the old gardens can still be located, they too have become less attractive due to the increasing levels of pollution and contamination of soil, water, and atmosphere. The practice of taking a refreshing walk through the city roads is almost impossible as the vehicles plying through Bangalore roads have skyrocketed over the last 10 years. Further, the Bangalore weather has undergone tremendous change; indeed, it has become warmer and almost unpredictable! Is this peculiar to Bangalore alone? No, not at all! In fact, the sketch I have tried to draw about Bangalore, indicating a lot of distortions with regard to the landscape and weather, people and their lifestyle, would be shared by almost all cities, though the degree and extent would be different in specific cases.

What has happened to Bangalore, however, is an indication of what is happening elsewhere in the world, and the changes that we experience here are heralds of what is in store for humanity. India, in general, or its southern part, in particular, boasts about its religious ethos and large following of practising believers. Almost everyone living in Bangalore has adherence to one or another religion, with a large majority belonging to Hinduism. In spite of the religious allegiance of the majority of Bangaloreans, these religions seem to be having almost no impact upon the changes that are taking place in the life and surroundings of the people. While the politicians

and the bureaucrats continue to be immersed in large-scale developmental works (as it has turned out to be the most lucrative business Bangalore has ever witnessed, in the name of which nature is butchered and large amount of public funds are unjustly siphoned out by the self-styled but 'democratically' elected custodians of Bangalore development) that has adversely affected the natural surroundings of Bangalore, not many religious heads have come out in the open to call for a change of developmental patterns, or to exhort his/her following to abide by a respect for nature without curtailing the prospects for development and all benefits that accrue from such developmental activities; in effect those who claim to be practising believers are almost untouched by their acclaimed religious foundation when it comes to environmental issues.

A question may be posed: what business has religion got to do with development in Bangalore or elsewhere? Is religion supposed to be an involved party in the issues related to the changing natural surroundings and high-tech developments that bring with it greater wealth and better living conditions? Can't religion be restricted to private domains than intruding into those domains under the auspices of secular and democratic forces? In answering the above queries, I tend to hold that religion is not merely a private affair at all; though it begins with a personal faith affirmation in the case of individuals, it must reach every recess of life, affirming all life-giving and life-enhancing aspects and denying all that is life-threatening and life-denying, whether it occurs in private or public domains. Religion being a view and a way of life at the same time, it should reach out to all domains of life, in a very special way, inspiring and animating every religious person to lead a life conducive to the integral co-existence of all, living and non-living, sentient and non-sentient.

In fact, we are confronted with a cluster of interlocking problems that surround our nature and threaten the very matrix of life, the future of humanity, and survival of the universe. In the name of development and modernity indiscriminate methods have been adopted by many in handling the natural resources. Although the available renewable and non-renewable natural resources are limited, the present generation, the world over, is blissfully ignorant or careless about it, and tends to behave as if these resources could be indiscriminately exploited to serve present purposes. The

clarion call from many concerned individuals and organizations<sup>1</sup> for initiating and maintaining a sustainable development is still unheeded both by private individuals and national governments.<sup>2</sup> Many of the developmental practices, and the accompanying political strategies adopted by multi-national business corporations and governments seem to be quite insensitive to the nature and natural habitats of millions of species that maintain the balance of life on earth. Indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources in the name of economic development is so widespread and is carried out under the protective shield of the ruling political parties. Although the situation is almost beyond the control of one or another individual or organization, it is the need of the hour that these issues are squarely faced and controlled through a definitive plan of action.

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<sup>1</sup>The “Rio Declaration” (1992) has finally agreed upon the following statements: (i) People are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature, (ii) Development today must not threaten the needs of present and future generations, (iii) Nations have the right to exploit their own resources, but without causing environmental damage beyond their boundaries, (iv) Environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process, (v) Eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in living standards in different parts of the world are essential if we are to achieve sustainable development whilst meeting the needs of the majority of the people, (vi) Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, (vii) The polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution, and (viii) Sustainable development requires better scientific understanding of the problems. Nations should share knowledge and technologies to achieve the goal of sustainability.

<sup>2</sup>Response of George W. Bush, the president of USA, on the “Kyoto Environmental Summit on Global Warming (December 1997),” is quite revealing. Although it was accepted after a lot of lobbying among different member states, Bush administration abandoned the Kyoto Treaty. In doing this, Bush declared: “I will not commit our nation to an unsound international treaty, that will throw millions of our citizens out of work. Yet we recognize our responsibilities.” Cited in Tapan Biswal and Manish Kumar, “UN Environment Programme: Rio, Johnesburg and After,” in *Human Rights, Gender and Environment*, ed. Tapan Biswal, New Delhi: Viva Books, 2006, 399. Interestingly, a treaty that is welcomed by almost all member states is rejected as ‘unsound’ by the US, precisely on the ground of adverse impact upon their economy; adverse impact upon the climate emerges as a secondary concern. This adamant posture indicates that anything that would challenge the present lifestyle and industrial practices would be rejected without any further thought.

