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Toward an Indigenous
Indian Environmentalism

The rhetoric of environmentalism has a long history of development in the American milieu, which has led to the emergence of various branches and subidentifications within this movement as found in the United States. As we reflect upon environmentalism in the context of India, it is important to acknowledge that many of the categories developed in the northern hemisphere of the western world do not necessarily apply within the South Asian context. It is important to define terms and identify presuppositions when discussing environmental issues in each context before attempting a cross cultural analysis.

In the chapter that follows, I will present an overview of American environmentalism, from the early nature writers to the present. I will then examine the emergence of environmental rhetoric in India. This movement owes a debt to the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal in 1984, an event that focused world attention on the Dickensian reality of industrial India, and prompted a new form of grassroots urban activism. In more rural contexts, such as in the Chipko movement and the debate surrounding the Narmada Dam project, the agricultural working classes have developed their own responses to ecological ravage. From both urban and rural activism, several themes or threads of environmental rhetoric have emerged within India. By surveying some of the literature on Indian

environmentalism, and by reflecting on my own experiences in South Asia, I would suggest that India's environmentalism, both in philosophy and practice, will remain distinct from similar movements in different areas of the world.

Some General Considerations

Environmental issues, because they deal with interrelating pieces, require a systems approach. The ecological sciences require an examination of life habitats such as swamps, forests, deserts, mountains, oceans, and so forth. This includes an analysis of the human impact on each of these systems, as well as a consideration of the quality of and acceptable standards for human life. Naive utilitarians deem all aspects of nature to be at the beck and call of humans. More pragmatic thinkers have seen the consequences of untrammelled human interference with the natural order of things, and have come to the conclusion that human health and well-being cannot be divorced from the health of our surrounding ecosystem. However, what might be considered environmentally appropriate by one group or subgroup in a given society might be appalling to another. Hence, anthropology, sociology, and religious studies become important pieces of the debate, both in terms of understanding varieties of environmentalism within one cultural context, and the more general features that characterize national attitudes and approaches.

American Environmentalism

The Nature Movement in America traces its origins to a complex array of historical, religious, quasi-religious, and aesthetic factors. European colonists saw America as the New World, a place to escape the confines of European society, to establish new communities of faith without government intervention, to accumulate new capital in a land imagined to be without history, a land into which the European fleeing the past might move freely. The allure of the American wilderness frontier took on Biblical overtones when understood in reference to the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. De-

pending upon which account of the return to the promised land one reads, the returning Jews found a paradise of abundant water and fruit trees, or a land long occupied and cultivated by the Canaanites, who resisted Jewish occupancy for many years. Likewise, early accounts of American settlement downplayed the displacement of native peoples and celebrated, rather than critiqued, the pioneer practice of clearcutting the great forests of the eastern seaboard to establish farms and villages.

With the rise of industrialization, urban centers grew in importance. In nineteenth century America, this resulted in huge population increases, westward expansion, the near genocide of the indigenous population, the growth of cities, all assisted by the advent of an intercontinental railroad system. Nature and the wild became more of a memory than a living presence to most Americans, and nostalgia for a simpler life laid the foundation for later environmentalism. Thoreau's essay "Walden" (1854), inspired in part by translations of the Asian literature and philosophy favored by the Transcendentalists, invited a reconsideration of values that privileged progress and industrialization over quietude and reflection. John Muir (1838–1914), the great explorer and nature aficionado and contemporary of Emerson and Thoreau, reveled in America's western landscape and lobbied successfully to set aside vast tracts of wilderness, thus initiating America's remarkable network of preserves, parks, and monuments. The National Park Service began in 1872 with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming.

Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), creator and first head of the U.S. Forest Service (1905), and President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) helped institutionalize the preservation and conservation movements, ensuring the continued establishment of vast parks and reserves, particularly in the West. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945) supported the National Parks Service and established the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of the New Deal. Stephen Fox notes that "At the dedication of Shenandoah National Park in Virginia in 1936, he lovingly invoked a vision of how vacationers would come to the park to find an open fire, the smell of the woods, the wind in the trees" (1985, 199).

