

Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions

FROM THE CRADLE that is a baby's first bed to the cremation pyre that is the last resting place for the body in many Hindu traditions, wood is an integral part of Hindu lives. From home hearths to religious sacraments, wood and fire are conspicuously present. Hindu weddings take place in front of a sacred fire that is considered to be an eternal witness; at death, the bodies are consigned to the fire.

The ashes of the cremated body are immersed in holy waters—the same rivers that feed and irrigate paddy fields; the same water that cooks the rice and bathes the dead before cremation. From cradle to cremation, Hindus have long had a palpable, organic connection with nature. But today they must also face the reality of environmental disaster. With the population hovering around a billion in India (with eight hundred million Hindus), the use, abuse, and misuse of resources is placing India on the fast track to disaster. What, if anything, can Hindu tradition say about this looming environmental crisis? Are there any resources in the Hindu religious and cultural traditions that can inspire and motivate Hindus to take action?¹

While in the Western world one has to argue for the significance and relevance of religion in everyday life, in India the interest and involvement in religion is tangible; religious symbols are ubiquitous. The traditional mantra heard among Hindus, "Hinduism is more than a religion; it is a way of life," is more than a trite saying. There is a deep relationship between religion and ingrained social structures and behavioral pat-

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terns. The characters featured in the various Puranas, or ancient texts about the Hindu deities, are known and loved by the masses. People never seem to tire of these stories. Only vernacular cinema seems to rival the epic and Puranic narratives in popular influence.

But do the many Hindu philosophies and communities value nature and privilege the existence of plants, trees, and water? Although the short answer is “yes,” Hindus have answered this question in many different ways that have been documented in excellent texts.² Plants and trees are valued so highly in Hindu sacred texts that their destruction is connected with doomsday scenarios. The Puranas and epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* give detailed narratives of the periodic and cyclic destruction of the world. There are four aeons in each cycle, and by the beginning of the third aeon, things are perceptibly going awry. As the *Kurma Purana* puts it, “then greed and passion arose again everywhere, inevitably, due to the predestined purpose of the Treta [Third] Age. And people seized the rivers, fields, mountains, clumps of trees and herbs, overcoming them by strength.”³ The epic *Mahabharata* (c. 500–200 B.C.E.) graphically depicts the events at the end of the fourth—and worst—aeon, and what happens after a thousand such aeons:

At the end of the Eon the population increases . . . and odor becomes stench, and flavors putrid. . . . When the close of the thousand Aeons has come and life has been spent, there befalls a drought of many years that drives most of the creatures, of *dwindling reserves* and starving to their death. . . . The Fire of Annihilation then invades . . . [and] burns down all that is found on earth. . . . Wondrous looking huge clouds rise up in the sky. . . . At the end of time all men—there is no doubt—will be omnivorous barbarians. . . . All people will be naturally cruel. . . . Without concern *they will destroy parks and trees* and the lives of living will be ruined in the world. Slaves of greed they will roam this earth. . . . All countries will equally suffer from drought. . . . [It] will not rain in season, and the crops will not grow, when the end of the Eon is at hand.⁴

What we note almost immediately is that these destructions are portrayed as cyclical and periodic. The first quotation about

the third aeon evokes the inevitable, predestined nature of such events. One wonders if human beings are powerless against such cosmic configurations. But even if we were to take these epics seriously, we have quite a while to wait. According to very conservative Hindu almanacs and reckoning, the end of *this* aeon—the fourth—is not expected before 428,898 C.E.

We also notice in the Hindu texts a close correlation between *dharma* (righteousness, duty, justice; from *dhr*, or that which sustains) and the ravaging of Earth. When *dharma* declines, human beings despoil nature. There is, however, no Hindu text focusing on *dharma* that advises us to be passive and accept the end of the world with a life-negating philosophy. Many Hindu texts are firm in their view that human beings must enhance the quality of life. A popular blessing uttered in many Hindu temples and homes focuses on human happiness in this life, on this earth: “May everyone be happy, may everyone be free of diseases! / May everyone see what is noble / May no one suffer from misery!”

