

Eternal Bhoomi

FOR FOOD, COMMUNITY AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

BANGALORE

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What's a Good Life



Vandana Shiva – “Swaraj: A Deeper Freedom”

Shabnam Virmani – “Walking with Kabir”,

Stephan Harding – “What is Deep Ecology?”

Nature, Health and the Body Beautiful - Junk the Fast Foods

Bhoomi Conference – 2011 SPECIAL

Celebrating One Year of Eternal Bhoomi...

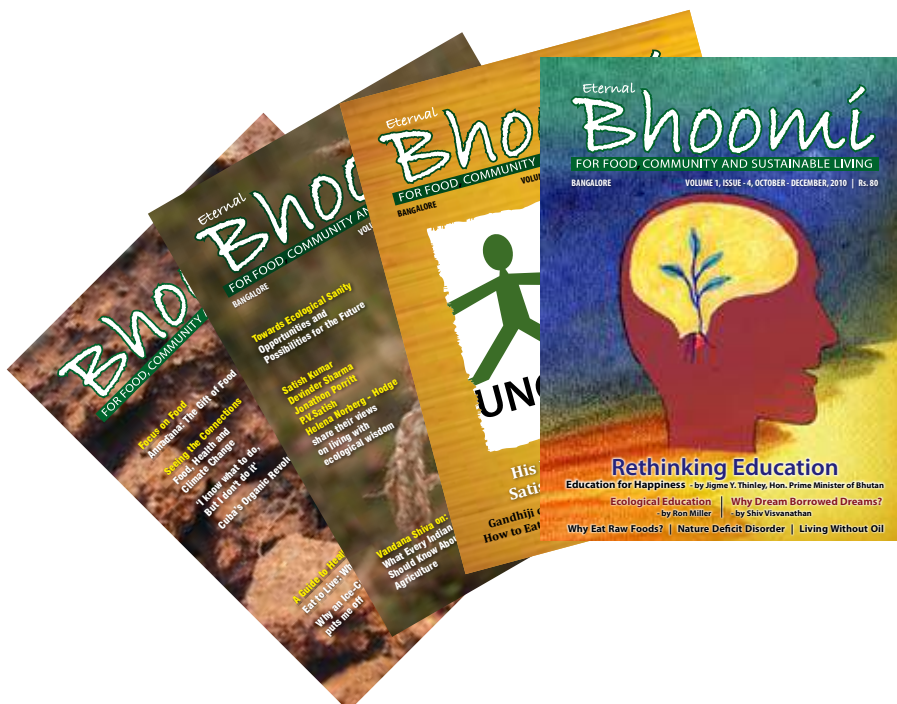
*We live on Bhoomi, Bhoomi is around us and in us
– let us live with reverence for Bhoomi...*

We are thankful to:

Satish Kumar ❖ His Holiness: The Dalai Lama ❖ Dr. Vandana Shiva ❖ Hon. Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigme Y Thinley ❖ Devinder Sharma ❖ Stephan Hale ❖ John Seed ❖ Helena Norberg-Hodge ❖ Rajesh Shah ❖ Trish Glazebrook ❖ Dasarathi ❖ Robin Murray ❖ Frances Moore Lappé ❖ Dr. Jeevan Kumar ❖ Stephen Harding ❖ Shammi Nanda ❖ Bharat Mansata ❖ Nicolas Carr ❖ David Orr ❖ Michael Pollan ❖ T.S. Ananthu ❖ Narayana Reddy ❖ Ron Miller ❖ Matt Harvey ❖ Dr. Vijaya Venkat ❖ Shiv Vishwanathan ❖ Julian Cribb ❖ Michael K. Stone ❖ P.V. Satheesh ❖ Hartman DeSouza ❖ Karma Kitchen: Washington D.C. Team ❖ Ananth Somaiah ❖ Ashok Ganguly ❖ Arvind Gupta ❖ Aruna Kalahastri ❖ Durga Sitaraman ❖ Gayathri Krishnamoorthy ❖ G.Gauthama ❖ Homayun Taba ❖ Jayawanth Bharadwaj ❖ Jayesh Sivan ❖ Kaushik Ramu ❖ Minchu ❖ Monisha Narke ❖ Dr. Nandita Shah ❖ Nalini Jayaram ❖ Nayan ❖ Nirali Shah ❖ Parthap Agarwal ❖ Poonam Bir Kasturi ❖ Preethi Narayanan ❖ Pooja Nayak ❖ Pushpa I. M. ❖ K.C Raghu ❖ Rajesh Thakkar ❖ Rema Kumar ❖ Roy Jacob ❖ A. Santhilakshmy ❖ Savita Uday ❖ Seetha Ananthasivan ❖ Shabnam Virmani ❖ Shyamali Khastgir ❖ Dr. V.S Shreedhara ❖ Sinduja Krishnan ❖ Sudarshan Juyal ❖ Sumitra Gautama ❖ Tanvi Chaudary ❖ Timira Gupta ❖ Udaya Menon ❖ Vanaja and Shirish ❖ Vasant Jajoo ❖ Vinod Sreedhar ❖ and many, many others

All our member – subscribers, chapter co-ordinators and the Bhoomi Team...

We are all in Bhoomi together!



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What's a Good Life?

All around us, the notion of a 'good life' includes exotic foods, big vehicles, lots of travelling, big buildings, designer homes, and factories to produce an uncountable variety of things, and electricity, coal and gas to make all this possible - all to keep pace with our faster lifestyles.

Individually, we may 'seek happiness' in a range of directions, but collectively most of the developed / developing world looks for a host of material comforts to lead a good life. Even world leaders, when they meet, like our Prime Minister and President Obama, seem to have time only for business as usual.

Often, we may be unaware of the connection between the good life we aspire for, and the ecological repercussions of our choices – climate change, peak oil, increasing pollution levels, food packed with unnatural chemicals, etc.

Even those of us who understand these connections find it difficult to give up the good life 'goodies' to which we are accustomed. Why? Where is this quest for a good life leading us?

A story narrated by Satish Kumar in Resurgence Magazine comes to mind. His mother told him this story of a man who was chased by a violent elephant. The man ran for his life, and finally climbed a tree, hoping the elephant could not reach him there. However, the single-minded animal began to shake the tree with his trunk. While the man held on for dear life, he was surprised by the honey that dripped on his face from a broken bee hive above him. He licked the honey, which seemed delicious, but along with it, he was stung on all sides by the disturbed bees.

Soon, a flying chariot with angels came by and stopped near him. Seeing his predicament, they offered to rescue him. 'Just a minute', said he, 'let me drink a bit more of this wonderful honey.' The angels prompted him again and yet again, and finally gave him an ultimatum. The man was still pleading to have just a little bit more of the divine honey, even as he was stung all over and likely to be destroyed by the elephant ultimately. The angels finally left, leaving the man to his fate.

Would the man in the story have jumped onto the chariot if he was offered another kind of honey which was equally or more heavenly?

Perhaps the only way we can let go of our addictions to a high carbon lifestyle is to find an even better life to enjoy and value. In this issue, several writers explore



a deeper freedom, a greater fulfillment and a life of personal balance, closely entwined with ecological balance. While they seem to be located in different ends of a range of perspectives, from deep ecology to eco-socialism, from activism to inner spiritual search, we believe that all these multiple paths are needed and that they unfold in the same direction.

We have completed one year of Eternal Bhoomi - it has helped to bring together several people from many walks of life to participate in our forthcoming Bhoomi Conference -2011 on 'What's a Good Life?' This would not have been possible if it were not for the generosity of many with gifts in the form of articles, illustrations, innumerable photographs, designs and ideas from readers and well-wishers.

We hope that you will continue sending us your good wishes, and enjoy reading our 5th issue!

Seetha Ananthasivan

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Kisan Swaraj Yatra



Letters to the Editor

I have been going through each and every page of the magazine since I received it about 20 days ago (Issue Oct-Nov-2010). The magazine has so many thought-provoking and educative articles. I would like to suggest that you include some practical tips on energy and resources conservation – I can help you with these; also, articles on eco-friendly laws and policies which can play a big role in climate change issues.

Best Wishes,

Sunil Sood,

National Coordinator, Home Energy management Programme
IAEMP

www.iaemp.org

It is well known that raw vegetables and fruits are good for health. But when my family members ate raw salads, they developed allergic reactions. The chemicals used in vegetable cultivation are so stable that they can't be removed even after washing. Even if the skin is removed, the under-layers will contain poisonous chemicals. The only option is to cook them, which will help the situation to some extent. So, it may not be advisable to use raw vegetable salads, as they might be unhealthy.

NH Visweswara,

Koramangala, Bangalore

Dear Mr. Visweswara

We agree that we need to be cautious about eating raw vegetables. It has been found that pesticide residues in Indians is very high. Since Indians usually peel and eat cooked food, perhaps it follows that cooked food does not remove pesticides – at least not to a great extent. Also the ICMR has done studies on milk and shown that in India the levels are very high (57 times the allowed levels). Milk is usually boiled.

It helps to purchase vegetables and fruits that are likely to need less pesticides (like gourds and papaya) and avoid those which need a lot of chemicals like apples, cauliflower and cabbage. The only real answer would be awareness creation and transition to organically grown food.

While caution is necessary, should we throw away the baby with the bathwater? There is a growing number of people today who do eat more fruits and raw vegetables and are benefiting from the change. However, we agree the issue needs more deliberation and hope to bring out an article on the subject in a future issue of Eternal Bhoomi. Thank you.

- Editors.

The Editors welcome articles as well as concise letters from the readers commenting on the articles published in Bhoomi.

Send your letters to:

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Swaraj: A Deeper Freedom

By Vandana Shiva

Photograph by Vinod Sreedhar

In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi exhorts using 'soul force' as a means to seek 'right livelihood' – which is what real freedom is all about.

Gandhi's Hind Swaraj has for me, been the best teaching on real freedom. It teaches the gospel of love in place of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It puts 'soul force' against brute force. For Gandhi, slavery and violence were not just a consequence of imperialism: a deeper slavery and violence were intrinsic to industrialism, which Gandhi called "modern civilisation".

He identified modern civilisation as the real cause of loss of freedom. "Civilisation seeks to increase bodily comforts and it fails miserably even in doing so... This civilisation is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed."

This, I believe, is at the heart of Gandhi's foresight. The ecological crisis, which is a result of industrialisation, is the most important aspect of civilisation. Industrialisation is based on fossil fuels, and fossil-fuel civilisation, which has given us climate chaos, is now threatening us with climate catastrophe.

The industrialisation of agriculture was aimed at producing more food and increasing our 'bodily comfort', yet a billion people are hungry today and two billion suffer from food – related diseases such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension.

Hunger has become the biggest market force. Money is first being made through the creation of hunger. And it is being made again through false solutions to hunger. Ironically, it is those technologies and economic systems that are offered as solutions to hunger that actually create hunger. Industrial agriculture, sold as the Green Revolution and the Second Green Revolution to developing countries, is a chemical-intensive, capital-intensive and fossil-fuel intensive system. It must, by its very structure, push farmers into debt, and indebted farmers everywhere end up pushed off the land as their farms are foreclosed and appropriated. In poor countries, farmers trapped in debt for purchasing costly chemicals and non – renewable seeds sell the food they grow

to pay back debt. That is why, today, hunger has become a rural phenomenon.

The debt-creating negative economy of high-cost industrial farming is a hunger-producing system, not a hunger-reducing system. Wherever chemicals and commercial seeds have spread, farmers are in debt and have lost entitlement to their own produce. They become trapped in poverty and hunger. That is why the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations' initiative Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) is misplaced. It will only create more hunger and famine, not reduce it.

Conventional measures of productivity focus on labour as the major resource and externalise many energy inputs. This biased measure of productivity pushes farmers off the land and replaces them with chemicals and machines, which, in turn, contribute to greenhouse gases and climate change. Further, industrial agriculture focuses on producing a single crop that can be traded globally

as a commodity. The promotion of so-called high – yielding varieties leads to the displacement of biodiversity. It also destroys the ecological functions of biodiversity. The loss of diverse outputs is never taken into account by the one – dimensional calculus of biodiversity are taken into account, biodiverse systems have a higher output than monocultures. And organic farming is more beneficial than chemical farming for the farmers and the Earth.

Industrial agriculture also creates hunger and malnutrition at another level – by robbing crops of nutrients. Industrially produced more food is a nutritionally 'empty mass', loaded with chemicals and toxins. Nutrition in food comes from the nutrients in the soil. Industrial agriculture, based on synthetic nitrogen – , phosphorus – and potassium – based fertilisers, leads to the depletion of vital micronutrients and trace elements such as magnesium, zinc, calcium and iron.

The increase in 'yields' of this empty mass does not translate into more nutrition but in fact leads to malnutrition. Monoculture does not produce more food and nutrition but it does take up more chemicals and fossil fuels, and hence is more profitable for agrochemical companies and oil companies.

Healthy soil produces healthy food. The most effective, low – cost strategy for addressing malnutrition is organic farming. Organic farming enriches the soil, and nutrient – rich soils give us nutrient – rich food.

When I carried out research on the Green Revolution in the Punjab, India, I found out that after a few years of bumper harvests, crop failures at a large number of sites were reported, despite liberal applications of fertilisers. The failure came from micronutrient deficiencies caused by the rapid and continuous removal of micronutrients by 'high – yielding' varieties. Plants, clearly need more than chemicals, and the voracious high – yielding varieties have sapped micronutrients from soil at a very rapid rate, creating deficiencies of such micronutrients as zinc, iron, copper, manganese, magnesium, molybdenum and boron. When organic manure is used, these deficiencies do not occur because organic matter contains these trace elements, whereas chemical fertilisers do not.

Earthworm castings, which can amount to between four and thirty six tonnes per acre per year, contain five times more nitrogen, seven times more phosphorus, three times more exchangeable magnesium, eleven times more potash, and one and a half times more calcium than soil. Their work on the soil promotes the microbial activity essential to the fertility of most soils. Soils rich in micro – organisms and earthworms are soils rich in nutrients too.

Organic farming that nurtures soil and its micro – organisms is a low – cost, decentralised strategy for addressing malnutrition. It serves the people – it does not serve industry. Now industry wants to turn malnutrition into the next market through genetic engineering and industrial fortification of food.

Hunger has become the biggest market force. Money is first being made through the creation of hunger. And it is being made again through false solutions to hunger. Ironically, it is those technologies and economic systems that are offered as solutions to hunger that actually create hunger.

An example of high-cost, high-risk 'fortification' proposals is Golden Rice, genetically engineered to provide more Vitamin A. In fact, the genetically modified rice provides seventy times less Vitamin A than coriander, fenugreek, curry leaves or drumstick leaves! In addition, since genetic engineering is based on the use of antibiotic – resistant markers and viral promoters, it introduces new and unnecessary health risks. GM rice is a high-cost solution. The Golden Rice is

patented, and patents generate royalties. That is the objective of patents.

Governments might pay for these high-cost, high-risk options, but this still uses public money which could instead be used to promote biodiversity-based organic farming as an ecological fortification strategy. Corporate greed and deeper industrialisation of food through artificial fortification are not the answer to malnutrition. Greed robs the poor of food. It is at the root of hunger.

For Gandhi true civilisation is that mode of conduct which points out the path of right livelihood. It was on this concept of right livelihood that Gandhi defined freedom. In Hind Swaraj he referred to satyagraha – the policy of nonviolent resistance – as 'soul-force' and 'passive resistance'. He wrote: "Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering: it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, if the government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me and I do not like it, if by using violence I force the government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I sue soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self."

Gandhi used satyagraha against the forced cultivation of indigo and later against the salt laws. Ultimately India's freedom from British colonialism was achieved through satyagraha, through nonviolence. We need to use satyagraha, soul-force, to gain rights to food for the poor and establish rights of small farmers to cultivate their land free of market forces.

One hundred years after Gandhi wrote Hind Swaraj his ideas are even more relevant as we seek creative ways to deal with climate change, corporate rule, food and water insecurity and the loss of citizens' rights.

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Vandana Shiva is a world-renowned scientist, author and activist and Director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology. She is a visionary who has been battling for India's food security and upholding farmers' rights.

LIBERATION ECOLOGY

By Frances Moore Lappé

An ecological worldview is one that sees endless possibility

What keeps us creating, as societies, a world that we as individuals abhor, a world violating our deepest values and common sense? Why is poverty deepening and climate chaos quickening even though solutions to each are known? These are the most puzzling, most critical questions of our time.

In large measure, the answer lies in the nature of human perception. Through human eyes there is no unfiltered reality. As creatures of the mind, we form ideas that have enormous power to determine what we can see, what we cannot, and therefore what we believe to be possible. Our ideas shape mental maps that either trap us or free us. Unfortunately, today's dominant mental map is trapping us in a world none of us wants.

It is a worldview driven by fear of being without. Its core premise is lack: there isn't enough of anything. We believe that we lack both the goods and goodness necessary to make the now-or-never, planet-wide turn towards sustainability that our times call for.

We can choose, however, to see the world and our place in it through the lens of ecology. Through this very different lens we realize that everything is co-created, moment-to-moment, in relation to all else. As physicist Hans-Peter Durr puts it, "There are no parts, only participants." This insight, of course, lies at the heart both of great wisdom traditions and of the new physics: separateness is an illusion and so too are notions of 'fixed' or 'finished'. Mutually created and ever changing: that's reality.

So, the essence of the ecological worldview is endless possibility. But, to feel this essence in our bones, we've got to empty our minds and our mouths

of disempowering messages that compromise our efforts to align ourselves with Nature. Here are five we might start with:

Disempowering message one: We must power down and get used to bleaker lives without fossil fuel.

Even the Worldwatch Institute, which I greatly admire, unwittingly sends the message that deprivation is inevitable if we're to rescue the planet. Fossil fuels, says an essay in its State of the World, 2008, made all the "material accomplishments [of the modern economy] possible". And in their textbook, Ecological Economics, environmental thinkers, Herman Daly and Joshua Farley tell us "Fossil fuels freed us from... the fixed flow of energy from the sun."

But wait. Each day, notes German energy Specialist, Hermann Scheer, the sun provides earth with a daily dose of energy 15000 times greater than the energy humans currently use. The sun is in fact the only energy that is not 'fixed' in any practical sense. The energy of the sun is not even 'renewable' – it is continually 'renewing'. We can't stop it!

The phrase "fossil fuels freed us" makes it easy to forget that fossil fuels has also trapped us, concentrating power in the hands of those who mobilize its extraction and make the rest of us their dependent 'customers'. Exxon, recently posted the largest quarterly profits in US history, amounting to almost \$1500 per second. And surely our species has learnt by now that concentrated power leads to really bad things: cruelty and suffering among them.

Disempowering message two: We've hit Earth's limits, so we must move from growth to no-growth.

This prescription is everywhere; the much beloved environmentalist Wendell Berry uses some variant of the word 'limit' sixty nine times in a recent article. But it keeps us from asking what, in fact, we have been doing. Is it really growth? Or is it waste and scarcity for many right now and for many more in the future?

At the age of twenty-six, trying to understand how and why hunger could exist in our world, I discovered that our "efficient, modern, productive" food system funnels sixteen pounds of grain and soya into cattle to get back one single-pound steak. At first, I imagined this ratio to be an exception, but I soon realized that such gross inefficiency is the rule. On average, 56% of all energy in the US economy is wasted. Energy expert Amory Lovins calculates that 87% of the fuels energy of US cars is wasted. 40 – 50% of US food ready for harvest is wasted.

Since what we call 'growth' is largely waste, let's call it that! Let's call it an economics of waste and destruction. Let's define growth as that which enhances life – as generation and regeneration – and declare that what our planet most needs is more of it.

Disempowering message three: We have to transform our selfish, greedy and materialistic human nature.

The dominant mental map tells us that if we strip away the fluff, humans are nothing but selfish little shoppers. But a moment's reflection, and now a lot of



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neuroscience, suggest that we are much more complex creatures.

So let's agree that humans can be both selflessly giving and cravenly cruel, and drop the debate over the goodness of human nature. Let's recognize the deep positive needs and capacities in human nature that are waiting to be tapped.

It turns out that co-operation explains our evolutionary success just as much as competition does. We're hard-wired to enjoy co-operation. A new study reported in Science shows that when two groups are given a chunk of money, one being instructed to spend it on themselves, and the other to spend it on gifts, those who

spend it on others report feeling happier. What's most telling, however, is that the subjects were surprised by the study's results. Having absorbed the idea that we're nothing but selfish materialists, we've become blind to the joy we experience in giving.

Empathy, too, is hard – wired. Babies cry at the sound of others crying but not at recordings of their own cries. Since such traits reside in virtually in all of us, we don't have to change human nature to turn our species towards life. (Phew!) We do, however, have to cultivate what I call 'heart-centred realism'. It starts with a sober look at the grand sweep of human history.

We can ask, under what conditions has humanity shown its capacity to inflict harm on others? From slavery to the holocaust, to Abu Ghraib, the evidence seems strong on a few counts: concentrated power and anonymity invariable bring forth the worst in human beings, including our capacity for unspeakable cruelty. Fortunately, with the observation in mind, we know how to build life-enhancing societies. We can replace harm-causing conditions with their opposites. We can generate and guard these norms and rules that continually disperse power and that dissolve anonymity via real community.

Disempowering message four: Though we bristle at rules and limits of any kind, we must impose tough regulations anyway for the sake of the planet.

But wait. Maybe it's endless choice that makes people feel crazy. Boundaries, spoken and unspoken, give our lives meaning, shape, and a sense of shared purpose connecting us to others – think the Ten Commandments, the Bill of Rights, or marriage vows.

We can celebrate that Nature offers non-arbitrary, infallible guidelines. The consequences of breaking them don't have to be guessed or debated; they are experienced. As we align with them, we have something real to count on.

We could also appreciate that new social rules, aligned both with Nature's non-arbitrary laws and with our own nature, will take shape and spread quickly if they ring true to us and if we feel engaged in their shaping.

Consider San Francisco's bill banning plastic bags from the city's grocery stores and pharmacies. It means millions fewer plastic bags used in the city each month. Soon after the bill was passed, other cities – including Boston, Phoenix and Portland, Oregon – began planning similar bans. San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, who pushed the measure, reported that Paris and London called, too. "We sparked a wildfire of common sense", he noted.

Disempowering message five: There's no time for bottom – up engagement of people for real democracy. We need action by those at the top who can make things happen fast.