Despite the National Parks Service and various other local programs to ensure open space, bird sanctuaries, and the like,

science and technology have burgeoned from the nineteenth century well into the present, encroaching on America's wilderness. The rise of the automobile and the advent of a middle class consumer economy led to a virtual explosion of new manufacturing techniques involving steel, rubber, innumerable chemical compounds, and eventually plastic. Not only were raw materials being consumed at an unprecedented rate to fuel first two world wars and then the post-Second World War economic boom in America, Western Europe, and Japan, but by-products in the form of new toxic pollutants were being spewed forth as never before. Furthermore, not only were the cities of the "developed" world affected by this significant shift, but the countryside became laced with chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides, many of which proved to be very harmful to the ecosystem.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new type of environmentalism began to emerge. Although Aldo Leopold had spoken of land use policies and the changing landscape in *Sand County Almanac* (1949), it was not until the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 that the nascent environmental movement found its first voice. Perhaps the most poignant symbol of environmental ravage lay in the decimation of the Bald Eagle population by DDT, which provided a rallying point that made the cleanup of pollution a patriotic cause. With the extensive publicity generated by Earth Day in 1970, the formation of the Environmental Protection Agency in the same year, and the ratification of the Endangered Species Act in 1973 (all during the Nixon Administration), environmental activism and consciousness became an important thread in the American fabric.

The literary world and academia began to find new interest in nature and the environment starting in the 1970s. Annie Dillard's *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1975) inspired people to pay closer attention to the gifts of the wild. Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams* (1986), though dealing with a more exotic locale, similarly invited its readers to observe the stark beauty of the landscape and the living beings that inhabit the earth.

Meanwhile, the early eco-philosophy that had been built on a rhetoric of individual rights by Peter Singer, Christopher Stone, and others, found its voice augmented with new approaches. Thomas Berry advocated the remythologization of cosmology and sug-

gested that the scientific story of the flaring forth of the universe and the gradual emergence of diverse life forms, eventually forming our current "community of subjects," be retold as the New Story, a myth to nurture our consciousness in what he calls the new Ecozoic Era. Biologists, physicists, and ecologists, including Lynn Margulis and James Lovelock, proclaimed the fundamental and essential relationship between life forms and the atmosphere of our planet.

Radical environmentalism, also known as Deep Ecology, first surfaced in the writings of Murray Bookchin, most notably in his 1963 book *Our Synthetic Environment*. Later prominent nature liberation advocates include Edward A. Abbey and Dave Foreman, and today the range of activism spans local single-issue groups to worldwide organizations such as Greenpeace. On the extreme end of the spectrum we find groups such as Earthfirst! and the Animal Liberation Front.

American ecological thinking, shaped by science and an emphasis on the principles of inherent worth, natural law, and rights theory, has now been taken up by theologians and biblical scholars, who seek to find threads of environmentalism in the earlier traditions of Judaism and Christianity. This theological trend stems in part from the critique of religion found in Lynn White's watershed article, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" (1967), an indictment of the dominion attitudes toward nature found in early Western religious texts. Rosemary Ruether and other feminist theologians have stressed the centrality of interconnectedness and cooperation in developing the ecofeminist perspective. Theologian John Cobb advocates a more earth-sensitive economy, while Jay B. McDaniel urges adoption of a more inclusive, panentheistic theology to uphold the integrity of living systems on the planet.

The American mainstream has come to embrace select environmental practices. Recycling programs in the 1990s proved profitable for cities and municipalities. Clothing manufacturers, cosmetic retailers, and fast-food restaurants found that environmental themes helped sell products, particularly following the 1990 twenty-year anniversary celebration of Earth Day.

In summary, American environmentalism took shape in the nineteenth century, when the Transcendentalists in the East and John Muir in the West rejoiced in the beauties of nature and

advocated greater intimacy with one's surroundings. It resulted in the establishment of nature preserves and a sentiment that values experiences of pristine wilderness. Approximately one century after the love of nature emerged as a value and a virtue in America, environmentalism took a new, but not unrelated, course with the lobby against harmful chemical intrusions into the ecosystem. While not losing touch with pastoralism and romanticism, environmentalism took on an urgency not previously known.

Aesthetically and emotionally, the nature movement of the nineteenth century, inspired in part by the vast landscapes of the American West, stimulated interest in preservation of the wild. Philosophically, environmentalism in the twentieth century called upon the American traditions of rights, liberty, individual pursuit of happiness, individualism, and justice to support not only the preservation of land but also to promote safeguards against pollution. Many Americans now think they have a basic right to live free from fear of harm due to pollutants. Furthermore, the Endangered Species Act extends the concept of inherent worth beyond the human realm to the animal realm, and advocates safety and protection for beings that in years past had no protection under the European or American systems of justice. A typology of American environmentalism would include a romantic, reverential awe for the natural order; concern for species and land preservation; and emphasis on the potential hazards caused by industrial toxicity.

