

# Editorial Note

## DISCOURSES ON SUSTAINABILITY

***Nature is no longer the rustic retreat of the Wordsworthian poet. ... [it] is now a pressing political question, a question of survival.***

***(Jay Parini)***

With these words, nature poet and critic, Jay Parini laments about the negative effects of modernization on nature in his introduction to *Poems for a Small Planet: Contemporary American Nature Poetry*. He notes that in recent times a poet cannot write about beautiful landscapes and nature as a source of joy like Romantic era poets because contemporary poets witness a picture of nature, which is spoiled to the core by humans.

There is no denying that our world is facing critical issues requiring our urgent attention and timely resolution like pollution, global warming, natural resource depletion, waste disposal, and loss

of biodiversity and deforestation. To show his concern towards a possible catastrophic end as a consequence of human action, philosopher and poet T.S. Eliot foresaw this degeneration in modern times and raised his concern through his masterpiece *The Waste Land* in the year 1922. This initiated a discourse about the growing uncertainty about human life and human habitats where images of desiccated land increased ecological awareness. There are many examples in the form of movies, paintings, songs and other literary art forms which are continuously contributing to raising our awareness of environmental issues and this present edition is one such attempt.

The concept of sustainability began to evolve in the 1970s and the primary reason was 'The Waste Land' around us. Eliot witnessed what the whole human race is experiencing, namely the over-exploitation of natural resources, over-industrialization, and urbanization. This new modern disease of tragic disregard for our ecology and for other species has compelled humans to reconsider their relationship with the environment. Environmentalists have asserted that the continued exploitation of natural resources decreases the quality of life. So, in the late twentieth century, sustainable development was a crucial matter and a deep concern to maintain environmental equilibrium. It was only in the 1970s that we had the realization that we ourselves are a part of nature and that destroying the ecosystem for economic/urban development was endangering our existence on this planet. When we come across reports of animals like aurochs who are extinct, or of elephants, lions and wolves facing extinction or being endangered, it may seem of little relevance to us. With the evolutionary crown on our heads, we might still be one of the stupidest creatures in the world, digging our own graves, and destroying our ecosystem for our selfish needs (Schrauwen, 2020). In the past few years, the discourses about environmental issues have led to the expounding and formulation of various theories, models and policies to promote sustainable development. Even

after initiating many environmentally friendly models and policies, the situation has not improved tremendously but it is believed that human efforts can stabilize the harm to some extent. According to the Brundtland Report titled *Our Common Future*, sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 8). The Brundtland Report, released in 1987, helped the UN institutionalize the idea and popularize the phrase 'sustainable development' to a larger audience.

Ming-Jui(2020) has contended that the discourses of sustainability can be divided into three different historical periods: First is the species survival period. According to anthropological studies, many human agricultural tribes had developed some kind of equilibrium with their settling environments to maintain a healthy balance between the environment's carrying capacity and the size of their community, allowing the tribes to survive within a specific physical area. Sustainable practices, during this period, were driven by the need to ensure the community's survival and seems to be unrelated to particular ideals or values. Second, is the environment equilibrium period. In the 1970s, non-renewable resources began to be depleted and natural environments were over-exploited as a result of increasing industrialization. The idea of anticipatory concern for the harm caused by current generations to future generations was developed in order to maintain a long-term relationship between humans and the environment during this time, as we realized that Earth is the only habitable place for humans. The third stage is the inclusive equilibrium period. During this time, the idea of sustainability has been broadened to include more aspects of human activity rather than just natural environments and ecology.

The conceptualization and promotion of sustainable development are not limited to academics but have entered all walks of life and disciplines. Gladwin et al. (1995), who introduced the idea

of sustainability to the general management literature, defined sustainable development as the process of attaining human growth in a way that is inclusive, linked, equitable, prudent, and secure. Bansal (2005) described 'corporate sustainable development' as a tri-dimensional concept that emphasizes environmental integrity, along with financial prosperity and social equity. Szekely and Knirsch (2005) defined sustainability for businesses as the maintenance and enhancement of economic progress, shareholder value, organizational prestige, corporate reputation, consumer relationships, product and service quality, as well as the adoption of ethical business practices, creation of sustainable jobs, increase in value for all stakeholders, and attention to the needs of the underserved.

The advancement of technology, modern equipment like agricultural machinery, chainsaws, fire weapons, artificial fertilizers, and pesticides, have given rise to four big scary monsters that are standing right in front of us: overpopulation, environmental pollution, climate change, and mass extinction (Schrauwen, 2020). But as long as we keep justifying the destruction of the ecosystem, we are looking the other way and believe that the monsters are not so big at all (Schrauwen, 2020). Denial threatens the well-being of people and the accomplishment of Sustainable Development Goals.

Charles (2001) has identified four dimensions of sustainability: ecological, economic, social, and institutional. Inappropriate reward systems, scarcity of resources juxtaposed against excessive demand, lack of accurate knowledge, coupled with poverty and a lack of sufficient options have been listed as some of the factors which have exacerbated the pervasiveness of unsustainability. Measures are often undertaken in a piecemeal fashion to address one of these factors. However, addressing that particular pathology often exacerbates the conditions of the rest of the four dimensions (Swan & Gréboval, 2005).