This framing may be the gravest mistake one could make, for, as Al Gore now puts it, "In order to solve the environmental crisis we've got to solve the democracy crisis."

Our problems are simply too complex, interconnected and pervasive to be solved from on high: they require the ingenuity and exuberant engagement of billions of us. So I would argue that the environmental crisis is the crisis of democracy. And our unraveling ecology could be just the wake – up call we need to be moving us from our dangerous, failing notion of democracy as something done to us or for us. Now is the moment to

replace this 'thin democracy' with a very different, emergent 'living democracy' – a way of life, a set of values aligned with the best in human nature: our need for fairness, our enjoyment of co – operation, and our capacity for mutual accountability as doers rather than whiners.

Living democracy assumes that these values apply in all the realms of life: politics, economics, education, criminal justice, family life, and on and on. In the political realm, it means removing the power of concentrated wealth within our political system and infusing the voices of citizens. It means 'publicly held government' – imagine that – which many have given up on. But today, in three US states, voluntary public financing of elections is working for all statewide offices. In Arizona and Maine, over 80% of state legislators have now run 'clean' – meaning completely free of big private racking.

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The impact is stunning, and is captured in the story of my new superhero, Deborah Simpson. In 2000, Simpson was a single mother with a high – school education working as a waitress in Auburn, Maine. Friends saw leadership qualities in her and suggested she run for office. She demurred, believing she had neither the money nor the name needed. "We have Clean Elections in Maine," her friend explained. "All you need is five bucks each from fifty people to get on the ballot."

Simpson has now been re-elected four times and is co – chair of the judiciary committee for the state of Maine.

Removing the power of money opens the door to a much wider

pool of leadership. It also means our representatives can listen to the concerns of their constituents rather than those of their underwriters.

In the US, there's a bipartisan campaign for voluntary public financing called Just6dollars.org, its name derived from a liberating fact: it would cost each American just six dollars, paid through taxes, to publicly fund campaigns for all national offices. What a bargain!

To succeed, we can begin to think of our efforts as co-creating an ecology of democracy. As we truly inhabit an ecological overview, we realize that in Nature there are no central commands: there is ongoing give and take. Animal – behavior experts used to think that, among animals, a dominant leader made decisions for the whole herd. But they're discovering it just doesn't work that way. For instance, herds of red deer, native to Britain, move only when 60% of the adults have stood up; whooper swans of northern Europe 'vote' by moving their heads, and African buffalo, by the direction of the females' gaze.

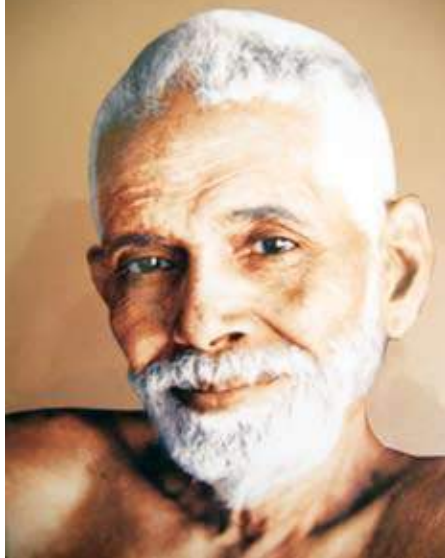
Scientists also conclude that this sort of animal 'democracy' carries a tangible survival edge over top – down direction. Perhaps it's the same way in human societies: the more inclusive the decision – making process is, the more information is weighed and thus, typically, the better the decision.

So, in every aspect of our work – from the generation or use of energy to the ending of hunger – let us peer through the lens of ecology, asking: how does my action generate new, sustainable relationships of empowerment? That is the core question of living democracy.

For the environmental crisis is fundamentally a democracy crisis, and we can let ecology itself show us the way through. Rejecting disempowering messages still embedded in a mechanical worldview, we can begin to find our power. Shifting the emphasis from Nature's constraining limits to Nature's exquisite laws, we can move from lack of possibility.

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Frances Moore Lappé is the author of many books including "Diet for a Small Planet". She is the founding Principal of the Small Planet Institute and was named James Beard Foundation's 2008 Humanitarian of the Year.



Happiness & The Art of Being

By Rema Kumar

Can one define happiness? Can it be measured? Is it an individual's inherent disposition? Are feelings of well-being linked to our earnings or situation in life? These are questions that humankind has been grappling with for eternity.

The common perception today is that happiness is something we obtain when we get what we seek – high marks in an exam, a car or a house, a job or anything else.

In contrast, that happiness is our true nature, our essential being, is the teaching of Sri Ramana. The book 'Happiness and the Art of Being' by Michael James is an in-depth exploration of both the philosophy and practice of the spiritual teachings of Sri Ramana. James spent more than eight years studying the original Tamil writings of Sri Ramana and his foremost disciple Sri Murugavar in minute detail. The voluminous book is divided into ten chapters and ends with 'The Practice of the Art of Being'. This article attempts to present the essence of the first chapter, 'What is Happiness'?

Sri Ramana, according to the author, led seekers towards the art of keen self-inquiry and self-attention by raising some fundamental questions, and answering them to raise yet another question.

For whom do we desire happiness? First and foremost, we seem to want happiness for ourselves.

Why do we love only those things or people that are potential sources of happiness for us? Because our greatest love is for ourselves – and we love our families or even do altruistic deeds only because it gives us happiness. Our love for ourselves is natural and unavoidable. We love whatever gives us happiness.

If all our happiness ultimately comes only from within us, is it not clear that happiness is something inherent in us?

Intricately woven into the issue of happiness is the question "Who am I?" Am I my body or my mind? If I identify myself with my body or my mind, when I get what my body / mind wants, I feel happy for a while, till the next desire arises. Or I may be restless or miserable if I do not get what I want.

Either way we wrongly believe that we derive happiness from objects of our desire. But when I am in deep sleep, i.e., *not identified with my body or mind*, I am at rest, perfectly happy, free from misery, hankering or unhappiness.

Then is my real self, which is naturally happy, beyond my body or mind? When our mind is stilled through meditation, not caught up with the restlessness of body or mind, we feel calm and peaceful, we feel happy.

If we let go of our identification with what our body or mind wants, we can experience our natural state of happiness – it is meaningless to pursue happiness, as if it exists outside of us. This is not to say that we do not pursue anything – our bodies and minds may continue to engage with various wants and needs – but can we be aware that we do not 'get' happiness, but own up our natural state of happiness? We experience perfect, unlimited and absolute happiness only when our mind is perfectly still. "Happiness is a state of being and unhappiness is a state of doing."

Sri Ramana's message therefore is that happiness is our natural state, our essential nature - its eternal source is within us, if only we align ourselves with an infinite consciousness.

If all our happiness ultimately comes only from within us, is it not clear that happiness is something inherent in us?

The reader may be left asking if this is as simple as it sounds then why do we not feel perfectly happy at all times?

Understanding Ramana's teachings intellectually, or through our power of reasoning is not enough – we need to learn them experientially. We need to turn our attention inwards to know our true consciousness (which is other than our body or mind) and discover the delight of being happy without cause or reason.

How does one break out of this vicious cycle of experiencing momentary happiness? As long as we feel our self to be a limited individual consciousness, i.e. that we are our mind (that experiences relative degrees of happiness and unhappiness) we clearly do not experience the truth that we, ourselves, are absolute happiness.

The author illustrates our struggle for happiness with this passage: "At the foot of a tree the shade is delightful. Outside the heat of the sun is severe. A person who is wandering outside is cooled by going into the shade. Emerging outside after a short while, he is unable to bear the heat, so he again comes to the foot of the tree. In this way he continues, going from the shade into the sunshine, and going [back] from the sunshine into the shade. A person who acts in this manner is someone lacking in discrimination. But a person of discrimination will not leave the shade."

So, in essence what Sri Ramana said is that there is no meaning in the pursuit of happiness. It is up to us to choose how much we wish to commit ourselves to "Happiness and the art of Being".

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MIRRORING THE GOOD LIFE

By Homayun Taba



Along with reflections on his personal journey, the author articulates some of his co-ordinates for a Good Life.

My eyes can't help zooming into the shopping carts of people around me in shopping-mall checkout lines. There are plentiful options of what and how much to buy. This cart example could be a metaphor for a good life, for a good life depends upon the choices we make. To live is to choose, but "to choose well", says Kofi Annan, "you must know who you are and what you stand for, where you want to go and why you want to get there."

The Upanishadic template of *preya* - palate's pleasure, and *shreya* - sustaining, nourishing of life, come to mind. Wholesome choices come from awareness, not just intelligence, with awareness understood more as whole-system thinking—a capacity to detect patterns and processes, intentions as well as an idea of consequences of the choices made.

Defining a good life depends on each person's passion, purpose, focus, experience, level of awareness/understanding and philosophy of life. Each of us has a philosophy of life, which, though perhaps unarticulated, is revealed by our value system and actions.

For me a Good Life would have these following co-ordinates among others:

Gift of Discernment

A good life requires us to live in awareness and refine one's *viveka*, the capacity to differentiate at all levels. Take the very basic capacity of differentiating what the palate loves – perhaps burgers, french fries, fizzy drinks - and what the body needs as nutrients for its optimum functioning.

The point is, we all have the necessary sensitivity, but progressively numb it. Ayurveda mentions *prajna paradha*, or misuse of the higher mind; a good life is practically impossible if this is dominant.

Self-Care

I regard *sva-dharma* as 'self-involved' but in its most positive

sense - as Taking Care of Oneself. I have been trying to align my lifestyle to the insights coming from such traditions as Yoga, Ayurveda, Zen and Sufism, where physical, mental and spiritual elements are deeply and clearly conveyed.

On the purely physical plane we need to pay attention to whatever we ingest, to proper elimination and detoxification, rest, relaxation, exercise, exposure to fresh air and sunshine. In terms of psycho-physical health, Yoga and Ayurveda provide us effective blueprints.

Sva-dharma is also significant when we realize the unique privilege of human birth. Honouring such a gift would mean leading a life that does justice to it.

Living somewhere in-between

Wisdom acquired by experience and learning from wise ones recommends living 'somewhere in between' - somewhere between aggressive spending and miserly deprivation, and to hold a worldview between reckless optimism and incorrigible pessimism.

In everything in life there is a place of balance; wisdom means searching for that place. Living well in a contemporary setting yet being in touch with the wisdom of the ancients is yet another balancing challenge - between the spirit of the times and the spirit of the depths.

Closely connected is the gift of contentment; knowing what enough is. Contentment is certainly not non-aspirational laziness or anti-progress, but arises out of recognizing and appreciating what truly adds value to well-being, and guides us to make choices accordingly.

At the core of this lies Radical Simplicity - whether it comes from a Zen appreciation of uncluttered life and beauty, Gandhian self-sufficiency, Schumacherian respect for the small and pertinent, or Vedantic and Buddhist desire management .



Intellectual vibrancy & buoyancy

Our assumptions come from our perception and interpretation of reality, rather than from reality itself, which in time, solidify into a belief system. The ability to listen, accommodate and frequently re-examine our most cherished ideas can help us get a clearer perception of situations or stances and escape the barren certitude of the dogmatic.

I use the term 'buoyancy' because some of our beliefs weigh heavily on us; often showing up as dead-end patterns, which as we get older, seem all the more familiar, though often more apparent to others than to ourselves.

Feeding the mind

The mind, like the stomach needs to be fed, and we can choose to provide substantial or irrelevant stuff. Minds are also capable of expanding or shrinking. Interest, curiosity, focus are tools of mental expansion. There are a wide variety of methodologies and practices to sharpen cognitive abilities; Edward de Bono, Howard Gardner and others have widened the field. However, a broad perspective is fostered by familiarity with world history, literature, religious traditions, philosophy and arts.

For me, soaking in world literature has proved vital. Literature is not ordered knowledge, as in architecture or even philosophy, and in that sense it resembles life itself. Literature shows us life's inner contradictions, often in a nuanced way. My readings have helped me traverse both geographic and psychological regions previously unknown to me.

Security in relationships

A Good life is not lived in isolation; we need others' energies for our well being, and sometimes need to avoid unwholesome relationships. In my version of a good life it is important to have tasted love, and at least one person you've loved, and one or two who have cared deeply about you. In my life, I have tasted such love from my parents, my wife and others around me. I feel blessed in most cases to have been loved for who I am.

Creativity

In every person there are two levels of story - of an outer functioning self, and an inner creative, dreaming and artistic self. We are imaginative beings - that is why boredom finds us so easily. Creative endeavors bring a sense of aliveness to us. Engaging with any art form has this vital role of supporting a good life. One commitment I have made for my wellness is to remain creatively and joyfully occupied.

Ceaseless struggle

We operate with of two maps, one mental, the other emotional, and need to learn when to navigate by each. The degree or intensity of the variance can determine the quality of our lives. The heart has a different set of reasons that the mind may fail to grasp. On the whole our minds get more education than our hearts, as a result in certain cases we make decisions with our hearts then wait for our minds to do the clean-up job. But at other times, the perception and sensing of our hearts turns out to be more accurate and deeper.

In a recent film I saw, the actress said to her man, "Your heart is bigger than your annoying brain; that's why I love you."

Aligning with Nature

The greatest insights of the yogis came from living in the bosom of nature, in close and intense observation of bio-rhythms, cycles, transitions. Their field of observation was their natural surroundings, and their field of experimentation their own bodies. Almost all *asanas* bear tree or animal names.

We spend too many hours of our waking life in artificial surroundings of geometric soullessness. There is a certain unruffled serenity that only nature can provide; when I am in the midst of a natural setting, I am left with nothing to do but to abandon myself to healing repose.

Spiritual Orientation

When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the spirit laughs for what it has found.

- Sufi saying

There are two dimensions to life: the historical dimension, where we identify with birth/ death, ups/ downs, beginnings/ endings; and the ultimate, spirit dimension. A good life is difficult if not impossible without factoring in the spirit dimension - the part of us that is eternal, imperishable and is of the nature of being, consciousness and bliss. There is this metaphor of being in 'exile', not so much a matter of geography but of estrangement in the world. Enlightenment could be perceived as a kind of home-finding and home-coming. Everyone has to come out of the 'lostness' of exile in his/her own way.

A good life could be said to be infused with meaning, and awareness of invisibles that lie just behind the visible. A Persian couplet enlarges the scope of our interwoven cosmic participation by reminding us, "The cloud, wind, moon and sun are at work, so that you get a piece of bread in hand. Do not consume it in forgetfulness."

Joyousness and Playfulness

"Everyone is the age of their heart."

- Guatemalan Proverb

There are a few people whose sense of being, aliveness, radiant happiness and real unrestrained hearty laughter have been a source of inspiration to me – like the Dalai Lama, whom I was fortunate to meet, Desmond Tutu and Jackie Chan. Each of them have had their share of hardships but their response to life has been a big YES. They seem to hold a perception of the world not as a battlefield but more like a playground.

There is a saying that we don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

I push to find a new context, a new way to orient myself to this approach, knowing this innate, almost artistic passion and exuberance for living comes from the decision to be happy, which is actually the decision to stop being unhappy.

Inwardness

One can live a lifetime at the end of which one knows more about other people than about oneself. Thoreau sees self-knowing as a home-cosmography that comes from directing one's eye inward, finding a thousand undiscovered regions. The sage Vasishtha believed this self knowledge or knowledge of truth is not had by resorting to a guru or preceptor, nor by the study of scripture, nor by good works: it is attained only by means of inquiry inspired by the company of wise and holy men. One's



Photograph by Ananth Somaiah

inner light alone is the means. When this inner light is kept alive, it is not affected by the darkness of inertia.

Yet, a good life can neither be lived wholly in the outside or wholly inside. Almost all traditions believe in a combination of fasting, silence and solitude to balance the density of daily life that have a pull on us, that deplete vitality and can leave heaviness upon one's soul.

There is enough in the world to be disenchanted and distracted with; to keep oneself centred in the midst of all this is possible when we seek to become aligned with 'being'. This can happen best in our moments of silence, self-punctuation, and reflection.

Redefinition

All of us are subject to the laws of aging and extinction. Clearly no bargaining is possible on the length of life, but we seem to have enormous influence over its width and depth.

If we talk of death, let's also think of old age. I wish - and work towards - a good old age. A well-spent life should end with a happy ending, a good death. When I give my terminal breath I'd prefer to be at home and while asleep, not in the hospital sustained by tubes into or out of every orifice.

We seem to be stuck with a certain contradiction here, that there is death, void and a certain absurdity to existence and yet there needs to be passionate love of life. We are invited to hold both together in our consciousness. Awareness of the inevitables of life need not lead to a gloomy outlook, but should encourage us to put in more sense and zest to our days.

Final Reflections

Fear less, hope more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, say more; love more, and all good things will be yours.

- Swedish proverb

A good life is an examined life, through reflection, dialogue, perhaps note-taking and autobiographical writing. I think here perfect objectivity is an unrealistic goal but fairness to self and others is helpful. In the end, what matters is to be sound of body and serene of mind. A phase of one's life can be said to end when its basic illusions are nearly exhausted. Maturing is an ongoing process where, by fits and starts, piece by agonizing piece, we give up the prized possessions of our personalities and tendencies to our deeper selves. Leading a good life takes courage and compassion and a prevailing sense of humour.

Homayun Taba is a writer, painter, educator, organizational consultant, Homayun Taba lives in Mumbai.

**So what have we done
in human societies
to enhance human consciousness?**

Individual people
might have done something,
but no society has created
any kind of infrastructure,
no government on the planet
has invested anything
to raise human consciousness.

**Unless humanity invests in consciousness actively,
sustainability
will be just a subject of conferences.**

* Excerpt from a talk delivered by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev at the House of Lords – UK Parliament, London, 19 October 2010.

WHAT IS DEEP ECOLOGY?

By Stephan Harding

Through deep experience,
deep questioning and
deep commitment emerges
deep ecology



Photograph by Andrew Beierle, www.andrewbeierle.com

In the 1960s, having read Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, Arne Naess was moved to apply his formidable philosophical skills to understanding the ecological crisis and its resolution. Since becoming the youngest ever professor of philosophy at the University of Oslo whilst still in his twenties, Arne Naess has revealed his brilliance by studying and writing extensively in many fields, including semantics, philosophy of science, and the works of Spinoza and Gandhi. But he is much more than an academic. His approach to ecology bears the stamp of his life's experience as a philosopher in the truest sense – as a lover of wisdom, and as a lover of mountains. A key influence in his long life has been his deep relationship to Hallingskarvet mountain in central Norway, where, in 1937, he built a simple cabin at the place called Tvergastein (crossed stones).

To understand what Arne Naess means by deep ecology it helps to imagine this place: high up, totally isolated, with commanding views of landscape down below. There he lived looking out on that vast, wild panorama, reading Gandhi or Spinoza and studying Sanskrit. In this inhospitable retreat, under snow and ice for most of the year, where only lichen and tiny alpine flowers grow, Arne Naess has spent a total of more than ten years, watching, climbing, thinking, writing, and adoring the mountain. It is at Tvergastein, with Arctic storms threatening to blow away his roof, that most of his important work in deep ecology has been done.

The word 'ecology' originates from the science of biology, where it is used to refer to the ways in which living things interact with each other and with their surroundings. For Arne Naess, ecological science, concerned with facts and logic alone, cannot answer ethical questions about how we should live. For this, we need ecological wisdom. Deep ecology seeks to develop this by focusing on deep experience, deep questioning and deep commitment. These constitute an interconnected system. Each gives rise to and supports the other, whilst the entire system is, what Naess would call, an *ecosophy*: an evolving but consistent philosophy of being, thinking and acting in the world, that embodies ecological wisdom and harmony.

Eye of the Wolf

Deep experience is often what gets a person started along a deep ecological path. Aldo Leopold, in his book *A Sand County Almanac*, provides a striking example of this. For Leopold, the experience was of sufficient intensity to trigger a total reorientation in his life's work as a wildlife manager and ecologist. In the 1920s, he had been appointed by the US government to develop a rational, scientific policy for eradicating the wolf from the entire United States. The justification for this intervention was that wolves competed with sport hunters for deer, so that fewer wolves would mean more deer for the hunters.

As a wildlife manager of those times, Leopold adhered to the unquestioning belief that humans were superior to the rest of nature, and were thus morally justified in manipulating it as much as was required in order to maximise human welfare.

One morning, Leopold was out with some friends on a walk in the mountains. Being hunters, they carried their rifles with them, in case they got a chance to kill some wolves. It got around to lunch time and they sat down on a cliff overlooking a turbulent river. Soon they saw what appeared to be some deer fording the torrent, but they soon realised that it was a pack of wolves. They took up their rifles and began to shoot excitedly in to the pack, but with little accuracy. Eventually an old wolf was down by the side of the river, and Leopold rushed down to gloat at her death. What met him was a fierce green fire dying in the wolf's eyes. He writes in a chapter entitled Thinking Like a Mountain that: "there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain. I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."

This deep questioning of the fundamental assumptions of our culture contrasts markedly with the mainstream shallow or reform approach which tries to ensure the continuance of business as usual by advocating the 'greening' of business and industry by incorporating a range of measures such as pollution prevention and the protection of biodiversity due to its monetary value as medicine or its ability to regulate climate.

Perhaps it is possible to understand what Leopold means when he says that the wolf disagreed with such a view, but how could a lifeless, inert mountain possibly agree or disagree with anything? What could Leopold have experienced in that pivotal moment in his life? Clearly, he is using the word 'mountain' as a metaphor for the wild ecosystem in which the incident took place, the ecosystem as an entirety, as a living presence, with its deer, its wolves and other animals, its clouds, soils and streams. For the first time in his life he felt completely at one with this wide, ecological reality. He felt that it had a power to communicate its magnificence. He felt that it had its own life, its own history, and its own trajectory into the future. He experienced the ecosystem as a great being, dignified and valuable in itself. It must have been a moment of tremendous liberation and expansion of consciousness, of joy and energy – a truly spiritual or religious experience. His narrow, manipulative wildlife manager's mind fell away. The mind which saw nature as a dead machine, there for human use, vanished. In its place was the pristine recognition of the vast being of living nature, of what we now call Gaia.