Indian Environmentalism

This brings us to our discussion of India. The Indian experience of land differs greatly from that of the North American continent as settled by European invaders. Vast segments of the American West have never been densely populated, even by indigenous peoples. In contrast, the Indian subcontinent has been continuously occupied for thousands of years. Mountains and rivers not only have long been considered sacred within India (Feldhaus 1995; chapters by Kinsley, Sullivan, and Alley in this volume), but have been seen as an integral part of the human experience, a source of both spiritual and economic strength (Spanel 1988).

Consequently, the issues of land preservation and environmentalism differ greatly in the South Asian context. Ramachandra Guha suggests that American environmental approaches may be inappropriate for India. He contrasts the "vast, beautiful, and sparsely populated [North American] continent" (Guha 1989, 79) with the densely settled subsistence, village-based economies of India. Whereas it might be possible, even today, to designate as forest or desert preserves vast tracts of North American land, it is far more difficult for India to establish more than small nature preserves. Furthermore, Guha suggests that for a nation living at barely above subsistence level, a full-blown program of preservation might be inappropriate, particularly if suggested by outsiders. It also should be noted that, in general, the Third World, of which India is part, requires far less of the environment than First World consumers, who seize the bulk of the world's resources, often at the expense of the poor who live elsewhere.

Given this social and geographic context, the terms of the debate in India differ greatly from that of North America. The land of India, its ecosystems, its climate, its agricultural uses, its cities, its economy, and its unique social and religious history require a different environmental strategy. Modern environmentalism in India, as mentioned above, began with the disaster in Bhopal in 1984. This event, which killed thousands and permanently injured millions of people, signaled that India's Green Revolution had come full circle. The magic chemicals that increased agricultural production and filled India's granaries beyond capacity, staving off the possibility of famine even during an extended drought, exploded into weapons of unimaginable destruction. India, which prior to this time had only a vague awareness of the environmental movement in the United States, suddenly became a lightning rod for grassroots environmental activity. Although M. K. Gandhi had set forth clear warnings regarding industrialization and modernity, government policies supported the chemical industry as vital to increased food production. However, while Americans bemoaned the loss of the symbolism of the Wild in the decimation of the Bald Eagle population, India faced in 1984 the more direct threat to human life that results from environmental irresponsibility.

In an earlier study, I surveyed several environmental organizations and movements that have arisen in India since the Bhopal

crisis. The Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi serves as a clearinghouse for issues of environmental concern. The Centre for Environment Education in Ahmedabad conducts an array of programs for both urban and rural peoples to help reduce smoke pollution and forest degradation throughout India. In cooperation with the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Centre for Rural Development and Appropriate Technology of the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi has been experimenting with organic farming techniques. Baba Amte, winner of the 1990 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, has directed his activism toward environmental issues since the Bhopal disaster, with particular focus on the Narmada River dam project. Also on a grassroots level, but dating from the early part of this century, the Chipko movement, in which rural women have played leadership roles, struggles to preserve the forest lands of Northern India (Chapple 1993).

In recent years, several new studies have appeared that demonstrate the complexity of the environmental rhetoric now emerging from within India. This discourse interweaves an upholding of traditional Indian culture and civilization with a resounding critique of the negative influences of modernization. Beginning with the premise set forth by Ramachandra Guha above, I would like to explore some of the contours of this new debate. Whereas in the American context, the early rallying cry for environmental action came from scientists and social activists with theologians only taking interest in this issue of late, in India, from the outset, there has been an appeal to traditional religious sensibilities in support of environmental issues.

Brahminical Models

This group of thinkers, activists, and writers seeks to reexamine the texts and traditions of earlier phases in Indian religious history to see if they contain insights regarding nature and land use that might be usefully translated into an environmental rhetoric. One of the early works of this genre, O. P. Dwivedi and B. N. Tiwari's *Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion* (1987) painstakingly quotes numerous texts from the vedic, *dharmasāstra*, and epic traditions that uphold nature as central to life processes in India. *Ecological*

Readings in the Veda (1994), written by Marta Vanucci, a biological oceanographer who lives in India, takes a similar approach, citing passages from the *R̥g Veda* and *Atharva Veda* that evoke environmental themes. The abundance of nature-based deities makes this task relatively easy; Vanucci particularly emphasizes the power of Agni as key to environmental understanding: “Agni the undeceivable, who spread out all the worlds, keeper is he and guard of immortality” (*R̥g Veda* 6.7.7; Vannucci, 43).

