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Calm before the Storm

As western nations swelter under unusual heatwave conditions, one hopes this experience will bring common-sense to the Climate Change debate, rather than the prevailing ideological obtuseness in major Western Countries, - an obtuseness which denies the reality of Climate Change / Global Warming.

But commonsense among the leaders of these states has become an uncommon phenomenon. And so the international negotiations on Climate Change move on at a snail's pace, waiting for the momentum to resume at their annual get-together in Africa later this year. David Hallman, our intrepid contact in these arcane niches where conferences and workshops plod on trying to rollback Emissions., gives us the lowdown on the latest happenings on this front.

But then, life must move on, and those of us who are believers, need to act upon our convictions.

Urban life is becoming increasingly stressful, polluted, chaotic, and inequitable. Does it necessarily have to be so? Today's dominant response is 'privatisation'. Not only are environmental concerns given the go by, but equity is also implicitly ignored. We bring you some contributions from initiatives in Mumbai, fighting against privatisation of water and its management; affirming the need to understand the ecological significance of its rivers; (rivers? flowing through Mumbai?) July 26, 2005 may have given the Mithi River some prominence, but the understanding we had studying the ancient river-valley civilisations is missing. There has always been an inextricable link between human settlements and the flow of water; there were also inextricable links between urban development and rural habitats. These are increasingly being broken. And so the garden city of Bangalore is destroyed, and Kerala, want to tread down that disastrous path! We bring you a small collection of articles on these matters in this issue.

The environmental movement is facing a challenge – the grave issues that face our communities, and now we can say with a straight face, our global village, - these issues are fragmenting our responses. The environment movement was just that, a movement, attempting to become, and succeeding in becoming, a groundswell. But it was never a monolith. The nuclear energy is the latest to split the community. The trade-off between one environmental disaster with another – the tradeoff between nuclear and fossil – fuel.

Some would like to see the issues in mystical terms – is mystical impractical? Some in spiritual terms. Is the environmental movement a rational, secular movement? Does the rational and the secular preclude the spiritual and the mystical?

We bring you some reviews and essays on these issues. And we find that mysticism and spiritual preoccupation does not necessarily lead to uniform thinking – there are divergent, contrary strands in these very conceptualisations.

The jury is still out on these matters, but the intent is that these different perspectives are seriously considered and analysed before we give any knee-jerk reponse, which is often engineered. ☹

editor

Animals, Agriculture, and City Planning

Providing multipurpose farmland within urban areas could help alleviate poverty besides improving the aesthetics of our cities

Urban is defined and marked by the absence of things rural. This conception is increasingly asserted through the urban development policies of the Central and State Governments. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission insists that all local bodies make conversion of agricultural lands for urban use easier. This is seen as a necessary condition to develop cities as engines of growth. State

Government legislation such as The Tamil Nadu Animals and Birds in Urban Areas (Control and Regulation) Act 1997 ensures that cows, buffaloes, pigs, and other animals are prohibited from the city. Attempts are often made to purge cities of fishing by removing fishermen and catamarans from beaches. These activities are aimed at bestowing order and aesthetics on the city.

On the other hand, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations recommends urban agriculture including animal rearing within

Of hi-tech, low efficiency, and malls

"We lag behind the other States in development. We need to make a Bangalore of Kerala." That's a theme that ran through the poll campaign in the State. Kerala Chief Minister Mr. Chandy suggests the United Democratic Front wants to make Kerala like Bangalore. That is his vision. That's development.

Fact: there is no major indicator of human well being on which Kerala does not outrank Karnataka by miles; life expectancy, literacy, infant mortality ratio, sex ratio, or schooling. Or even nutrition, health, equity, and the ending of child labour. But his view seems to revolve around express highways, flyovers, enclave smart cities, and the rest of it. The State has a good network of village roads, though. But good village roads are not a sign of development. Massive traffic jams are.

India's development debate has actually regressed this past decade. In the media, development is about engineering and technology. Not about improvement of the human condition. Nor about trying to be non-destructive. It is not important that the engineering and technology work. We don't even scrutinise that. But without them, it's not development. So if you have localised water systems that meet people's needs, that's not development. But if you plan to spend a quarter of your GDP on a brainless interlinking of rivers, that's development.

Central to the regressive debate is the faith that there is only one way of doing anything. The big-budget, super-scaled, privatised way. Also, with major names. Dabhol in the Enron era was a fine example of this. The 'debate' sparked off by the Narmada-linked fasts in Delhi took the same route. People are incidental, the project is the thing.