Notice that the experience was not looked for, expected or contrived. It happened spontaneously. Something in the dying eyes of the wolf reached beyond Leopold's training and triggered a recognition of where he was. After this experience he saw the world differently, and went on to develop a land ethic, in which he stated that humans are not a superior species with the right to manage and control the rest of nature, but rather that humans are 'plain members of the biotic community'. He also penned

his famous dictum: "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Experience and Belonging

Arne Naess emphasises the importance of such spontaneous experience. A key aspect of these experiences is the perception of gestalts, or networks of relationships. We see that there are no isolated objects, but that objects are nodes in a vast web of relationships. When such deep experience occurs, we feel a strong sense of wide identification with what we are sensing. This identification involves a heightened sense of empathy and an expansion of our concern with non-human life. We realise how dependent we are on the well-being of nature for our own physical and psychological well-being. As a consequence there arises a natural inclination to protect non-human life. Obligation and coercion to do so become unnecessary. We understand that other beings, ranging from microbes to multicellular life-forms to ecosystems and watersheds, to Gaia as a whole, are engaged in the process of unfolding their innate potentials. Naess calls this process self-realisation.

The new sense of belonging to an intelligent universe revealed by deep experience often leads to deep questioning, which helps to elaborate a coherent framework for elucidating fundamental beliefs, and for translating these beliefs into decisions, lifestyle and action. The emphasis on action is important. It is action that distinguishes deep ecology from other ecophilosophies. This is what makes deep ecology a movement as much as a philosophy. By deep questioning, an individual is articulating a total view of life which can guide his or her lifestyle choices.

In questioning society, one understands its underlying assumptions from an ecological point of view. One looks at the collective psychological origins of the ecological crisis, and the related crises of peace and social justice. One also looks deeply into the history of the West to find the roots of our pernicious anthropocentrism as it has manifested in our science, philosophy and economics. One tries to understand how the current drive for globalisation of Western culture and of free trade leads to the devastation of both human culture and nature.

This deep questioning of the fundamental assumptions of our culture contrasts markedly with the mainstream shallow or reform approach. This tries to ensure the continuance of business as usual by advocating the 'greening' of business and industry by incorporating a range of measures such as pollution prevention and the protection of biodiversity due to its monetary value as medicine or its ability to regulate climate. Although deep ecology supporters often have no option but strategically to adopt a reform approach when working with the mainstream,

What's a Good Life?

their own deep questioning of society goes on in the background. This may subtly influence the people with whom they interact professionally.

Ultimate norms can be very diverse. For example, a Buddhist and a Christian would disagree about the existence of God, but both would want to protect and nurture life. Thus there is a need for a set of basic views which can be broadly accepted by deep ecology supporters with widely divergent ultimate norms.

For this reason Arne Naess and George Sessions devised the deep ecology platform, also known as the eight points of the deep ecology movement. They constitute Level 2 of the apron or pyramid, and are meant to act as a sort of filter for the deep questioning process. If you can largely agree with the platform statements, you fall within the umbrella of 'the deep ecology movement' and you can place yourself within the ranks of its supporters. The platform is not meant to be a rigid set of doctrinaire statements, but rather a set of discussion points, open to modification by people who broadly accept them.

The Deep Ecology Platform

1. All life has value in itself, independent of its usefulness to humans.
2. Richness and diversity contribute to life's well-being and have value in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs in a responsible way.
4. The impact of humans in the world is excessive and rapidly getting worse.
5. Human lifestyles and population are key elements of this impact.
6. The diversity of life, including cultures, can flourish only with reduced human impact.
7. Basic ideological, political, economic and technological structures must therefore change.
8. Those who accept the forgoing points have an obligation to participate in implementing the necessary changes and to do so peacefully and democratically.

This version of the Deep Ecology Platform has been formulated by those attending the Deep Ecology course at Schumacher College, May 1995.

In fact, the version given here was modified from the original by participants attending a deep ecology course held at Schumacher College in 1995. Some deep ecology supporters regard the platform as the outline of a comprehensive ecosophy in its own right. Here Level 1 statements of wide identification are represented by the first three points, which incorporate the ultimate norm "Intrinsic Value!" Points 4 to 7 are seen as a bridge between the ultimate norm and personal lifestyles, with point 8 relating specifically to concrete actions in the world.

Finally, we come to deep commitment, which is the result of combining deep experience with deep questioning. When an ecological world view is well developed, people act from their whole personality, giving rise to tremendous energy and commitment. Such actions are peaceful and democratic and will lead towards ecological sustainability. Uncovering the ecological self gives rise to joy, which gives rise to involvement, which in turn leads to wider identification, and hence to greater commitment. This leads to 'extending care to humans and deepening care for non-humans'.



Photograph by Gayatri Krishnamoorthy, flickr.com/rosemilkinabottle

The article contains excerpts from 'What is Deep Ecology?' by Stephan Harding. The complete article is available on the Schumacher College, U.K. website. (www.schumachercollege.org.uk)

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NATURE, HEALTH & BODY BEAUTIFUL

A plant-based diet helps us connect with nature and live
with ecological wisdom

By Dr. Nandita Shah &
Madeline Neal-Bakewell

In order to understand how to reach one's highest beauty potential, one must understand what makes us healthy and what makes us ill. All around the world obesity, heart disease, asthma, diabetes, cancer, mental illnesses, and even acne are on the rise. Young people today are coming into an inheritance of ill health and disease both in their bodies and in the crumbling ecosystems around us. People may live longer on medications but suffer from more illnesses in the meantime than their ancestors did. One in five people in the world suffers from diabetes; one in eight has heart disease, and in America, one in three suffers from cancer.

Meanwhile, the growing threat of climate change is on everybody's lips. The current fishing rate exceeds the ocean's sustainability by about two hundred and fifty times. Our land is overwrought by farming, species are plunging into extinction at unprecedented rates, and the trend of overpopulation offers little hope.

What can the individual do to heal her own body? It all comes together in a plant-based whole food diet - which is perhaps essential for the survival of humankind. This drastically reduces your environmental footprint, revolutionizes your health, and can help you reach your highest beauty potential.

A Diet Guided by Naturalism

Nature's guidance provides us with the answer. Other animals in the wild, do not

suffer from ailments like obesity. Think of a deer, an elephant, or a wolf. They are strong, athletic, healthy beings, each with its own astounding beauty. Similarly, no other species has decimated their natural home in the way that humans are doing currently.

Technology and corporate structures have led us away from our natural health, beauty, and ecological well-being. The more we have advanced technologically, the further removed we have become from nature. However, adhering to a more natural lifestyle, the way that other animals do, can alleviate our suffering.

This means abstaining from all animal products, eating only foods made from plants, and eating our foods whole, just as our ancestors did. This is the natural way for humans to eat and will make us healthier, as will be explained shortly.

Wellness and good looks go hand in hand. When we consume the food that is natural to our species, it's not only diseases that become a rarity, but acne and obesity also disappear. Our skin glows and we tend to live longer and look younger.

Why Whole Foods?

Human beings are the only animals that render their food less nutritious before they eat it. In recent times, we have started consuming increasing quantities of 'refined' foods. These are foods wherein, only an extracted part of the whole food is used. Refined products

include white (polished) rice, maida, oil, and sugar, or foods made out of these.

We even 'refine' vegetables or fruits by peeling them or juicing them. Most of the nutrition of plants is stored right under their skin. When we peel, we lose a lot. We can turn to our nearest relatives, other primates, to relearn how to eat. Monkeys will peel bananas but not apples or guavas.

Today, we sometimes worry about not peeling because of the pesticides used in agriculture. However many pesticides are not only skin-deep. When a coconut tree is sprayed at the bottom, the water from its fruit is found to contain pesticides. The only way that we can avoid consuming pesticides is to choose foods that have been grown by conscientious organic farmers. However, if we are not able to get organic foods, we need to be careful what foods we buy and avoid foods that are likely to have excessive pesticides.

All refined products are full of calories and lacking in nutrition. These empty calories make us obese, just as the insufficient nutrition makes us sick. These can be replaced with whole (unpolished) rice, atta, nuts and seeds and dried fruits and occasionally, jaggery. It is possible to cook with only whole foods and have delicious meals. Of course this takes time to learn, but it is possible and fun.

Why Plant Foods?

The other crucial part of this diet is eating only plants, meaning no meat

Photograph by Gayatri Krishnamoorthy, flickr.com/rosemilkinabottle



or dairy. A look at our own bodies can demonstrate that we were made to be herbivores. We don't have appendages - suitable teeth, or claws, for instance - to attack and kill our prey. Then, we cannot digest and chew our meat without cooking it and removing the bones. By relying on technology like stoves, knives, and refrigerators we have become divorced from our natural nourishment. This may be the root cause of our disease.

A further analysis of our anatomy shows us why eating meat and dairy is unsuitable for the human body. Like other herbivores, we have a long intestinal tract, 12 times the length of our spines. Carnivores have digestive tracts 3 times the length of their spines. Our canine teeth are flat and short. Even largely plant-eating chimpanzees have far more pronounced canine incisors than our measly ones.

Our natural eating behaviours further point towards humans being herbivores. Animals that eat other animals drink their water by lapping like a dog. Like other herbivores, such as a horse, we drink by sipping. Unlike carnivores that eat perhaps only once in a few days or weeks, herbivores eat all day long. So do we, at least three meals per day in fact. Do you sometimes feel like you would like to eat all day long? That is because it is our natural state to do so.

Fortunately we can listen to our instincts to learn what is good for us. When we walk through a farm or orchard, we become naturally attracted to fruits or

vegetables that may be growing there. Our instinct is to pick and eat them. But we don't salivate when we see a chicken or a goat running around, still whole and alive. For a dog, the story might be reversed. This is nature telling us what our natural food is. We are also naturally attracted to sweets, and this is because in nature the best food for us is sweet, and that, of course, is fruit.

Thus by using our minds we can ascertain that nature intended for us to be herbivores, and to avoid processing our foods in order to eat like other animals. But one might still ask, what is the harm in meat and milk?

Understanding Meat and Milk

Because our digestive system is designed for a plant-based diet, animal products are difficult to digest and take a long time to pass through our guts, providing ample time to absorb toxins. The meat we consume is high in proteins and fat with no fibre. This predisposes us to disease. Many chronic diseases can be prevented and reversed just by avoiding animal and refined plant products.

The most common killers in the world today are heart disease and hypertension. These conditions are caused by cholesterol. Only animals produce cholesterol. Being animals, we also produce our own cholesterol. We do not need extra cholesterol and we usually end up with too much due to the animal products that we eat.

Milk is also an animal product. Every

mammal in nature produces milk only for its young. In humans, the enzyme renin, which is required to digest milk, becomes absent in the body after age 3 or so. Several studies show that a large number of humans are 'lactose-intolerant' and that consuming milk products is connected to breast, prostate, intestinal and other cancers. Furthermore, the milk protein, casein, is responsible for many incurable autoimmune diseases including Type I Diabetes.

We are conditioned to think of milk as a perfect food, with protein and calcium, which are important for growing children. But where do the animals like cows, horses or even elephants get their protein and calcium? We do not really need another animal's milk. Isn't it interesting that a baby, when first offered cow's milk instinctively spits it out? Has advertising completely brainwashed us?

Powerful food and meat lobbies promote these products in the name of the proteins they contain, but protein deficiency in itself is rare. It does not occur if a person meets his or her caloric needs. This is because every single cell contains protein. No matter what we eat we are consuming proteins. Today many more people suffer from diseases of protein excess, like obesity, cancer, osteoporosis, gout and allergies, rather than protein deficiency.

Clearly, a protein-focused diet is not the way.

So What Should We Eat?

All of us have come across stories in magazines about fruit juices and salads that actors take to maintain their beauty. Plant foods include fruits, vegetables, nuts, roots, leaves like spinach and lettuce, grains, such as wheat, amaranth and oats, and legumes such as chickpeas and lentils.

Humans are the only species who cook their food. Agriculture and the possibility of storing grains was a major step to bring in food security and the evolution of several civilizations. While cooked food today has become a necessity, we have forgotten the value of raw foods.

Eating raw foods - especially plenty of fruits in the morning is excellent for cleansing the system every day to provide several nutrients which are good for our skin, and gives us a lightness which makes us feel fit and happy.

We need to avoid overcooking foods, which destroys the nutrients in vegetables, and especially avoid or minimize oils, (which are not whole foods). Salads, nuts (including coconut) and sprouts can all be added to daily meals to make the food tasty and to take care of our good looks and health.

A plant-based diet is loaded with vitamins, phytonutrients and antioxidants, which are especially important for health and complexion. But such a diet is likely to lack Vitamin B12. Vit. B12 is only made by bacteria. If we were living completely in nature, drinking stream and pond water and eating naturally grown foods, this would not be such an issue. But today we eat food and drink water that is sterile. Therefore, it becomes important to check Vitamin B12 levels and take supplements where required. Also, we must be careful to get enough sunlight to avoid Vitamin D deficiency, since many of us work indoors most of the time.

A Plant-Based Diet Offers Hope to Reduce Climate Change

Animal products are not only bad for our health, they are also unsustainable. In fact, many major environmental issues converge into a demand for plant-based food. Here is just a sampling of some of the facts:

Today 65 billion land animals are reared for food every year to feed our 6.6 billion population. All these animals take up food, land, water, energy, and pollute the environment.

80% of the corn grown and 40% of



Powerful food and meat lobbies promote products in the name of the proteins they contain, but protein deficiency in itself is rare.

the total grains grown in the world are consumed by livestock. As the world population increases, we need to reduce livestock to avoid large-scale hunger.

Meat is energy-intensive. With the energy needed to produce a single hamburger, you could drive a small car twenty miles. Adopting a plant-based diet actually does more to reduce emissions than driving a hybrid car! Meat requires more land, water, fertilizer, pesticides, refrigeration, transport and energy than would be used if we simply ate plant foods directly. It requires 20 times more land to feed a non-vegetarian compared to a vegetarian.

Large Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO's), create incomprehensible quantities of excretions that pollute land and water, spreading disease in their surrounding communities. Forests, too, are felled to grow animal feed and this too, contributes to climate change as well as to a loss of biodiversity and habitat.

It becomes difficult to believe these facts when they are not popularised by the media - you can convince yourself only by doing research and discover all the ways in which we are destroying our ecosystem. Eliminating animal agriculture, although difficult to enact, desperately needs to be done.

The Beauty of the Whole Self

A healthy body is an attractive body. For this reason a plant-based diet renders people more attractive simply because they are healthier. Skin takes on a glow that simply cannot appear with an omnivore's diet. A plant-based diet helps to slim down and helps with body-

sculpting because we are eating foods in their whole, natural state, rich with fiber and cleansing nutrients. This is why Hollywood and Bollywood stars alike are adopting this method of eating.

But this way of eating also enriches inner beauty, which is inextricable from the beauty of the outer body. By appreciating all of nature with every bite, the self becomes more compassionate. By ceasing to participate in cruelty to animals also, only positive energy comes into the self. When we consume meat from stressed animals about to be slaughtered, or milk from a cow that just had her baby stolen, we are also consuming adrenaline from these frightened creatures. This makes us more anxious and less self-confident. By improving one's inner self through earth-conscious, compassionate eating, one can begin to radiate beauty of all kinds.

So empower yourself by re-aligning your body with what nature intended. By so doing, you will beautify your own being, inside and out, and relate with wisdom to the land that sustains us.

Dr. Nandita Shah is a doctor who believes that we are the cause of our disease and we can reverse it. She is the founder of the organization, SHARAN (Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature - www.sharan-india.org.)

Madeline Neal-Bakewell is a longtime vegan with an interest in animals and the environment. She completed a thesis in eco-feminism and animal minds.

Perceiving How We Perceive

This article examines two basic aspects of mental perception which can be part of our training and educational processes – to live wisely on earth.

By Seetha Ananthasivan

“A human being is part of the whole, called by us “Universe”, a part limited in time and space.”

- Albert Einstein

Gandhiji spoke of the need to follow a development path where we would be a part of Nature, not apart from Nature in the early 20th Century. Several others like Thoreau, Rachel Carson and Schumacher, the Club of Rome Report and more recently, the IPCC report have alerted us that the unrelenting human activity on earth will cause a range of crises that will be terrible for humankind. The media does its bit, even if it is a tiny bit, to disseminate information about pollution, ecological degradation and climate change.

If such alerts have been coming to us for over a century, how is it then that the majority of people do not seem to be at all pained or even concerned at the havoc we are wreaking on Earth's ecosystem, without which we cannot live? Is it that we find it difficult to be conscious that we are a part of the whole, “limited in time and space” - hence, unaware of our limitations, we live in an illusion of comfort and plenty?

I remember reading a long time ago about a conversation between Arnold Toynbee and Bertrand Russell. They spoke of their understanding of history, and how at every phase of growth when humankind acquired a new skill or faculty, they seemed to have lost another. For example, when our ancestors first learnt to write, human memory seemed to deteriorate. When humans learnt agriculture and storage of food became easy, they began living in villages, towns

and cities. This transition, it is said, caused the human's sense of smell to become less powerful.

During these few hundred years when reductionist science and technology has taken over our lives, have we lost our intuition “to be aligned to Nature's ways” and “to see the larger picture”? The Native American proverb that “we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children” or the Vedic concept of “Vasudaiva Kutumbakam” - the world as one family - came from earlier eras. At least some aspects of all religions also were concerned with infiniteness and being part of a larger world.

There is another Native American injunction: “when you do something, think how it affects the seventh generation from now”. These kinds of statements are hardly heard today, since we have forgotten to look deeply into ourselves, into Nature's ways and into the future of our modern civilization.

A 'Good Life' for 9 billion people

Today, in schools and colleges, there is hardly a mention of the importance of “the whole” – even about the whole human being – there is mostly a study of the parts, often without seeing their connections to other parts. So, do we need to understand how we perceive – or do not perceive – the whole?

Is our difficulty in seeing the whole picture, in addition to the Cartesian mind-body split which has governed our education, economic and other systems, responsible for our alienation from Nature?

No doubt political and socio-economic transformation are needed if we are to look at a basic ‘good life’ for 8 to 9 billion people on earth by the middle of this century. But we would also need to look at issues of cognition and mental perception to understand the faculty of perceiving the larger picture that we would need as a civilization – and not leave ‘seeing the whole’ to a few philosophers, poets and thinkers.

This article examines two basic aspects of mental perception which can be part of our training and educational processes in schools, colleges and elsewhere.

Perceiving how we Perceive

As far as sensory perception is concerned we know we see with our eyes and the nervous system. But mental perception is very complex – affected by our identity, needs, our belief systems and much more.

The eye cannot see itself – we can see our eyes only in a mirror, we can imagine it or we can listen to others speak about our eyes. Similarly, we seem to be able to perceive many things outside us, around us and then interpret or find meanings in the way we perceive things. This ability makes us “intelligent”, and this unique ability perhaps has made us anthropocentric as human beings.

But we are generally not in touch with how mental perception happens. Certain ways of mental perception have become habitual to us and we do not seem to be conscious of any other way of perceiving. On the time dimension, we only see things as they are today, not as they have been or as they will be in future. On the space

dimension, we are aware only of what we have seen or experienced: hence mental perception and cognition of the larger reality of the whole planet and whole life seems to elude us.

Object Perception & Process Perception

“When you see this paper, can you see a cloud?” – said the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. We have become used to seeing things and objects, which seems but natural, since that is what we see! But as Thich Nhat Hanh says, when we see this paper, can we see the cloud, the rain, sun, the forests, the cutting of trees, the factory that makes the paper, the paper traders and finally the paper in your hand – we can call this “process perception”.

A major preoccupation in nursery and primary education is on learning the names of objects. Then we relate it to the person to whom it belongs, for what it is used, how much it costs and so on. We are thoroughly trained for ‘object perception’.

When we see an object, say a bottle of water or a mobile phone, can we go from ‘object perception’ to include ‘process perception’? Can we invite children to look at a bottle of water and wonder where the water came from, where the plastic came from, how it was made into a bottle, how much power is used and how much wastes are created by the bottling factories? Does the factory deprive the local people of water for their own use? Where do the bottles go after we throw it in the waste bin?

An aspect of process perception gives us the important ability to distinguish between root level problems and end-of-branch problems. Most of the time we keep addressing issues at the end-of-branch level - a well known example being the institutionalised way in which we cure symptoms or diseases rather than build immunity. Medical colleges do not include courses on “Building immunity to diseases” through food and lifestyle.

Such process perception needs practice to become a way of life. We also need process perception to look at ‘living’ plants and animals. What has gone into the making of a kitten – the kitten has her parent genes – and what else? Food converted to bones, blood and muscles and fat? The food in turn



Photograph by Gayatri Krishnamoorthy, flickr.com/rosemilkinabottle

comes from other plants or animals... which comes from the soil, seeds, water and innumerable organisms...

Ultimately, focusing on process perception leads us to the wonder of life itself.

Known Space and Consciousness of the Whole

“Think global, act local” has become a green slogan. But while children today get to see a lot of the world directly as well as through the TV and books, the habit of perception seems to need a special focus to help them ‘Think Global’.

From ancient times we have heard of mystics – Buddha, Christ, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharishi and many more – whose mystical experiences gave them the ability to see the whole, and realize what could be beneficial for the whole of mankind. Mystical experiences however are too complex to be part of education or training.

Book based learning in class rooms and urban living has perhaps created the biggest fragmentation in our minds. Learning experientially - being in open spaces and wilderness, being with animals and relating to different people - in indefinable ways fosters deeper understanding.

At a simpler level, even in classroom situations, children respond

to ‘beckonings’ to expand their understanding and sense the importance of seeing the whole picture. But such understanding cannot come from books and purposive (exam-oriented) learning. Learning through themes and hands-on projects help in fostering holistic thinking. Teachers and students can attempt to look at the fantastic and apparently infinite web of life. This can be done in multiple ways – but learning from actually being with Nature possibly has no substitutes.

When adults themselves are concerned with larger perspectives, raise issues and discuss situations with children, they pick up much more than may be evident to us. Great teachers rely on conversation and discussion to foster wisdom.

Humberto Maturana said, ‘Love is the only emotion that expands intelligence’. Understanding perspectives about the whole earth, the whole biotic community or whole city, country, etc. is not enough. We need to go beyond academics, which is focused on teaching-learning without feelings, without experience and without soul. Learning in ways that touch us as whole human beings will help us see the whole picture. It may also lead us to a more meaningful good life.

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Crafting a Chair

Text & photographs by
Sudarshan Juyal

It began about six-seven years ago...

