

**Compiled Report on the Conduction of an International Conference Held at Hindu College, University of Delhi (21.03.2023), sponsored by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) entitled “Trends in Environment: An Inter-Disciplinary Approach.”**

*“The environment and the economy are really both two sides of the same coin. If we cannot sustain the environment, we cannot sustain ourselves.”*

*~Wangari Maathai*

The theme of environmental conservation, intended to adduce meaning and accentuate channelized human efforts to preserve the human balance with the natural world, has unfortunately been unduly constricted to, and rooted in the banality of scientific discourse. While, environmental relevance as the primary progenitor and preserver of the existence of life is well appreciated in the pragmatic knowledge base harbored by scientific endeavor, the mere



Figure 1 International Conference entitled "Trends in Environment: An Inter-Disciplinary Approach" organized by Hindu College, and sponsored by the ICPR

pragmatism of solutions belies the protracted nature and sheer diversity of the problem. While science and technological advancement has suggested inadvertent and often definitive answers to the incessant degradation of the environment, it fails to understand the essence of an equilibrium between human activities and the naturality of the immediate environment, that may be understood on the base of a metaphysical and socio-cultural quotient. To restrict

the thematic consideration to one end of a distorted spectrum, would seemingly be conceived as the epistemological failure to identify a prudent solution.

The International Conference organized by Hindu College, University of Delhi, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 2023, sponsored by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), under the



*Figure 2 The Dignitaries for the Conference, Respected Chief Guest and Guest of Honour being Felicitated by Dr. Ananya Barua*



*Figure 3 Lighting of the Lamp by the Dignitaries*

aegis of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative of the Government of India, and as a part of the march of Hindu College towards its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, was an exercise intended to address the very concern cited above.

Enigmatically entitled “Trends in Environment: An

Inter-Disciplinary Approach,” the conference, through the invitation of abstracts and papers from a diverse milieu intended to integrate the idea of

environmental conservation, by placing it through the lens of historical scrutiny, from the Vedic times and before, attempting to gauge changes in the nature of human behavior vis-à-vis their environment, along a connect-disconnect-reconnect paradigm.

Through the integration of differential and often antagonistic viewpoints, seeking credence in philosophical or literary expressions, the conference intended to trace the trajectory of human interactivity with the natural world, if only to reflect on the idea of the new sense of destiny for humanity.

The event was graced with the presence of eminent and distinguished personalities, like Professor S.M. Patnaik, who reached the Sushila Devi Auditorium of Hindu College at 9:26



AM and was received warmly by the Convenor of the event, Dr. Ananya Barua. The Chief



*Figure 4 Dr. Ananya Barua, Convenor, initiating the proceedings of the event, with the presentation of the concept note*

Guest, Professor Sachchidanand Mishra, the Member Secretary of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, and also the esteemed Chief Guest for the event arrived at 10:03 AM, and was received by co-convenor Dr. Archana Verma. The programme began with the elucidation of the theme of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the necessary role of the conference as an attempt to promote the integration of interdisciplinary ideas, the

commencement symbolized by the lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries and the convenors, accompanied by the Saraswati Vandana, and the felicitation of the guests with traditional



*Figure 5 Chief Guest, Professor Sachchidanand Mishra, Member-Secretary ICHR, delivering the inaugural address*

phulam gamosas. Guest of Honor for the event, Dr. Heather O' Leary, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Florida, St. Petersburg Campus, who had joined online in the hybrid conference, was virtually felicitated.

The felicitation was followed by the address of Dr. Maneesha Pandey, Nodal Officer of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Hindu College Chapter, who introduced briefly the significance of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav as an outreach initiative launched by the Government of India,

and impressed upon the audience the importance attached to environmental conservation in the

initiative, elaborating upon Mahatma Gandhi's idea of sustainable development goals for an independent India, and the utmost urgency to understand the relationship between human lives and environment to tackle the concerns of environmental degradation.

