Cultures of Sustainability, Sustainability of Cultures

Dharmic Ecology of The Bishnoi and Swadhyaya Communities
1490s and 1940s

• **Bishnoi** ("The Twenty-Niners")
  – Guru Jambheshwara (*Guruji*)
  – (1451 – 1536 CE)

• **Swadhyaya** ("The Self-Study Movement")
  – "New Religious Movement" (20th c. – )
  – Pandurang Shastri Athavale (*Dadaji*)
  – (1920–2003)
The Origin...

- Around 1485 CE…
  - The Drought
  - The Mystical Experience
29 Rules and 120 Statements

- Overlapping of Dharma
  - Protecting the environment
  - Personal hygiene
  - Spirituality
  - Personal and social morality
The Bishnoi Dharma...

• “If you remember that the divinity residing in your heart also resides in animals, you will surely achieve heaven...[you] will not be able to justify the violence when questioned by your own deities”.

(my translation)
Environmentalism of the Bishnoi Guru

- Water Harvesting Sites
- Tree Plantation
- Animal and Bird Sanctuaries
The Bishnoi Legend(s)...

- In 1730 CE and more...
THE PEOPLE WHO HUGGED THE TREES

adapted by DEBORAH LEE ROSE

with pictures by BIRGITTA SÄFLUND
Bishnois Today...

• The Amrita Devi Award
The Origin of Swadhyaya

- 1942 – Discourses on Hindu texts
- “The Indwelling God”
- “Devotion as Social Force”
- Devotional Activism
Relationship

• Profit ?
• Pleasure ?
• Principle ?

✓ Devotion
“Reverence for all”

“The acceptance of the principle of the immanence of God not only generates reverence for self, reverence for other selves but also reverence for the whole creation. This attitude towards nature is nobler than the purely utilitarian attitude which leads to wanton destruction of nature and exploitation of biological resources. Most of the ecological problems can be solved if one develops reverential attitude towards nature.”
“Bhakti is our understanding of God's profound love for us and our response to that love in the form of concern for his creation. Intense love for God and His creation cannot make us passive spectators of social evils prevalent in the society. Our love and concern issue into dynamic activity. This dynamic love we call Krutibhakti. Whatever talents, skills, efficiency, time and money we have, we will willingly and lovingly offer them at the feet of the Lord as an expression of love and gratitude to Him.”
“Silent Singing Revolution”

- Devotional Visits
- Socio-spiritual Shrines
- Ocean Worship
- Dairy Industry
- Tree Temples
- Farms of God
- Water Harvesting
“We are not environmentalists”

• Devotion and its “by-products”

• Prayog (Experiments) for farmers to express their reverence for divinity

Current Swadhyaya Leader > Dhanashree Talwalkar (Didiji) >
Water Harvesting

• Recharging the wells (about 125,000)

• Harvesting water in ponds (about 1000)

• “If you quench the thirst of Mother Earth, she will quench yours.” - Athavale
Arboreal Dharma of Swadhyaya

• “Reason based Religion”

– Krishna Attraction and Capillary Action

– God in trees
Puja (worship), Pujari (priests)

- Vānaprastha
- Pujārī
- Produce as Prasad
A Lay Swadhyayi...

“One who goes to farms just for work is a farmer, but one who goes to enjoy and respect greenery, goes with reverence and gratitude for God. This reverential perspective inspires to make the entire world green.”

(Personal communication with Jitubhai Patel, January 2007)
Krishna Plantations

- Annual Tree plantation activities (1993 - )

- Families recite Vedic hymns with trees
A Timeline...

- 1979 – First tree temple
- 1987 – Wasteland Award
- 1996 – Magsaysay Award
- 1997 – Templeton Prize
- 1999 – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Highest Indian Award
- 2000 – 24\textsuperscript{th} tree temple
- 2003 – “Didi” continues the work…
Dharma…

- “Dharma” used for “religion”, “property”, and “duty” (Weightman and Pandey 1978)
- Dharma for supernatural, natural, & human worlds… (Parajuli 2001)
Dharma of trees (Virtues of trees and nature)

Dharma of humans (Human virtues)

Dharma for the environment (Environmentalism to preserve the nature)
Moral = Ecological = Dharmic

- Ann Gold (2002) – “Human behaviors are irrevocably interwoven with the natural environment’s condition….the deterioration of one implies and involves the other.”

- Marriott and Inden, Appadurai, Smith (2006) – The distinction between mind and body, humanity and nature, essence, idea, quality, and deity, would be (largely) one of degree rather than of kind
Embedded Ecology

“Ecological notions, beliefs, and practices are *embedded* in cultural forms, particularly in religious and aesthetic practices and institutions.”

(Vijaya Nagarajan extending Karl Polanyi’s Embedded Economy 1998)
Dharmic Ecology

- The theory: Dwivedi (2000)
  - *Vasudevam Sarvam* (Omnipresence of divinity)
  - *Avatara* (Reincarnation in non-human forms)
  - *Ahimsa* (non-violence and vegetarianism)
  - *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (global family)
  - *Sarva Bhuta Hita* (welfare for all)
  - *Karma* (action and consequence)
Dharmic Ecology

- *Upayoga* (S’ble usage), *Upasana* (Reverence)

- ~ Gaia Hypothesis

- ~ Reverence for Life (Albert Schweitzer)

- ~ Land Ethic (Aldo Leopold)
My 2nd book (January 2017)

Science and Socio-Religious Revolution in India

Moving the Mountains

Pankaj Jain
Dr. Pankaj Jain पंकज जैन
Associate Professor
Dept of Philosophy and Religion
Co-chair, India Initiative Group
Section Editor for Hinduism, Encyclopedia of Indian Religions
University of North Texas
Twitter: @ProfPankajJain
www.Facebook.com/DharmaAndEcology
Pankaj.jain@unt.edu

Thank you