The regression shows in other ways, too. For instance, in the way some of the most vapid concepts are now romanced. It's at the point where malls are seen as the finest 'public spaces.' Never mind, what the lesser shops and chains do to small retailers and the jobs of countless thousands. This notion of progress sits well with the one-way-only view of development.

Of course engineering and technology can play a vital role in development. They should. They must. Check how the bottom 30 per cent in each of our States is doing or has done over a period of time. It might give you a very different view of development.

P.Sainath; <http://www.hindu.com/2006/05/03/stories/2006050305061000.htm>

cities as a useful means to tackle poverty and promote sustainable city practices. Urban agriculture is not the same as city beautification projects. Parks are purely ornamental and recreational. They are also water intensive and cater to fixed strata of the city populace. Urban agriculture means horticulture, wetland development, fish farms, and domestic animal farms. It helps with poverty alleviation and food security, besides being recreational and educational.

The World Food Summit in 1996 has highlighted the need to increase access to food in the wake of increasing urbanisation. Food security is not only about availability but also concerns accessibility. High food prices mean low accessibility.

The problem is further compounded by the way food distribution in cities is fast changing. Increasingly, city planners are doing away with hawkers and other informal food distribution

points. Administrators typically consider hawkers and street food vendors a liability — as something that takes away from their cities' image. Instead, cities increasingly promote supermarkets and other large-scale organised shops. These cater to higher income groups and rely on food processing and packing. Processed foods increase the ecological footprint of a city, as goods have to be transported from long distances.

The FAO estimates that Delhi will require an additional 1,96,500 trucks of 10 tonne capacity by 2010 to supply food for its population, while Mumbai will need 3,13,400 trucks of supply more a year. This will have serious implications for traffic and roads.

According to FAO estimates, low-income urban households spend 60 to 80 per cent of their budget on food, which is 30 per cent more than rural households. The World Food Summit in 1996 has highlighted the need to increase access to food in

By the Rivers of Mumbai

The significance of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park for Mumbai is reiterated by the fact that all of the four small rivers in Mumbai - Mithi, Poisar, Dahisar and Oshiwara - originate from this forest and eventually drain into the Arabian Sea. The consequences of mismanagement and human intervention in the course of these rivers were seen during the 26/7 floods in Mumbai. Let's take a look at how they fare.

Poisar River: Its natural course has been changed or squeezed by the mushrooming complexes and shanty colonies. What's left of it has become a dumping ground for waste, from the housing colonies and slums, from industrial units and stables. What was once, in the 1970s, a source of sparkling clean water is now a smelly drain.

Dahisar River: This river covers a distance of 12 km before meeting the Mira-Bhayander Creek and was once an idyllic recreation spot. But for civic officials it is no more than a major nullah, which is clogged with plastic and garbage.

Oshiwara River: It is narrowed wherever its drain networks run through the shanties of Jawaharlal Nagar, Siddarth Nagar and Motilal Nagar. It is polluted at Goregaon by industrial units and cowsheds from where hundreds of animal carcasses were lifted after the deluge.

Mithi River: Is a victim of unplanned development, encroachment, concretisation over its river beds, and pollution. On an average over 800 million litres of sewage is dumped daily into the river, and industrial units, including giants like Larsen & Toubro, are guilty of discharging untreated effluents into the river.

Following the July 26 deluge, the BMC has ostensibly taken measures to clean up the rivers and rebuild restraining walls. It remains to be seen whether the efforts will be timely and in full measure.

e-mail from Allwyn D'Silva, Justice and Peace Commission, Mumbai; drtc@vsnl.com

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K-East Ward - A Blueprint for Mumbai

Last year the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) proposed to set up a project to privatise water supply to the city of Mumbai. Under approval from the World Bank, MCGM had engaged the services of Castalia Ltd., a consultant firm from New Zealand, to conduct a feasibility study. The K-East Ward had been selected for the pilot project. Despite application to the MCGM, details were not forthcoming.

In January, Justice and Peace Commission, together with the Institute for Community Organisation Research (ICOR) spearheaded a citizens' movement to protest against privatisation of water and to demand space for people's participation in the discussions. There were seven public meetings to create awareness among the masses and on April 1 a rally was conducted to highlight the issue. More than 5000 people participated.