Then, I was working for a TV channel and the crushing, oppressive corporate culture took up most of my time. Sunday was the only day I spent time with my son Aditya and wife Sunita, and that too was spent (read: wasted) visiting malls, restaurants and places where one ended up buying things, eating fast food or window-shopping. That was the idea of “A Good Life...”

Then one day I met Shammi Nanda, who had studied at the same film institute in Pune as I had and this marked the beginning of a new wonderful relationship. Shammi proposed that we do something on weekends with the children of some of our friends. As I indulged in a little origami in my spare time, he roped me in for an Origami workshop.

On the following Sunday, some of us gathered in the nearby AAREY Colony (a wonderful place, still holding a large green patch, so far spared by the land sharks and builders) All of us carried paper, colours, brushes, scissors, gum as well as some food, water, coffee, tea and mats. It was like a picnic. For five hours, we had a gala time. After a long time we had enjoyed our Sunday to the fullest without spending a single rupee and wandering aimlessly in and out of shops. We came back with papers filled with joyful colours, origami caps, birds and cheerful kids.

Thus began the discovery of real joy: working with our hands. Week after week, all of us gathered on Sundays to spend quality time together doing simple creative activities. A few more families and friends joined in and we started calling it the ‘Sunday Club’. We discovered so many talents within ourselves; cooking,

singing, tie & dye, macramé, making pickles, pasta, pizza, wire jewelry, clay pottery, papier-mâché, singing, playing marbles, kite flying, climbing trees ... the list was ever-growing. We did not look to malls and restaurants for spending our weekends. Our Sunday club transformed into an extended ‘learning exchange’ club; and all of us bonded in a completely different way.

On the personal front, it was a difficult time. My wife was going through a traumatic phase as she had been suffering from schizophrenia for the past few years. My relationship with many close ones had become strained. She had completely

No nails and hammer, no high-end tools, no irritating sounds of cutting and hammerings... We discovered the dignity of labour, the beauty of small things and futility of greed and vanity.

cut herself off from our regular social circles and I too, started shying from social gatherings of any kind. My son Aditya was becoming affected by this. My self-esteem was the lowest it ever was and Mumbai was getting on my nerves. Like most people slogging for a greedy corporate sector, I had lost touch with the real work and was working for one corporate to pay others (in form of post-dated cheques as EMIs).

Prior to our weekly activities, we had ceased to be individuals and lived in the roles assigned by our corporate organisation very seriously. We had turned

into directors, cinematographers, writers, programmers, developers, consultants, ‘ors’, ‘ers’, ‘ists’ and so on. Our Sunday Club was a blessing in disguise in those times. We discovered the joys in small things. A piece of paper turning into a bird was like magic. I relived those wonderful years of childhood again. Week after week, new crafts were unfolding before our eyes.

Thanks to Shammi and the Sunday Club, we met so many people doing diverse interesting things. It further extended to our trips to Vanwadi, a regenerated forest farm near Mumbai and meeting people who nurtured it like Bharat Mansata, Bua, Ambibai, Daualt. We also met others like Manish – Vidhi Jain, Ramji (the list is too long) from Shikshantar, an organization dedicated to rethinking the ideas and practice of education and many other wonderful souls who helped in flushing toxins of all kinds from my system and psyche.

One of the things I learnt during those days at our club was rolling paper (newspapers, old magazines, useless credit card bills, used notebooks, electricity bills and so on) into sticks. Once you have rolled plenty of them, it is ready to be used to make structures like barrels, boxes, photo frames, mirror frames, table lamps, chairs, tables and curtains. The possibilities are endless... even paper jewelry.

However, I only took it seriously when my son Aditya wanted a small chair and table for his studies. I thought this was a good chance to experiment and also save some money. Though I was not very confident, I began by rolling a huge pile of newspapers into sticks. This



is the most tedious and repetitive part of the process. It is a lot more fun if you involve your friends and family members at this stage. In fact, kids love it as they find these sticks quite amusing (you will have to restrain them from a mock sword fight!).

For a beginner, it will take some time to roll paper into firm and uniform sticks

1. To begin, moist the index-finger a bit, and pinch the newspaper sheet from any corner.
2. Once you get hold of the paper, roll it tightly. Once you reached 1/3rd of the paper, one can put the paper down and roll with the help of your palms. It is important to keep a firm grip on the paper or else it tends to become loose and will not be of much use for making a strong chair. Use one hand to keep the roll in place tightly.
3. At the end, apply some glue or diluted Fevicol to close the end to hold the stick structure. Make many such sticks. For this part, it is best to choose a flat surface like a dining table or the clean floor of your study or living room.

It is a good idea to observe cane furniture if you get a chance. Even studying bridges in pictures will help you evolve your own structural designs. I was inspired by the design of a cane chair I had seen, to make the chair in the pictures attached with this write-up. You can draw few designs on a paper first, to make the process easier.

I began joining the rolled sticks together with fevicol (undiluted) to make a simple structure. It was weak, wobbly and a rather sketchy rendering of the design I had in mind. Everyone at home smiled at the childish shape I had in front of me. Once I added two more layers of sticks to that, the structure suddenly grew

stronger by at least four times.

I kept adding few more layers of paper sticks and the structure gained some more strength and credibility in the eyes of others. An important thing to remember is to use only undiluted fevicol at this stage. The quantity should be right (not too less and not too much) and be applied on the complete surface of each stick. Then let it dry a little (not completely) and press them into the shape. Keep a moist piece of old cloth to wipe messy hands.

While making the chair, I kept testing the piece by inviting my son and his friends to sit on it. By trial and error, I discovered the need of few more braces and cross supports (like those we see in the old wooden and iron bridges). As I added them, the structure became strong. It was soon ready to be used by my son. I grew a little more ambitious and added a few more layers, and the load capacity increased manifold.

Finally, the chair was ready sans seat and the backrest. I had seen chairs with old style woven seats and backrests in many houses and tried doing that with the paper sticks, but they were too thick for the purpose. I simply made a much easier and cruder version of the same for the backrest.

For the seat, I put one layer after another in criss-cross fashion. For the finishing touches, I wrapped each joint with paper sticks in such a manner that there was no possibility of them coming apart. It took about three-four hours every day for a week to finish the piece.

Everyone was amazed at the beauty, including me. Our maid Kalpana (who'd initially been very skeptical about the whole thing) was invited to sit on it and she did so with a lot of hesitation. The chair held together and so did my faith in the smaller things in life. The only tool I

used was a flush wire-cutter (as scissors took little more effort in cutting the sticks but one can use them if needed) and the material was about 8 kilograms of waste newspaper and 3/4 kg of fevicol.

No nails and hammer, no high-end tools, no irritating sounds of cutting and hammerings... it was almost like sculpting in silence though with a little mess around my house and a few glue stains on the floor that everyone happily got rid of in no time.

Many of my friends who visited my house offered to buy the chair, but I had grown attached to the work. When I moved to Dehradun, I left the chair behind with a friend as I did not have the courage to hand it over to the rough handling of movers and packers. It is still more or less intact and so is my love for these little experiments.

Like all other good things in life, our Sunday Club came to a gradual halt. However, it continues to be present in all of us in one way or the other.

We discovered the dignity of labour, the beauty of small things and futility of greed and vanity. I am still very far from a meaningful existence and my wife is still struggling with her condition, but the intensity of misery is far less than it would have been. I have managed to gather courage to move to my hometown in Uttarakhand (Dehradun) and do the things I like. I am trying to reduce my carbon footprint. My relationships with old friends and family have been rejuvenated. My son Aditya has grown into a chirpy, well-meaning boy of 11 years and I feel more connected to people and my family.

Sudharshan Juyal is a film-maker and an artist who loves using materials around him to create simple, functional and aesthetic craft.



Walking with Kabir

By Shabnam Virmani



I had set out thinking I would preach Kabir to the violent, misguided ones out there. But soon Kabir started speaking to me, in here.

My search for Kabir started in 2002. I was living in Ahmedabad when the Godhra event happened and I witnessed the anti-Muslim pogrom which unfolded in the state of Gujarat. Immediately Kabir seemed to call out, '*Sadho, dekho jag baurana!* (Oh seekers, see the world's gone mad!)'. I instinctively felt, yes, this man is saying what I feel.

In 2003, I set out on a series of journeys, camera in hand, venturing into diverse socio-cultural, religious and musical landscapes, meeting with people who sing, love, quote, revere and make meaning of Kabir for their lives. Six years later some of these experiences found expression in four documentary films, several music CDs and books. But while I journeyed into outer worlds, at Kabir's constant bidding, I also journeyed within – and the story for me didn't proceed according to script. There were surprises and transformations Kabir had in store for me.

I had set out thinking I would preach Kabir to the violent, misguided ones out there. But soon Kabir started speaking to me, in here. Soon he started showing me the fissures in my own mind, the violence (gross or subtle) and the dishonesties I am capable of when I construct and defend my ego. He showed me how I subtly 'other' multiple categories of people in order to consolidate my identity

and how this 'othering' keeps me locked in dualistic ways of perceiving myself and the world – ways that are ultimately violent and divisive. I saw how this inner reality linked with my outer one, how dishonesty and violence at the individual level unfolds into pogroms and war at the larger level, as we 'other' whole communities while defending our collective egos of sect or nation. This is not what I was expecting to find on these journeys – to find myself complicit in the social scenario I had set out to condemn, at least in some measure.

*Buraa jo dekhna mein chala,
bura na milya koi
Jo man khoja aapna,
mujhse bura na koi
I set out to find evil
and found no evil one.
I searched my own self
and found no one as evil as I.*

In another famous couplet, he says –
*Kabira khadaa bazaar mein,
liye lukaathi haath
Jo ghar baare aapna,
chale hamaare saath!
Kabir stands in the market,
flaming torch in hand.
Burn down your home,
then come walk with me!*

The metaphor of a 'home' unfolds in deeper and deeper ways, but one

immediate reading points to the walls of identity we build to separate us from them. Kabir pushes us out of these comfort zones, our carefully constructed identities and self-images, which quite like our houses, are material, located and very fragile. They need to be constantly defended and protected from the quakes and storms of change and time. We don't have to jettison all our frameworks or forms, but surely we should be able to step out of them from time to time, and with a certain lightness, wonder and even humour, observe our own particularity within a multiplicity of others. Evidently, this is not an easy task, and it's not surprising that Kabir claims his home is a tough one to reach.

*Kabir kaa ghar shikhar pe, silhali si gail
Wahan paanv na tike papeel ka, kyun
manvaa laade bail?
Kabir's home is on a peak –
the path is slippery and treacherous.
The foot of an ant slips on it.
Oh mind, why load your bullock?*

So, nudged by Kabir himself, each of the four documentary films journeys cross a boundary of some kind; both the physical borders drawn across our geographic realities as well as those etched in the treacherous terrains of our own minds. The film '*Had Anhad* (Bounded Boundless): Journeys with Ram and Kabir' (probes the divides

created by religion and nationalism and journeys from India to Pakistan.

'*Koi Sunta Hai* (Someone is Listening): Journeys with Kumar and Kabir' probes the boundaries we create in the realms of knowledge, art and music. The metaphor of *ghar* here slides into *gharana*, literally 'houses' of learning in Hindustani classical music. These *gharanas* often get encrusted with snobbery and exclusivity and we see in this film how the renowned singer Kumar Gandharva had the courage to 'burn' down his citadel of classical learning.

It seems to me that to grapple with the problem of divisiveness we must not only 'tolerate' difference, we should make friends with it. The film '*Chalo Hamara Des* (Come to My Country): Journeys with Kabir and Friends', shows a friendship between a rural Dalit folk singer, Prahlad Tipanya and an American scholar, Linda Hess, a friendship between the Kabir of rural Malwa and the Kabir of an American scholar-translator who practices Zen Buddhism. The film subtly evokes this cross-cultural friendship, strengthened by their porous ego borders and openmindedness. As that film traverses the physical landscapes of rural India and North America, it is really traversing hearts and minds, crossing bridges of understanding, despite difference.

Kabir haldi peeyari, chuna ujwal bhai
Ram snehi yun mile, donon varan gavai
Kabir says, turmeric is yellow
Limestone a brilliant white
Two lovers of Ram met thus –
both shed their own colours

So I decided to walk over to 'other' sides that made me uncomfortable. Coming as I did from an agnostic family background and having been inspired later by the leftist ethos of social activism in my 20s and 30s, I had a deep mistrust of religion, rituals and gurus. When I ventured into the religious contexts of Kabir, I was uncomfortable, startled and deeply disoriented to discover my response – first confusion, and then a creeping empathy.

It was this uneasy tension in myself that became the underlying quest of the film '*Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein* (In the Market stands Kabir): Journeys with Sacred and Secular Kabir'. It probes the ironies, compulsions and contradictions that unfold in the life of Prahlad Tipanya who, while being part of the activist



Fariduddin Ayaz at the Bangalore Festival, 2009

secular group Eklavya, also decides to join the Kabir Panth as a *mahant* (cleric of the sect). The film tracks the opposing pulls of the individual and the collective, the spiritual and the social, the contrasting calls of autonomy and social authority, as he tries to conscientiously translate the ideas of Kabir into his own life practice.

Given my mistrust of the culture of gurus in our country, I was surprised on these journeys at being given the gift of a guru. Prahladji, the charismatic village school teacher and folk singer from Malwa, Madhya Pradesh, drew me to him precisely because he didn't set himself up as a guru. He often says that our true guru is beyond boundaries and found within ourselves, arising spontaneously in the house of our own experience. He resists and upsets the practices of hierarchy, ego massaging and knowledge politics that mark so much of the culture around gurus. He carries his insights with lightness and shares them with a playful ease and deeply inclusive humility that shows me that he is a true *sadhak* (seeker) himself. I marvelled again – this is not what I expected to find.

The Kabir films and festivals that are currently unfolding around their screenings and live music concerts are a small effort towards experiencing Kabir in an integrated way, without fragmentation. They try to bring the socio-political, material world, with its dilemmas and choices together with the spiritual world, the deep inner realms of meditative stillness and the insights of self-knowledge they hold for us. The films and the festivals do not offer us music as temporary escape into elevated spaces free of the muck of reality. They constantly weave between the sublime

and the mundane, the spiritual and the political.

There was a moment during the Bangalore festival of Kabir in February-March 2009 when it felt like this truth was realized. The context was the growing jingoistic mood in our country four months after the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. Despite the pessimism and lack of help from many quarters, our team had secured visas for our Pakistani singer friends to join other Kabir singers from Malwa, Rajasthan, Kutch and Karnataka at this festival. I think this was achieved through our sheer will and commitment to recall the voice of Kabir as a shared cultural heritage across the nation's borders precisely at that moment in history.

It was the last day of the festival, the final concert of qawwali by Fariduddin Ayaz from Karachi and the 1350-seat auditorium was packed to the brim. When he burst into the famous Rajasthani folk song '*Padhaaro mhaare des* (Come to my country)', the moment crackled with a tragic beauty. 'Let us go to that undivided land,' he said, 'that country beyond India and Pakistan, that undivided mind space where we all belong, where Kabir is calling us...' Many in the audience were weeping.

I would like to talk about a few other things these journeys taught me, things that didn't seem at first directly connected with Kabir. As a convent-educated, English-speaking person, I found myself connecting with my own native language universe in ways I didn't anticipate, and certainly with a joy that I didn't expect. I would spend hours on long-winded

road journeys to remote village concerts with folk singer friends, squabbling with camaraderie over word meanings. I would find myself poring over song texts with a medieval Hindi dictionary in hand, transcribing and excavating with the excitement of an archaeologist, the meanings and nuances of the words and poems. This labour was way beyond the needs of my films and sometimes I'd be overcome with a sense of unreality. When the sounds and textures of these non-English dialects began to enter me, I realized they were filling up a void that I wasn't even aware existed.

As I ventured into the life of Kabir in the community, I began to experience a strange tension with my technology. The presence of my camera seemed to separate me from the action and relegate me to being a passive observer. It was not long before I began to steal chances to relinquish the camera, pick up the *manjiras* (cymbals), clap and join in the singing in a room full of sweaty *bhajnicks* (devotees) totally intoxicated on the *nasha* of Kabir.

Being part of the making process seemed more vital and important than consuming what is made, in my case, 'recording' it. It seemed imperative to be fully enveloped in the live pulsating music, to allow it to infiltrate your very pores and have the poetry literally enter your body by singing it. As one singer puts it in one of the films, '*Ham baani ko loot liye, baani ko kha gaye!*' (I looted this poetry, I ate up the words!)

Another not unrelated experience was to leave my middle class city world to enter the villages, to experience a direct contact with nature, with the tactile physical world. If we're in a closed car the outer world whizzes by in a vague and muffled manner. But if we walk there is a sense of experiencing the land directly. We sweat in the sun, stumble on the rocks, hear the birds, taste the dust, feel the breeze. For me these experiences became inseparable from the experience of Kabir. They were not irrelevant to his poems, their life force. To walk barefoot for three days in the village of Damakheda, to eat only once a day and like it, to eat on the earthen floor, to sleep on hay, to eat food plucked straight from standing crops in the fields, to wade through rivers with camera on my shoulder, to relinquish the desire to cordon myself off from the experience of the tactile, physical world around me.



Film Screening at Malwa, Photograph by Hari Adivarekar

Our middle class lives deliver to us mediated experiences that come to us through books, TV, radio, music CDs and the internet – technology that can certainly deliver powerful experiences, but that can also circumscribe our lives, cut it off from immersion in a vital life force that exists in nature, in the tactile experience of sound, music and earth. We get alienated, we become watchers of spectacles, far-removed, we become phlegmatic; we don't participate.

I realized how the meanings of the songs changed when they entered and inhabited your whole body. I realized how too much learning and scholarship can actually be an impediment to intuiting the wisdom of Kabir. Often I'd meet an 'illiterate' villager who seemed to silently 'know' so much more than the voluble pundits of Kabir lost in the maze of their own erudition.

Kabir urges us to receive this knowledge by taking the plunge, through direct immersion and participation, through a full body experience, by implicating the self with a searing honesty and making it vulnerable. What we all find easier to do, however, is to cling to the safety of the coast, be observers, do a cerebral reading and, with our faculties of self-preservation in full throttle, keep ourselves once-removed, high and very dry.

Likhaa likhee ki hai nahin, dekhaa dekhee baat

Dulhaa dulhan mil gaye, to pheeke padi baraati!

You can't read or write about it.

It must be seen and experienced.

*When the bride and groom unite,
the wedding party pales*

So I was not surprised to discover recently that one of the root meanings of the term *bhakti* is 'participation'. I am not surprised that it is the folk music of our villages – with its democratic and inclusive spirit – that has nourished the *bhakti* traditions in this country. In the best tradition of the all-night village *satsangs* (devotional gatherings) and *jagrans* where this poetry flourishes, transmits and is practiced, many boundaries begin to blur – those between singer and listener, between singer and song, between self and other, between self and God.

Laali mere laal kee, jit dekhun tit laal

Laali dekhan mein gayee, mein bhee ho gayi laal

*The redness of my beloved is such –
wherever I look I see that red.*

*I set out in search of red,
I became red myself*

'Dhai Akar Prem Ka – The Kabir Festival will take place in Mumbai 14th – 23rd January, 2011

The above article contains excerpts from the original article published in the Seminar Magazine. The complete article is available on www.kabirproject.org

Shabnam Virmani has inquired into the contemporary resonances of Kabir through a series of journeys over the last six years through films, music and books. The project was seeded at the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore where it continues to be located, and is supported by the Ford Foundation, New Delhi

What's a Good Life?

– for the whole world...

When we go out into the open – especially into farmland or forests, to mountains or the sea, Nature seems vast – the Earth seems to stretch as far as the eye can see, and if there is hardly another soul in sight, we can very well feel that we are not really overcrowding or messing up life on earth. There are enough green plants and trees around and the blue skies and inexorable waves lull us into a happy sense of reassurance. 'God's in his heaven and All's well with the world', as the poet said.

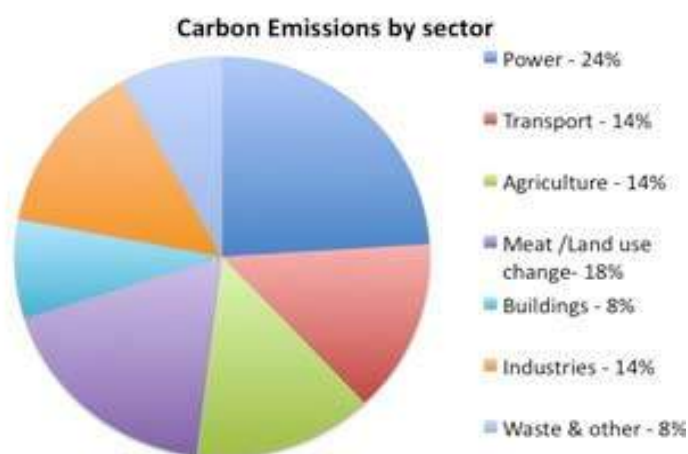
Unfortunately, a few lush landscapes cannot be our measure of how much we have interfered with the fragile ecology of the Earth, anymore than we can measure the extent of cancerous growth within, from the smile of a patient.

The Earth's signals of global warming and climate change have made us take a harder look at human excesses and question the compulsions of our modern civilization. Most of these excesses and compulsions are directly connected with the notion of a 'Good Life' that we hold. It is no doubt that they have dynamic relationships with the path of 'development' that most of the world has chosen.

Much of the good life at the individual level– be it eating food from across the globe or driving a car and hence polluting the commons... are accepted as legitimate, fine, good living. It becomes difficult to preach or practice a low carbon lifestyle: yet hundreds of thousands of people and organisations the world over are working with conviction and hope towards sustainable living - both for their intrinsic value of starting with oneself and to elicit more top-down solutions.

Much of the time we get to read of various fragments of the problem, in different corners of the newspaper. It becomes difficult to 'see the whole picture'. The poster overleaf is an attempt to join the dots from the 'stuff' we do not want to give up to the consequences they lead to, including the percentage of carbon emissions* that they result in. Our intention is to indicate the connections – precise data is simply not available. We suggest that the poster be displayed in class rooms, school and college lobbies or even in homes: as a reminder to help us transition to a more sustainable 'Good Life'.