This was followed by the inaugural address of Dr. Ananya Barua, Convenor of the International Conference, who thanked the Chief Guest and the Guests of Honor for gracing the event with their benign presence and highlighted the underlying importance of the conference as a part of the march towards the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hindu College, and the novelty of the multi-disciplinary approach that it intended to promote. She also presented the concept note for the seminar, appreciating the participation from the North-East, and the efforts of the scholars and volunteers at organizing the event amidst budgetary and temporal impediments.

The presentation of the concept note for the conference was followed by the inaugural address of the Chief Guest, Professor Sachchidanand Mishra, who postulated, that real progress came only when its sustainable, with due care taken of the environmental issues at hand, and briefly mentioned certain important figures and personalities at the forefront of conservatory practices. Critiquing the view of scientism, an over-reliance or obsessive over-dependence on scientific orientation solely, he talked about the covid pandemic, the ideal relationship humanity should have with their immediate environment.

He highlighted the significance of the Ahshwatta tree cited in the Bhagavata Gita, and the Kalidas's Raghuvamsa, where the Devadaru tree was taken as son by Lord Shiva, arguing that attachment of divine attributes make a difference in human actions, and the scientific nature of these beliefs are only being traditionally uncovered. He also referred to the pollution of the Yamuna river, and that the people are the children of the earth, and must respect nature as their mother, concluding with the Gandhian proposition, that nature has enough resources to satisfy human needs but not human greed.



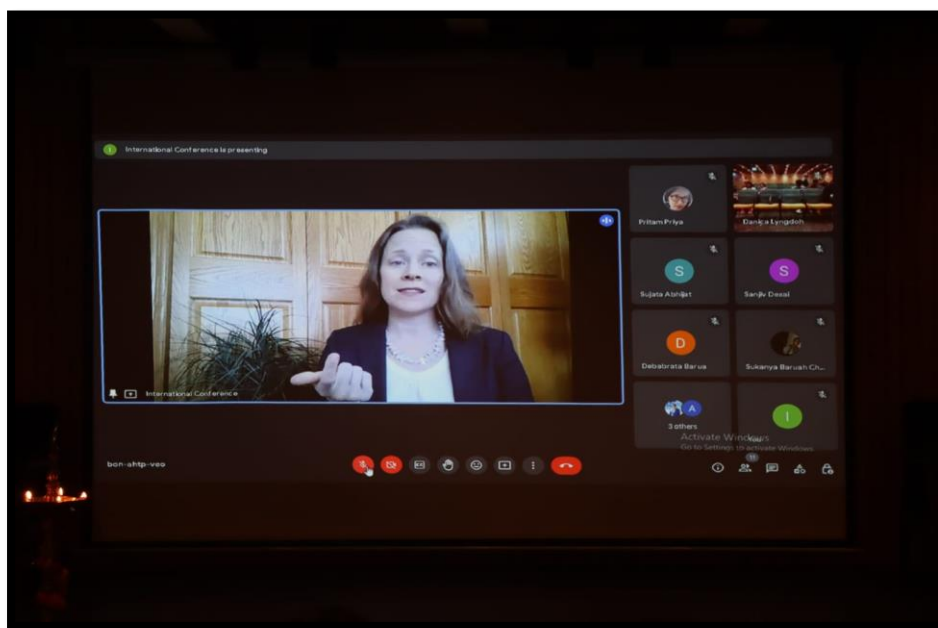
*Figure 6 Guest of Honor, Professor S.M. Patnaik, ex-Vice Chancellor, Utkal University*

This was followed by the address of Guest of Honor, Professor S.M. Patnaik, the erstwhile Vice-Chancellor of Utkal University, Odisha, India, and a renowned anthropologist, who suggested the present environment as "Physital" as a combination of physical and digital attributes, highlighting the disconnect with the nature world, and the earlier harmonious existence with the environs in the past, that is till visible among indigenous communities today, highlighting the necessity of a

proper understanding of folklore and practices of non-Sanskritic, regional Hinduism, as also

tribal religions prevalent in the Nilgiris, Kaigas and Kurwas in Chhattisgarh. He lamented the price humanity had to pay to be modern, highlighting cases of Chepang in the foothills of Himalayas, suggesting that it was nature that controlled us, and there was a need to incorporate both external and internal viewpoints to understand the contextuality of dynamism, notably nature-human relationship with man-woman relationship, Lord Krishna and the inverse plant, concluding that the role of philosophers and historians in the regard is as profound as the scientists.