Since then a Citizens' Forum consisting of around 28 NGOs working in the K-East Ward has been formed. They submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Water Resources, New Delhi, Ministry of Water Resources, Maharashtra, and Asst. Municipal Commissioner of K-East Ward (Ward officer) for promoting peoples participation in water governance.

On May 15, the MCGM held a stakeholders' workshop. MCGM made a presentation about the project, which it has now termed as Water Distribution Improvement Project (WDIP) in K-East Ward.

MCGM promises:

Improved and equitable distribution to all customers

No privatisation - the MCGM will not sell its water and water assets

No layoffs of the MCGM employees

No tariff hike linked with pilot WDIP



At this stage the proposals outlined by the MCGM in its presentation seem rather nebulous. There are many questions left unanswered. If it is not about privatisation, then why do the terms of reference include options for bids by private parties? Why is there a proposal to engage a private contractor to install and monitor water meters? Citizens need to keep up the momentum and be informed.

Water is a basic right. Let's not allow it to become a commodity for profit.

e-mail from Allwyn D'Silva, Justice and Peace Commission, Mumbai; drtc@vsnl.com

transported from long distances.

Cities that have seriously considered the issue of urban poverty, environment, and food security have made plans to allow for more agriculture within their urban and peri-urban areas. Bangkok has 60 per cent of its metropolitan area as agriculture land, as has Madrid. Beira in Mozambique has a high percentage of about 88 per cent of its green spaces used for family agriculture. Ottawa has 5,000 hectares of agriculture land within city limits. The famous marshes of Xochimilco, located on the outskirts of Mexico City, are fed by treated wastewater from the city. This water is used for irrigating flowers and vegetables and also recharges the aquifers. With a careful selection of plant species, the agricultural yield can be increased. In certain cases, the yield has been as high as 50 kg of fresh produce per square metre a year.

Visions for Indian cities are not encouraging.

The proposed Delhi master plan 2021 has allocated only 15 to 20 per cent under green and recreational areas. Villages within the Delhi Metropolitan development area are planned for urbanisable potential rather than for agricultural value. In Bangalore, the 742 sq km of green belt around the city is reduced to 248 sq km in the proposed master plan. The emphasis is clearly on land for buildings. In the last few years, a disapproving attitude towards animals has also been made visible and even enacted as legislation in cities such as Chennai. For long, Chennai and other cities were suffering from milk shortage. Till the 1980s, domestic farms within the city supplemented the daily milk supply. When capital and technology converged in the form of industrialised scale supply, the city was emboldened to ban cattle from its limits. This deprived many of the urban poor of their livelihood. To the planners, the picture postcard image of a gleaming global city can be perfected only at the expense of cows and farms.

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supplemented the daily milk supply. When capital and technology converged in the form of industrialised scale supply, the city was emboldened to ban cattle from its limits. This deprived many of the urban poor of their livelihood. If cities can handle waste produced by hotels and other service industry units, they can also be designed to handle cattle waste.

But it is always the services rendered by the poor that are easily expendable. To the planners, the picture postcard image of a gleaming global city can be perfected only at the expense of cows and farms.

Cities such as Kolkata hold out promise through their innovative practices. The 3,900-hectare East Kolkata wetland located in the peri-urban area is used for fisheries. The many ponds are benefited from the 1,300 million litres of treated wastewater discharged from the city. About 13,000 tonnes of fish are harvested and about 60,000 people provided a livelihood. In addition, 150 tonnes of vegetable are also produced daily. Pigs and ducks are reared as well. Kolkata has creatively combined recycling with urban agriculture and augmented its resources. Will the National Urban Renewal Mission take note of such creative efforts instead of seeking to implement mega projects that may not really address the issue of urban poverty?

Many cities make it mandatory for plots exceeding 10,000 square metres to set aside 10 per cent as open space. If these open spaces could be either consolidated or managed independently, they could provide the space needed for urban agriculture.

The idea is to go beyond ornamental green spaces such as parks and, instead, provide productive multipurpose urban farmlands. Such measures can help improve the aesthetics of cities without excluding the urban poor. 

A. Srivathsan

<http://www.hindu.com/2006/06/27/stories/2006062706281000.htm>

Vanuatu — the happiest place on earth

THE MOST happy place on the planet is the South Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, according to a radical new index, compiled to draw attention to the fact that it is not necessary to use up the earth's resources to achieve long life and happiness.

The innovative global measure of progress, the Happy Planet Index, has been constructed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Friends of the Earth using three factors: life expectancy, human well-being, and damage done via a country's "environmental footprint."