In the context of developmental issues and the resulting environmental concerns, the South and North are again at loggerheads. The call for restraint in development emerging from the Northern countries, specifically addressing the Southern economies, is many a time rejected as insensitive to the needs of the latter.

The most industrialized nations of the world have produced enough CFCs [Chloro Fluoro Compounds] to generate dangerous holes in the ozone layer of the atmosphere, with deleterious effects on the health of the entire world's plant, animal, and human population... The poor and developing nations around the world (primarily in the global South) attempt to satisfy their rights to development as the rich, industrialized nations (primarily in the global North) call for environmental protection against the same development practices that they themselves invented and used for decades and which introduced much of the environmental degradation we see around the world today.<sup>3</sup>

It is a fact that the North has realized the adverse impact of development only after having attained a greater growth rate over the last two centuries, and in achieving this growth rate they were involved in indiscriminate business practices in which the natural resources around the globe have been exploited beyond any reasonable limits. The nations in the South, however, have started off only quite late in this race for economic growth – with an *unrealizable* goal of the economic and living standards of the North – and are looking forward to quick bucks by accessing most of the resources left untapped by the North, but in the South. The ‘enlightened’ North, then, begins moralizing the whole situation, and critiques every industrial practice of the South without, however, sharing the know-how or nature-friendly methods of development. In fact, while discussing a lot of issues from the developing world, and making those nations responsible for the same, many affirm that all such practices must be stopped; however, no word is directly mentioned about the developed nations, which have already contributed most to the environmental crises that we face today; they have already made their road through development – of course, at the cost of the nature and other economies. As they lament about the present attempts of

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Figueroa and Claudia Mills, “Environmental Justice,” in *A Companion to Environmental Philosophy* (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy Series), ed. Dale Jamieson, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 426.

the developing nations to stand on their feet, it should naturally provide an ambience to question and challenge the apathy that many developed nations (especially its irresponsible governments) have been exhibiting to initiate corrective measures. All these nations, whether in the North or the South, do lack political will to adopt alternate modes of development without endangering the whole creation. It is already accepted on international level that the polluter should be accountable to the pollution, and should be made to bear the cost of rectifying the situation. This must be enforced even if it would require a reversal of a lot of developmental activities as well as 'developed' habits and lifestyles of peoples, both in the industrially developed and developing countries.

The destruction of environment that we witness today has begun long ago, along with industrialization of almost every field, including agriculture. It was a sudden surge and a leap into the future: from the limited and apparently innocent practices of a village craftsman and his shop, humanity was making leaps into mechanized production units and aggressive distribution systems. As the volume of production was increased and the extent of distribution enlarged – both for the sake of better profits – industrialization began to eat up the chunk of nature and natural resources. Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' rationalization processes have led humanity to this high-paced industrialization, through which technological and economical efficiency was made to be the imperative of human achievements. As this slogan was spread to every facet of human existence, ranging from the things of everyday need to the most sophisticated electric and electronic gadgets and precision instruments, factories began to incorporate many an environmentally insensitive practices. They adopted certain methods of tapping on to the available sources of raw materials without any thought of replacement; they adopted no sustainable processes of waste management; they concentrated only on efficiency in production – both qualitatively and quantitatively – and the ensuing increase in profit. At a time when industrialization became so fashionable in the now-industrialized world, it was the right of everyone who had the necessary capital and the know-how (and, of course, the much needed political patronage) to involve in any business practice indiscriminately, if that would produce goods of consumption effectively, meaning higher quality goods in a cost-effective manner. One of the consequences of this indiscriminate industrial practice is the objectification of nature.

Nature, which had been a terrifying swarm of deities at one time, a partner in human endeavour for 10,000 years, became at best a simple warehouse of “raw materials,” “resources,” ripe for exploitation, and at worst a cowering adversary ripe for destruction. The century that gave us “science,” as the method that turns everything into value-neutral objects, finally reduced all approaches to nature to a simple utilitarian (some times called “positivism”), which completed the depersonalization of nature.<sup>4</sup>

Although there are many other ways of seeing and approaching nature, an industrially motivated people – generation after generation – adopted a mode of objectifying nature for convenience and utility. This has led to certain behavioural changes among human beings, as they began to interpret everything in nature as something to be controlled and used to fulfil human wants and desires.<sup>5</sup>

Every realm of human living is infused with a world view of dominion over nature. This is particularly visible, for example, in the contemporary business practices. The emphasis in business is on an increase of profit or the shareholders’ wealth, which is usually attained through aggressive business practices primarily centred on the exploitation of natural resources, mostly acquired at the lowest possible investment. In the competitive world of international business practices, the environmental damages are hardly treated in realistic terms, but are mostly treated as contingencies or externalities that cannot be avoided if successful business is to be conducted. As the career prospects of the involved individuals and the profit for the whole of business would significantly depend on their ability to utilize every possible resource, everyone is directly or indirectly forced to continue to exploit nature to the maximum extent. Nature is taken

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<sup>4</sup>Lisa H. Newton, *Business Ethics and the Natural Environment*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2005, 5.