Numerous Vedic hymns celebrate the earth and water, asking for protection and glorifying the root constituents of the natural world. The *Puruṣa Sūkta*, one of the best known hymns of the *R̥g Veda*, proclaims a continuity between humans and the cosmos, stating that the gods, the heavens, and the earth itself arose from the primal person (*puruṣa*). This assertion of relationship carries an innate message of interconnectedness that could be used to advocate respect for nature and the elements. Many of the later legal books of the Brahminical tradition stipulate that trees are to be protected and that water must not be defiled.

In the past few years, several articles and books have been published that advance this naturalist, religion-based indigenous approach as a way for addressing India’s ecological problems. These include “Ecology and Indian Myth” by Kapila Vatsyayan and “Nature as Feminine: Ancient Vision of Geopietty and Goddess Ecology” by Mandhu Khanna in a five volume set titled *Prakṛti: The Integral Vision* edited by Kapila Vatsyayan (1995) and published by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Ranchor Prime, an English devotee of the Hare Krishna movement, who is also mentioned in Bruce Sullivan’s chapter in this volume, worked with the World Wildlife Fund to publish *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth* in 1992. In this book he examines largely Vaiṣṇavite resources for environmental protection. He reinterprets the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu in an ecological vein, and suggests that Kṛṣṇa provides several examples of environmental wisdom through his care for the Vrindavan forest and purification of the Yamuna River. He cites modern and contemporary figures who have worked to re-establish the pre-British lifestyle in India, including Mahatma Gandhi; Sri Sewak Saran, a Kṛṣṇa devotee living in Vrindavan; Satish Kumar, an expatriate Indian who directs Schumacher College in Britain, which specializes in teaching a spiritual approach

to the environment; Balbir Mathur, who left India to seek his fortune in America, but then returned to develop and promote Trees For Life, which has planted thousands of trees throughout India; and Sunderlal Bahuguna, a driving force “behind Chipko Andolan, the now world-famous tree-hugging movement which started among the Himalayan villages of Uttarkhand in 1973” (Prime 1992, 90).

Perhaps the most comprehensive work of this genre to date is *Pañcavaṭī: Indian Approach to Environment* (1992), written in Hindi by Banwari, editor of *Jansata*, a Hindi newspaper published in Delhi. In this book, which has been translated into English by Asha Vohra, Banwari examines the forest culture of India as providing the appropriate ecological model for life in the subcontinent. He opens with a chapter entitled “Prakṛti: Approach to Nature,” a summary overview of the significance of nature in India’s philosophical and religious traditions, especially the Sāṃkhya school. He then shows how key indigenous values and concepts support an ecological worldview. Banwari suggests that worship of Ganesha, the god of auspiciousness (*māṅgalya*), can lead people to emphasize the spiritual over the material, and hence help reduce the overconsumption that is beginning to plague life in India. He writes of mythical trees (*kalpavṛkṣa*) and magical forests (*vanaśrī*) and groves (*pañcavaṭī*), to which he attributes India’s abundance and traditional economic strength. He writes of the care for forests and trees in India’s ancient cities and towns, and celebrates the remote forests as “the land of no war,” the abode of renouncers and meditators. He explains Hindu holy days in relationship to the cycles of nature and concludes the book with a discussion of the healing and medicinal powers of trees, as well as advocacy for the planting of trees (Banwari 1992). The remarkable contribution of this book lies in its careful research of the importance of the tree in Indian history, and the implied sense of continuity between antiquity and the contemporary world.

Tribal Models

In addition to citing classical Hindu materials in support of a South Asian environmental ethic, Geeti Sen’s *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India, Attitudes to the Environment* includes several essays that bring forth tribal traditions within India as potent ecological resources. Citing the *ādivāsīs* of Gujarat as true peoples of the earth, Maurice

F. Strong suggests that the modern world can learn much from indigenous wisdom and ways. Similarly, Sitakant Mahapatra quotes from Santal and Kondh literature in celebration of the earth, albeit with an additional theme seeking human welfare:

Let the earth be green with our crops.
Let there be no hindrance to our movements.
Let there prevail among us
The spirit of mutual love and goodwill.

(Sen 1992, 71)

K. S. Singh examines the Munda creation epic, the Sosobonga. In this story, the Munda tribe develops iron technology to the detriment of their environment, and then corrects this excess, restoring their land to its natural beauty and bounty. Other essays within this fascinating collection examine the traditional ways of the Oraons, the Bhils, the Gonds, the Warlis, and others, through the prism of environmentalism. The book concludes with a three-party interview, in which Dunu Roy and Geeti Sen discuss with Medha Patkar her work with tribal activists seeking to resist such projects as the huge Narmada dam and other projects. This discussion, and many of the essays, highlight the trenchant tension between the drive toward modernization in India and the desire of traditionalists to preserve ancient ways of life.