Vanuatu comes top because its people are satisfied with their lot, live to nearly 70 and do little damage to the planet. "People are generally happy here because they are very satisfied with very little. This is not a consumer-driven society. Life here is about community and family and goodwill to other people. Most people here live day to day. The only things we fear are cyclones or occasional earthquakes" was the response of Marke Lowen of Vanatu Online, the country's online newspaper. People in Vanuatu considered themselves "caretakers" of the land.

Zimbabwe takes bottom place in the table. Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia, countries that have experienced recent civil upheavals, all feature in the top 10 on the grounds that they do little environmental harm and manage comparatively high levels of satisfaction with life.

The big industrial nations fare badly. Britain is 108th, below Libya, Gabon, and Azerbaijan. The U.S. is 150th and Russia is 172nd, near the bottom of the 178 nations for which statistics are available.

Life satisfaction varies greatly from country to country. The real message, that the survey seeks to convey is that the environmental damage being done by the wealthier nations, presumably in the pursuit of happiness and long life, may have the opposite effect. Two factors are cited for the low showing of many countries: those recently adopting market economies and those badly affected by HIV/AIDS do worst.



Duncan Campbell

<http://www.hindu.com/2006/07/13/stories/2006071303350900.htm>





I HAVE A WARM
FEELING...
BUT WHAT
IS IT?...



Climate Change Update #39

14th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD14)

At CSD14 in New York from May 1-12, 2006, there was a somewhat faltering attempt to analyze the state of access to energy around the world. There were clear links made in some sessions between energy access and sustainable development in all countries with the emphasis being on facilitating a transition toward more priority for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. Many NGOs expressed concerns whether this vision of a more sustainable energy future would carry over from this review year to next year's policy negotiations.

For a complete report and analysis of CSD14, see the Earth Negotiations summary at:

<http://www.iisd.ca/csd/csd14/>

UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies Session (SB24)

This meeting of the subsidiary bodies (or committees) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn May 15-26, 2006 was the first international climate negotiations since the big UN Climate Conference in Montreal (COP11/MOP1) in December 2005. That meeting ended with a near universal and relatively enthusiastic agreement to initiate negotiations toward new emission reduction targets and timetables for the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (post-2012).

The Bonn meeting got off to a rocky start however because Canada, which continues to chair the process until the next COP in Kenya in November, has had a change of government. The new Conservative Government is openly skeptical of the Kyoto Protocol. Many country delegations and environmental organizations including Canadian faith communities are very critical of the steps taken by the new government to cut-back on climate change funding and to backtrack on Canada's commitment to the Kyoto Protocol.

Nevertheless, an important step was taken in establishing the "Ad Hoc Working Group on

Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol" (AWG). An agreement was reached by the end of SB24 on the terms of reference for the AWG emphasizing among other things that "...AWG should aim to complete its work on time to ensure no gap between the first and the second commitment periods;...it will proceed "expeditiously" towards agreement on further commitments;..."

A range of other issues were addressed ... but progress was limited including on the urgent need to facilitate responses and funding for the critical adaptation needs of poorer developing nations that are already experiencing impacts as a result of human-induced climate change.

For a full report and analysis of SB14, see the Earth Negotiations Summary at:

<http://www.iisd.ca/climate/sb24/>

Global Roundtable on Climate Change

The 3rd session of the Global Roundtable on Climate Change (GROCC3) which was created by Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's Earth Institute and Director of the UN Millennium Development Project was held in Iceland June 13-14, 2006.

We met in Reykjavik at the invitation of Iceland's President Grímsson, who is also a member of the Roundtable. Iceland has made a remarkable transition over the past 60 years from being an impoverished country dependent on imported fossil fuels and suffering from coal smog to an ecologically, technologically and socially progressive nation that meets 80% of its energy needs from renewable sources of hydro and geothermal.

Major issues discussed:

- Potential of renewable sources.
- Carbon capture and storage
- Reducing emissions from deforestation in developing countries.

- Energy for the world's poorest.
- Development of an energy efficiency network – proposed by the Wuppertal Institute – to link companies, academics, etc. for sharing and increasing market potential for energy efficiency products and services.
- Importance of countries agreeing to establish a price for carbon (through a carbon tax, a cap and trade system, or some other mechanism) to speed the increased competitiveness of efficiency and renewable energy sources. It is likely that a price on carbon would be used to further promote nuclear power as well.