The speech was followed by the inaugural address of the Guest of Honor and keynote speaker for the day, Dr.



*Figure 7 Keynote Address by Dr. Heather O' Leary*

Heather O' Leary, who elaborated upon her experiences and ambition to go to the other side of the world (India) to find out what it meant to be human, suggesting the necessity to listen to the stories of the people, their legends and

folklores, and constructively collaborate and modify human connections with the environmental impositions, working towards greater inclusivity and challenging hegemony.

She praised the conduct of the conference as a promising step towards a new direction ,thanked the organisers for involving her as a part of such a grandiloquent exercise and apologized for her absence from the same.

The proceedings for the day began with the first set of paper presentations which were presented online, from an extremely erudite and resourceful set of personalities who delivered several informative and thought-provoking presentations. The first speaker, Dr. Sanjeev Desai through his publication "Inflamed Earth," equated the environmental disbalances with bodily ailments, notably inflammations in the body, and the need to restore the balance of the earth through holistic approaches, proposing the concept of Earth's democracy a movement that promotes laws of renewability, conservation and diversity.

This was followed by a presentation by Dr. Pragati Sahni and Dr. Sujata Abhijat, entitled, "Environmental Ethics: The India Question," wherein they propounded the deeply involved question of equality and distribution of resources to understand the problem, and the colossal number of perspectives research on the same involved, notably, Environmental movements that



aspire for a sense of co-existence like the Chipko Movement, non-philosophical humanities writing, like the idea of eco-feminism interpreting the problems from a feminist perspective, Madhav Gadgil and the importance of ethics, Ramchandra Guha's works on environment, and Amitav Ghosh's works "The Great Derangement" or "The Nutmeg's Curse" portraying resistance of acknowledging climate change or the problems of radical anthropocentrism and the religious context which has a binding role as in the concept of five elements or Panchamabhuta or Vasudeva Kutumbakam.

The next speaker, Dr. Sukanya Baruah Chaliha, who presented her paper on the theme "Trends in Environment: An Inter-Disciplinary Approach," suggested the religious iconography or religious traditions of ancient India as an aware and consciously deliberate measure to strike a balance with environment. Citing the example of Mohenjo Daro and its unique emphasis on urban planning and sanitation, the concept of the five elements or Panchamabhuta and reference to the Bhumisukta that refers to the earth as mother, she highlighted the vast treasure-trove of history that ancient philosophy was, and that it could well be the solution to the many contemporary problems faced.



*Figure 8 The Successful conduction of the hybrid mode of presentations was one of the key highlights of the conference*

The educative speech was followed by Dr. Pritam Priya Goswami, presenting her paper on the theme "Exploring the Inter-relationship between Nature and Folk-life in the Writings of Kunzang Choden," focusing her deliberation on the prospect of the philosophy of "Shunnyata" literally translated as

emptiness and vacuity, its utilization in several ancient Hindu and Buddhist philosophies and that, it may point the way forward to potential solutions to the issue of environmental degradation.

The next speaker was Dr. Kamal Kumar, who spoke on his paper entitled "entitled "Green Federalism and Forest Governance in India: A Leap towards Environmental Justice," elaborating on the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (FRA 2006) as also known as The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006), arguing that it ushered in a new era of green governance, and that utmost care should be taken to ensure preservation of the indigenous lifestyles.