We do hope you find the poster useful in "Seeing the connections"



* The carbon emissions by sector have been adapted from the Stern Report, 2006. (Later data about carbon emissions have not been reported sector wise as above) The land-use change – deforestation of rain forests is being done largely for growing fodder crops for the meat industry, and hence has been listed as Meat / land use change accounting for 18% of carbon emissions. The FAO Report, 2007 also says that Meat eating accounts for 18% of carbon emissions. In all other cases the Stern Report nomenclature and percentages have been retained.

Middle Page Spread

Middle Page Spread





It is not the strongest of the species nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.

- Charles Darwin

Environmental Crisis: Challenges in the 21st century

By Dr. V.S. Sreedhara

The crisis in global environmentalism has deepened more than ever before. While some advocate a 'return to the earth' path, involving lifestyle changes to save global population from starvation, others put forth a strong case for tough regulations through proper institutional frameworks for realizing a larger, shared global sustainability. However, there is no denial of the fact that environmental crisis is increasingly becoming globalised and local initiatives, although important, are not enough to address the present crisis.

At the same time, global efforts at saving the earth from further devastation have also run into rough weather, thanks to the enormous political, economic and social differences between the North and the South, as well as the changed nature of Nation States. The cautious optimism of the Rio World Conference in 1992 (popularly known as the 'Earth Summit') which tried to hammer out a cooperative path toward long-term sustainability, linking development with environment has given way to skepticism, mainly due to bickering about increasing spending and cost-sharing between the rich and the poor nations. The North's concern about climate change and biodiversity preservation have gained primary focus, pushing the South's worries about clean water, food scarcity, and healthy agro-eco systems to a secondary status, leading to bargaining and crafting multilateral treaties.

The summits that followed have become a theatre for replaying the already existing global divisions based on an uneven balance of power, even becoming vehicles for legitimizing further industrial growth, providing more opportunities for MNCs and big

corporate players to reap more money in the name of sustainable development. The very premise of such global summits is increasingly being questioned for its flawed notions of sustainability and 'economic modernization' which are inherently capital-intensive. The criticism is that such a globalised approach while promising marginal gains, has ignored more fundamental social, political and economic changes needed to achieve true sustainability. This has led many to see with greater clarity, that economic relations can never be seen as independent from ecological systems that sustain life on the planet.

The 'Reformist/ Survivalist' Approach

The present approach to environmental problems differs substantially from those that were prevalent when the first concerted efforts began in the late 1960s. The primary concerns then were about the negative environmental consequences of unregulated industrial development, depletion of resources and increase in population pressure. Some of the path-breaking books of that decade like, 'Silent Spring' ('62), 'Limits to Growth' ('72) and 'Blueprint for Survival'

('72) argued for an 'authoritarian' and 'survivalist' strategy as the basis for environmentalism. These terms signify harsh measures necessary to control the effective use of finite and limited resources. The ever increasing population, these books argued, would result in scarcity and struggle for survival. The focus, therefore, was on social control since, left to themselves individuals do not self-regulate their consumption or profits. The belief was that adequate eco-friendly technological development would answer the 'survivalist' crisis and that an effective combination of social control and technological innovation would lead to better environmental management. Thus, it showed a firm faith in the adaptability of institutions, along with a belief in the application of science, rationality and managerial ingenuity.

However, it should be recognized that early environmentalism was reformist in its content, and manipulative (i.e. human skill and knowledge could transform nature into a 'desired garden'). For instance, though it demanded social control, it did not dwell into its mechanization like, who controls social organizations and whose interests they serve. In other words, it did not raise hard political questions about power relations that govern the mode of production and distribution. The ideological basis of this approach, which is generally termed 'techno-centric environmentalism', is still active and wields considerable influence among many contemporary environmental initiatives. It has now taken the form of new taxes, governmental sanctions and penalties, standard setting of emissions and other pollutants. As O'Riordan puts it, it has produced a 'superficially alternative reform', which is essentially a survival strategy for the political status

Summits function like pressure groups to push establishments in certain directions without altering the exploitative nature of the state or raising some fundamental questions about the North-South divide.



Photograph www.sacred-sites.org

The eco-centric worldview has led to the formation of green politics based on ecological balance, social responsibility, grassroots activism, and the philosophy of non-violence.

quo. According to him, the techno-centric environmentalists 'believe that they can upgrade the quality of existence for the entire world's people so long as the right entrepreneurial conditions hold'.

The debates that happen within global summits, in a way, uphold this view. In spite of severe disagreements, which sometimes veer towards a total breakdown, they are in general agreement about maintaining a status quo in the structures of power. More often than not, the summits function like pressure groups to push establishments in certain directions without altering the exploitative nature of the state or raising some fundamental questions about the North-South divide. The globalization of environmentalism is also a part of globalization of economy and hence without questioning the roots of globalization, new environmental praxis is difficult to emerge.

Take for example, how global pacts on environmental protection finally end up serving the interests of multinational companies like Cargil, Monsanto, or Du Pont. These agro-business giants have been pushing GM food as a technological alternative to food crisis. These efforts at tackling the problem of agricultural production through biotechnology have drawn

sharp criticism from environmentalists themselves, if one sees the severe protest demonstrations that take place at every global summit. The critics point out that MNCs are using environmental crisis to engineer their cause and increase their hold on farmers, which has only ended up in pushing agriculture into a debt trap, particularly in Third World societies. All these developments have brought in a realization that the crisis today cannot be solved by a technological approach and attention to social, cultural, political and economic dimensions are crucial.

Bio-centrism or Deep Ecology Approach

In opposition to the techno-centric, regulatory forms of solution to the environmental crisis, some have put forth the idea of an eco-centric approach, also known by other terms like bio-centrism or deep ecology. In spite of some important differences within, this approach shares certain common concerns which can be characterized as promotion of self-reliance and sufficiency, focus on a new environmental ethics that includes respect for all life forms, and an emphasis on decentralized, democratic, small-scale communities using 'soft technology' like reliance on renewable resources, organic farming etc. The well known slogan, 'Act

locally and think Globally' stems from this position.

The eco-centric worldview has led to the formation of green politics based on ecological balance, social responsibility, grassroots activism, and the philosophy of non-violence. Most of the third world down-to-earth activism, like our own Narmada Bachao Andolan, are examples of this approach. These movements succeeded in fusing environmental concerns with those of social justice and equity, thereby making environmental issues into a political question.

However, some brands of deep ecology most notably that of Lovelock and Capra, tend to perceive ecological crisis as rooted in the spiritual impoverishment caused by industrial society and an enlightenment-driven, rationalist worldview. As a cure to the ills of techno-rational modernity, they call for awareness about the 'embeddedness' of nature where everything is connected to everything else. It also highlights the deep connections between nature and the feminine self, leading to eco-feminism. It rejects a reformist approach to solving the crisis since reforming a system, which is fundamentally flawed, will not do. But, this approach is not without its limitations either. Taken to its limits

deep ecology, with its emphasis on self-purification, could remain inimical to the complexities of social structures that are equally embedded with the question of political economy.

Eco-Feminist Approach

The aspirations of eco-centricism promoting close linkages between ecology and feminism on the one hand and an ecological world view that upholds right of nature (including animal rights) as a spiritual value on the other, can be traced back to those heady days of the 60s, when several counter cultural movements emerged along with environmental concerns. Two such movements deserve mention: feminism and civil rights. Together, these ideas heralded a new turn in the human history of intellectual growth that continue to influence much of contemporary thought. By unsettling many accepted notions of knowledge, culture and political theories, they ushered in new forms of questioning the status quo, including orthodox Marxism.

For instance, the period witnessed a marked disillusionment with economy-based class struggle as the only form of 'authentic' revolt against authoritarianism, exploitation and social injustice. By inserting the notion of gender and race, they drew attention to the ways in which class was structured through gender and racial relations. The patriarchal technology of governance subjugated women, which in many ways was similar to the subjugation of nature for "man's" needs. Marxism came under attack for sidelining these markers of exploitation and promoting economic reductionism and Soviet brand of authoritarianism. It cannot be denied that in spite of its radicalism, the left-thinking ignored both women and environmental issues to a secondary status relegating them to the domain of the super-structure.

Eco-Socialist Approach

As far as their faith in technology and progress was concerned, there was very little difference between the right and the left. In spite of the basic difference as to the means of production, both the orthodox left and its capitalist other believed in unlimited growth and exploitation of nature for human ends. The Marxist practice had very little sympathy with environmental issues, even though Marxism as a philosophy had emphasized the emergence of a 'new

man' under socialism who is not alienated from either labour or nature. The rigidity of left thinking in India with regard to environmental issues becomes clear when one sees their cold-shouldered approach to NBA and big dams. The communist parties were conspicuously absent in many environmental movements in Karnataka like 'Save Kudremukh' or anti-nuclear struggles. On the contrary, the CPM-affiliated youth wing DYFI brought out a pamphlet in support of continuing Kudremukh Iron Company, as closing it would affect the workers' livelihood. Even today, though both the CPI and CPM oppose nuclear bombs, they are not averse to nuclear power stations.

The challenges thrown up by the advent of new ideas altered the theoretical underpinnings of left thinking, leading to what is called the 'greening of the left'. By absorbing many concerns of feminism and environmentalism, Post-Marxist critical theory has grown sensitive to the issues of gender, race/caste as well as to those of ecology. The mapping of Marxism with ecology and women issues has developed into a new paradigm in environmental studies called eco-socialism.

The socialist analysis of environmental issues is to be seen as a part of the rebuilding of the left. While upholding several aspirations of eco-centricism, eco-socialism tries to locate the ecological crisis within a dominant capital structure. Unlike the followers of deep ecology, left environmentalists would like to go beyond mere lifestyle or behavioural change and look into the structures of governance that prevent a full realization of personal changes. It is now becoming increasingly clear that a few experiments in organic farming, however important such initiatives are, will not be enough to tackle the larger issue of agricultural crisis, which is intricately connected to a new-liberal policy of market economy and privatization. In a situation where national sovereignty in terms of trade and resource use are at stake and poorer nations are forced to accept economic liberalization, there is very little scope for meaningful change towards a sustainable agricultural development. Bringing lifestyle changes and developing a close bond with nature that eco-centricism favours, do not happen in a vacuum. Economic and political conditions shape environmental attitudes far more deeply than psychology or spirituality.

Similarly, eco-socialism has its differences with feminism that essentialises women as 'natural associates of nature' and can slip easily into an apolitical understanding of gender relations. While acknowledging the deeper connections between domination of nature and of women, eco-socialism tends to view the gender relations as intricately woven with those of class, race and caste. For instance, it is usually the poor and socially marginalized women who bear the brunt of ecological crisis, be it the scarcity of food or water. As many have noted, the link between destruction of nature and the destruction of women's livelihoods manifests both materially and ideologically. Vandana Shiva, for instance, observes that globalization has created a new form of 'environmental apartheid', which 'restructures control over resources in such a way that the natural resources of the poor are systematically taken over by the rich, and the pollution of the rich is systematically dumped on the poor'.

To conclude, it can be said that the environmental crisis of the 21st century has thrown open multiple challenges and a wide range of issues that can be addressed only through multiple ideologies and practices. Given the realities of capitalism, resource-conserving and non-consumerist practices will never be promoted as a viable solution for they work against market economy of profiteering. The expectation that a set of policy changes, along with technological innovations, could bring a renaissance in environmental protection is unrealistic. It calls for a more radical transformation in the social, political, cultural and economic arenas with a clear focus on a more socially just, economically viable and environmentally sound alternatives. Environmental degradation has to be seen as a major contradiction of the 21st century capitalism, an awareness that is crucial to pave way for an equitable society. The various struggles of adivasis and poorer sections of society against mining, SEZs and other corporate appropriation of resources that have spread all over the country is an indication as to where the future challenges and solutions lie.

Dr. V.S. Sreedhara is a Professor of English at Vijaya College, Bangalore. He is also a human rights activist, and has edited numerous books in Kannada. He has been part of textbook committees at both pre-university and degree levels.

Junk It!

Knowing the hidden dangers of your favourite fast foods

By Aruna Kalahastri

In modern times, we favor factory and industrial processing, which gives us the convenience of a quick meal. Processing destroys the nutrients in food rather than increasing them, and makes our food more difficult to digest. Furthermore, industrial processing depends upon products that have a negative impact on our health, such as sugar, white flour, processed and hydrogenated oils, additives, colorants, synthetic vitamins and an extrusion processing of grains – which are the tools of the food processing industry.

Fast food has very high energy density (about 65 percent higher than a typical diet) which makes us eat more than we otherwise would. Energy density refers to the amount of calories an item of food contains in relation to its weight. Foods with high energy density confuse the brain's control systems for appetite, which are based solely on portion size i.e. food intake is assessed by the size of the portion. A typical fast food meal contains many more calories than a similar-sized portion of a healthy meal.

FRENCH FRIES

These may be tasty, but doctors have long warned against consuming them too often because of their hefty doses of both sodium and saturated fats.

McDonald's French Fries (Medium 114 g):

Total Calories: 380

Total Fat: 20 g (% Daily Value = 31)

Saturated Fat: 4 g (% Daily Value = 20)

Trans Fat: 5 g

Sodium: 266 mg

Ingredients that are not good for health:

Saturated Fats & Trans Fats

Scientific evidence shows that consumption of saturated fat, transfat, and dietary cholesterol raises low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad cholesterol,” levels, which increases the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, more than 12.5 million Americans have CHD, and more than 500,000 die each year. That makes CHD one of the leading causes of death in the United States. [Source: FDA Consumer Magazine, Oct 2003].

Sodium

Additionally, according to the recommendations of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, 1,200 – 1,500 mg of sodium is the daily sodium requirement for adults. Keeping these figures in mind, you should also know that the regular table salt that we consume contains 40% sodium, and a single teaspoon of table salt contains 2,300 mg of sodium.

Although the body requires minimum quantities of sodium, too much sodium contributes to high blood pressure. Sodium can also lead to building-up of fluids in people who suffer from congestive heart failure, cirrhosis, or kidney disease.

In 2006, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition further concluded that both potatoes and French fries seem to lead to an increased risk in the development of Type II diabetes. The risk was higher among women who were already obese.



Acrylamide

This is formed naturally when starch-rich foods are fried, baked, grilled, toasted or microwaved at high temperatures. For e.g: Chips, roast potatoes, crisps and bread. It has also been found in a variety of other foods. It has caused cancer in rats in laboratory tests and its presence in some foods may harm people's health. Acrylamide has not been found in any raw or boiled foods.

Generally, French fries and potato chips are usually cooked at 190 °C (374 °F) – a temperature high enough to cause the formation of acrylamide.

According to some studies, in foods like French fries and potato chips, Acrylamide is present to the tune of about 300 times more than the “safe” limits recommended by WHO (World Health Organization).

Source: www.cspinet.org



KFC's GRILLED CHICKEN

Surprisingly, the details of ingredients in their products is available on their website -www.kfc.com. Here's what's in **KFC's Grilled Chicken** (finger lickin' flavour)

Fresh Chicken Marinated With Salt, Sodium Phosphate, and Monosodium Glutamate. Seasoned With: Maltodextrin, Salt, Bleached Wheat Flour, Partially Hydrogenated Soybean and Cottonseed Oil, Monosodium Glutamate, Spice, Palm Oil, Natural Flavor, Garlic Powder, Soy Sauce (Soybean, Wheat, Salt), Chicken Fat, Chicken Broth, Autolyzed Yeast Extract, Extractives of Turmeric, Dehydrated Carrot, Onion Powder, and Not More Than 2% Each of Calcium Silicate and Silicon Dioxide Added As Anticaking Agents.

Ingredients that are not good for health:

Maltodextrin

According to the Sugar Association (U.S.), it is "a short chain of molecularly linked dextrose (glucose) molecules", manufactured by a process that breaks down starches found in common cereals such as rice or corn, as well as in starchy vegetables such as potatoes. The process typically produces a white or cream-colored powder that can be sweet or flavorless.

Maltodextrin, because of its sweet properties, is often used as an artificial sweetener in canned foods and dessert mixes. It also functions as filler and thickener, i.e., it can be used in place of cornstarch or flour to thicken sauces, gravies and syrups.

Some of its associated problems: it suppresses your immune system, promotes imbalance of intestinal flora, causes blood-sugar fluctuation which can lead to diabetes, promotes weight gain, can cause neurotransmitter imbalance that leads to depression, and can even lead to addiction.

Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)

More familiar to you as MSG; we have already detailed its impacts in our last issue. This unnatural flavor enhancer is a neurotoxin that kills brain cells by over stimulating them. It is commonly regarded as one of the most dangerous food additives in existence and is associated with Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and learning disabilities.

Partially Hydrogenated Soybean & Cottonseed Oil

With more than 60% of cotton in India and 43% of cotton globally being genetically modified, the chance of GM cotton oils in our foods is very high. It doesn't take great computation to get this right. Also, about 58.3% of soya globally, and 85% of American soya is genetically modified. These could impact health in addition to the impacts created by consuming partially hydrogenated oils (transfats).



SOFT DRINKS AND COLAS

We had a cool dirty dozen (12 top brand soft drinks) in the Indian food industry tested by 'Down to Earth' magazine (Aug 15, 2003) found to be contaminated with LINDANE (g-HCH).

Harmful Ingredients the soft drinks contain:

Lindane

Lindane is an insecticide. Its consumption damages the body's central nervous system, immune system and is a confirmed carcinogen. It was found in 100 per cent of soft drink samples. Its concentration ranged from 0.0008 milligram per litre (mg/l) to 0.0042 mg/l in the samples tested. This last amount is 42 times the limit stipulated by the European Economic Commission (0.0001 mg/l) to control contamination in water used as 'food'.

Carbonation and Phosphoric Acid

If this does not deter us from taking a cool sip there is more: the carbonation in all soft drinks causes calcium loss in the bones. Most soft drinks also contain phosphoric acid. This substance also causes a drawdown on the store of calcium.

Sugar

You add sugar to the picture, and it gets worse! The sugar, dissolved in liquid, is quickly carried to the bloodstream, where its presence in overload quantities signals the pancreas to go into overdrive. The jolt of insulin causes the body to reduce the testosterone in the bloodstream, and depresses further production of it. In both men and women, testosterone controls the depositing of calcium in the bones. The sugar also leads to Type II diabetes.

Sugar Substitutes

Sugar substitutes in diet colas have worse health impacts. A new research study, which included nearly 60,000 pregnant women in Denmark, found that those who consumed one serving per day of artificially sweetened, carbonated drinks were 38% more likely to give birth prematurely. Those who consumed four servings of these drinks were 78% more likely to have a premature delivery. (Source: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition)

Aspartame, (a commonly used sugar substitute), breaks down into three major chemicals: aspartic acid, phenylalanine, and methanol. Methanol oxidizes into formaldehyde and then formic acid, both of which are toxic. These can accumulate in the body and have been linked to premature birth in primate studies.

Aruna Kalahastri is an anti-GM activist; she is passionate about photography and interacting with young adults on pressing issues facing our world. You can write to her at aruna.kalahastri@gmail.com.



Photographs by Kaushik Ramu

Why Farmers Need a Pay Rise...

The world's farmers need a pay rise - or come the mid-century, the other 8 billion of us may well find we do not have enough to eat, says this Australian journalist

By Julian Cribb

Globally, and in Australia, food has become too cheap. This is having a wide range of unfortunate— and potentially dangerous — effects, which include:

1. Negative economic signals to farmers everywhere, telling them not to grow more food
2. Increasing degradation of the world's agricultural resource base
3. A downturn in the global rate of agricultural productivity gains.
4. The decline and extinction of many local food-producing industries worldwide
5. A disincentive to young people (and young scientists) to work in agriculture

6. Loss of agricultural skills, rural community dislocation and increased rural and urban poverty affecting tens of millions

7. The waste of up to half of the food, which is now produced

8. A pandemic of obesity and degenerative disease that sickens and kills up to half the consumers of the 'modern diet' resulting in soaring health costs

9. The failure of many developing countries to lay the essential foundation for economic development— a secure food and agriculture base

From this list, it can be seen that low farm incomes have far wider consequences for humanity in general

than is commonly supposed. Indeed, in a context in which all of the basic resources for food production are likely to become much scarcer, it may be argued that, indirectly, they imperil every one of us.

A market failure

Today many of the world's farmers have little incentive to invest in agriculture because the returns are so poor. This applies as much to highly-skilled and advanced farmers in developed countries such as Australia or the US, as it does to struggling smallholders in Asia or Africa.

Reasons for the low returns are not hard to find: farmers are weak sellers,

trapped between muscular globalized food firms who drive down the price of their produce, and muscular industrial firms who drive up the cost of their inputs. This pincer movement not only discourages 'developed' agriculture but also prevents undeveloped agriculture from developing.

A growing imbalance in power between farmers and those who dominate the food supply chain is what has changed.

Two decades ago, most farm produce was largely bought from local farmers by local buyers for local markets and consumers. In the 21st century, there has been an increase in the concentration of market power in the hands of a very small number of food corporations and supermarkets sourcing food worldwide. These are – quite naturally – doing all they can to reduce their input costs (farm prices) as they compete with one another. This is not a rant about globalization: it's a simple observation about the facts of global economic life.

The power of the farmer to resist downward price pressure has not increased. Indeed, it has weakened as the average producer now competes against some struggling farmer in a far away country, rich or poor, who is also simply trying to survive by selling at the lowest price.

Its effect is apparent in the fact that world food output is now increasing at only about half the rate necessary to meet rising demand, and that yield gains for major crops have stagnated.

While some will argue all this makes for greater economic 'efficiency', the logical outcome of unrestrained global market power will eventually displace around 1.5 billion smallholders, with devastating consequences for the landscapes they manage.

Global degradation

In a recent satellite survey, researchers working for FAO reported that 24% of the earth's land surface was seriously degraded - compared with 15% estimated by an on-ground survey in 1990. The FAO team noted that degradation was continuing at a rate of around 1% a year.

Every agronomist and agricultural economist knows that, when farmers are under the economic hammer, a good many of them will overstock and overcrop in a desperate effort to escape the poverty trap – and this leads to the kind of

resource degradation exemplified by the Oklahoma dust bowl and, in Australia's case, the Eyre Peninsula disaster of the 1940s.

If we continue to sacrifice 1% of the world's productive land every year, there is going to be precious little left on which to double food production: yields in 2050 would have to increase by 300% or so, which is clearly a tall order.

Much the same applies to irrigation: "In order to double food production we need to double the water volume we use in agriculture, and there are serious doubts about whether there is enough water available to do this," is how Dr Colin Chartres, Director General of the International Water Management Institute summed it up recently.