Some of the more contentious discussions revolved around:

- The relative roles of market mechanisms (such as a carbon price) vs regulatory policy measures.
- The relative priority of demand-side measures (e.g. conservation and efficiency) vs supply side initiatives (e.g. carbon capture and storage) as the most effective means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

- The multiplicity of factors affecting consumer choices.
- The place of nuclear in future energy scenarios.

Next steps for the Roundtable:

- Redrafting of proposed GROCC statement on climate change (science, public policy and corporate responsibility)
- Facilitating some practical demonstration projects: e.g. promote investigation of carbon capture and storage, South/South cooperation in energy for the poorest, the PNG proposal on avoided deforestation, consumer options and proposals, regulatory proposals on power generation.
- Provide an educational seminar for newly elected members of the US congress in December after the November mid-term elections (this proposal was made by NCCCUSA General Secretary Bob Edgar and enthusiastically supported by Jeffrey Sachs).

e-mail from Dr. David G. Hallman, Coordinator, WCC Programme, July 3, 2006; dhallman@united_church.co

This is embarrassing, but I've become a fossil fuel supporter

Competition for energy resources is increasing. The price of oil has hit \$75 a barrel, and for reasons no energy company has yet been able to explain to me, it takes the gas price with it. Even before this new surge, the wholesale cost of gas had trebled in just three years. Governments are likely to recommend a new generation of nuclear generators in its energy review in the summer. It can now summon some heavyweight support: the Financial Times revealed that the International Energy Agency has converted to the nuclear cause.

My fellow environmentalists argue that the money would be better spent on wind turbines. I find myself at odds with almost everyone, by deciding, that in one respect at least our battle against climate change depends on neither nuclear power nor renewables, but on a fossil fuel.

Hydrogen can be used to power a fuel cell, which



is a kind of gas battery. If, as their promoters predict, fuel cells can very soon be made small enough, cheap enough and reliable enough they could provide the electricity our homes require. There are three means of making hydrogen without releasing much carbon dioxide: by

reacting natural gas with steam and capturing and burying the carbon it contains, by passing steam and oxygen through pulverised coal (and catching the carbon) and by the electrolysis of water. The last option is the one beloved of environmentalists (because the electricity can come from wind) and

the nuclear industry.

Carbon our homes produce means using hydrogen, and hydrogen means natural gas. I appear to have become a supporter of the fossil fuel industry. ☹

George Monbiot

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Columnists/Column/0,,1760672,00.html>

Nuclear power is safer now, but we still don't need it

IF SOMEONE had worked out how to cause a war within the environment movement, they could not have developed a better means than nuclear power.

In the book I am publishing in September, I will show that when you take into account both human population growth and the anticipated reduction in the biosphere's ability to absorb carbon, we require a worldwide cut of roughly 60 per cent per capita by 2030. If emissions are to be distributed evenly, this means that the U.K.'s need to be cut by 87 per cent in 24 years.

The most fundamental environmental principle — one that all children are taught as soon as they are old enough to understand it — is that you do not make a new mess until you have cleared up the old one. To start building a new generation of nuclear power stations before we know what to do with the waste produced by existing plants is

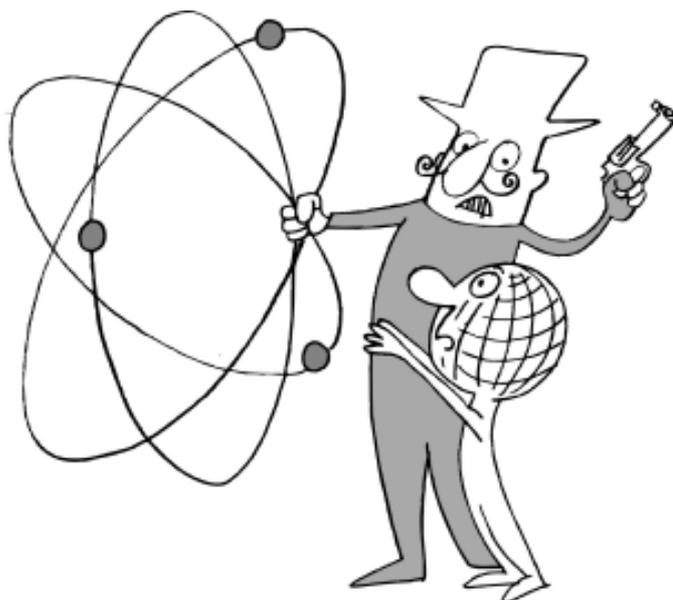
grotesquely irresponsible. How on earth can we say what nuclear power stations will cost if we do not even know what their decommissioning entails? And how does any system — political or technological — cope with the timescales involved? If, as a result of slow leakage into the groundwater, radioactive materials from a burial site were to kill an average of only one person a year for one million years, those who made the decision to bury them will — through their infinitesimal and unrecorded impacts — be responsible for the deaths of a million people.