Post-Gandhian Models

Vandana Shiva, whose *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (1988) opened a new chapter in world environmental theory, acknowledges the indigenous environmentalist resources available deep within the Indian psyche, but prefers a more political and pragmatic approach to the many problems that India faces. She criticizes the Western model of “maldevelopment,” and in the process conjoins a modern feminist perspective with traditional Indian views regarding feminine power (*śakti*) (Braidotti et al. 1994, 92–96). She states that the modern consumerist model, enhanced by technology, disrupts traditional agricultural practices and “ruptures the co-operative unity of masculine and feminine. . . . Nature and women are turned into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man” (Shiva

1988, 6). She also criticizes the manipulation of seed technology and the widespread use of inorganic fertilizers as disruptive to India's ecosystem. She further develops this argument in her essay "The Seed and the Earth," where she states, "The crisis of health and ecology suggests that the assumption of man's ability to totally engineer the world, including seeds and women's bodies, is in question. . . . The main contribution of the ecology movement has been the awareness that there is no separation between mind and body, human and nature" (Shiva 1994, 141–142). Drawing from traditional Indian cultural values and a post-modern critique of the prevailing development model, Shiva advocates the adoption of an integrated, holistic view of both humans and their environment.

Similarly, D. L. Sheth of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi states that the grassroots ecology movements of India "do not view ecology as merely a cost factor in development . . . but view ecology as a basic principle of human existence" (Sheth 1993, 284). This interpretation of environmentalism in India values the human person in the context of—rather than in opposition to—the surrounding environs.

The various authors and activists cited above seek to find models from earlier times that hold forth the possibility of an environment-friendly economy and culture. Dwivedi, Tiwari, Vanucci, Prime, and Banwari hearken back to sacred Hindu texts and stories. Geeti Sen holds forth tribal models for consideration. Shiva and Sheth advance a holistic, post-Gandhian approach to environmentalism. All these authors state their cases positively, advocating the study of early traditions, the planting of trees, and development of technology and agriculture that enhances life within India. With the exception of Vandana Shiva, who provides a critique of contemporary "development" schemes, these authors as a whole do not reject the underlying life-affirming premises of the Vedic tradition, which celebrate and support the pursuit of human pleasure and happiness.

Renouncer Models

From the earliest phases of Indian civilization, an alternate ascetic religious philosophy has existed in parallel to the Vedic, deity-affirming, Brahminical tradition. Traces of yogic practice can be

found in the ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, with documentation of organized Yoga appearing in the early Upaniṣads, the Buddhist Sūtras (Suttas), and the early texts of Jainism. By probably the second century of the common era, Patañjali summarized and systematized various styles of yogic renunciation in his *Yoga Sūtra*. This brief text builds on the Sāṃkhya philosophy to advance modes for gaining control over one's compulsive behavior (*saṃskāra*) through mastery of the body, mind, and spirit continuum.

By the time of Alexander, the renouncer communities and meditative schools of India were collectively referred to as the *śramaṇa* traditions. This vector within the continuum of India's religions emphasized renunciation of worldly involvement and the adoption of a strict ethical and ascetic code. At the heart of this code for all three forms of Śramaṇism (Jainism, Buddhism, and Yoga) lay the practice and discipline of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*). Stemming from a concern to avoid injury to all creatures, this vow of nonviolence became normative for all three Śramaṇical traditions. Its advocates also lobbied for the cessation of animal sacrifices within Brahminical Hinduism, and most likely pressured high-caste Hindus to adopt vegetarianism (Chapple 1993). Related to the vow of nonviolence, both Jainism and Yoga espouse four additional restraints: abstention from falsehood, positively stated as truthfulness (*satya*); abstention from theft (*asteya*); abstention from inappropriate sexual activity (*brahmacarya*); and abstention from the accumulation of possessions (*aparigraha*).

The Buddhist tradition adapted a code of ethics nearly identical to that followed by the Jainas and Yogins. Both Jainism and the Buddhist monastic code (*vinaya*) developed scores of additional vows, while Patañjali's Yoga system added a list of five positive ethical practices to be observed: purity (*śauca*), contentment (*saṃtoṣa*), austerity (*tapas*), study (*svadhyāya*), and devotion (*īśvara-praṇidhāna*). These vows and observances have been at the core of India's ethical fabric for over two millennia, and have helped shape both monastic and lay life within the subcontinent.

