

Editorial Note

Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on Sustainability

"Only when the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten, and the last stream poisoned, will you realise that you cannot eat money." – Cree Indian Proverb

When the Europeans were exploiting Native Americans, and their lands, one of the tribes, the Cree, prophesied that humans should realise the importance of nature and systematic use of it before it is too late to recover from the loss. So, we can say the idea of sustainable living is not new but age-old. Through this edition, there has been an effort to revisit the concept of sustainable practices in human life. The aim is to include *Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on Sustainability* to explore how various scholars philosophise on sustainability and contribute approaches towards sustainable life through literary reflections. Gadotti in his contribution, *'Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts'* states: "To us,

sustainability is the dream of living well; sustainability is a dynamic balance with others and the environment; it is the harmony among differences" (Gadotti 2009).

The primary understanding of sustainability is shaped by cultures and gets reflected through literature. The unique interrelation between communities and their natural environments emerges and evolves through space and time. The perspectives and actions of communities vis-a-vis nature and its conservation also takes a visual form through songs, poems, myths, and stories. Exploring the overall perspectives in the literature across communities could be crucial to how much text can, directly and indirectly, shape individual action and life course as also public policies. Elements like religion play a significant role in conservation practices. Religious texts, if considered literature, have a major say on natural and natural conservation, specifically in India.

One can capture different literary forms and text across space and time, from verbal literary expressions in indigenous communities in their most unstructured and informal arrangements, to structured and standardised texts. This includes worshipping deities as one of the natural elements to the most formal scientific literary enquiries. If all these literary forms are compiled together, they will offer broader coverage of different dimensions of sustainability and conservation. The concern for nature would get expressed through the writer's emotions and sentiments reflecting character. A prolific literary genius, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore founded his vision for education on social sustainability. In the twentieth century, Tagore initiated a new approach ahead of his time in India: conserving the ecosystem through building an ashram, *Shantiniketan*, for students. It was to keep the young generation close to nature, embrace and celebrate local traditions, and appreciate nature's beauty. In his book *Rabindranath Tagore: A Life of Intimacy with Nature* (2019), Debarati Bandyopadhyay writes about how Tagore used the lens of ecocriticism and pointed out human negligence and an exploitative

stance towards nature, which is pushing the world towards global crisis. He emphasised that there should be harmony between humans and nature. Bandyopadhyay (2019) quoted Rabindranath Tagore and wrote, "What is the value of success if it is at the cost of humanity and if it makes a desert of God's world?"

The Indian writer Markandaya (1955), who uses the lens of ecofeminism in her writings, asserted that environmental degradation is related to the oppression of women. In one of her novels *Nectar in a Sieve* the character of Rukmani is important for her connection to the land and her positive attitude towards nature as she seeks happiness by growing crops. Her daughter Ira supports her family in difficult times by throwing herself into prostitution and posing as a river supporting life.

In the Indian Context, it would be interesting to scrutinise old Hindi songs and poetry. Most of them used to have the presence of natural elements and symbols of human emotions. For example, (तू प्यार का सागर है) *Tu Pyar Ka Sagar hain* lyrics from the movie Seema sung by Manna Dey (2020 <https://www.hindi tracks.in>) and another Hindi song lyrics from the film *Kashmir Ki Kali*, *Yeh Chand Sa Roshan Chehra* (1964 [http:// Hindi lyricsgram.com](http://Hindi lyricsgram.com)). In Marathi poems, the abundance of nature is the crucial element; for example, *Balkavi* Marathi Poem (फुलराणी हिरवे हिरवेगारगालिचे, हरीतांचे, मखमलीची) *Phoolrani Hirve Hirvegar Galiche, Harittrinache Makhmalichi* (2016 <https://wwwtransliteration.org>). Similarly, Jagdish Patil writes about how due to urbanisation, the local natural environment and *Agri* communities are getting exploited (Phadke, 2014).