This was followed by Ms. Anupama Madhusudan, who presented her paper entitled “Eco-Raps: A Millennial Response to the Ecological Concerns in Kerala,” highlighted the theme of eco-musicology, arguing that hip-hop is inextricable from race, and the social structures are enmeshed with and shaped by the material world. She cited several exemplary instances, as in eco-hip hop by DJ Caven, Voice of the Voiceless by Vedan, proposing that as a form of music rap defied Brahmanical structure, movies like Bhoomi Njan Vaghunidam or the World that they live in, and Vaa (2021), portraying environmental cataclysm with experience of the marginalized.

The last speech of the online presentation session was by Professor Navaneetha Suresh, who spoke on her paper entitled “An Ecocritical Analysis of Bioregionalism in the Movies, Black panther and Where the Crawdads Sing,” basing her theme on bioregionalism and the fact that the way of thinking of the world was rooted in a particular place, as opined by scholars like Peterburg and Linda Dusman. Furthermore, there was the need to understand importance of indigenous tribes and local issues, interconnectedness and holistic approaches, and the exemplary movie “Black Panther” a movie based on identity and power, and the identity attached to the cultural world, and the movie “Where The Crawdads Singh,” portraying the

vital relationship between the nature and humans, and the negative impact of colonialism for its plausible alteration.



*Figure 9 Presentation by Dr. Tarang Kapoor*

The offline session commenced with the introductory speaker Mr. Wahengbam Johnson, who presented his paper on the uniquely appropriate theme of “Situating Ecotourism in Manipur, North-east India: Trends, Problems and Prospects,” highlighting the plausibility of an alternative system of

tourism, rooted in the ideal of sustainability, and the promotion of the idea of eco-tourism that appreciates the tenets of the natural environment within the Aegis of which the very idea is situated.

The illustrious speech was followed by Ms. Nemneithem Haokip, who presented her paper on the theme, “Land Ethics: Significance of Jhum Cultivation in The Kuki Community,”

enumerating the beneficial practice of agricultural produce among the Kuki community where production is bereft of any pesticide and herbicide and based on the indigenous idea of sustenance or fulfillment. While the novel agricultural methods are susceptible to the demands of the market, from surplus and mass produce to the utilization of chemicals to increase efficiency, the traditional practices like Jhum might pave the way for sustainable farming .

The presentation was succeeded by Dr. Tarang Kapoor, who presented her paper on the theme entitled “Deep Ecology: Insights from Vedanta,” distinguishing at the very outset, the conceptualization of surface ecology, standing for taking from nature, and deep ecology that intends giving back to nature of the idea of refurbishment. She also quoted seminal works on Deep ecology as in 1984, by George Scenes, which suggested a new interpretation of self as an integral part of the grand whole. She also quoted the works of Ramchandra Guha, who had brought forth the misappropriate interpretation of eastern religions, suggesting that in countries like India, since ancient times, people depended on the forest economy for their survival and did not indiscriminately take from it.

The next presentation was by Mr. Vibhuti Pathak, who expounded upon his paper with the theme “MEDIEVAL INDIA: THE RECONNECT AND DISCONNECT WITH THE ENVIRONMENT,” drawing parallels in the organization of military and urban planning with a clearly defined notion of environmental consciousness. He proposed that the attitude of the Mughal rulers towards the environment were highly ambiguous, and although the rulers like



*Figure 10 Presentation by Mr. Vibhuti Pathak*

Babur were greatly fascinated by the exotic diversity of the Indian natural flora and fauna, the knowledge was restricted to the usage of efficient military tactics as in the Siege Of Ranthambore by Akbar that involved use of higher altitude and exploitation of the terrain, the use of amphibious warfare

in the east involving projectiles and match-lock men, and the placement and construction of cities like



Shahjahanabad in pertinence to Vaastu Shastra. Following the conclusion, the gathering dispersed for lunch before the final session.

The following presentation was by Dr. Aditi Mann, who delivered her presentation on the paper “The Heavenly Abode: Study of Environmental Heritage Protected by Peasant Communities of Northern India,” focusing on the work of Oscar Luis which was extraordinary in its detail, and suggested the framework of Jajmani system and patriarchal structure of the villages as also having a tenets of natural preservation. She cited the example of field studies, particularly the Majna Dabas village, where the majority peasant Jats worshipped the local deity Dada, and every aspect of the natural element was imbued with respect as a part of the deity. Also, she referred to the ancient water bodies or ponds called Jhors, which have largely been filled up by extensive construction activities.