Solutions to land and water degradation are reasonably well known, and have been shown to work in many environments – but are not being adopted at anything like the rates necessary to double world food production or even to conserve the existing resource base. One reason is that farmers, in the main, cannot afford to implement them, even though many would like to do so. As a result, world

agriculture is today primarily a mining activity. We all know what happens to mines when the ore runs out.

Productivity decline

The role of low returns in discouraging farmers, in both developed and developing countries, from adopting more productive and sustainable farming systems cannot be overlooked. While a few highly efficient and profitable producers continue to make these advances, the bulk of the world's farmers are being left behind. Since small farmers feed more than half the world, this is a matter of some concern.

The fact that agriculture appears perennially unprofitable and suffers from continuing social malaise probably contributes, subliminally, to a view that society ought not to be wasting its money funding research for a bunch of losers: there are a thousand other more attractive and exciting fields for scientific investment. This negative (and false) image of agriculture is an unspoken driver behind the reduced global R&D effort.

Is food too cheap?

For affluent societies at least, food is now the cheapest in real terms it has ever

Today many of the world's farmers have little incentive to invest in agriculture because the returns are so poor... farmers are weak sellers, trapped between muscular globalized food firms who drive down the price of their produce, and muscular industrial firms who drive up the cost of their inputs.



been in human history.

It seems almost redundant to observe that, when something is too cheap, people do not value it as they should. This produces a lack of respect for the product itself, for the people and industries involved in its production – farmers and scientists – and for the place it is produced, the bush.

In an age where 3.5 billion humans have only the dimmest notion where their food comes from, lack of respect for the main thing that keeps them alive is coming to be a predominant 'value' in the human race.

A culture of waste

Food is now so cheap that developed societies such as the US, Britain and Australia throw away nearly half, while developing countries lose nearly half. A society that pays its farmers such a low return, has found it can afford to send nearly half of their efforts to the landfill. Or burn in an SUV enough grain in one week to feed a poor person for a year.

Where our ancestors stored, conserved and recycled nutrients, it now appears we waste 80-90 percent of all the nutrients used in agriculture. On farm, up to half the applied fertiliser does not feed crop or pasture but escapes into the environment. Of the harvested nutrients, some are lost post-harvest, in processing and cooking – but more than 30 percent are simply discarded, in the shops and in the home. Then we dump around 90% of our sewage nutrients in the ocean.

In short, the modern food system has established a culture of total waste, sustained only by the mining of energy and nutrients (from rock or soil), which will eventually run out or become unaffordable to most farmers.

An unhealthy situation

Cheap food is also responsible for a pandemic of disease and death larger in the developed world than any other single cause of human mortality. Cheap, abundant processed food is a driver for obesity, which now affects one in five humans, and plays a role in the society-wide rise in cancers, heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Cheap food, in other words, is an economic invitation to consumers – including millions of children – to kill themselves prematurely through overindulgence. Cheap food is the chief

economic driver of the greatest budget blow-out in all western democracies: healthcare.

Solving the food challenge

The purpose of this essay is to call attention to the effect a never-ending reduction in farmers' incomes will have on world food security at a time of rising physical constraints to production, including scarcities of land, water, energy, nutrients, technology, fish and stable climates.

At the very time when most experts agree we should be seeking ways to double food output sustainably over the coming half-century, the ruling economic signal is: "don't do it".

A social wage should be given to farmers by governments for their stewardship on behalf of society of soil, water, atmosphere and biodiversity, separate from their commercial food production

Of course, we could simply obey the economic signal and allow agricultural output to gradually fall behind – but that will expose 8 or 10 billion consumers to massive unheralded price spikes, of the sort experienced in 2008, which have a dire impact on the poor, start wars and topple governments – and will not benefit farmers as much as a stable, steady increase in their incomes.

It is necessary to state that this essay does not advocate a return to agrarian socialism, protectionism, commodity cartels or an end to free markets. But it does hold up a warning flag about the universal dangers of underinvestment, negative signals and sentiment, resource destruction and rural dislocation caused by the undervaluing of the one commodity humanity absolutely cannot do without, as we approach the greatest demand for food in all of history.

There are numerous ways this issue might be addressed. Here are a few:

Price: through an educated "community consensus" that results in willingness on the part of consumers, supermarkets and food processors to pay more for food so

as to protect the resource base and enable farmers to invest in new technologies.

Subsidy: by the payment of a social wage to farmers by governments for their stewardship on behalf of society of soil, water, atmosphere and biodiversity, separate from their commercial food production.

Regulation: by limiting by law those practices or technologies which degrade the food resource base and/or rewarding those which improve it.

Taxation: by levying a resource tax on all food which reflects its true cost to the environment to produce, and by reinvesting the proceeds in more sustainable farming systems, R&D, rural adjustment and enhanced resource management.

Market solutions: establish markets for key farm resources that result in higher returns for farmers from wise and sustainable use.

Public education about how to eat more sustainably; industry education about sustainability standards and techniques.

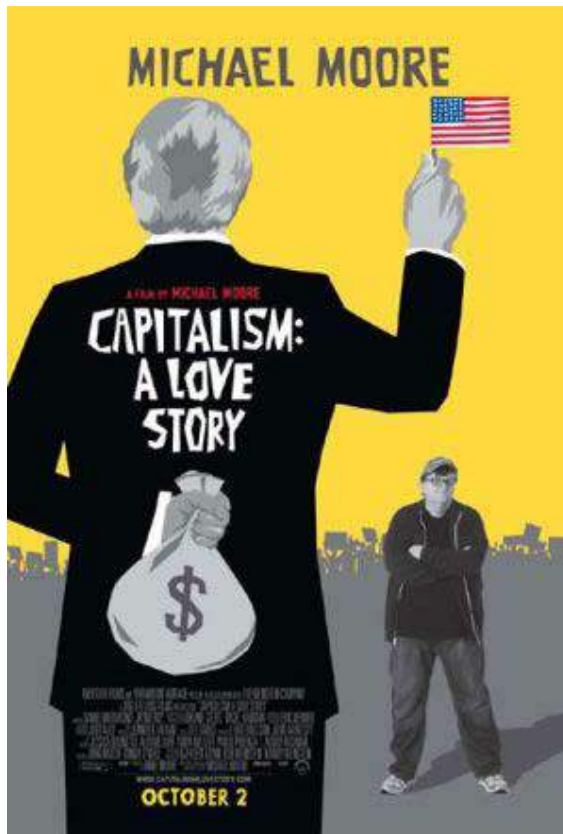
The technical solutions to many of the world's food problems are well-known and well understood – but they are not being implemented as widely as they should because of a market failure which is blocking off their adoption. To avoid grave consequences affecting billions of people, that failure needs correction.

It is not the purpose of this essay to solve the issue of how to deliver fairer incomes to farmers worldwide, but rather to encourage debate among thoughtful farmers, policymakers and researchers about how we should go about it. But it does question whether some of the 'old truths' of the 20th century still apply in the 21st, or whether the age of globalisation and resource scarcity has changed the ground rules.

It also asks whether the unstinted application of overwhelming market forces against farmers is the act of a sapient species – or a mob of lemmings?

Over to the sapient ones among you.

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Is Capitalism a Necessary Evil?

By Sinduja Krishnan

In what has become his trademark incorrigible style in documentaries, filmmaker Michael Moore is standing outside the tall glass façade, with a red megaphone in hand, screaming, “This is Michael Moore, and I am here to make a citizen’s arrest of the Board of Directors of AIG”. When he is unable to get through the gates, he runs a “Crime Scene – Do Not Cross” tape around the entire block of buildings, making his point quite clear – that men who occupy high posts on the Wall Street are nothing less than criminals.

What really is the price America is paying for its love of capitalism? It’s this question that Moore explores—and captures very vividly—by attempting to understand the country’s economic system and why governments allow banks so many powers like deregulating financial laws, ability to get loans with cheaper interest rates, pay-offs to many government personnel, etc. In his opinion, economic terms are purposely jargonized. He backs up this point by going to Wall Street and asking all the employees to explain the meanings of the terms, which some of them are unable to do.

Moore declares that in the ‘land of opportunity’ – as America is often referred, because of its open capitalist system, which allows freedom of enterprise, where all were treated equally and all had equal opportunity before the law – there was a sense of propriety in the way businesses were earlier run. However, in the 1930s and 40s, when the Great Depression and the Second World War hit the industrialized countries, industries suffered a serious setback, many factories were shut down which meant that large numbers of people were out of jobs. Yet in all this, the richest ones were getting richer, as the CEOs ended up making a lot of money from the buy-outs.

In what is a far-fetched, but compelling argument Moore puts together a little history lesson about the economic workings of the United States of America. Governments from Ronald Reagan’s to George Bush’s were filled with advisors, all of whom were affiliated with the Wall Street. The Treasury Department headed by the head of Merrill Lynch, also an advisor to George Bush was run like ‘an arm of Wall Street’. There was an orchestrated dismantling of the entire

industrial infrastructure upon which the country was built, ostensibly for the short-term profits of the corporations. Policies and regulations were changed to suit the big guns, and many politicians retired from the Government, and went right back to these large companies on Wall Street.

Another vicious cycle entrapped in the money game is the hype built around the Ivy League Schools. Students build up large debts to study in these schools and have to take up ‘destructive’ jobs in the Wall Street in order to pay it off and because the lure of the capitalist economy is too great to resist.

Capitalism unabashedly concentrates riches in the hands of a few, a fact proved in an internal memo from Citibank to its investors. The memo drafted in 2009, stated that in the United States 1 percent of the ‘richest’ have more wealth than the bottom 95 percent of all households. The memo states that this would ‘cause unrest if this 95 percent wants a more equitable share of the wealth.’

Another topnotch businessperson, Alan Greenspan, was celebrated as an economic genius when he talked Americans into “tapping their home equity”. What did Mr. Greenspan mean? According to Prof. Elizabeth Warren of Harvard University, this meant that a homeowner could be encouraged to borrow money against his home (as collateral), and if he failed to repay the loan, the house would be taken away.

‘Capitalism—A Love Story’ demystifies capitalism, its hallowed symbols like Wall Street, and its inadequacies and failure as a fair system. It is as much the impact of corporate dominance as well as what the power of money does to individuals and businesses alike. It is a plea to not let ourselves become enamored by terms like Free Market or Free Enterprise because many people are paying for this free market with their jobs, livelihoods and their homes.

Why a Love Story? In my opinion, it is because of a sense of helplessness and inevitability with which we hold our relationship with capitalism. For someone who is in awe of the system, the movie has compelling examples to scratch the surface a bit deeper and examine – what is the true cost of capitalism?

Sinduja Krishnan is an ecologist and a keen student of yoga who enjoys music, dance and running.

Going Beyond Activism...

By Nirali Shah

In order to address any imbalance in the outer ecology, the internal disturbances and negativities within my mind needed to be resolved first.

At a certain age, the navel sack of the deer bursts and exudes a fragrant musk substance. Frantically seeking the origin of the perfume, the deer sniffs wildly in every direction. Not finding any external source of fragrance, the creature destroys itself by mad dashes among the rocks. Alas! If only the deer had put its nostrils to its navel! [i]

A few months back the Minister of State for Environment and Forests held public hearings to determine the advent of Bt Brinjal in India. When I attended certain talks, and read the research and varied reviews about Genetically Modified (GM) seeds, I became acutely concerned about the irreversible damage it would inflict on the health of humans and animals.

In the last two years, I have spent considerable time living in remote villages and forests, learning organic farming and reforestation. I saw firsthand, that farming is a lot about 'soil building' and that GM seeds would kill the microbial activity in the soil leaving it infertile.

This would result in an enormous threat to the economic stability of farmers, who are already struggling hard to survive. I lived with many farmers in their mud homes, shared meals with them and developed meaningful relationships. It was while spending time in Vidarbha, Maharashtra that I also became more aware of the causes of farmer suicides. It was clear to me how GM seeds could contaminate thousands of traditional species of the same crop, endangering the rich biodiversity of nature; I felt deeply moved to do something about this.

I started writing articles, mobilizing resources and holding public meetings and awareness campaigns to sensitize people about GM seeds in Ahmedabad. At the time, I had typhoid fever and was not in the best of health. However, since the issue was so grave and the threat so imminent, I felt called to go out and put in as much energy as I could to inspire more people to attend the public hearing and take a firm stand against Bt Brinjal. It was a very intense period in my life.

After a month of campaigning against Bt Brinjal and the subsequent public hearing, I took time to slow down.

In the past five years, I have spent a few weeks every year in complete silence, with no contact with the outside world, in places as diverse as a forest monastery in the deep crevices of the Himalayas to a closed room near a city where food was dropped inside my room from a small window. This time of solitude has helped me direct my attention inward. I saw that I was feeling a lot of anger and distrust towards Monsanto (the corporation that supplies GM seeds), the politicians and the farmers who wanted GM in India. Through my daily work routine, I had not realized that I was experiencing all this noise and negativity in my mind, but when I would sit alone in silence, the hopelessness and discontent revealed itself more clearly.

I could also see that this hatred and cynicism was draining me and making my mind unhealthy. For, today if we were struggling against Bt Brinjal, two





Photograph by Gayatri Krishnamoorthy, flickr, rosemilkweed

people or corporations in my being.

When I spent time in meditation and solitude to choicelessly observe the subtle workings of my mind, I was able to get a deeper glimpse into the subconscious layers of my inner ecology. It became increasingly clear to me that all problems that our world is facing today, such as environmental destruction, economic injustice, terrorism, rapes and human trafficking, animal cruelty, etc. are all intertwined branches stemming from the seeds of fear, greed or ignorance of our collective minds. I realized that while it was imperative to work rigorously on issues from the outside, we cannot afford to ignore the correlation of these issues to their seeds. I felt that now I was working on the root of the disease and not just the symptoms.

Earlier, I was giving my physical and intellectual energy to the GM issue while not being fully mindful of my thoughts and emotions while doing this work. I started to look more closely at my own anger, hatred and discontentment towards the corporations and politicians. It struck me that in order to address any imbalance in the outer ecology, the internal disturbances and negativities within my mind needed to be resolved first. I could not solve the problem from the same inner space that created it. I realized that first I needed to make a radical shift from fear to faith, from anger to acceptance, and from restlessness to stillness.

I have come to believe, that as an activist I am affecting the world at multiple strata. One layer is the physical and intellectual energy that I put into my projects; an even more profound layer is at that of thoughts. The internal matrix of emotions, feelings and awareness in our minds is forcefully radiating into the world, reflecting in our actions and vibrations that touch others. Many of us are drawn to change the outer circumstances, but we also need a deeper transformation that can flower through an inner spiritual activism that holds the true power to awaken, love and heal our world.

*References: [i] God Talks With Arjuna By Paramahansa Yogananda, Verse 40
Many thanks to Samir Patel for his help with the article.*

Nirali Shah is an artist and activist. She enjoys learning the Hindustani classical flute, farming, writing and spending time in silent meditation retreats.

A deeper transformation can flower only through an inner spiritual activism that holds the true power to awaken, love and heal our world

months later, it could be against a new pesticide or a forest that could be cut, a chemical factory might grab fertile land from poor farmers, someone will start mining a sacred mountain or a terrorist attack will snatch away innocent lives. The old insensitive politicians will retire and new ones will step in to play the same game. I had begun to wonder, how many times would we as activists find the energy to fight against issues, one after another, in isolation? These issues appear like snowballs continually rolling towards us, and we are trying to stop them by throwing rocks at them.

What causes these snowballs to form in the first place and how do they gather momentum to create avalanches?

I have friends who have been dedicated activists for many years. Most

of them feel burnt out today! I sense that these problems were prevalent thousands of years ago and might continue for thousands more. Fighting these snowballs constantly can be very demanding on the soul. Some can become negative and cynical towards the system, the world, the politicians and corporations. Or others can learn to ignore the issues by becoming less sensitive and settle back in their comfortable cocoons.

But now the question has intensified for me: "What was I supposed to do? How should I use my energy so that I don't get drained, but can channel it to bring more goodness and peace in my life and in the world around me?" Because at one level I felt it was crucial for me to engage with the GM issue, at the same time, I do not want to carry the burden and pain of negative emotions towards

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE To tell how far down a certain path you'll walk once you've taken that vital first step. Ten months ago I decided that I was going to live as oil-free a life as possible. Originally this consisted of me using no plastic, only buying products from local craftspeople, having no bin and eating nothing but local, organic and vegan food.

To begin with people constantly questioned why I was acting so "extreme", my answer always being that I had just become tired of being a hypocrite. I'd be marching for peace through the streets of London, criticising Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair, whilst expecting them to keep me supplied with cheap oil through my purchases at the checkout. I was sending them completely conflicting messages. Why should I expect them to care about something I obviously didn't really care about?

After the initial questioning was over, the realities of the experiment kicked in. On a physical level, I was feeling quite weak during the first month and was struggling to find the energy even to dig my allotment. My body was used to the protein that China's lentils, Bolivia's nuts and America's soya supplied me with. I initially lost about half a stone as I could not find any products with a high fat content, the problem being not that we can't grow such crops here, but that we've sub-contracted our food security to those countries where the labour is cheaper.

On an emotional level I was feeling quite down, and the third week into my 'no oil' experiment was probably the lowest I've ever been. At the time I had no idea what was causing it as I should have been really happy, given the fact that I was finally living closer to my Truth. But after some research into my symptoms – weakness, unhappiness, poor sleep – I realised that I was lacking in an essential amino acid called tryptophan. Supplements were out of the question (being manufactured using oil), so I hunted down local foods high in this amino acid – mustard greens, foraged hazelnuts, seaweed, broccoli, kale, sprouted rye grain and spinach, to name but a few – and within weeks, I wasn't just feeling back to normal, I was starting to feel healthier than ever.

What has concerned me, however, is how physically and mentally addicted we have become not just to oil, but to

Living My TRUTH

By Mark Boyle

the products of oil. If I was suffering because I could no longer feed my minor addictions to bananas and cashew nuts, then how much more so those who are addicted to cheap tobacco, cheap alcohol, cheap drugs, widely available allopathic medicines, and most of all, the thrill of being able to have whatever you want when you want it? If oil ran out tomorrow, would a society so addicted to oil as ours be able to come up with solutions for its survival?

The discipline this experiment required is doing me good, however. Gandhi once stated that a coward can never be spiritual, and that self-discipline is essential training for bravery. I believe one of the main issues in the world today is self-discipline, or, more precisely, the lack of it. I have friends who tell me that they couldn't live like this because they couldn't give up chocolate or soya milk. The reason we have so much destruction, so much hatred, so much apathy and inaction, is because the soldier of peace, the Satyagrahi, has long since stopped being as brave as the soldier of war.

The two most difficult parts of the experiment have been the social aspect and the fact everything takes so much time without oil. However, I am convinced that these are only problematic because I am doing it in isolation. If done communally, these issues evaporate almost instantly. Doing this communally is my longer-term vision. I have already begun with plans to get a core group of individuals together to start the first Freeconomy Community. After the initial infrastructure is in place, this community will live without money, and therefore live without oil by default. "Is living oil-free not enough?" I hear you ask. "Why go to the extreme of living completely without money?"

Six months into the experiment I realised that what I was doing was not



Photograph www.wikipedia.com

enough. There should be no disparity between thought and action, head and hand. I am always striving to understand the root causes of the environmental destruction we inflict. We live in such a wasteful culture; and the main reason we are so wasteful is because we have no respect for, and no connection to, the things we consume. Because we don't have to make what we consume, or even know the person who made it, we have no appreciation for the embodied energy that goes into it. The tool that allows this disconnection to happen is money, a tool that also allows us to bank exploitation for a rainy day, and a tool that has replaced friendships and community as the primary source of our sense of security.

If we had to grow all our own food, we wouldn't waste a third of it as we do now. If we had to make our own tables, we wouldn't throw them out the moment we changed the interior décor. If we had to clean our own drinking water, we sure as hell wouldn't foul it.

Given this realisation, I have no choice but to let my experiment take a rapid evolution, and so not only have I taken anything containing petroleum-based products out of my diet, I've also now taken money out of my life! Have I gone too far? I hope so, for unless one pushes the boundaries of sustainable living, how will we know how far we truly need to go? And as the Mahatma also once said, "the difference between what we do and what we could do would be enough to solve most of the world's ills." I look forward to updating you on my year without money, the logical next step to my year without oil.

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Faced with huge and complex ecological and social crises, humankind stands at a crucial juncture where it is forced to re-examine prevalent beliefs. In a very structured and logical way, the book 'Ahead To Nature' makes one understand the facets of the crisis at various levels and also its inter-connectedness. Instead of merely looking at the superficial manifestations of the problems and its differing pathologies, the book dives into the roots of these crises at psycho-socio-scientific levels. Taking into consideration the relevant psycho-socio factors, the book analyses the problems, focuses on the key factor "consumption" and puts forward a broad framework of solutions from both scientific and spiritual standpoints.

The author provides a comprehensive description of the numerous crises that we are facing at various levels. The people at the 'bottom of the pyramid' struggle for the most basic needs like adequate food, clean water, and an assured means of livelihood. However, the greater irony of our materialist – consumerist way of life is that even so – called successful people in today's world – those at the top of pyramid – often struggle with a sense of meaninglessness in their personal lives, difficult interpersonal relationships, and lack of time for their children and family, loneliness and various other conflicts in their lives.

Today, we find that while epidemics of cholera and typhoid are on the wane, numerous psycho-somatic epidemics like migraine, depression, asthma, spondylitis, hyper-acidity, diabetes, arthritis, eczema, epilepsy, Parkinsons and several others are on the rise. We come across people silently suffering from such diseases, with no cure in the offing.

At a social level, we have increasing crime, competitiveness, poverty, injustice, exploitation, corruption, dysfunctional socio-economic political systems, classes, fundamentalism, terrorism, war, etc. At an environmental level, we have severe problems of ecological disasters like pollution, resource-depletion, vanishing eco-systems, climate change, etc.

The Cartesian outlook, fostered by our education system makes us look at each of these problems in fragments. This book shows us how all of these problems are inter-related and deeply connected. Thus the crisis is not merely "out-there",

but the crisis outside is merely a reflection of the "crisis-within". Hence the solution for such problems needs to transcend both the "outer" and the "inner" and hence the solution is essentially "spiritual" or "meta-physical" in essence. The author proposes that the spiritual solution, if implemented, will not 'solve', but 'dissolve' the problems at all levels. The solutions lead us to a lifestyle that helps in upgrading individuals and societies; and one that is ecologically sustainable. Such a world-view has not only a spiritual base, but a profound scientific footing as well.