<sup>5</sup>Surprisingly, it is claimed that human beings, though only one of the millions of animal species on the earth, consume almost 40 per cent or more of the total resources available; and, as the years go by, the amount is on the increase. If this is the case with regard to human consumption, it is impossible to sustain such practices, as these resources are limited in quantity. Moreover, it must also be realized that the high rate of consumption will have its adverse consequences on other species, especially because human beings are taking from the share of every other form of life as well. See Peter Vitousek, Paul R. Ehrlich, Anne H. Ehrlich, and Pamela Matson, “Human Appropriation of the Products of Photosynthesis,” *BioScience* 36 (1986).

to be a bounty to supply all needed raw materials, and as a dumping ground of all that is considered to be waste once the designed product is made. The aggressive business strategy adopted by many business corporations can be sustained only if all the involved parties boost the earnings, constantly moving on an upward graph.

If the above example is taken in all its seriousness, we understand that the degradation taking place within the nature is fundamentally based on attitudes, perspectives, or the world views adopted by individuals. As it is stated by Skolimowski, “contaminated minds produce, almost of necessity, contaminated environments.”<sup>6</sup> The present status of our environment indicates that there is widespread flaw in the human handling of nature as a whole, resulting in its destruction and contamination at extensive levels. Indeed, individuals as well as groups of people are to be held responsible for almost all issues of environmental pollution and the indiscriminate use and the consequent depletion of natural resources. Although, from a moral perspective, individual human persons could be finally held responsible for all these, it may not be possible to exonerate certain key agencies in this regard. It may not be an easy task to list all the involved parties; however, the role of religion, economy, and political agents is of vital importance, as all these three have been directly or indirectly contributing to the ill effects that we experience in our environment. Hence, any search for a solution in this regard has to first take into account how the *unholy alliance* among the above mentioned triple entities has resulted in destabilizing ecological balance, especially in the twentieth century.

A perusal through the sacred scriptures of various religions indicates that almost all of them have originally inculcated a respectful attitude towards nature as a whole. Starting with the ancient scriptures of the Hindus, the Vedas, and the scriptures of the Semitic religions, almost all of them repeatedly portray a symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature, and call forth to maintain the same with human conscious efforts.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Henryk Skolimowski, *Dharma, Ecology and Wisdom in the Third Millennium*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1999, 12.

<sup>7</sup>Koran also attests to the positive mandate given to human beings in ministering to the creation with a spiritual vision infused by Allah: “... He created all, including man. To man He gave a special place in His creation. He honoured man to be His agent, and to that end, imbued him with understanding. Purified his affections, and gave him spiritual insight, so that man should understand Nature,

That is, religions originally had a life vision that was integral and holistic that catered not only to human levels, but also to every sphere of creation, including inert matter (see Col. 1:15-17). However, in the course of time, such a vision seems to have lost its impact. Historically, due to the distortions of religious tenets, almost all religions passed through dark ages, during which not only religious principles and practices were not capable of enhancing the life of their members, but also caused and perpetuated life-negating ambiances. This went to the extremes of justifying any exploitative attempts from those in power, mostly at the pretext of serving and saving the needs of the community. Surprisingly, at this level of religious consciousness, individual persons and various natural elements were almost neglected and manipulated, apparently for serving the interest of the whole society, which was elevated to the zenith of religious practice, mostly by vested interests.

All these dynamics were clearly visible in the development of Christianity in the West and in the adverse impacts on natural environment. Although Semitic religions have a particular pattern of thinking, hailing from their shared roots and world view, devious interpretations of the Christian religious tenets had been instrumental in accelerating the aggressive exploitation of the natural resources. It is true that the Bible considers the world as respectful, as it stands in relationship with God; in fact, human beings are placed in this world as the only possible link between God and the creation. The original vision of creation as portrayed in the Bible projects the presence of human being as one of enabling the whole nature/creation to be itself and to be in communion with God, with the possibility of both human and the nature being sanctified simultaneously. The freedom of human beings that would initiate this process, according to the Bible, hints at human beings as capable of enhancing or condemning the creation, by treating it as an integral part of their existence or as an object altogether separate, thus providing scope for mutual sanctification or condemnation (shareable by the human in relation to the nature). The Christian view of freedom attached to humanity implies a heavy responsibility for the destiny of creation; this responsibility implies not only a passive indifference towards creation, but cultivating deep

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understand himself... For the fulfillment of this great trust man was further given a will, so that his acts should reflect God's universal will and law." *Koran*, "Al Baqarah" Chapter 2.

respect towards it, on the one hand, and an active involvement in preserving and ennobling it in and through their existential presence and activity, on the other.