The speaker concluded that agricultural communities established these shrines as a symbol of their dependency on the natural world, and though the worshipped deities were anthropomorphic, their nature of reverence was mostly animistic in character.



*Figure 11 Presentation by Dr. Alka Michael and Mr. Sunil Harsana, whose efforts to save Mangar Bari evoked a huge appreciation from the audience*

The next speakers were Dr. Alka Michael and Mr. Sunil Harsana, who presented their paper on the theme of the conservatory practices in the sacred groves of India, which they highlighted as a means of a self-sustaining ecosystem. The paper, more than a theoretical discourse was an expression of their efforts to save the

Mangar Bari sacred grove, the only remaining forest cover in Haryana down to an abysmal average of 3%, due to the indiscriminate mining and construction activities in the Aravalli.

Also, the caves in the region, discovered through conservation efforts have brought to light ancient and prehistoric sites of value.

The next speaker was Dr. Santosh Kumar, who presented his paper on the theme "Environmental Facts in relation to Human Body: A Sociological Study of Environmental Epigenetics" arguing that sociologists like Herbert Spencer have used the theorizations of biology to define human society, and the purpose might have been partly due to the inspiration of work relations.

This was succeeded by a presentation by Ms. Saumya Suyal, who presented her paper on the theme "Environmentalism Models of Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature," arguing that the general theme of aesthetic appreciation of nature since the romantic movement with the pre-conceived notion that nature was sublime and beautiful, was marred by the prospect of problematization as natural objects were unique and different.

She enumerated historical changes in the depiction of nature in philosophy, as in Holmes Roston's approach with more emotions, wherein a rotting plant could be considered as aesthetic as a pine tree.

The next speakers were Dr. Mansi Gupta and Professor Nani Obey, who presented their paper on the theme "Speciesism and Beyond: Revisiting Climate Change" cited vivid arguments against speciesism while discussing the problems of climate change, highlighting the negative consequences of segregation and the derogatory levels of valuation when it came to the natural world.

The presentation was succeeded by Dr. Divya Bajaj and Ms. Medha Varshney who presented their paper on the theme "Diminishing wildlife, an important link for the emergence of zoonotic diseases." Defining zoonotic diseases as those spread directly or indirectly by animals, and

quoting statistical figures, they argued that such diseases as the Hantavirus have exceedingly increased over the last thirty years, and the increasing consumption and demand for meat and deforestation being responsible for the non-reservoir people going down.



*Figure 12 Presentation by Dr. Anish Chakravathy*

The last speaker for the day was Dr. Anish Chakravarthy who presented his paper on the theme "Spinoza's Environmental Ethics and Anthropocentric Critique," focusing on Spinoza's view of humans as a part of nature and his vociferous critique of anthropocentrism, his relative equation of God and nature and significance as one of the first theories to find a delicate harmony between nature and contemporary politics.



*Figure 13 The Convenors, Dr. Ananya Barua and Dr. Archana Verma alongside the Chief Guest and the Guest of Honor, marking the successful culmination of the conference*

The event came to an end with the valedictory session, where Dr. Ananya Barua thanked the scholars for their participation and the student volunteers for their persistent efforts that ensured the success of the event. This was followed by the distribution of certificates to the participants,

and dispersal for high tea.

Overall, the holistic view of enquiry involving multi-disciplinary facets and outlook when it came to environmental conservation was one of the key aspirations in the seminar, and the sheer diversity and illustrious presentation by a plethora of scholars served to create a benchmark in the field of academia for prospective events attempting to follow a similar trajectory. The prospect of multilateral and potentially convergent and convenient viewpoints over the strictly unilateral obsession with arid factuality was a myth the conference dispelled, and the dynamism of varying conceptions as depicted in the conference shall serve as a model for the conduction of research in the near future.

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