Despite this unequivocal ratification of the pursuit of happiness, Hindus of every stripe have participated in polluting the environment. In this essay, we will look at the resources and limitations within the many Hindu traditions to see how the problem of ecology has been addressed. Before we look at these resources, a few caveats and qualifications are in order.

The first important issue to be aware of is that there are many Hindu traditions, and there is no single book that all Hindus would agree on as authoritative. In this essay, I will cite many texts from a spectrum of sources. The second point to note is that the many texts within Hindu traditions have played a limited role in the *history* of the religion. Although works like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the many Puranas have been generally influential, philosophical works like the Upanishads are not well known by the masses. The texts on right behavior (*dharma shastras*) have been only selectively followed, and popular practice or custom has had as much weight as religious law. All these texts, along with Puranic and epic narratives, have been the carriers and transmitters of *dharma* and devotion (*bhakti*).

Dharma is all-important in Hindu communities, but the texts that define and discuss *dharma* were known only by a handful of Brahman men. Instead, notions of *dharma* were communicated through stories from the epics and Puranas, and such moral tales were routinely retold by family or village elders. Like Aesop's fables—or MTV today—these narratives shaped notions of morality and acceptable behavior. The exaggerated reliance on texts of law is a later development and can be traced to the period of colonization by the British.⁵ With the intellectual colonization by the West and the advent of mass media, Hindus today, especially in the diaspora, think of texts alone—rather than oral tradition or community customs—as authoritative. Many Hindu temples in India now hold classes and study circles on the *Bhagavadgita* (“the Song of the Lord;” a text composed circa second century B.C.E. that is part of the epic *Mahabharata*). The Ramakrishna and Chinmaya missions publish theological books and tapes with translations and commentaries to explain their canonic texts to an educated middle-class public.

Finally, I do not speak about these resources for anyone except those who in some manner belong to one of the Hindu traditions. Gerald Larson has alerted us to the dangers of indiscriminate use of philosophical texts as a generic resource for environmental philosophy, and one has to be mindful of these warnings.⁶ Still, given the increasing popularity of sacred texts among many sectors of Hindu society in the late twentieth century, I feel comfortable in using many Hindu texts as resources in this essay. We will see shortly that some Hindu institutions are citing esoteric passages on *dharma* from sacred texts in order to raise the consciousness of people about contemporary social issues. The regulation of *dharma* with a dual emphasis on text and practice has given it a flexibility that we can use to our advantage today.

The resources from which the Hindu traditions can draw in approaching environmental problems are several and diverse: there are texts, of course, but also temples and teachers. Hindu sacred texts starting with the Vedas (c. 1750–600 B.C.E.) speak extensively about the sanctity of the earth, the rivers, and the

mountains. The texts on *dharma* earnestly exhort people to practice nonviolence toward all beings; other texts speak of the joys of a harmonious relationship with nature. Temples are large economic centers with endowments of millions. Many have had clout for over a millennium; devotees, pilgrims, and politicians (especially after an election) donate liberally to these centers. Finally, there are gurus. Teachers like Sathya Sai Baba can influence millions of devotees around the world and divert enormous resources to various projects.

These vast and varied religious resources can undoubtedly be used to raise people's consciousness about environmental problems. In this essay, I will explore some of the resources in the Hindu traditions that may be relevant to the environmental crisis, discuss a few cases of environmental mobilization that have sprung from religious sensibilities, and finally assess some of the other strands in the Hindu traditions that often impede the translation of philosophies into action.

THE NARRATIVE, RITUAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

In most Hindu traditions, Earth is to be revered, for she is our mother. Mother Earth, known by one of her several names (Bhu, Bhumi, Prithvi, Vasudha, Vasundhara, Avni) is considered to be a *devi*, or a goddess. She is seen in many temples together with Lord Vishnu ("all-pervasive") in South India and is worshiped as his consort. She is to be honored and respected; classical dancers, after pounding on the ground during a concert, touch the earth reverentially to express their esteem for the earth. The earliest sacred texts, the Vedas, have inspiring hymns addressed to Earth.⁷

The ethical texts have many injunctions that are directly relevant to environmental problems. Many of them stress the importance of nonviolence toward *all* creatures. Nonviolence in thought, word, and deed is considered to be the highest of all forms of righteousness, or *dharma*.⁸ Normative nonviolence, if followed, would inevitably promote biodiversity.