It has also become clear that we will never rid the world of nuclear weapons if we do not also rid it of nuclear power. Every state that has sought to develop a weapons programme over the past 30 years has done so by manipulating its nuclear power programme. We cannot deny other states the opportunity to use atomic energy if we do not forswear it ourselves. But perhaps the strongest argument against nuclear power is that we do not need it, even to reach the extraordinarily ambitious target that the science demands.

With similar levels of investment in energy efficiency and carbon capture and storage, and the exploitation of the vast new offshore wind resources the Government has now identified, we could cut our carbon emissions as swiftly and as effectively as any atomic power programme could. Some of our arguments against nuclear power have collapsed, but it seems to me that the case is still robust. ☹

George Monbiot

<http://www.hindu.com/2006/07/12/stories/2006071208891100.htm>



James Lovelock and Gaia's Revenge

James Lovelock's passionate and provocative book *The Revenge of Gaia* (Penguin, 2005) takes us on a beautifully written journey through the dangers that beset our planet. The language is crafted to inspire a sense of urgent pragmatism. As such, it provides an excellent further twist to the hurricane of opinion whirling around energy policy, climate change, and globalisation today.

Lovelock describes how the Earth is a living planet, able to adjust and rebalance changes in chemistry and temperature through multiple mechanisms, in contrast to Mars and Venus, both inert and lifeless.

His argument and conclusions are filtered through this personification of our planet, a strategy aimed at engaging with people on another level than the purely scientific. His approach throws up unexpected and counter-intuitive findings, and ensures that he enrages and enthuses in equal measure. Scourge of many greens, he is scathing about "sustainable development", and its feeble prescriptions, in the face of massive changes to our planetary systems.

He lambasts those who think that renewable energy can provide a clean solution to our energy needs, while lashing out at organic agriculture as a useless strategy given the scale of the challenges faced.

Iconoclastic and idiosyncratic, he argues that all human civilisation is in imminent danger. He makes frequent reference to war, the need for defence against the coming attack, proposes the rationing of goods and fuel, and urgent plans made to ward off the chaos ahead. He thinks we cannot rely on international agreements to solve climate change – instead individual nations must start, here and now, to find ways of protecting themselves from the risks ahead, regardless of international agreement.

Lovelock argues strongly in favour of nuclear energy, on the grounds that electrical power is absolutely vital for civilisation. He presents data which shows that, on the basis of past experience, nuclear energy is forty times safer in terms of numbers of people killed per unit of power generated, than coal, oil, and hydropower. For Lovelock, nuclear-waste problems are "a nightmare fantasy wholly without substance". We

have far more to worry about from the huge volumes of carbon dioxide, which will bring far more catastrophic consequences.

As Crispin Tickell notes in his thoughtful introduction to *The Revenge of Gaia*, the key question is how to achieve a

symbiosis between people and the planet – currently much out of alignment, given our carefree and extravagant use of fossil fuels, and the inertia inherent in our economic and politic systems.

There is a lot to irritate in this book. He castigates those who don't listen to scientists, yet indulges in the language of myth and theatre. He argues the need for an urgent shift to a militaristic, imposed set of solutions, which our systems of democracy cannot generate. But can we really assume a benevolent dictator able to play this role? While he criticises us for thinking of ourselves as stewards of this earth, this is indeed what he then counsels us to become. While it is certainly true that much urban life is separated from the wider world, there is a powerful hunger from many an urbanite for knowledge about where food comes from, and willingness to pay for more socially just and environmentally sustainable patterns of production.

It's hard to reconcile his views on nuclear energy with those who argue the need for major energy efficiency measures, decentralised supply and cheaper renewable sources now being developed.