The book provides a vivid description with several examples about the beautiful co-existence and mutual co-operation that exists within nature. It also demonstrates how human beings, instead of being with nature have been exploiting nature. The author analyses some of the major scientific achievements in the last three centuries, which have shaped our world-view. He shows how a 'Newtonian' or a 'mechanistic' world-view has influenced our lives and made us 'materialistic' and also how Quantum mechanics is moving away from its matter-based approach. The author draws several parallels between modern science and Indian philosophy and elaborates on the movement of science from 'Dvaita' to 'Advaita' i.e towards transcendence of our inner and outer duality.

One begins to understand more deeply, the meaning of Albert Einstein's statement "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind".

Dileep Kulkarni, the author, is a mechanical engineer by training. He moved from the city to a small village, Kudawale in Konkan, Maharashtra in 1993, in order to live closer to nature. He felt, "Talking was not sufficient, my wife and I felt, we should practice what we believed in". He lives in a mud house with no home appliances, no vehicles, not even a cooking gas and the only energy-consuming gadgets that he owns are a radio and a few bulbs. He works towards eco-awareness through his writings and talks.

The book is written in simple and lucid language. The reader would need no prior background on spirituality, ecology or science to enjoy the book. It is an essential reading for everyone who is open enough to acknowledge the mistakes in the past, is dissatisfied with the present and ready to walk a new way for a better future.

Vasant Jajoo comes from a telecommunications engineering background. He is currently exploring the meta questions behind "life" and "sustainable living". He can be reached at vasantjajoo@gmail.com.

AHEAD TO NATURE

From 'Problem-Shifting' To 'Problem Solving' By Dileep Kulkarni

By Vasant Jajoo



Photograph by Pooja Nayak

A GAP YEAR

Text & Photos by
Chaitanya Shareef Kulkarni (Minchu)

'I never let schooling interfere with my education'

Mark Twain

No studies, no regular classes, no exams, tests, and no tension about marks for a whole year! This sounded too good to be true. On a trek once, Appa told me that I could take a break after completing my Class 10 examinations instead of immediately going to college. I was then 15 years old – he gave me an opportunity to experience life differently and explore my passions and hobbies.

Initially, the idea of a gap year seemed very appealing but after I finished my tenth exams, I was a bit nervous about it. I was worried that, academically, all my classmates would go ahead of me. Appa then suggested I read 'Free from School', a book written by Rahul about his year away from school. There were many fun encounters described in it, and it persuaded me to go on a gap year adventure.

While I was still deciding whether to take the break, my friend Himanshu, told me that his father too was encouraging him to do something similar. Appa and I then met Prakash mama, Himanshu's father, and it was finally decided that we would take a year's gap. The most interesting reaction came from one of my distant relatives, who when told of the gap year asked me "Have you failed in your SSLC exam?"

Over one year Himanshu and I did most of our experiments together – met scholars, journalists, artists, and individuals doing interesting things, travelled a fair bit, trained in water sport activities, picked up photography skills, even worked in a small hotel and most of all, enjoyed everything hugely. All of which would not have been possible inside a classroom.

A different way of life

The very first thing we did was to visit Sudhakar mama, a Vedic scholar, in Bangalore. He and his family have some unique ideas for living. In his house there were hardly any steel utensils! They were mostly of brass and copper. All the cooking was done on a briquette stove.

We also got along well with his son Bhrugu who has been homeschooled. Bhrugu is 12 years old; he likes reading magazines, does craftwork, studies Sanskrit and Vedas at home, and plays the flute very well. Amrutvarshini, his older sister, is an expert on Sanskrit grammar and teaches other M.A students.

We learnt just a little bit about the Vedas – but what has stayed with me is the experience of a very different way of life.

Learning Light

The photography workshop at Sagara, in Shimoga in Karnataka was one of the best things we did that year. Radhakrishna mama who is an expert in 'Hase Chitra' (a form of tribal art) and a theatre actor hosted us at his house during our trip.

We learnt about many things – from DSLR cameras to white balance from shutter speed to the 'rule of thirds' for composing a picture.

The bit I found most enjoyable was going around the city to take some photographs. Our group's assignment was to prepare a final picture by combining different pictures using Photoshop, and create our own set of pictures.

After the workshop, we also learnt a bit about 'Hase Chitra'. We first practiced



some simple drawings on paper after which we learnt to make natural colours using Kesu leaves to prepare green colour. We put the leaves in a mixer and then added water, and soaked a piece of cloth in it. We added 30 – 40 percent of glue and mixed it in. Similarly, we also made two shades of colors from soil. We learnt to make paintings using our fingers and a blade.

We also saw pickle being made from *midikai* – a small variety of mango, interacted with writers and journalists, chatted with an expert in butterflies, who had around 256 dead specimens of butterflies as well as a collection of other insects like millipede, dung beetle, etc. On our last day we saw the 'Netti of Bhatta (rice)' – planting small rice saplings and also managed to visit the lush green Jog falls nearby.

North Bound

Himanshu and I have been on many treks before. Therefore, when Anupama Moushi, a teacher at school told us about the water sports course in Himachal Pradesh, we jumped at the idea.

We first visited the Roerich Memorial Trust in Naggar, Himachal Pradesh. Nicholas Roerich was a Russian painter, explorer and philosopher and since it was his 135th birth anniversary celebrations, we witnessed music and dance performances by Russian children; we saw their paintings, and did our bit by helping clean and arrange the chairs.

Along with the other visitors we walked around the nearby village of Rumsu, which had old traditional buildings, some built as long ago as 150 years ago! The trees there were huge and unlike anything we'd seen before! We visited Manali with our Russian friends,

saw some monasteries and temples and managed to pick up some Russian words and number names. We were fortunate to see the Dalai Lama at McLeodganj, a predominantly Tibetan populated hill town close to Dharamsala.

Pong Dam Adventures

We got off to a shaky start when we realized that our bus conductor didn't know where the Water Sports Complex was. When we finally managed to reach Pong Dam, we realized that along with another trainee, we were only three participants – and the first couple of days were not very exciting.

Then, when five more trainees joined in we had a great time with a series of activities – rowing, sculling, canoeing, sailing. We also tried our hand (rather our feet) at water surfing and waterskiing, which was quite challenging. What we really enjoyed was capsizing in the kayaks!

Our bus adventures didn't end at Pong dam. After the course, we went to Talwara city nearby; from there to Pathankot and to Amritsar by bus. Halfway into the journey, the bus driver stopped the bus and started talking to the passengers in Punjabi. We didn't understand a word. It was only after some time we understood that the bus would not go to Amritsar and we'd have to take another bus. Bus facilities are poor in Himachal Pradesh!

On our return to Delhi, we got a chance to see the NDTV studio, thanks to my uncle who was a panelist in a TV program that day. We sat among the audience and appeared on TV! We also watched a cricket match between India and Australia, which was fun since we had never been to a stadium to watch a match before.

Karwar Capers

After the high-tech world of the television studio, we went to a small coastal town, Karwar to work as waiters at a small restaurant.

The restaurant, run by my father's colleague's grandmother served only non-vegetarian lunch and dinner – a challenge for Himanshu who is purely vegetarian. We stayed at a room in Kodibagh, approximately 4 kms from Karwar town, and were given cycles for our daily trips back and forth

On our first day there, the regular waiters were absent and we were a bit lost. I was a little tensed since we were new to the place and the work – but we

My time away from school and college has helped me gain confidence because there was no pressure; we had the opportunity to do what we were really interested in.



soon learnt to take orders, and serve the customers.

Some workers were cutting the fish and some the mutton pieces. Jnaneshwar uncle, the cook of the hotel told us what the menu for the day was. Initially the customers were few, so it was not difficult to manage. But as the number of customers increased it became confusing. We decided to break up the tasks to coordinate better; Himanshu would serve the water and take their orders while I would serve the customers their orders and extra items like soda, cold drinks, extra rice, extra curry or bhaji.

In the evenings, we walked along the seashore or read books on the beach, collected seashells and generally sat around. We had to return to the hotel around 6:30 pm, as the customers came by 7 pm. Parcel orders were popular and so was the biryaani. Late at night, we cycled back to our room in Kodibagh on empty roads in the dark. We would be so tired that we were fast asleep as soon as we lay down on our beds.

I had fun tasting different types of fish and crab. Though we didn't get a chance to go deep sea fishing, we observed the fishermen from the shore. It was wonderful to watch them throwing their nets so skillfully into a semi-circular shape and then pull the ends together. We tried our hands at pulling in the net – it was much tougher than we thought!

Our Learnings

Now that I have joined college this year, it is a bit difficult to get back to the strict 'timetabled' way of living. After a few days however, it was not very difficult to get back to studies as usual.

The gap year has really changed my way of thinking. It gave me a better picture of the world outside school. I saw many places and met people who were skilled in so many different ways; many of them also work for the society at large. Now I feel that it is not only the college degree that matters, but also the way we live and work in the world.

My time away from school and college has helped me gain confidence because there was no pressure; we had the opportunity to do what we were really interested in. For example, snakes fascinate me and I learnt to identify them, handle them, learnt a bit about their life cycle, their behavior. I feel luckier than my 500 batchmates to have had an opportunity to learn and work with snakes.

I also became friends with a few snake experts - through e-mails and social networking sites as well, and have often taken their help and clarified my doubts. Recently, I rescued a 1.5 meter long Cobra on my own!

This experience has definitely changed me in subtle but important ways – I feel connected to so many more people, places and creatures of the world. Experience is the greatest teacher! I wish all youngsters the opportunity to educate themselves during a 'gap year'.

Chaitanya is currently studying in Class 11. His passions are reptiles, trekking and photography.



All photographs by Pooja Nayak

‘Magic’ Aiji and the Paper Animals

By Pooja Nayak

Artist, anti-nuclear activist and puppeteer Shyamali Khastgir feels art is a means to understand interconnections, and in this age of machines, an opportunity to create with our hands....

Shyamalidi is busy cutting strips of paper when I enter the house that has been an art space for the past few days; she is preparing for her next workshop with the children. The table is replete with giraffes, elephants, dogs, cats, fish and even the odd unknown species or two standing patiently in a sea of strips. The children call her ‘Magic Aiji’; a fold here, a snip there and a miniature paper animal is ready in less than a minute. ‘The biggest misconception people have about art’, she says, ‘is that they think it is a decorative thing, they forget it is a means of expression.’

Daughter of renowned Bengali artist and sculptor Sudhir Khastgir, 70-year-old Shyamalidi grew up doing her art training in Tagore’s Shantiniketan in West Bengal. Her experiences there and growing up in her father’s studio, she feels, led her to become an artist. At the Kala Bhavan in Shantiniketan, handicrafts were given as much importance as fine art painting – classes under the tree were a regular feature, and so was running around barefoot; all of which, she believes, shaped her sensibilities to nature.

Art is seeing Interconnections

Over the past many years, art has also become her medium to communicate to the children the importance of our natural surroundings and the need to preserve it. She says, ‘In most schools today, while there might be an art class, not many teachers inspire their students to let everyday experiences be integrated in their art or craft work. Even when I was learning to make Batik, say we had to make a lotus, our teacher would say “Go and look at a lotus in my garden now, and see what are the other plants around it, what are the different kinds of insects on it”...that way you start relating to seasons, and become aware of the interdependence in Nature. You cannot just draw something to fill up the spaces...’

For instance, when she takes a class for her students and asks them to make drawings of trees or a flower, she asks them not to draw from memory. ‘I ask them to sit in front of that flower or tree and notice all the things around... you can see birds, if they have nests, the insects

around it, you wonder if they're friendly to the flower or the tree. Then there's the soil and its textures, how the trunk of the tree looks and feels and so on. 'And entwined in all this,' she believes, is the joy of observing and discovery – all of which, along with freedom, are necessary for a good creative life.'

Shayamali has also been an anti-nuclear activist since the mid-70s. 'That was when I had gone abroad after my marriage and India tested her first nuclear device – it upset me terribly. My physicist uncle had told me about the harmful effects of nuclear radiation to humans, to animals and to our environment. After that, for a good many years I kept coming back to India and protesting against nuclear testing wherever it was possible. I have seen what a terrible situation it is in Pokhran.' Sometimes she takes her puppet Basundhara (meaning earth in Bengali) when she travels. Basundhara has a deformed leg, which generates a lot of interest among the children, an opening for her to talk about the harmful effects of nuclear technology.

Though her father had no political affiliations, he was anti-war. As kids, they were not allowed to accept expensive gifts from an uncle who worked in the armament factory, because he felt that it was not wholesome for a child to be exposed to the expensive gifts earned from arms and war. Even machine-cut clothes were avoided, when handmade was available – 'You're an artist and an artist should support another artisan' was what her father had told her.

Art is appreciating Life

Shayamali believes that much of art is already around us, but that with all the overemphasis on machines and media-bytes we are unable to recognize it. Thus, we miss lessons that people whose lives are entwined with nature, share with it. 'When I was in Baliapur in Orissa, I had a chance to observe the women who collected shells and crabs on the beaches.

The biggest misconception people have about art is that they think it is a decorative thing, they forget it is a means of expression.

Observing them, I understood the true meaning of 'Sita' – who came from the womb of the earth. They were so deeply connected with the soul, and were so much a part of nature that it was not possible to distinguish them apart from it. Many of those women did not even own land, all they had was a small *jhopdi*. Collecting seashells, using them to make little trinkets and then selling them in the markets, there was so much self-reliance and dignity. They were poor, but were not begging. And when that land goes, they won't get anything because there is no record of any ownership, because it was never needed... much like the Adivasi and his forest. Because everything in nature is for everyone to share prudently, there are no owners. So how can you take away land and people's livelihood?'

All of this got her wondering about 'How much do we really know about survival? With how little can we manage?' According to Shyamali, the paintings, clay, paper and cloth offer a lot of scope for conveying these ideas in an interesting manner. Art is one way to sensitize people, for it is important to know about people who are experimenting and trying to live in different meaningful ways even though their contexts may be different.

Art is Compassion

Her favourite material is clay. 'Art has a meditative quality, one needs to really delve into the material to create something. You need to concentrate; if you do not, the pot might just break, become

misshapen or not be strong enough. You can sit for hours by yourself and watch the pot 'become' in front of your eyes. People may find it boring, but it is such a rich experience. And it is the same with the charkha, or a musical instrument, you really need to involve yourself with it. If we all learn to engage ourselves with art, we won't feel helpless or depressed.'

She asks children to use only waste paper while making puppets. Making paper puppets is just an excuse to talk to them and to convey so many things, for she finds that art creates a space where people become receptive. Once when she was talking about junk food through puppets, all the children there said that they loved their chips, their colas, pizzas and their bhujias. But one parent told her later that her child didn't eat chips for a very long time – "Because we had the puppets talking about how most of these readymade foods were bad for their health."

Children, she feels, understand deeply, and the younger they are, the more intuitive. In her opinion, though Santiniketan has become touristy – which is not good for a creative soul – she believes that it is in some ways, better than most other places for children to grow up in... it is still a community, people know each other, there are classes under the tree and Tagore songs are always in the air. For when people come with respect, with a sense of learning, then it is nourishing even for artists.

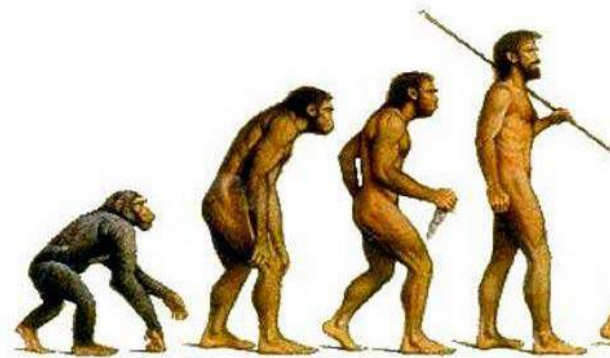
She adds, 'The real test though is fostering an understanding in the educated people about how they can live simple lives, respect handicrafts, support cottage industries, and preserve that wisdom from vanishing forever.'

Shyamali Khastgir is a writer, an artist and activist. She lives in Santiniketan.



How the Internet is making us Stupid

By Nicholas Carr



The Internet's profound influence on our cognitive abilities is turning us into adept multitaskers, but at the cost of imagination, creativity and in-depth thinking

Although the world wide web has been around for just 20 years, it is hard to imagine life without it. It has given us instant access to vast amounts of information, and we're able to stay in touch with friends and colleagues more or less continuously.

But our dependence on the internet has a dark side. A growing body of scientific evidence suggests that the net, with its constant distractions and interruptions, is turning us into scattered and superficial thinkers.

I've been studying this research for the past three years, in the course of writing my new book *The Shallows: How the Internet Is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember*. But my interest in the subject is not just academic. It's personal. I was inspired to write the book after I realised that I was losing my own capacity for concentration and contemplation. Even when I was away from my computer, my mind seemed hungry for constant stimulation, for quick hits of information. I felt perpetually distracted.

Could my loss of focus be a result of all the time I've spent online? In search of an answer to that question, I began to dig into the many psychological, behavioural, and neurological studies that examine how the tools we use to think with – our information technologies – shape our habits of mind.

The picture that emerges is troubling, at least to anyone who values the subtlety, rather than just the speed, of human thought. People who read text studded with links, the studies show, comprehend less than those who read words printed on pages. People who watch busy multimedia presentations remember less than those who take in information in a more sedate and focused manner. People who are continually distracted by emails, updates and other messages understand less than those who are able to concentrate. And people who juggle many tasks are often less creative and less productive than those who do one thing at a time.

The common thread in these disabilities is the division of attention. The richness of our thoughts, our memories and even

our personalities hinges on our ability to focus the mind and sustain concentration. Only when we pay close attention to a new piece of information are we able to associate it “meaningfully and systematically with knowledge already well established in memory”, writes the Nobel Prize-winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel. Such associations are essential to mastering complex concepts and thinking critically.

When we're constantly distracted and interrupted, as we tend to be when looking at the screens of our computers and mobile phones, our brains can't forge the strong and expansive neural connections that give distinctiveness and depth to our thinking. Our thoughts become disjointed, our memories weak. The Roman philosopher Seneca may have put it best 2,000 years ago: “To be everywhere is to be nowhere.”

In an article in *Science* last year, Patricia Greenfield, a developmental psychologist who runs UCLA's Children's Digital Media Center, reviewed dozens of studies on how different media technologies influence our cognitive abilities. Some of the studies indicated that certain computer tasks, like playing video games, increase the speed at which people can shift their focus among icons and other images on screens. Other studies, however, found that such rapid shifts in focus, even if performed adeptly, result in less rigorous and “more automatic” thinking.

In one experiment at a US university, half a class of students was allowed to use internet-connected laptops during a lecture, while the other had to keep their computers shut. Those who browsed the web performed much worse on a subsequent test of how well they retained the lecture's content. Earlier experiments revealed that as the number of links in an online document goes up, reading comprehension falls, and as more types of information are placed on a screen, we remember less of what we see.

Greenfield concluded that “every medium develops some cognitive skills at the expense of others”. Our growing use of

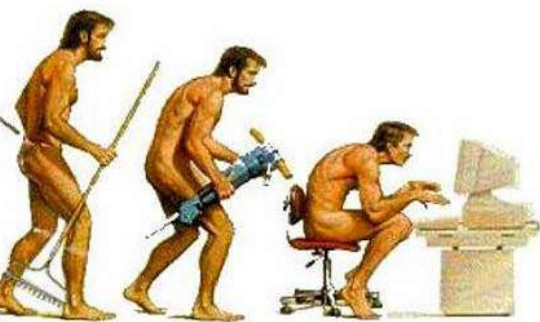


Illustration from www.snup.org

The cellular structure of the human brain, scientists have discovered, adapts readily to the tools we use to find, store and share information. By changing our habits of mind, each new technology strengthens certain neural pathways and weakens others. The alterations shape the way we think even when we're not using the technology.

screen-based media, she said, has strengthened visual-spatial intelligence, which can strengthen the ability to do jobs that involve keeping track of lots of rapidly changing signals, like piloting a plane or monitoring a patient during surgery. But that has been accompanied by "new weaknesses in higher-order cognitive processes," including "abstract vocabulary, mindfulness, reflection, inductive problem solving, critical thinking, and imagination." We're becoming, in a word, shallower.

Studies of our behaviour online support this conclusion. German researchers found that web browsers usually spend less than 10 seconds looking at a page. Even people doing academic research online tend to "bounce" rapidly between different documents, rarely reading more than a page or two, according to a University College London study.

Such mental juggling takes a big toll. In a recent experiment at Stanford University, researchers gave various cognitive tests to 49 people who do a lot of media multitasking and 52 people who multitask much less frequently. The heavy multitaskers performed poorly on all the tests. They were more easily distracted, had less control over their attention, and were much less able to distinguish important information from trivia.

The researchers were surprised by the results. They expected the intensive multitaskers to have gained some mental advantages. But that wasn't the case. In fact, the multitaskers weren't even good at multitasking. "Everything distracts them," said Clifford Nass, one of the researchers.

It would be one thing if the ill effects went away as soon as we turned off our computers and mobiles. But they don't. The cellular structure of the human brain, scientists have discovered, adapts readily to the tools we use to find, store and share information. By changing our habits of mind, each new technology strengthens certain neural pathways and weakens others. The alterations shape the way we think even when we're not using the technology.

The pioneering neuroscientist Michael Merzenich believes our brains are being "massively remodelled" by our ever-intensifying use of the web and related media. In the 1970s and 1980s, Mr. Merzenich, now a professor emeritus at the University of California in San Francisco, conducted a famous series of experiments that revealed how extensively and quickly neural circuits change in response to experience. In a conversation late last year, he said that he was profoundly worried about the cognitive consequences of the constant distractions and interruptions the internet bombards us with. The long-term effect on the quality of our intellectual lives, he said, could be "deadly".

Not all distractions are bad. As most of us know, if we concentrate too intensively on a tough problem, we can get stuck in a mental rut. But if we let the problem sit unattended for a time, we often return to it with a fresh perspective and a burst of creativity. Research by the Dutch psychologist Ap Dijksterhuis indicates that such breaks in our attention give our unconscious mind time to grapple with a problem, bringing to bear information and cognitive processes unavailable to conscious deliberation. We usually make better decisions, his experiments reveal, if we shift our attention away from a mental challenge for a time.