Nor are other, more specific, ethical injunctions lacking in Hindu traditions. Manu, the law giver, said around the begin-

ning of the Common Era, “Impure objects like urine, feces, spit; or anything which has these elements, blood, or poison should not be cast into water.”⁹

Ritual and devotional resources that privilege the natural environment abound in the Hindu tradition. The protection of groves and gardens, as well as pilgrimage to sacred and pure places, is recommended by some Hindu communities and mandated by others. The Puranas and the epics mention specific places in India as holy and charged with power. Many Hindu texts say that if one lives or dies in the holy precincts of a sacred place, one is automatically granted supreme liberation. There are lists of such cities and villages. Many lists are regional, but some are pan-Indian and span the subcontinent, creating networks of sacred spaces and consolidating the various Hindu communities.

In the time of the *dharma shastras* around the beginning of the Common Era, the description of the sacrality of the land was confined to the northern part of India. Manu says:

That land, created by the gods, which lies between the two divine rivers Sarasvati and Drishadvati [is] . . . Brahmavarta. . .

. . . the tract between those two mountains which extends between the eastern and western oceans, the wise call Aryavarta (the country of the noble ones).

The land where the black antelope naturally roams, one must know to be fit for the performance of sacrifices; [this land] is different from the country of the barbarians.¹⁰

Later, the sacred lands were extended beyond the land between the Himalaya and Vindhya mountains to cover the whole subcontinent.

More recently, India personified as the mother (Bharata Mata) has been important in political thinking. Mayuram Viswanatha Sastri (1893–1958), a musician who participated in the struggle to free India from colonial rule, composed a song popular among all South Indian classical singers, called “Victory, Victory to Mother India” (*jayati jayati bhārata mata*). In this and many such songs, India is personified and extolled as a compassionate mother-goddess filled with forests, filled with sanctity that should not be violated.

While India is personified as a mother and considered holy, most Hindus localize the sanctity and go regularly to the regional temple or a sacred place that has been important to their families for generations. The whole town surrounding any temple is said to be sacred. Every tree, every stream near the precincts of the temple exudes this sense of sacredness. Bathing in the sea, river, stream, or pond of water near the temple is said to grant salvation. Hindus are beginning to use these notions of sacrality and rituals of pilgrimage as one inspiration for ecological clean-ups.¹¹

The philosophical visions of the various Hindu traditions portray the earth, the universe, and nature in many exalted ways. Nature is sacred; for some schools, this Prakriti (“nature,” sometimes translated as “cosmic matter”) is divine immanence and has potential power. These links have been explored in a quest for indigenous paths to solving the environmental crisis.¹² In a related way, the five elements of nature—earth, water, fire, ether/space, and air—are sacred. Rivers are particularly revered.¹³ The philosophical images of Prakriti are often awe-inspiring. Consider just one of these images: central to the *Bhagavadgita* is the vision of the universe as the body of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu. While the first consequence of this vision in its narrative context is to convince the warrior Arjuna of the supremacy of God, many theologians, including Ramanuja (traditional dates 1017–1137), have understood these passages, as well as several in the Upanishads, as depicting the correct relationship between the Supreme Being and creation. Ramanuja and his followers equally emphasize the immanence and the transcendence of the Supreme Being. The elaboration of this philosophy is found in the many texts of Ramanuja’s disciples, the members of the Sri-Vaishnava community.¹⁴