But as a loud and insistent wake-up call that helps us understand (as the book's subtitle has it) "why the earth is fighting back – and how we can still save humanity", there is nothing to beat *The Revenge of Gaia*. ☺

Camilla Toulmin, March 30, 2006;
http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization_climate_change_debate/gaia



THE REVENGE OF GAIA :
Why the Earth Is Fighting Back
- and How We Can Still Save Humanity'
James Lovelock; Publisher: Allen Lane,
Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11,
Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi-110017. £ 11.99

Growth through Gaia: Friendly Approaches

"The revenge of Gaia" is not a Rider Haggard adventure story set in some deep (now vanishing) African jungle. It is the passionate plea of one of the foremost conservationists of our time to save the Earth from the irreversible adverse effects of warming set in motion by natural and manmade causes.

What or who is Gaia? In the early 1970s, James Lovelock, the distinguished British biologist, and his associate Lynn Margulis postulated that "life on Earth actively keeps the surface conditions always favourable for whatever is the contemporary ensemble of organisms." That is, life on earth, instead of adapting itself to the given climatic conditions as earlier believed, actually modified the conditions to suit its survival and further evolution. This regulatory mechanism was christened 'Gaia' after the Greek goddess by Lovelock's friend, William Golding, the Nobel Prize winner for Literature.

The Gaia hypothesis was later refined to the 'Gaia theory'. All the components of what we call the 'biosphere' act in unison to make conditions fit enough for survival of existing species, though a few may succumb to the changes.

This idyllic equilibrium of Gaia can tolerate the fury of forces, natural and man-made, only to an extent, without getting destabilised. The horrifying situation today is that this equilibrium is in danger of reaching its tipping point, thanks to natural and man-made causes. This is no fantasy but real. Climatologists warn us of dire consequences such as repeated crop failures, acute water scarcity, inundation of vast tracts of coastal lands and displacement of populations, should this trend continue. Though nature plays a major role in global warming, man's contribution to it has not been insignificant. At least a half to one-third of the observed global rise in temperature of 1deg. Celsius in the last 150 years can be attributed to anthropogenic causes.

Lovelock's prescription to get out of this

growth versus Gaia impasse is refreshingly different from that of staple green recipes, which seek a return to the primitive past. He is a strong believer in science and technology and he feels that they can be made not only more environment-friendly but also to serve the larger human cause of alleviating hunger and poverty.

His earlier works evoked a positive response from radical ecologists as they felt they had a seer to support them. They may not be so welcoming this time. Take, for instance, his remark that enthusiasm for renewable energy "will fail and bring discredit to both the greens and to the politicians foolish enough to adopt renewables as a major source of energy before they have been properly developed."

Lessons for India

Are there any lessons to be learnt for us in India from "the revenge of Gaia"? There are many, particularly in the context of an 8-10 per cent annual GDP growth projected for the next 25 years. The energy requirements to fuel this growth have been forecast by the Kirit Parikh Committee in its report released in December 2005. The panel said a fourfold step-up in energy demand from its present level of 385mtoe (million tonnes of oil equivalent) would be called for by the year 2031-32. As much as half of this demand, will have to be met by coal. The accompanying releases of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere will have their own contribution to make to global warming. The mining activity that would form the back end of coal based power generation and the mineral extraction to feed the metallurgical industry, notably steel, will leave behind vast acres of derelict land.

Unless environmental concerns are factored into the formulation and execution of projects, the damage to local ecological balance will be irreversible.

N.R. Krishnan

<http://www.thehindu.com/br/2006/07/18/stories/2006071800181500.htm>

Reflections for Environment Day

As never before, all life on earth is being threatened and its signs are everywhere: climate change, flash floods, disappearing land sites, diminishing fish stocks, increasing wastelands. As individuals and as a society, we make decisions based on certain values. Why then are the consequences so disastrous? Perhaps it is because these values are based on: greed, reflected in our patterns of materialistic consumption; the will for domination, manifested in the demand for economic globalisation; and fear, which gets expressed as violence.

There is a clarion call for change. But there is also a question of how? David Hallman, editor of Ecotheology, who also served with World Council of Churches, advocates some values through which he believes the spirit of God works – not by a single massive, centralised, dominating action, but rather by a multiplicity of small initiatives often in unexpected places. He says that these potent spiritual values expressed through – though not limited to – Christianity and other faiths could transform the way we live and organise our societies.

Gratitude: Life is filled with challenges that can overwhelm us unless we have a dynamic and well-grounded spiritual reservoir on which to draw. Gratitude to God for the blessings of life is among the most important foundations for that reservoir. Gratitude propels us to a response of caring. When we are grateful for something we grow in our concern for it – for family, nature, life itself.