It is disheartening to note that the high ideal of simultaneous sanctification of human and the nature is lost on the onward march of Christianity, especially as its members were more and more motivated by materialistic concerns. It is a gradual shift from mutuality to exclusivity and exploitation. From the available biblical 'creation narratives', the dominant view, i.e., the view promoted by those in power, conveniently preferred an exploitative theory, according to which humanity is urged to "multiply and dominate the earth." A new theological interpretation of the whole creation story was offered to usher in *dominion* over the whole of nature, implying the *right* on the part of human individuals to exploit everything in nature to their advantage, even if it meant that nature is destroyed irreparably. The religious licence to dominate and exploit nature for the sake of human welfare produces, gradually, the modern almighty economy in the form of capitalism. In fact, all-enveloping dominion and exploitation are inherent to the capitalist economic theory, as it is single-mindedly intent on augmenting the profits, even if that would mean the destruction of everything else. Eventually, these trends have given rise to a technological revolution and a new civilization that is unmindful of the large scale damages done to nature. Unsurprisingly, the religious outlook of Christianity (particularly the Calvinist theory<sup>8</sup>), especially its renewed understanding of the rights of human beings to conquer nature and to exploit every available resource was reinforced by the subsequent theological interpretations of biblical revelation. Even the final seal of salvation was said to be dependent on the success that a person attains in this world: it was understood on par with capitalist business calculations! Though the above referred theological

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<sup>8</sup>Martin Palmer writes pointedly at the Calvinist brand of Christianity that sustained an attitude of exploitation of nature: "This total dismissal of the vast majority of the world meant that Calvinism was a very successful commercial creed. If no one but the Elect – those predestined by God for glory – was of any importance, then you could use and abuse others as much as you wanted. As you were already assured of salvation, it did not matter what you did to anyone else – your salvation was not affected. From this sprang the sort of ruthless, hardheaded business practices which helped the capitalist world become so powerful." Palmer, "The Protestant Tradition," in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Elizabeth Breuilly and Martin Palmer, New York, NY: Cassell, 1992, 93.

interpretation was officially subscribed only by a few Protestant sects, in practice it was shared by many Christians, who were only too happy to open up the new avenues of progress to further their earthly success.

Another factor that had contributed to the degradation of nature is the prime place accorded to the spiritual, and the neglect of the material or natural. Although affirmed as God's creation – which God is said to have found "good" (Gen. 1:31) – the dualistic understanding of reality (affirmed as part of Christian outlook especially through the Platonic-Manichaen theories of Augustine and subsequent 'spiritualisers') had relegated the nature to a secondary status. The primacy of the spiritual, gradually, facilitated a right for every Christian to loath the physical world and to condemn the natural. This world view, coupled with the capitalist tendencies perpetuated in collaboration with the new technologies, in turn, became instrumental in offering complete support to 'tame' the nature for serving the high ideals of the spiritual. It is understood to be a God-given mandate to use the nature and its bounty as human beings wish. This apparently 'affirmative' stand, evolving from a 'spiritualised' understanding of the dualistic world view, has played havoc in Christianity's role in degrading and butchering nature.

It is against this background that we locate (not chronologically) various movements, such as Enlightenment, and modern revolutions, such as French Revolution, American Revolution, etc., paving the way for asserting not only the individual person, but also his or her inalienable rights. Though there were initial suspicion and rejection of such views by religionists, especially those who held the reins, in history we find a gradual acceptance of the Enlightenment values into the life and dogmatic formulations of various religions. Modern interpretations of various sacred scriptures indicate that most of the Enlightenment values are already found in them. Such an attempt to re-orient the teachings of various religions along the line of the primacy of the individual, has simultaneously been complemented by the theory and practice of capitalist market economy, in which the individual's ability to amass as much profit as possible was justified. In the course of time, then, we find many religions supporting the stand of capitalist market economy as the justifiable mode of human life, though its principles seemed to be going against many a section of the human society itself.