To sustain the way of life for both present and future generations, Goal 12 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for the promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns. However, switching to a sustainable lifestyle involves rethinking how we buy, live, and organize our daily lives. It also requires changing our ways of communication, trade, sharing, education, and in fact the creation of our identities. It entails changing our societies and coexisting peacefully with nature. Many of our decisions as citizens—on energy use, transportation, food, waste, communication, and solidarity—can help create sustainable lifestyles, both at home and work (WWF-India, 2015).

India needs a cultural change and a mindset that returns us to the values instilled in us by our forefathers, values that encourage us to view nature as a source to be nurtured rather than an object to be consumed or conquered. This requires the adoption of a lifestyle that only allows you to take from the environment what it/we can replenish. A postmodern sustainability culture must replace the modern consumer culture (Dev, 2017).

The Indian conception of life is expressed in a cogent worldview in which all of its facets coexist in a state of interconnected harmony under the control of a universal order that is reflected in all spheres of human experience. The human being is part of a well-organized system in which all facets of life and nature have a place and are not at odds with one another but rather work in harmony. The Indian tradition and ethos are based on this balance between people and the natural world (Dev, 2017). Indian communities have been collecting rainwater for centuries because we have long recognized the value and scarcity of fresh water in some of the states.

Norgaard (1988) has argued that the challenges of sustainable development can be organized around three themes. First, sustainable development will require the use of energy and

chemicals to be subservient to maintaining the ecosystem; secondly, nonWestern cultures need to define their parameters of development instead of following Western measures; third, a shift from a mechanical to a co-evolutionary understanding of systems which helps explain why development has been unsustainable and what we must do to attain sustainability.

## **Overview of the current issue of Sambhasan**

The present issue of *Discourses on Sustainability* consists of various articles covering diverse areas followed by book and movie reviews and an obituary of Ela Bhatt that provokes reflection on various sustainable ways of living. The first article by Sachdeva proposes that the Andaman and Nicobar islands are not merely markers of our borders and fragile environments, they are the most significant outposts of our identity as a nation and subcontinent in the tropics.

Dabee's article evaluates the adoption of Vedanta philosophy as a possible Gestalt solution towards sustainability and sustainable development by examining the Darsanas metaphysic-epistemic-ethic-aesthetic framework and its relevance thereof. Siddiqui in his article on *Sustainable Behaviour and Ecology in Persian literature* highlights that Persian literature always has shown concern about humanity, the environments they inhabit, and their coexistence. The prose work of Qabus Nama is described which addresses sustainability through a story of the mountains.

Pandey, in his article, examines various aspects of sustainable development in the context of linguistic diversity. He also explores how politics has led to the development of a monolingual approach, and how it has impacted linguistic attitudes and language use patterns. Rathod and Labade's article focuses on an indigenous nomadic tribe, the Banjara community in India,

and their folk songs and indigenous ways in which nature is acknowledged and revered as a constant source of sustainability.

In his article, Koshy analyzes insights from philosophy and psychology and explains the limitations of sustainable development, many of which appear to be temporary solutions to reduce environmental destruction. Yesudhas's article on building community resilience among senior citizens in Mumbai through an intervention action project with the elderly shows how to develop social sustainability and community resilience among senior citizens.

Chakraborty and colleagues in their article, discuss the impact of urbanization on the local ecosystem and the damaging impact on the livelihoods in fishing communities. Their study also addresses air and water pollution and Chakraborty et al. suggest sustainable development strategies. Kuznetsov and colleagues in their article use reports and resource materials from the United Nations and other organizations to discuss the challenges and opportunities that are encountered during the environmental, social and governance (ESG) transformation in the corporate sector, specifically in Central Asia. Sarkar in her article highlights the stark contrast between the reverence of mother goddesses in India and the subjugation of human mothers in India. She further outlines the contribution of mothers in the promotion of sustainable practices at the family level.

The book review by Azad and the movie review by Nakhare also explore the themes of sustainability, ecology and conservation preservation. The contribution of the Gandhian, Ela Bhatt, is acknowledged in her obituary by Former Vice Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad Anamik Shah and her long-time colleague in SEWA, Sonia George, General Secretary SEWA, Kerala, and member of the National Council.

## Conclusion

Since the cognitive revolution, humans have been going through a kind of high-speed evolution, accelerating exponentially. However, we have one blind spot, all the way from prehistoric times through the industrial era, but especially in these last 200 years, where we need to recognize our dependence on intact ecosystems and stabilize the climate and secure food, clean water and clean air (Schrauwen, 2020). If we want to prevent our ecosystems from collapsing, we need a revolution on a large scale. To some extent, an awareness of environmental problems did come up in the 1970s, ever more scientific research on the topic deepened our understanding, green political parties were formed, and protection of the environment became a general political point of interest (Schrauwen, 2020). The United Nations organized summits, international declarations were drawn up and accepted; environmental laws were put in place. We are able to realize a sustainability revolution in fishery, agriculture and forestry, and manage a zero-carbon revolution simultaneously in this 21st century (Schrauwen, 2020). The current issue of Sambhasan continues a multidisciplinary dialogue on sustainability, drawing inspiration from global as well as Indian cultural and academic resources. Our hope is to catalyze and cohere the efforts of diverse sectors in promoting sustainability.

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