But Dijksterhuis's work also shows that our unconscious thought processes don't engage with a problem until we've clearly and consciously defined the problem. If we don't have a particular goal in mind, he writes, "unconscious thought does not occur." The constant distractedness that the net encourages – the state of being, to borrow a phrase from T.S. Eliot, "distracted from distraction by distraction" – is very different from the kind of temporary, purposeful diversion of our mind, that refreshes our thinking. The cacophony of stimuli short-circuits both conscious and unconscious thought, preventing our minds from thinking either deeply or creatively. Our brains turn into simple signal-processing units, shepherding information into consciousness and then back out again.

What we seem to be sacrificing in our surfing and searching is our capacity to engage in the quieter, attentive modes of thought that underpin contemplation, reflection and introspection. The web never encourages us to slow down. It keeps us in a state of perpetual mental locomotion. The rise of social networks like Facebook and Twitter, which pump out streams of brief messages, has only exacerbated the problem.

There's nothing wrong with absorbing information quickly and in bits and pieces. We've always skimmed newspapers more than we've read them, and we routinely run our eyes over books and magazines to get the gist of a piece of writing and decide whether it warrants more thorough reading. The ability to scan and browse is as important as the ability to read deeply and think attentively. What's disturbing is that skimming is becoming our dominant mode of thought. Once a means to an end, a way to identify information for further study, it's becoming an end in itself – our preferred method of both learning and analysis. Dazzled by the net's treasures, we have been blind to the damage we may be doing to our intellectual lives and even our culture.

Nicholas Carr is a columnist and author of many books. His latest release is 'The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains'. He writes on the social, economic and business implications of technology.

Bt Cotton: Invincible no more



Four decades of mono-cropping and intensive use of fertilizer and pesticide has led our farmers to welcome genetically modified hybrids, which promised them far higher yields and lesser pest attacks. A gene from the common soil microbe Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) has been introduced into the cotton seeds to help protect the cotton plant from its common pest – Bollworm. This modification helps the plant produce endotoxins that have insecticidal action. In eight years, almost 90 percent of the area for cotton in India has come under Bt Cotton cultivation.

Having seen around 2 generations of hybrids, of Bt Cotton varieties, they are still far from a solution to this common pest.

Earlier this year, the results of another study conducted by Monsanto (the company that produces GM seeds) in 4 districts in Gujarat, which are under Bt cotton cultivation, showed unusual amount of susceptibility to pink bollworm.

Recently, researchers from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur and the Institute of Wood Science and Technology, Bangalore, who were the first to conduct field – level studies in India, have shown that the bollworm has been revisiting the GM cotton plant. According to a scientist Y.B. Srivnivas from IWST, in future there will be more resistance to Bt. The genetically modified hybrid varieties have been shown to be ineffective and the worms are showing signs of feeding and are producing offspring. Incidentally, most of the findings of the study matched those of a similar study done in China, which show that the bollworms already have a built-in resistance to the Bt cotton.

Source: *Deccan Herald*

Biofuels from Algae?

In a race to find a sustainable source of bio fuels, algae may be the next big thing. There are many different algae, which grow rapidly given the right conditions. They can also have a high percentage of lipids, or oils.

Most of the research into the use of algae for biofuel production focuses on microalgae (which forms green scum on water surfaces and is made of tiny organisms capable of photosynthesis) as opposed to macroalgae such as seaweed. Many different processes are being considered and patented and all need large sealed growing tanks that maintain a controlled environment.

Algae can double their mass several times a day and produce atleast 15 times more oil per acre than alternatives such as palms and soyabens. The algae photosynthesis needs sunlight and CO₂, and nutrients like cellulose – which can come from agricultural slurry or sewage.

The mature algae is skimmed every day. Production is continuous unlike for standing crops such as corn and soy, where there is harvest, once or twice a year at best.

The oil produced by the algae is rich in triglycerides (as in vegetable oil) and is mixed with alcohol such as ethanol to produce biodiesel and glycerol in a process called transesterification.

In some processes, the waste algae can be sold as high-protein animal feed.

Source: *The Guardian, UK*



Bangladesh & India most susceptible to climate change

Over 170 countries that were analysed by Maplecroft showed that India and Bangladesh are most at risk from climate change in the next 30 years. Maplecroft analyzes data using several variables to assess the vulnerability of countries to the potential damage from various social, political or environmental risks.

The Climate Change Vulnerability Index – which evaluates some 42 economic, social and environmental factors, and which include exposure to climate-related disasters and sea-level rise – is able to assess vulnerability to climatic disturbances, human sensitivity and future vulnerability of the governments of countries.

Of the many countries that were assessed, 16 countries were marked in the “extreme risk” category, including India, Nepal, Bangladesh Afghanistan, Pakistan, Madagascar and Mozambique among others. Sri Lanka was rated as “high risk”.

According to the studies, the countries with the most risk are the ones that are characterized by high populations, high levels of poverty, reliance on agricultural land that could be both flood prone and drought prone. Climate events like flash floods in Pakistan have already affected more than 20 million people and killed more than 1700 people.

Maplecroft rates Bangladesh as the country that is most at risk due to its vulnerability to floods and droughts, its high population, reliance on agriculture, and also because its government has the lowest capacity to adapt to predicted changes.

India may be considered a powerful country now, but according to Maplecroft it is ranked second, right after Bangladesh. The same risk factors for Bangladesh also apply to India.

Source: www.nationalgeographic.com

20 percent of the World's species are threatened

Photograph from wikimedia



The year 2010 was declared as the International Year of Biodiversity – to help conserve biodiversity. A report launched at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity meeting in Nagoya, Japan, stated that 52 species of mammal, bird and amphibian species move closer to extinction each year from habitat loss, invasive species and over-exploitation.

On the other hand, many other species would have fallen closer to extinction if not for individual and more concerted conservation efforts for certain species. The IUCN (World Conservation Union) has drawn up a Red List of Threatened

Species (of species that are exploited, hunted, coveted) to give us an idea of the status of conservation of the species. According to ecologist E.O. Wilson, the backbone of conservation is being eroded, and that for a species to go one-step up the Red List means that they are much closer to extinction than we thought.

The study also highlights 64 species that have become less threatened due to conservation efforts. Global, regional and local levels of conservation efforts are important to protect species. 1/5th of all plant species are threatened, most of which are found in the tropics and threatened due to human conflict. Most conservation efforts are aimed at protecting 'Keystone Species', like elephants, tigers, large trees like conifers. This effort at conservation has a ripple effect to even the lowest of species.

Global figures from IUCN:

Total species assessed = 55,926

Extinct = 791

Extinct in the Wild = 63

Critically Endangered = 3,565

Endangered = 5,256

Vulnerable = 9,530

Near Threatened = 4,014

Total Lower Risk/conservation dependent = 269 (an old category that is gradually being phased out of the Red List)

Data Deficient = 8,358

Least Concern = 24,080

Source: www.iucn.org

Argentina protects her Glaciers

Photograph by Juan Pablo Oitana, <http://www.gruponexus.com/>



Glaciers are large bodies of ice that have existed over many millennia and are one of the main sources of freshwater. Global warming is causing the glaciers to melt at an increasing rate, thereby increasing water flow in rivers for a time. In Peru, the mountain glaciers are seen to be receding rapidly. According to a report from the INRENA, Marcos Zapata and his team have found that Peru's glaciers are receding at a rate of 20 metres per

year as opposed to 9 metres per year in 1977.

Argentina, on September 30, 2010 enacted a law that allowed its glaciers to be protected in times of climate change. This legislation will also help to take inventory and update information on the glaciers every five years, especially the ones that act as water reserves. The Andes, which extend all along the western part of South America within seven countries, are an important mountain ecosystem for the entire continent. In 2008, the then President of Argentina had vetoed the law to protect the country's glaciers. However, now Argentina is showing countries the way by enacting this powerful piece of legislation.

This law prohibits the release, dispersal or disposal of any harmful substances of any kind in the vicinity of the glaciers. It also prohibits the exploration of mines. It requires that an environment impact assessment be carried out prior to any activities which are not planned. The law also imposes stiff penalties on any who infringe upon the regulations of this law. The law does not allow destroying or moving the glaciers and treats them as public goods. This will not only help to protect drinking water sources for the future, but is also a landmark law to help preserve important "environmental hotspots" like these in times of climate change.

Source: *Environment News Network*

Obesity increasing in children

A study of school children by Edusports, a Bangalore-based company showed that one in 4 children above the age of eight is obese. Even worse, 18 percent of children below the age of 7 are obese or overweight. Obesity is not a communicable disease like cholera or malaria. It is however, a disease of lifestyle; while not lethal in itself, it increases the risk of several health problems like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, or the mental health concerns all of which increase with age. 25 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 had high Body Mass Index. This high BMI reflected lower flexibility, endurance and overall fitness of the children.

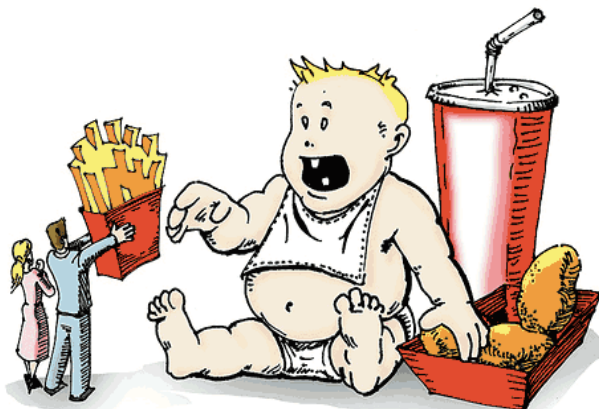
The above study was conducted in 21 schools across the NCR region as well as other large cities in the country. The study was done to establish a gap in physical education for children in schools, where sports takes a back seat compared to

academics. The study was conducted in the academic year 2009-10.

An article in the LA Times elaborating on a study produced by Yale about junk food outlets selling promotional toys to kids was of the opinion that the governments should step in. The ban, which has since been passed says that “promotional toys will be banned with fast food meals, unless they adhere to certain nutritional

requirements”, as set by the government. If the government can make it mandatory for these companies to adhere to certain norms, it may make it more difficult for them to sell these toys with the junk food to the kids, who are already suffering from obesity and related diseases.

Source: Los Angeles Times, The Hindu



Source: www.topnews.in

Tender coconut – A wonder liquid

Coconut water is said to be the purest liquid in nature apart from rainwater. Here are some of the health benefits of coconut water:

Coconut water is known to help in regulating body temperature to keep it cool, especially in the summers.

It rehydrates the body well. It contains no cholesterol and is low in calories and fat.

It also has a good balance of potassium, sodium and calcium.

It has anti-fungal, anti-microbial and anti-



viral properties all of which are important to prevent infections in the body.

People with kidney stones can drink coconut water to help break up the stones and flush them out.

It provides relief from nausea and vomiting and should be had for diseases that show these symptoms, like typhoid, malaria etc.

It is a good detoxifying agent.

It helps to control diabetes.

Source: Times of India

Photograph by Rajaram R, www.elevenelements.com

A Vote for Safety

The US Senate will vote on the Food Safety Modernization Bill, which promises to achieve several important food safety objectives, greatly benefiting consumers without harming small farmers or local food producers.

The bill would, for the first time, give the F.D.A., which oversees 80 percent of the nation's food, the authority to test widely for dangerous pathogens and to recall contaminated food. The agency would finally have the resources and authority to prevent food safety problems, rather

than respond only after people have become ill. The bill would also require more frequent inspections of large-scale, high-risk food-production plants.

The law would also help to protect Americans from unsafe food produced overseas: for the first time, imported foods would be subject to the same standards as those made in the United States.

One sticking point was the fear among small farmers and producers that the new regulations would be too costly — and the counter-fear among consumer groups that allowing any exemptions for small-scale agriculture might threaten public

health. Those legitimate concerns have been addressed in an amendment, added by Senator Jon Tester of Montana, that recently was endorsed by a coalition of sustainable agriculture and consumer groups. The Bill however is under fierce attack from critics for being prohibitively expensive; agricultural trade groups are against it because the small farms now partially exempted, would pose a food safety threat.

Source: New York Times Article on Food Safety Modernization Act by Eric Schlosser and Michael Pollan.

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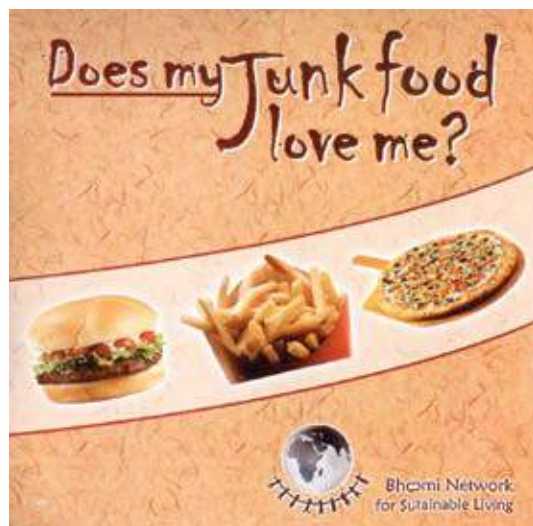
Phone No: 080 2844 1173

For any correspondence

please email us at

Bhoomi.network@gmail.com

or call us on **080-28441173**



The following can be ordered by you for use in schools, colleges, NGOs, housing colonies and for sharing with friends

1. Docu-drama for students/ parents:

"Does my Junk Food Love me?"

(1 Video DVD on how chemicals and ingredients of junk and processed foods can harm children)

Rs. 200

2. Powerful and Inspiring Talks on Food and Climate Change by

Satish Kumar – **"What can we do as Individuals?"**

Vandana Shiva – **"What every Indian should know about food and agriculture"**

Rs. 250

Mailing Address:

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c/o Prakriya School Campus

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Aastha Foundation

For Human Learning and Growth

*Express, relate and build perspective
Explore a refreshing learning space
Experience a feel of community*

6 Day Programmes (May 9 – 14, 2011)

1. Discovering Potential in Role and Identity (Age 25 years & above)
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For further details:- Phone: 9945825852 / 9901370003
Email: aasthafoundation@gmail.com

Aastha Foundation is a not-for-profit Public Trust, established in 1995. Aastha's membership includes Trustees, Institutional members and Professional members who are professionals in Management, Human Resources Development, Education and Applied Behavioural Sciences

Trek in the Sharavathi Valley – March / April 2011

"To live a responsible life on our planet, we need to learn to live and delight in the abundance of Mother Earth"

Gaia Wilderness Learning Center has been set up with the aim of fostering consciousness about a 'living' Earth along with adventure and experiential ecology activities.

Gaia's programmes are designed to provide rich experience of Nature and foster an understanding of the web of life and our part in it.

We are professionally trained outdoor enthusiasts with several years of experience in the Western Ghats and are committed to experiential learning beyond the class room along with interactions with local people of the area we visit.

Look forward to an exciting & meaningful programme in March / April, 2011

Sharavathi Valley is part of the Western Ghats - one of the Bio-diversity hotspots of the world, a region for all of us to experience, explore and cherish. The trek in Sharavathi Valley will include breathtakingly beautiful routes along the Sharavathi River as well as interesting historical sites like the 600 year old Kanoor Fort and the Jain temples of Chathramukhi Basti.

For details email Ananth Somaiah at ananthsumaiah@gmail.com



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Editor

Seetha Ananthasivan



Bhoomi Network brings this column for students and teachers in particular, to focus on issues which concern the well-being (and possibly, survival) of all human beings, and about which decisions are made by a very small minority of our population. Educational Institutions need to be spaces where students learn about their future world. The freedom of agriculture is the freedom of our future. With a strong focus the political and policy levels, the Kisan Swaraj Yatra is a journey about Food, Farmers and Freedom.

Kisan Swaraj Yatra

Food. Farmers. Freedom.



The Green Revolution in the 1960s with its introduction of chemicals and promise of high yields and large profits has left many farmers in a crisis. The lakhs of suicides over the last 12 years and reports of farmers wanting to abandon agriculture (40 percent according to the National Commission on Farmers chaired by MS Swaminathan), large-scale displacements and migrations to urban centres in search of jobs bear testimony to magnitude of the problem.

In these times, the Kisan Swaraj Yatra is a nationwide movement for farmers to draw attention to the continuing agricultural crisis in India. And their message is quite simple – Food, Farmers, Freedom. Initiated by the Alliance for Sustainable and Holistic Agriculture (ASHA), which includes many farmers groups, more than 400 NGOs, institutions, doctors, activists and individuals all across the nation, the journey raised awareness about the issues that our farmers are facing in the country.

The yatra which originated in Sabarmati – iconic in its past struggles for freedom – ended at Rajghat on 11 December 2010 with many stops in villages, towns and cities across 20 states in the country. Author and environmental activist Bharat Mansata traveled with the yatra for 9 days. He says, ‘the message which still rings in his ears, and which should ring in all of our ears is: “Apna Beej, Apna Desh” (Our Seed, Our Country). The focus of the Yatra was liberation from a type of imperial system which has taken away the basic right for Seed which is the very basis of our existence and the foundation of agriculture.

The call is for a pro-nature, pro-farmer approach to our nation’s policies. According to a report by IAASTD (International Assessment for Agricultural Science and

Technology Development), there is no more space for “business as usual” to continue, that genetically modified foods is not the way to go but indigenous knowledge is.

As it is, the proposed Seed Bill with its provisions for stripping farmers of their control over seeds gives outside agencies (not just government, but private firms) too much power and control over the entire agricultural system without considering its implications on the Indian farmer.

The Kisan Swaraj Yatra is also a voice against the ‘increasing corporatisation of basic resources, through pro-industry, anti-farmer policies, regulatory frameworks and by conferring legal rights to industry in the form of exclusive right like IPRs over life forms, the government is violating the apriori rights of our farmers over resources like Seed.’

In an article in a newspaper, Mansata adds that the yatra brings a positive message of hope through an alternative agro-ecological path that is sustainable and holistic. ‘Integrated agro-ecological systems offer multiple benefits, including enhanced productivity, reduced costs, healthier food, and the regeneration of soil, biodiversity and groundwater. Fossil fuel inputs and greenhouse gas emissions are significantly reduced, while energy efficiency and carbon sequestration are much higher - vital considerations in an age of fuel scarcity and climate change’

The **petition** makes several demands. Some of them are:

- Stop treating common resources like land, water, and especially seed, as commodities for the benefit of corporations.
- Prevent fertile land from forcible acquisition and conversion for non-agricultural purposes.
- Guarantee a minimum family income to all farming families
- Cancel all government agreements with Monsanto, Syngenta and other agri-business MNCs in India
- Mitigate contribution by agriculture to climate change and help farming communities to adapt to climate change by promoting sustainable farming techniques
- Stop all international agreements in agriculture until a comprehensive review is done to assess the implications of these on farming communities

Source: <http://www.kisanswaraj.in/>, http://www.karmayog.org/gmo/gmo_31514.htm, DNA, November 19, 2010

Bhoomi Network For Sustainable Living

Announces a programme on:

Inner and Outer Ecology

Dates: 21st April - 2nd May, 2011 at Bangalore

This programme is the first in a series of 4 programmes designed primarily for those who wish to be facilitators / anchors in workshops and projects on various aspects of sustainable living. Attending this programme by itself can also be a meaningful experience also.

It will provide a unique opportunity for students, teachers, members of NGOs and others to learn in two major ways:

- through self-exploration in inner ecology laboratories where all participants foster each other's learning through intensely participative experiential sessions
- through a range of resources, workshops, projects and meetings with ecologically sensitive leaders and living in and learning from regions of wilderness.



Objectives of the Programme

We are inextricably connected with nature around us and our planet earth. Innumerable strands of the web of life run through and in us - yet our living processes do not reflect this reality. This programme aims to foster wholesome living, holistic thinking, perception of processes, collaboration and co-operation to aid us in working more actively with inner and outer ecology.

The programme also aims to equip participants with resources, skills and support systems to anchor programmes or projects concerned with sustainable living, particularly for students in schools and colleges.

Structure and Processes of the Programme

The programme would involve learning through living in a community, with at least an hour of participation in the organic garden, kitchen etc. It will include participative learning sessions anchored by facilitators in human processes as well as others who are committed to learning to live sustainably. Introductory modules on Gaia, Systems theory, Organic Farming, Ecological Economics, Eco-literacy etc. will also be included.

1. 6 days of residential programmes on self exploration (inner ecology) at the Bhoomi Centre at Bangalore; accommodation will be twin sharing, triple sharing rooms, with nutritious vegetarian food.
2. 6 days of wilderness learning programmes at the Sharavathi valley rainforests in the Western Ghats.

Registration Information

The fees for this programme will include:

1. a compulsory payment of a nominal amount based on actual living expenses and
2. a voluntary payment amount towards the Bhoomi Programme Fund.

For further information and registration, please contact: bhoomiprogrammes@gmail.com

Bhoomi Conference 2011



What's a Good Life?

The Bhoomi Conference is a space to ask questions about the connections between our notions of a good life and relationships, happiness, economics and ecology – to explore leads and directions offered by various thinkers, scientists and philosophers-

What is the Good Life we really want for ourselves?

How do we decide what is too much consumption?

Is our drive to succeed as individuals harmful to our civilization and planet earth?

Climate change is also a global, political issue – does individual change matter then?

Keynote Speakers

Day 1: Seeing the Whole Picture

Shri. Devinder Sharma

Dr. Nandita Shah

Dr. Vandana Shiva

Day 2: Towards A Sustainable Good Life

Dr. Mira Shiva

Dr. V.S. Sreedhara

Shri. Gopinath Menon

Workshops

Perceptions & Processes: Connecting the Dots & Understanding Ecological Principles

Visioning for a Sustainable Good Life: What can we do at individual and collective Levels?

Be a Bhoomi Networker...

Join us at the Bhoomi Conference to explore new potentials and possibilities and find co-travellers in this journey of education & awareness-building for sustainable living.

Apart from being an enriching learning space, the 2nd Bhoomi Conference also celebrates the joy of sharing & networking amongst all of us working for a common cause.

Register...

For more details write to us at bhoomiconference@gmail.com

OR call us at 080 28441173 (office hours) website: www.bhoomiconference.org