Almost at this time we find the free market economy finding inroads into the religiously accepted ways of economic behaviour. The aggressive market trends that were indirectly, at least, backed up by the religionists and the official organs of various major religions in the world tended to push the boundaries of individual rights beyond the permissible limits, stretching them to such extremes as to totally neglect a cosmic vision of life, tending to be egoistic in behaviour and action. One of the catastrophic impacts of this new vision of life along the principles of capitalist market economy has been the unbridled use of natural resources. Even if it were for amassing unjustifiable profits, they had not only an economic justification, but also a pseudo-religious justification, whereby the exploitation of the natural resources continued without any control whatsoever. Nothing needs to be said further as to what is the consequence: social relations as well as ecological relations have been turned upside down, leading to life-threatening practices on the part of human agents and natural calamities and imbalances from the nature.

True, initially, religion was instrumental in helping human beings integrate themselves with nature under the auspices of God or the divine. However, later, certain deviant elements within religion itself initiated an alienation of humans from nature; the natural was pitted against humans in such a way that, finally, they were seen against each other: humans established dominion over nature. This alienation gradually led to yet another foundational alienation: between humans and the divine. Human outcry for total autonomy led the way towards the denial of religion, and the banishment of every religious dimension from human life. These consecutive alienations led humanity to a state of disintegration and disarray.

The speed with which the destruction of nature was carried out over the last two centuries bears witness to the fact that the western civilization has ingrained into it this world vision. The technological craze that is experienced by the contemporary world has its roots in the western thought which wants to control the whole of nature through impersonal instruments that have become the mark of human domination. In fact, generations of western philosophers and theologians (not necessarily Christian believers), inspired by this exploitative model have contributed further in cooking up rational or systematic foundations. The Cartesian dualism, Nietzschean “will to power” (despite his very provocative criticism of the Christian

stand on nature), the Marxian revolution for the redemption of the Proletariat (at any cost), etc., have contributed over the years for re-affirming the western mindset in continuing to subdue and exploit the nature. The widely accepted utilitarian philosophy tended to give momentum to the exploitation originally sanctioned by religions. Among many others, a strong voice heard from among philosophers from the West is that of Martin Heidegger, who insistently called the western civilization to give up the Cartesian model and to return to a new era of 'shepherding' the Being. Care for being, according to him, should necessarily include the whole nature, human beings being only a part of it, though definitely occupying an important role. Such a vision of reality would naturally bring back the western, or an apparently Christian, civilization back on its track. For, "faith, our basic attitude toward life and being, is crucial to how we work and play, how we treat our wealth of resources. If we could develop a faith more holistic, more peace-making, more feminist, more like ancient peoples' sense of Mother Earth's sacrality, we might offer the twenty-first century a new rationale to ease its interrelated crises of world hunger, nuclear arms build-up, and widespread pollution."<sup>9</sup>

In fact, Christian sources themselves are abundant in providing inspiration for such a holistic understanding of nature and reality; what is required is only a re-emphasis, which does not seem to be so easy as the civilization has been glorifying materialistic values against the original integral thrust of the Bible, especially of the New Testament (although in a germinal form). This may be easily traced from the fact that many Christians in the West are said to be officially not practising Christian faith; however, the world view ingrained in their mind does not cease to be different from what was already imprinted on the western psyche in general. Yet, a paradigm shift to reinstate an integral life vision that would mutually accord rightful place to nature and to humanity is the need of the hour.

The negative picture painted above around Christian interpretations and the resulting destructive tendencies in the West, I should say, is not at all exclusive to them; in fact, it is shared by almost all religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, which are acclaimed to be religions closer to nature and nature worship. Ruthless destruction and exploitation of nature have been unleashed in India and other Asian countries where these

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<sup>9</sup>John Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature*, New York: Paulist Press, 1983, 7.

religions are the majority religions. Even the profound doctrine of Advaita (and its realizable goal of oneness of the whole of reality) and the Hindu ideals of *Vasudaiva kudumbakam*, *ahimsa* and *sarvodaya* (non-violence or holistic creative love and the welfare of all) could not motivate the Hindus to accord nature its proper place in human affairs. Although not many critical and objective studies are available as to the negative impact of religious doctrines of Hinduism and other Asiatic religions upon nature, there are scholars like Thomas Derr, who do not spare any religion from the overall critique on religious ideologies being instrumental in effecting environmental destruction:

... if ecological disaster is a particularly Christian habit, how can one explain the disasters non-Christian cultures have visited upon their environments? Primitive cultures, Oriental cultures, classical cultures – all show examples of human dominance over nature which has led to ecological catastrophe. Overgrazing, deforestation and similar errors of sufficient magnitude to destroy civilizations have been committed by Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, North Africans, Persians, Indians, Aztecs, and even Buddhists, who are foolishly supposed by some Western admirers to be immune from this sort of things.<sup>10</sup>

This points to an all-pervasive corruption of religious foundations (brought about by pseudo-Christian practices) and the inability of almost all religions to motivate their votaries to cater to a healthy and integral attitude towards nature. As a matter of fact, it is the onslaught of materialistic and consumeristic orientations resulting in the enthronement of individualism that has brought about the sidelining and downfall of original religious ideals and the total inability of religions to motivate their faithful. This is being accentuated in the contemporary society by industrialization and uncontrolled craving for the consumption of goods without any regard for the sources and other generations who have a right on the available resources.