According to Ramanuja, the universe, composed of sentient matter (*chit*) and nonsentient matter (*achit*), forms the body (*sarira*) of the Vishnu. Just as a human soul (*chit*) pervades a nonsentient body (*achit*), so, too, does Vishnu pervade all souls, the material universe, and time. The name Vishnu, in fact, means “all pervasive.” Vishnu-Narayana is inseparable from Sri-Lakshmi, the Goddess. According to the Sri Vaishnava theologian Vedanta Desika (1268–1368), both Vishnu and Sri per-

vade the universe together; the universe is their body. It is important to note that in this philosophy, it is *not* the case that the material universe is female and the transcendent god is male; together, the male and female deities create and pervade the universe, and yet transcend it. We—as part of the universe—are the body of Vishnu and Sri; we are owned by them and are supported by them. Vishnu is the personal name given to the Supreme Being, or Brahman; the two are identical. In his famous work *Summary of the Teachings of the Veda (Vedartha Sangraha)*, Ramanuja says that Brahman is purity, bliss, and knowledge. The sentient and nonsentient beings form the body of Brahman. Before creation, they are undifferentiated in name and form from Brahman. By the will of the Supreme Being it becomes manifest as the limitless and diversified world of moving and nonmoving beings. At any given time, therefore, the universe is one with this Brahman, both before and after creation.¹⁵

All of creation has the Supreme Being as its soul, its inner controller and support. All physical forms have Brahman or the Supreme Being as their ultimate Self or soul. Ramanuja makes this identification clear through a process of “signification,” or pointing:

Therefore all terms like gods, men, yaksa [a celestial being], demon, beast, bird, tree, creeper, wood, stone, grass, jar and cloth, which have denotative power, formed of roots and suffixes, signify the objects which they name in ordinary parlance and through them they signify the individual selves embodied in them and through this second signification, their significance develops further till it culminates in Brahman, the highest Self dwelling as the inner controller of all individual selves. Thus all terms are denotative of this totality.¹⁶

While Ramanuja’s argument is based on language and grammar in this passage, he argues for the reality of all of creation and its divinity based on scriptural passages. The reality of all of creation is pulsating with divinity. This vision of organic connection between the Supreme Being and all other created beings invites us to look at the world with wonder and respect. If the entire universe is divine, how can we bring ourselves to

pollute it? Ramanuja's is only one of the many philosophical visions of the universe that has bearing on the ecological enterprise.

ONE TREE IS EQUAL TO TEN SONS: *DHARMA* AND *ARTHA*
TEXTS AND PRACTICES AS RESOURCES FOR ECOLOGY

The many texts that focus explicitly on *dharma*, or righteous behavior, were composed in the first few centuries of the Common Era. In addition to these, many sections of the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Puranas are also focused on *dharma*. Other scriptures have encouraged the planting of trees, condemned the destruction of plants and forests, and said that trees are like children.

In this context, a passage from the *Matsya Puranam* is instructive. The goddess Parvati planted a sapling of the Asoka tree and took good care of it. She watered it, and it grew well. The divine beings and sages came and told her: "O [Goddess] . . . almost everyone wants children. When people see their children and grandchildren, they feel they have been successful. What do you achieve by creating and rearing trees like sons . . . ? Parvati replied: "One who digs a well where there is little water lives in heaven for as many years as there are drops of water in it. One large reservoir of water is worth ten wells. One son is like ten reservoirs and one tree is equal to ten sons (*dasa putra samo druma*). This is my standard and I will protect the universe to safeguard it. . . ." ¹⁷

The words of Parvati are relevant today. Trees offer more than aesthetic pleasure, shade, and fruit. They are vital to maintain our ecosystem, our planet, our well-being, and Parvati extols them by saying they are comparable to ten sons. The main Puranas, texts of myth and lore, composed approximately between the fifth and tenth century C.E., have wonderful passages on trees. The *Varaha Purana* says that one who plants five mango trees does not go to hell, and the *Vishnu Dharmottara* (3.297.13) claims that one who plants a tree will never fall into hell. ¹⁸ The *Puranas* differ in the number and description of hells in the universe, and one may perhaps take the liberty of inter-

preting “hell” as symbolic of various levels of suffering, including a steamy planet where we keep poking holes in the ozone layer. The *Matsya Purana* also describes a celebration for planting trees and calls it the “festival of trees.”¹⁹

Just as the planting of trees was recommended and celebrated, cutting them was condemned by almost all the *dharma shastras*. Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* (c. fourth century B.C.E.) prescribes varying levels of fines for those who destroy trees, groves, and forests. Kautilya says:

For cutting off the tender sprouts of fruit trees, flower trees or shady trees in the parks near a city, a fine of 6 panas shall be imposed; for cutting off the minor branches of the same trees, 12 panas, and for cutting off the big branches, 24 panas shall be levied. Cutting off the trunks of the same shall be punished [with a fine between 48–96 panas]; and felling of the same shall be punished with [a fine between 200–500 panas]. . . . For similar offenses committed in connection with the trees which mark boundaries, or which are worshipped . . . double the above fines shall be levied.²⁰

Despite these exhortations, the twentieth century has seen a massive destruction of trees. In the deforestation that has occurred in the Himalayas and in the Narmada basin, there has been a tragic transgression of *dharma*. Temples are now in the forefront of reforestation movements, urging devotees to plant saplings.

We have looked at some of the narrative, ritual, philosophical, and ethical resources in the Hindu traditions that could help us fashion a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the natural world. We know that the environmental problems facing India are tremendous, but there is also no doubt that religion is a potential resource for raising people’s consciousness about these problems. Of course, Hindus, like people of other faiths, have been delightfully selective in the ways in which they have used scripture, practices, and modern technology. Pointing out the scriptural resources does not mean they will be incorporated into an effective worldview. In what follows, I will therefore examine more closely how specific Hindu groups have successfully used particular Hindu beliefs and texts to encourage eco-friendly actions.

“Trees, When Protected, Protect Us”

Many of the stories and narratives in Hindu texts focus on the value of trees and plants. One of the most successful attempts at reforestation in recent years has been through the initiative of the large temple at Tirumala-Tirupati. Billboards with statements like “A tree protects: Let us protect it” or “Trees, when protected, protect us” greet visitors to the sacred pilgrimage town of Tirumala-Tirupati, in Andhra Pradesh, South India. The statement is obviously adapted from the Laws of Manu, which say that *dharma*, or righteousness, when protected, protects us.

In response to the ecological crisis in India, the Venkateswara (“Lord of Venkata Hills,” a manifestation of Lord Vishnu) temple at Tirumala-Tirupati began what is called the *Vriksha* (“tree”) *Prasada* (“favor”) scheme. Whenever a pilgrim visits a temple in India, he or she is given a piece of blessed fruit or food to take home. This is called a *prasada* or “favor” of the deity. Some temples in India are known for their preparation of sweets; the Tirupati temple, for instance, is well known for making and selling *laddus*, a confection the shape and size of a tennis ball. Although small quantities of *prasada* in most temples are free, *laddus* are also sold for a small fee. Approximately 80,000 to 125,000 are sold daily by the temple kitchens.²¹ Ingesting *prasada* is a devotional and mandatory ritual; by eating what is favored and blessed by the deity, divine grace is said to course through one’s body. The Tirumala-Tirupati temple, which is located at an elevation of 3,000 feet, was once surrounded by heavy forests. In an effort to honor the beauty of its original setting, the temple has established a large nursery and encourages pilgrims to take home tree saplings as *prasada*. This temple is the richest shrine in India and carries with it a great deal of *dharmic* and financial clout, both in India and with the “NRI” (“non-Resident-Indian”) temples of Hindus in the diaspora. The wealth of the temple is legendary; in 1996, the reported annual income was upward of U.S. \$35.6 million a year. This does not include the gold and silver contributions (around 300 kgs of gold and 1,880 kgs of silver in 1996) or the income from investments. This temple has about 12 major temples under its care, and its initiatives are emulated elsewhere.

The plants sold as *prasada* are inexpensive; they cost about the equivalent of five cents each. The saplings cultivated are suitable for the soil in various parts of India, and by planting them at home one can have a piece of the sacred place of Tirumala wherever one lives. At the same time, officials at the temple have since 1981 run a “bioaesthetic” program under the name of Sri Venkateswara Vanabhivridhi. In this program, a devotee donates money for the purchase and planting of trees and plants. The donor is honored by being granted special *darshan* (viewing of the deity in the inner shrine), accommodations on Tirumala (normally very hard to get), and public acknowledgment of the gift (strategically placed boards list the names of donors and the amount of their donations). This initiative has apparently been successful: over 2,500,000 indigenous trees are said to have been planted on India’s hills and plains.²²

Sacred Trees in Temples

Almost every temple in South India dedicated to the gods Shiva or Vishnu, or to a manifestation of the goddess, has a *sthala vriksha*, a special tree regarded as sacred to that area. This “official” tree is usually a grand old specimen, surrounded by a path used for circumambulation by pilgrims and devotees. The *sthala vriksha* symbolizes all trees and reminds pilgrims that all trees are worthy of respect.