Within this ethical landscape, India has responded to historical circumstances in its own unique fashion. Perhaps the most notable application of the nonviolent ethic in Indian history can be found in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi, whose peaceful revolution ousted colonial rule from the subcontinent. Furthermore, his initiative served as a catalyst for the decolonization of the rest of Asia

and Africa. Combining techniques of passive resistance learned from Quakers and New England Transcendentalists with traditional Indian applications of austerity (*tapas*, one of the yogic observances) such as fasting and weekly silence, he contributed through his personal discipline to a new, post-colonial world order. Gandhian ideals continue to fuel a quest for social justice within India, particularly through the uplift of the lower castes and tribes.

Environmental degradation in India raises interesting new challenges for the renouncer ethical traditions. On the one hand, the respect for life emphasized in Jainism, Buddhism, and Yoga accords well with the discourse of environmental ethics. Jainism in particular, with its doctrine of countless life forms (*jīva*) taking form even as particles of earth, water, fire, and air, presents an operative cosmology that is perhaps the most sympathetic to an ecological worldview (see Tobias 1991, 1994a, 1994b). However, the underlying teleology of the Śramaṇical traditions lies not in the realm of worldly affirmation but in self-transcendence.

The goal of Yoga is to achieve *kaivalya*, a state described as disinterested spectatorship. The goal of Buddhism is to escape the suffering snares of *saṃsāra* and enter into a state of desirelessness or *nirvāṇa*. The ultimate goal of Jainism is to ascend through the fourteen stages of spirituality (*guṇa-sthāna*) and enter into a state of eternal, blessed solitude (*kevala*). Without exception, each of these traditions focuses primarily on interior processes and advocates detachment from worldly concerns. Just as Christianity has been criticized as too other-worldly and hence detrimental to the environmentalists' project, so also it might be argued that the Śramaṇical religions of India have little to offer, due to their inwardness. However, just as Christianity and Judaism are rediscovering nature metaphors in the Bible as resources for the development of an ecological ethic, and just as Brahminical texts are being mined as rich resources in celebration of the earth, so also Jainism and Yoga and Buddhism are being explored anew.

Buddhist Environmentalism

There has been a proliferation of literature written on environmentalism by Buddhist authors in America. In 1990, Allan Hunt Badiner

published a collection of 32 essays by Buddhist authors entitled *Dharma Gaia*, including a foreword by the Dalai Lama. The poet Gary Snyder has long been identified with Buddhism and the tradition of nature writing. Stephanie Kaza, a Buddhist theologian and botanical ecologist, in her *Conversations with Trees*, interweaves Buddhist philosophy and the botanical sciences.

American Buddhist environmentalism provides an interesting bridge into the next phase of our discussion. Many Americans became interested in Asian religions during the late 1960s, a period of great cultural turmoil. Zen Buddhism, in particular, provided a voluntarist alternative to traditional American religion, and the budding communities of Buddhists from New York to California allowed a sense of participation and creativity not possible within mainstream churches. Furthermore, Buddhism offered a language and ethics that supported such countercultural activities as vegetarianism and, seemingly, environmental activism. Various instances can be cited in the Buddhist canon that support kindness to animals, respect for plant life, and preservation of habitat, values that accord well with contemporary environmentalism. However, aside from notable exceptions such as Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Phra Prachak in Thailand, most Buddhist environmentalists do not live in Buddhism's Asian homelands. Throughout Southeast Asia, ostensibly Buddhist countries pursue economic programs that degrade the environment. In Japan, noted Buddhist scholars have been wary of the appropriation of Buddhism in service of environmental ideals. N. Hakamaya, for instance, claims that "Buddhism does not accept but negates nature" (Schmithausen 1991, 38–41). This resistance to environmentalist activism in the name of Buddhism underscores the complexity of this issue and suggests that one must exert caution when attempting to engage in cross-cultural social thought, as mentioned in the reference earlier in this chapter to the critique of Ramachandra Guha.

Jaina Environmentalism

From the perspective of traditional religious precepts in Buddhism, Jainism, and Yoga, environmental values such as minimal consumption of material resources can be upheld. Additionally, the

Jaina teaching that life forms pervade even seemingly inanimate realms bears remarkable similarity to the Gaia hypothesis advanced by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, which states that our unique atmosphere and even many of our rocks owe their origin to life processes. Bacteria and simple forms of life breathed forth oxygen; their decaying bodies formed limestone and continue to constantly reconstitute our soil. In their own ways, both worldviews emphasize the interconnectedness of life forms, a cardinal ecological principle.