Humility: This is one of the most challenging

spiritual values to comprehend. It is often misunderstood to be weak and spineless but its practice requires great strength and courage. Assuming a humbler self-understanding in relation to the rest of creation is a step towards an ecologically sustainable community.

Justice: The creation of sustainable communities will not happen without a commitment to justice. The challenge for us is to maintain our vision of the earth community as one that integrates social justice and economic integrity and to fight the forces that would subvert that vision.

Peace: Peace comes in various guises today. It is portrayed as satisfaction, economic subservience, dominance. But the true nature of peace challenges military, economic and personal violence. It is therefore a critical spiritual value for building sustainable communities in which all nature can thrive.

Faith and Hope: Faith is the assurance that a just world is possible. Faith without hope is a dry commitment. Hope brings joy, expectation, excitement and celebration. Hope gives us the energy to continue our struggles and to overcome discouragement.

These are some of the forces that can transform our understanding of the joy and responsibility of being members of the earth community and influence our decisions towards a just, peaceful and sustainable living. ☺

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explanation so simple? We see the relation between events in a linear manner because that is the only way we have to see them. Could it be that we don't look for a collapsed chronology because we don't have the mental hardware to see it? Time as a fourth dimension to existence may be more elastic than we allow ourselves to imagine. The birth of the dinosaurs, the fall of Rome and the extinction of the Thylacine may be events that are occurring as I type this... and... you read it.

Some religions believe that the creation can be healed and develops in God's will. The individual aspects of creation, will and have always existed as ideas. All ideas exist, they merely await expression. We need to bring this kind of ecological spirituality back into our lives. Without it our spiritual selves become attached to things like material possessions and artificial realities. ☺

Steven Jeffrey; http://www.ecopsychology.org/journal/gatherings8/html/spirit/spirituality_jeffrey.htm

There is a need for spirituality in the environmentalist movement. Trying to persuade people to bolster biodiversity on the grounds of economic necessity is a hard argument to win when the forces working against biodiversity have very strong economic arguments regarding families, jobs and rural communities. As long as environmentalists continue to fight economists in purely economic terms, they are destined to lose.

Spirituality gives people the strength to sustain their action throughout their lives. To have a spiritual understanding of the morality underlying a cause will help it to be reconciled with other causes which share that morality. For example a common ground of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (underlying Muslim, Judeo-Christian and Buddhist philosophy) is equally applicable to refugee incarceration, habitat destruction and compulsory overtime in the workplace. We, as environmentalists, should try to integrate environmental action with social action and vice versa.

Division and unification

Often a group is so focused on their specific point of interest that they argue to the detriment of all others. An example of this clouding of issues can be seen in the activities of the Socialist Alternative (a political group). Every issue that the group discusses seems to turn around to the prospect of class warfare and a separation of the working and the capitalist classes. Apart from making for fairly monotonous meetings the forcing of the issue of class division is...well...divisive. Some social reformers view themselves as capitalists, and by demanding a class war the Socialist Alternative is isolating itself from a portion of their supporter base. The advantage of having sacred aspect to the environmental debate will (hopefully) have a unifying effect. Earthworker is a caucus of unionists and members of environmental organizations, which seeks to recognise the common needs of both the environmental and the union movements [www.earthworker.org.au]. It believes how can we treat the natural environment with any kind of respect while we cannot treat our fellow humans with respect?

Evolution of Creation

One of the biggest dangers of conventional religions is that they often seek to show the world as a set creation that is subject to man's will rather than an ongoing creation of which man is a part. Although there are plenty of aspects of Judeo-Christian religion that expect the humane treatment of animals, the starting point is always that of a natural world or wilderness that must be feared and tamed. This is opposed to a nurturing environment that bore us and has the ability to cradle us within it. Aboriginal spirituality, Gaia and Paganism all have the belief that we are part of our environment rather than its master. Until we accept that the creation is an ongoing act, we have little hope of accepting the environment into our world.

One of the recurring themes in aboriginal art is the life-spiral. When a life is represented by a spiral, each loop will be related to the loop that went before it. An individual is as much an ongoing creation as the rest of the world, and the patterns are repeated. A few years ago there was a heated debate in Australia about private or state ownership of assets. It is an interesting note that the same issue was discussed in ancient China before Christ was born. The planet has rolled on but the human arguments remain the same. The simple explanation is history repeating itself...but is that



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