The next in the unholy alliance that has brought about catastrophic destruction upon nature is the economy and modern concept of development. Industrial development within the matrix of a capitalist economy, which is intent on amassing wealth even through unjust means of

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<sup>10</sup>Thomas S. Derr, "Religion's Responsibility for the Ecological Crisis: An Argument Run Amok," *World View* 18 (1975), 43.

cutthroat competition, has unleashed the insatiable human cravings. By and large, anything and any person is said to be valuable only in terms of its/his/her capability of being 'exploitable'; if one does not fall in that category, it would be considered 'valueless'. As profit generation basically depends on people's desire, their needs and wants, the market forces have come to such a state of even creating certain wants among the people so that industry/market could produce and sell more and more goods that in no way would be needed by many. So, economic market forces that tend to be dictating the needs of the people are basically functioning on manipulative strategies, but with a single goal: boosting the profits. Although at one time people had engaged in exploiting the natural resources for economic purposes, the extent of damage committed today by various agencies in the name of economic development cannot be attributed to ignorance. Having had a rather clear picture of how unbridled developmental activities and insatiable craving for material consumption affects (and would affect) the nature, the contemporary society has reached a point of no return unless natural disasters force them to do so. Even agriculture, which was at one time considered to be a process of participating in the natural rhythm, is being carried out to cater to the industrial greed, and any artificial method of farming would be welcomed without a thought of further adverse consequences. As the needs and wants of the people at large are pampered up, any amount of production does not seem to be enough. It is natural, then, to exploit the nature, which is indiscriminately expected to match up to human greed: nature is the servant of humanity, which shall be controlled by humans to facilitate the fulfilment of their wants. Thus, ultimately, the attitude of religious persons (referred to in the previous pages) and that of the industrialists and the economists runs on parallel lines. Indeed, they are not different, but the same people whom we approach for our analysis' sake from two different angles, that of religion and economy.

However, if the affairs of life and nature are to be set in order, the market economy needs to be freed from the sheer profit motive, and must be brought under the control of reason and common good. Deforestation, exhaustion of nutrients of soil, chemical residues in the soil, etc., resulting from aggressive agricultural practices to cater to the increasing wants of the people around the globe need to be stopped;<sup>11</sup> they do provide convenience

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<sup>11</sup>Entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, indicates that in every energy conversion, any system and its surroundings spontaneously tend toward increasing

to people and profit to the businessmen, but both result in a whole lot of troublesome consequences both for the present and future generations. The present form of capitalist or neo-liberalist economic arrangements unleashes systematic violence against nature's survival which is totally unjust in the way it operates.

Economics must recognize the *limits* of the ecological system. The earth cannot go on producing more and more. The idea of economic growth and development only means an increase in the ability to grab more of the pie: the pie itself cannot get any bigger. More land devoted to cattle for hamburger meat means less land for tropical forests. To enrich oneself at others' expense is unjust and immoral.<sup>12</sup>

Degradation of the environment should become a major concern of all, and the business firms must be forced by the collective will of the people to stop with those business practices that destabilise the natural equilibrium with an anthropomorphic tilt.

The speed with which the affairs of human world are conducted has, for example, undergone tremendous change while the rest of the world functions the way it used to be (like the difference between email and snail mail in the new electronic world of communication). Human manipulation of every segment of nature to suit exclusively the human world has changed the natural matrix and its horizons unimaginably. Globalized economy is instigating every segment of its operation to match the new (astounding) speed, whether it is at the level of capital investment, labour power, tapping of natural resources, or even the conversion of natural elements into commodifiable entities. While the pace of nature and everything in nature continues to be the same, the global market economy seems to be sustainable only at an unnatural (and inhuman!) pace. As speed has conquered human domains (e.g., computing) everything and everyone else who is incapable of coping with the ever increasing speed of the multinational companies (those market giants who, in fact, tend to control every facet of human and natural dynamics through their subtle economic and political strategies) are either being side-tracked or being manipulated.

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distortion. Even environmental-friendly approaches in generating or converting one or the other form of energy must be oriented to low entropy; lest the system will become unstable to such an extent that it will annihilate itself.

<sup>12</sup>Freda Rajotte and Elizabeth Breuilly, "Treatment for the Earth's Sickness: The Church's Role," in *Christianity and Ecology*, 103.