Both ecology and the renouncer traditions of India implicitly raise issues of an ethical nature. If all life is interconnected, as indicated in both Jainism and Buddhism, it stands to reason that destruction of habitat or introduction of a new predator will affect an entire ecosystem, often with disastrous results. To preserve the integrity of nature, care must be exerted. In Jainism, the destruction of life forms through violence (*hiṃsā*) results in direct injury to one's own soul, increasing the accretion of deleterious *karma*. To avoid harm to oneself, the Jainas developed a comprehensive way of life rooted in the observance of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*). This includes vegetarianism for all members of the Jaina community, occupational restrictions for lay Jainas, and stringent nonviolent behavior for members of monastic communities, such as sweeping one's path to avoid harm to insects, and total abandonment of all material goods, even, in the case of the most Digambara monks, renunciation of all clothing.

All of these practices, stemming from the vow of nonviolence, can be seen as enhancements for an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Jeremy Rifkin and others have written about the great environmental benefits that arise from vegetarianism (Rifkin 1992). Traditionally, Jainas have entered career paths that could, in most instances, be seen as environmentally friendly, such as trade, accounting, and publishing. The vow of nonpossession (*aparigraha*), originally conceived as a method for reducing one's karmic baggage (in both literal and metaphorical senses of the word), can today be seen as a call for modern persons to minimize their consumption, a key issue in the environmental movement.

Within the Jaina community of India, a small book entitled *Declaration on Nature* was published by L. M. Singhvi, High Commissioner for India in Great Britain. This 1990 document explicitly supports an environmental agenda from a Jaina perspective. It

quotes Mahāvīra's warning that observant Jainas must be respectful of the elements and vegetation: "One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water, and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them" (Singhvi 1990, 7). Singhvi himself writes that "Life is viewed as a gift of togetherness, accommodation and assistance in a universe teeming with interdependent constituents" (Singhvi 1990, 7). Stating that there are countless souls constantly changing and interchanging life forms, he goes on to note that "Even metals and stones might have life in them and should not be dealt with recklessly" (Singhvi 1990, 11). This small book, which summarizes Jaina cosmology and ethics, has been distributed widely in an effort to extend environmental awareness throughout the Jaina community.

Several Jaina organizations have taken up the cause of environmentalism, regarding it to be a logical extension of their personal observance of nonviolence (*ahimsā*). The Shrimad Rajchandra Kendra near Ahmedabad announced in 1990 plans to operate a news service to "supply information on the different Jain environmental projects and on ecology issues generally to the 450 Jain newsletters and magazines in India as well as those abroad" (*Ahimsa Quarterly Magazine* 1991, 5). A reforestation project has been underway at various Jaina religious pilgrimage sites, such as Palitana in Gujarat, Ellora in Maharashtra, and Sametshirkhar and Pavapuri in Bihar. At Jain Vishva Bharati in Rajasthan, a fully accredited university, the Ahimsa Department offers a specialization in ecology. In December, 1995, the department co-sponsored a conference entitled "Living in Harmony with Nature: Survival into the Third Millennium." Topics included the environmental crisis, ecological degradation, and unrestrained consumerism. These activities at various Jaina organizations reflect some ways in which the traditional Jaina observance of *ahimsā* has been reinterpreted to accommodate environmental concerns.

Yogic Environmentalism

The Yoga tradition, a pan-Indian system of spirituality utilized by nearly all the religious traditions of India, includes within its disciplines several resources that can, at minimum, increase

environmental awareness. It affirms the reality of the natural world (see *Yoga Sūtra* 4.16), whereas Advaita Vedānta and other schools of Indian thought assert that the world is mere illusion. It lists several forms of concentration (*saṁyama*) that enhance one's awareness of the body and orientation within the cosmos:

From concentration on the sun arises knowledge of the world.
 On the moon, knowledge of the ordering of the stars.
 On the polar star, knowledge of their movement.
 On the central energy wheel (*cakra*), knowledge of the ordering of the body. (*Yoga Sūtra* 3.26–29)

These abilities arise from mastery of physical postures (*āsana*) and the breath (*prāṇa*) as explained briefly in the *Yoga Sūtra* and in greater detail in later Yoga texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā*. Through mastery of the physical body comes enhanced awareness of its relationship with the natural world. The senses become rarefied and receptive to experiences of how the body relates to the elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and to the movement of heavenly bodies mentioned above. Additionally, Yoga sets forth ethical principles that accord well with environmental precepts: through nonviolence (*ahiṁsā*) harm is minimized to animals; through nonpossession (*aparigraha*) one consumes only bare necessities; through purity (*śauca*) one becomes mindful of pollution and will seek to avoid it in any form. The ultimate goal of Yoga, as mentioned above, involves the cultivation of higher awareness, which, from an environmental perspective, might be seen as an ability to rise above the sorts of consumptive material concerns that can be harmful to the ecosystem.