Alongside the literary expressions on nature and sustainability in indigenous languages, are international scholarly views which are much more structured and have historicism and critical inquiry as their essence of synthesis. Writers like Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau, Robert Frost, William Wordsworth, Thomas Hardy, Louise Erdrich, Arundhati Roy, C.R.Neelakandan and many more are

providing rich opportunities to readers to discover new dimensions of nature and how it affects the human world. In the literature, the relationship of sustainability to economic, social, and ecological notions about the environment has been constructed, and many writers are pointing out the exploitation of nature and overuse of natural resources through their works. For example, Amitav Ghosh in his *The Great Derangement* (2016) and *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021) offers a powerful synthesis on climate change by interweaving scientific facts, historical background, and political events and cultures. Gupta (2021), while reviewing the book *Nutmeg's Curse*, highlights two examples of the relationship of indigenous communities and human relations with nature and the environment. First, European colonialists decimated indigenous populations and thereby destroyed the synergistic relationship between indigeneous peoples and nature. Second, the colonialist invasion continues to treat humans, the earth, and nature as resources to be exploited. David Orr and Fritjof Capra have been very influential in spreading and popularising ecological knowledge in a multidisciplinary manner (Zapf, 2016).

The study of sustainable development is not limited to pure science. It has also entered into humanities and many other subjects where writers and critics are trying to draw us closer to nature and helping us to see the results of ecosystem imbalance. Many writers are describing the complex relationship between human beings and nature, questioning the representation of nature in literature to raise the reader's interest in their ecology and their connection to it. Zapf (2016) has suggested that the three pillars of sustainability generally have been ecology, economy and society. It has taken a long time to bring the dimensions of culture into the discourses on sustainability in standardised literature.

Most books on conservation and sustainability have offered conservationist philosophies revolving mainly around morals and ethics. Various philosophers in recent times insist on the need to

consider environmental ethics, the moral relationship between humans and nature, the moral status of humans, and the need to become eco-centric from human-centric. Since the 1980s, environmental philosopher Bryan Norton, has become a significant figure in this area, vocalizing the need for a sustainability framework. He advocates for a cross-disciplinary and pragmatic approach to the moral, epistemological and methodological aspects of nature-human interconnection. In their edited book, *A Sustainable Philosophy—The Work of Bryan Norton*, editors Sarkar and Minter (2018) have put together diverse ideas on environmental philosophy, relevant public policies, environmental economics, sustainability studies, and resource management. In 1987, the United Nations published the "Brundtland Report" which defined sustainable development as a transgenerational justice problem (Brundtland Report, 1987). In this report sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. This idea was also emphasised by Mahatma Gandhi when he said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not everyone's greed" (Schumacher, 1973). With this quotation, Mahatma Gandhi directed human beings to show respect to nature and not overuse resources for momentary pleasure or to earn extra money, as nature has enough to meet our requirements. However, nature cannot satisfy the endless greed of humans.

The interrelation between sustainability and literary texts has rarely been explored and represented. Documenting such interrelations is the third issue's main objective under the Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on Sustainability theme. In addition, readers are benefited through other articles offering learning about sustainability practices. The first article by Chetan Solanki emphasises the adoption of Energy Swaraj to deal with the climate crisis. Mohammad Sanaullah Al-Nadawi discusses sustainability in Arabic literature, while Andrew John De Sousa presents an eco-critical analysis of selected poems of the celebrated Indian poet Eunice de Souza. Raj

Karia, in his article, explores the interaction between religion and ecology. The article by Ishrat Ali Lalljee examines the works of Ruskin Bond from an eco-critical perspective. Meera Baindur discusses the concept of ecological conservation in urban areas using the examples of heritage trees and a local park. The depiction of the environmental dimension in Kannada literature is covered by Ganesh Upadhya, Poornima Shetty and Kala Bhagwat. Ajit Abhyankar highlights the significance of finance as a means to meet sustainability goals, emphasising Green Projects. Kumud Kumar Sharma comprehensively discusses climate change and sustainability. The book reviews by Vidushi Shrivastava and Anuradha Bakshi further explore the theme of ecological conservation and sustainability. The third Sambhasan issue on Sustainability (July 2022 – September 2022) has been possible of these enriching contributions from authors, our Dank to them.

We are also grateful to the expertise of anonymous reviewers. We place on record our gratitude to the authors and peer reviewers of this issue. The university authorities have continued their generous encouragement of this journal as a space for intellectual endeavours. We want to express our deep gratitude to them and to our team of Sambhasan Assistant Editors for their meticulous copyediting. We thank Ms Prajakti Pai for the excellent layout. Our sincere thanks go to the Editorial team for their help and valuable suggestions from time to time. We extend our gratitude to Mr Sanket Sawant of the University of Mumbai's DICT and Director Uday Deshmukh for uploading the journal.

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