Nature and everything natural fall into this latter category of the mercilessly-manipulated, which are not accorded even the right to exist by themselves: they all are accorded value only in terms of their place within the total market spectrum; if they do not fit into the market economy's scale, they are not even accorded existence!

Our analysis indicates that the capitalist economic orientations are at the root of a lot of problems that haunt the environment. Even after realizing that its economic orientations are leading the creation to its own destruction, its insistence on augmenting profit still presses ahead faster and nature-denying modes of production. Arran E. Gare looks at this phenomenon from a global perspective where any capitalist economic agent is intent on continued exploitative strategies:

Capitalism has evolved into a differentiated system which now envelops the globe, and in this system, massive oppression and exploitation of vast regions of the world by the core zones of the global economy are inevitable. Individual states are part of a system of states situated within this differentiated economy, engaged in a struggle to augment their own power and to preserve or change the status of their region within the global system, to exploit other regions, to resist exploitation or to suppress local populations to facilitate exploitation by other regions.<sup>13</sup>

This refers to the way 'developed'/industrialized/North nations continue to exercise control over the rest of the world economies, primarily focussing on a very narrow understanding of welfare. Unfortunately, the highest ideal of a society, the common good, is interpreted individualistically, which in turn paves the way for a subtle and total neglect of the whole of the society.

Globalization, the neo-liberal face of capitalism, along with its promises and threats, has brought about a disorientation among the people at large. The glittering side of development and the surge of the middle class and the upper middle class onto the heights of 'ever booming' economy, leave the people clueless in deciphering what exactly is to be chosen: should they give up an all-promising career and opportunities for the 'outmoded' environmental concerns, which would only adversely affect the prospect for better business, better economy, and better pay-packets? Globalization introduces an attitude among the growing economies (like

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<sup>13</sup>Arran E. Gare, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, London: Routledge, 1995, 98.

India and China) that they themselves are advancing at a faster pace that cannot be matched by any other, thus apparently assuring a place with the already developed. The infused pride of these middle class, boosted by the politicians who are intent on cashing in every opportunity for their advantage and the 'almighty' media that does not miss any chance for making private economic mileage of anything that takes place on the face of the earth, blinds these nations to involve in indiscriminate use of the resources. Their sole aim is economic growth. The hidden economic and, hence, human and cosmic tragedies are either not understood or are conveniently overlooked for temporary benefits. They, however, easily forget that "nature shrinks as capital grows."<sup>14</sup>

Local and international<sup>15</sup> political structures also play an important role in degrading nature and creating ecological imbalances. In fact, it is these political agents who are responsible for according force to pseudo-religious as well as market forces in their attempts to exploit and destabilise natural resources. If we critically look at the contemporary political ideal of democracy, most of the democratic governments are said to be market-effected new face of capitalism.<sup>16</sup> Even the left-led democratic governments

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<sup>14</sup>Vandana Shiva, "Recovering the Real Meaning of Sustainability," in *The Environment in Question*, ed. D. Cooper and J. Palmer, London: Routledge, 1992, 187-93.

<sup>15</sup>Nations of the world should unite, not merely under the auspices of the ineffective United Nations. The UN is a visible sign of international disarray resulting from the 'dominion' exercised by the so-called industrially developed nations. From the perspective of a safer (environmentally and politically) world, which was the primary objective of forming the UN, at least as it was projected to the rest of the world, we should come to a more united and egalitarian set up. This needs the basic and equal recognition of all member nations. In this regard, India, or any other nation, should stop lobbying for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, but should strive hard to establish equality and justice among all member nations and for the abolition of any privileged position enjoyed or claimed by member nations. To my mind, the present system of veto power enjoyed by a few nations is almost on par with the caste system of Hindu society, but now practised globally by the *industrialised and globalized* 'brahmins'.

<sup>16</sup>Politics has been invaded by market economies. Along this line, Gare opines: "At present, government policies and programmes are overwhelmingly formulated on the basis of neo-classical economic theory, in which the economy is treated as a closed system, driven by greed, tending toward equilibrium, and in which nature is

have turned out to be puppets in the hands of national or multi-national business concerns.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to the issues of environmental devastation effected by industrial and business practices, politicians tend to be siding with unbridled development as that would temporarily satisfy the populace, which would assure them continued governance, even if that would eternally impoverish the nation in terms of natural resources and country's wellbeing. This presents us with a very pathetic situation. Putting together lack of effective political will and the profit-driven market economy as the key responsible factors that do not relent in the fast-track mode of production and consumption, R. J. Johnson holds that "the solution of those problems is difficult because the only institutions within which the necessary collective action could be mobilised exist to promote the interests of that mode of production."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, an environmentally sustainable global civilization has to emerge through a definitive commitment among the local population, which can overcome the impasse initiated by the parochially motivated and economically-crippled 'democratic' governments that define their ends only on political grounds.