Yoga is perhaps India's largest cultural export, in part because it does not require adherence to the many constraints of caste system or to a specific theological position. Its techniques have been employed by Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sufis, and Sikhs, both in India and elsewhere; it has also become common at YMCAs and health clubs worldwide. To the extent that the development of environmental consciousness and conscience requires awareness of one's body in relation to the physical world, Yoga provides a potent, non-ideological tool.

From within the Śramāṇical or renouncer traditions, resources are emerging for the enhancement of environmental theory and

action. Though Buddhism does not have a significant presence in contemporary India, Buddhists, primarily in America and Thailand, have used Buddhist principles to develop a new *dharma* for the earth. The Jains within India and abroad have thoughtfully applied the *ahiṃsā* doctrine to environmental issues, through publication and dissemination of materials as well as hands-on projects such as tree plantings. Yoga, perhaps the most amorphous yet most widely known of the Śramaṇical traditions, does not have a central theological spokesperson or organization through which to interpret environmental issues. However, the basic precepts of a yogic lifestyle involve an emphasis on health, exercise, vegetarianism, and nonviolence that accord well with core environmental principles.

Religion and the Environment in India

In the materials discussed above, the Vedas, the *dharmaśāstras*, the Upaniṣads, and even the *Bhagavad Gītā* have been invoked in the name of heightening environmental consciousness. Likewise, nostalgia for a pre-Hindu tribal relationship with nature has been put forth in current literature as a possible model for environmentalism. I have also suggested that the renouncer values that advocate minimal consumption of resources might also be newly interpreted for an environmentally friendly ethic.

Although the integrated reality of village economy, which served as the economic context for the Brahminical and renouncer traditions of India, certainly sustained agrarian India for millennia, and although many tribal people today continue to eke out a subsistence existence, neither model bears direct relevance for the burgeoning urban life that hundreds of millions of people in India have embraced in the past few decades. Although the classical traditions, both Brahminical and renouncer, contain nature imagery and promote abstemiousness and tribal societies generally operate in harmony with and in reliance on a tribe's immediate ecosystem, these are not likely to capture the imagination of precisely the sorts of people who stand to commit the greatest infractions against the ecological order, the people throughout South Asia who are feverishly buying cars, building condominiums, and filling their flats with prepared foods and plastics.

India's emerging middle class, rather than critiquing its movement toward Western-style development, in fact finds consumerism and its attendant human comforts quite attractive. There is little incentive for the upwardly mobile urban Indian to heed the nascent environmentalist's plea to follow and respect traditional ways. Environmentalism monitored and promoted in the form of legislation and non-governmental agency activism is a construct originated in the developed world. As Guha and others have protested, why should India buy into a movement that stems from the First World, the greatest polluters and exporters of technology? From another angle, why should peoples of the South deny themselves the sorts of luxuries that have characterized the developed North?

To answer these questions, it is crucial that the peoples of South Asia continue to develop their Gandhian suspicion of the benefits of technological consumerism. If, as Vandana Shiva suggests, Indians can reflect on the interconnectedness of the human being with its environment, then some process of questioning the onslaught of modernization and its consequent pollution can begin.

The Brahminical models, stemming from the Upaniṣads and *dharmaśāstras*, present both beautiful and bucolic images in support of environmentalism, as indicated in much of the literature cited above. However, these texts and traditions are also problematic. As Lance Nelson argues elsewhere in this volume, if the world is seen to be unreal, then perhaps it is not important to respect or maintain it. Or perhaps the attitude will prevail that such dirty tasks should be left to persons of lower caste status, so one's purity will not be violated, as suggested by Frank Korom (this volume). The extolling of wealth, as evidenced in the *Arthaśāstra* and in the popular worldwide worship of the goddess Lakṣmī among Hindus, does not bode well for a minimalist economic theory. According to the *Ṛg Veda*, human nature is fraught with desire; through desire the many worlds of human endeavor take shape, assisted and abetted by ritual sacrifice and purposeful activity. The mainstream culture of India, not unlike the consumerist culture emerging worldwide, places great value on human comfort. Pragmatically speaking, the effectiveness of the environmental movement in India, as elsewhere, will depend upon the extent to which ecological ravage impinges on human pleasure, as demonstrated in the years following the Bhopal disaster.