

Forests and Mankind...  
The Story and Lessons

Presentation  
on  
The World Forestry Day  
21<sup>st</sup> March 2021

Dr Arvind Kumar Jha

Mankind lived within a paradigm

*dominated by*

an understanding

where human beings

revered the Earth as mother,

saw themselves as

a part of the Nature,

and

lived off the natural resources

# Reverence for mother earth

- समुद्रवसने देवि पर्वतस्तनमंडले ।  
विष्णुपत्नि नमस्तुभ्यं पादस्पर्शं क्षमस्व मे ॥  
 O Goddess Earth, You have ocean as your attire, and mountains as your breasts; O wife of Shrivishnu, I pay obeisance to You. Please forgive me for treading on You with my feet.
- An American - Indian community, (the **Sioux** Indians) **refused to till the land** because they did not want to wound the body of mother Earth. They said, 'Must I mutilate her flesh? Then I can not enter into her body and be born again.'

# Man as a part of Nature

- 10,000 year-old cave paintings at *Bhimbetka* near **Bhopal** in Central India depicting birds, animals, and human beings living in harmony.
- *Ishopanishad* (over 2000 years ago) says, 'This **universe**..the creation of the Supreme Power is **meant for the benefit of all his creation**. So each 'life-form' must learn to **enjoy** its benefits as a part of the system **along with other species**. Let not any particular one species encroach upon the other's rights.'

# The traditional depiction of reverence

- **Trees and plants associated** with Rashis, Nakshatras, Gods and in their worship are used parts of flora .
- Hindu gods and goddesses are shown to use wild life and animals as **mounts**.
- '**Bono-Devi**' in Sundarbans.
- '**Waghoba**' in villages in Forest areas
- **Sacred groves** with their role in biodiversity conservation.

And.. Mankind prayed for  
well-being of all

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः। सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः॥  
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु। मा कश्चित् दुःख  
भाग्भवेत्॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

- May all be **prosperous and happy** ... May all be **free from illness** .. May all **see** what is spiritually uplifting .. May no one suffer....

And Prayed for peace (i.e. balance)...  
in all components of Nature

ॐ द्यौ शान्तिरन्तरिक्षः शान्तिः पृथ्वी  
शान्तिरापः शान्तिः औषधयः शान्तिः  
वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वै देवाः शान्तिब्रह्मा  
शान्तिः सर्वः शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः  
सा मा शान्तिरेधि  
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॐ

# Wilderness and Culture

*“**Wilderness** is never a homogeneous raw material, it is very **diverse**, and the resulting artefacts are quite diverse. These differences in the end products are known as **cultures**.”*

*The rich diversity of world’s cultures reflect a corresponding diversity in the wilds that gave them birth.”* – **Aldo Leopold**

## ..... Culture

- Culture — developed as a **collective human making** ... of language, social behaviour, art and artifacts, traditions, customs and beliefs, material expression of livelihood related needs based on and **related to natural resources** and so forth.
- **‘Nature’ gave birth to various cultural patterns** in different areas ....

.. Along with came..'Development' with .. 'effects'

- Progressive increase in the size of the human ecological footprint.
- Man's **domination** over nature .. Growing as a **global pathology**.
- Man trapped in **ecocidal** materialistic growth with utilitarian approach. **Ecosanity** suffering.
- Man challenging the **capacity of our planet's systems** to process pollution and other anthropogenic stresses. He feels that he can effectively **compensate** for the damages done.

# Approaches towards Forests: The shifts

Reverence oriented

To

Revenue oriented and Regulatory

to

Welfare-centric nature

And

Democratization of its management

# Solutions?

## In fact New Challenges emerged

- Harmonizing Conservation and Development
- Adaptation of systems to climate change scenario
- Increased sphere of activities; Greater role in environmentally sustainable community development.
- Greater coordination with multiple stakeholders & diverse line agencies
- Growing responsibilities with ref. to environmental legislations and international conventions
- Arena of emerging administrative paradigm :
  - a) Generalists challenged by professionals and vice versa
  - b) Democratization challenging professionalism

# The alternative to secular approaches ?

- ‘Secular approaches’ to environmental concerns including forests **have not been sufficient.**
- **More-than-secular approaches** are required to reduce, if not resolve, many environmental problems.
- Some kind of **Great Turning** appears inevitable, whether “**voluntarily**” by choice or by the force of “**nature’s revenge**”
- **Spiritual ecology** may well be the last chance for the survival of our species especially in the face of the increasing pressures of global climate change

# Spirituality

The emphasis is on subjective experience and the "deepest values and meanings" by which people live incorporating transformation / growth usually in a context separate from organized religious institutions.

# Mottos of India's Institutions

## -Spiritual tenets-

- Government of India - 'सत्यमेव जयते',
- Indian Navy - शं नो वरुणः,
- Indian Airforce - नभःस्पृशं दीप्तम्,
- RAW - धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः,
- Maharashtra Police - सद्रक्षणाय खलनिग्रहणाय,
- IIM Bengaluru - तेजस्वी नावधीतमस्तु
- IGNFA, DehraDun- अरण्यं ते पृथ्वी स्योनमस्तु.
- Supreme Court of India - 'यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः'
- Central Schools - तमसो मा ज्योतिर्मय

## Some Examples:

### The Move towards Spiritual Ecological principles

- **Bolivia and Ecuador:** The rights of mother earth recognized as equal to humans. 11 rights declared in Bolivia.(2016).
- **New Zealand:** Whanganui river:a legal person. (2017)
- **India:** The Ganga and Yamuna rivers recognized as living entity and juristic/legal person with all rights like a living person on 20-3-2017 by Uttarakhand HC. 'Loco parentis': the human face to protect, conserve, and preserve it were appointed.
- **Canada:** The Magpie river: A legal person (2021)

# Wangari Muta Maathai's initiative

- Born in Nyeri, Kenya, in 1940, got **Nobel Peace Prize in 2004**
- Through networks of rural women, has planted and sustained **40** million trees across Kenya since 1977
- Maathai believes that the key lies in **traditional spiritual values: love for the environment, self-betterment, gratitude and respect, and a commitment to service.**
- Maathai draws inspiration from many faiths, celebrating the **Jewish** mandate *tikkun olam* ("repair the world") and renewing the **Japanese** term *mottainai* ("don't waste").

# A quiet Revolution

- **Spiritual ecology** is a quiet revolution.
- It is a revolution in the sense that it calls for **profound transformations in individual lifestyles as well as societies.**
- It is **nonviolent, decentralized** and not yet well-recognized and appreciated.
- Spiritual ecology tries to help people to find their own pathway toward a **more sustainable, green, just, and peaceful future.**

## Summing Up:

How spirituality can inform ecological practices ?

**Realize that**

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.

We are **spiritual beings** having a human experience.

- Teilhard de Chardin

Thank You