A common factor that has unleashed adverse impacts of religion, economy, and politics upon environment is the individualistic attitude that runs through the inner fabric of our society. Subscribing to one or another religion and its universal principles of altruism and inter-relatedness do not seem to be successful in fundamentally altering the economic and political individualism. It would only open up the highways to disasters and alienation. However, the cosmic system exists and functions on an intricate networking of all its constituent elements. Human agency shall partake in this integral networking in a meaningful manner by consciously involving in it, and enhancing the same for the sake of the common good. It would succeed in transforming and motivating the human race to a harmonious existence if all would fulfil their cosmic responsibility both at the individual and collective levels. For, it is the inner harmony experienced at the individual levels that can be extended to the wider horizons and the outer

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treated as nothing but a passive resource." Gare, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis*, 154.

<sup>17</sup>The Communist-led West Bengal government in India is the best example.

<sup>18</sup>R. J. Johnston, *Environmental Problems: Nature, Economy and State*, London: Belhaven, 199.

world. Indeed, the inner harmony can be realized only if religious dimensions of human existence are taken seriously.

There is need for a new perspective, a new philosophy, if the biosphere should continue to exist and exercise its prime role: ecology shall not be seen as a luxury, but an imperative. Human approach to any reality, including religion and religious affairs, must be primarily infused with a vision that emerges from *oekos*. It calls for a radical *metanoia*, a transformed vision of life in which the whole nature would assume the status of a sanctuary, and human response will be one of taking responsibility in the form of offering respect and reverence to the sanctuary. Nature shall no more be a machine that supplies raw materials to the industry but the life-giving and life-affirming matrix under the over-arching creative and protective involvement of human beings. From a practical point of view, this can be attained by a concerted effort of religions and the states by investing in the education of the younger generations. The crippling narrow technological vision that permeates the whole gamut of education must give way to a holistic wisdom. Religion, economy, and the state – great institutions that encompass human affairs in the contemporary society – should be capable of enhancing human existence to such great levels of consciousness that human beings would become catalysts in leading a life that is totally integrated with nature.

It is with these hopes that the *Journal of Dharma* has undertaken the present issue on “Ecological Concerns.” Against the background of the present day ecological crises unleashed by modernist and industrial civilisation, A. Pushparajan proposes the relevance of Gandhian eco-vision in conceiving a “development through appropriate technology.” In another article on “Environmental Crisis and Religions,” Jose Kalapura affirms that “as religion exists in nature and nature sustains human life, both religion and nature should be inescapable parts of human existence.” From an eco-pneumatological reading of Raimon Panikkar, Brad Bannon affirms that “the time has come for a radical *metanoia* in which we begin to recognize the Earth as caretaker of us and of the countless organisms that are equally cared for by this Mother Earth.” “Tapovanam and Eco-surroundings,” by Jojo Parecattil, is an attempt to recapture the age-old cultural paradigms of Indian classical literature to infuse the contemporary world with deeper respect for nature. Radharani P. has made a study on ‘Tree worship’ as is prevalent within Hinduism and affirms that, by and large, it was

instrumental in imparting better respect for nature. K. P. Sasi and S. M. John Kennedy approach the issues related to the natural resource of water from ideological and existential perspectives.

Indeed, a radical spiritual revolution has to take place if our consciousnesses were to be transformed from the present mode of exploitation of nature to that of collaborators and partners with nature. The individualistic consciousness need to be supplied with a communitarian consciousness, in which justice would take into account not only human point of view, but also the cosmic. In fact, emergence of a cosmic consciousness is essential if we were to give shape to a sustainable eco-sphere. If religious ecologies had been so influential among the votaries of different religions, even to the extent of alienating them from the environment and in furthering the destruction of the nature, what we need today is, again, alternative religious ideologies, but with a different orientation and healthy/holistic perspective. Preference for religious ecologies over secular ones results from my conviction that religion is still a vital force in motivating people into action by effecting a self-transformative life vision. In fact, affirmative action with a view to bring about a better world to live in can be facilitated by the concerted efforts of all cosmic forces, in which human beings have to play the lead role. Future will not be bleak if human conscious efforts are underway in holistically infusing religious ethos into economical and political spheres. Nothing exists by itself or for itself; cosmic networking is an undeniable fact, which we human beings shall effect in this universe through our unceasing conscious efforts. So, let me conclude with the closing hymn of the *Rgveda*, an aspiration for peace and harmony attained in the realization of human integration and cosmic communion:

United your resolve,  
 United your hearts  
 May your spirit be at one!  
 That you may long together  
 Dwell in unity and concord (X.191.4).

**Saju Chackalackal**  
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