The Trees of Badrinath. Badrinath, a major pilgrimage center in the Himalayas, was a victim of overuse. A handful of pilgrims would go to the temple, high in the forested mountains. Located at 3,130 meters, it used to be surrounded by heavy forests. Now, with new roads, over 400,000 pilgrims visit the temple every year. Through the joint efforts of the director of the G. B. Pant Institute of India’s Himalayan Environment and Development, the chief priest of the temple, and the residents of the town, thousands of trees were planted in 1993. The Institute supplied the plants; the priest blessed them and urged the pilgrims to plant the trees as a sign of religious devotion. The priest told the story of how the Goddess Ganga (the river) would not come to Earth until Lord Shiva promised to break her fall. Shiva’s matted hair contained her and she did not flood the

plains. The priest likened the forests to the matted hair of Shiva. The trees are now cut; in summer the Ganga floods the land and landslides destroy the local villages. The priest urged the pilgrims: "Plant these seedlings for Lord Shiva; you will restore his hair and protect the land." The religious leader who supervised the planting efforts said that "We all have a duty to plant trees: they give shade and inspire meditation." And the village headman remarked, "These are sacred trees that we will do our best to protect."

Many of the plants died during the winter that followed. In response, the G. B. Pant Institute established a nursery at Hanumanchatti to acclimatize seedlings. It also designed special metal covers to prevent snow from breaking the soft tips of the plants. Scientists determined the most promising native trees for planting and preserving biodiversity—Himalayan birch, oak, maple, spruce, and juniper, as well as other species. As a consequence, survival rates improved dramatically, and some plants have reached a height of two meters.²³

The Paradise of Vrindavana. Vrindavan, the pastoral home of Lord Krishna in the Puranas, is the site of major environmental initiatives.²⁴ The International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is working with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Eco-corps, and Environ, a U.K.-based agency, to plant trees, clean the holy Yamuna River, and stop the dumping of toxic waste in the area. The World Vaisnava Association is actively involved in this project. The "patron saint," as it were, is Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna. Many of the unemployed young people now work with BAL (Balaram Eco Sena, or the Ecological Army of Balaram). Organizers have urged the local population to join the movement, telling them that Lord Balaram "is calling every one of us for Dham Seva (service to the holy land.)"²⁵ As we see in the story of Vrindavana, it is not just trees and groves but also the mighty rivers of India that are considered to be sacred.

Rivers: Physically Polluted Moral Purifiers

By bathing in the great rivers of India, one is said to be morally cleansed of sins *and* to acquire merit or auspiciousness. A story popular in oral tradition makes the point: A king goes to sleep

on the banks of the River Ganga. When he wakes up in the middle of the night, he sees some women covered in filth taking a dip in the holy river. They emerge from the river cleansed and then disappear. The king returns on several nights and sees the same thing. Eventually he asks them who they are; they reply that they are the embodiments of the rivers of India. Every day, they tell him, human beings bathe in the rivers and their sins are absolved by that act. The rivers—embodied as women—absorb the moral dirt and then come to the Ganga, the grand purifier, to purify themselves. Variations on the story describe where the Ganga goes to get herself purified, although it is generally assumed that she needs no purification.²⁶

The generic version of the story distinguishes between two kinds of dirt. Moral dirt or sin, known as *papa* in Sanskrit, is perceptible as physical dirt in the bodies of the river. The story, therefore, makes a direct connection between morality and physical pollution. In addition to moral purity and physical purity, one may also note that in other Hindu contexts there is a third kind of purity: ritual purity.²⁷ Bathing in rivers and other bodies of water ritually purifies the pilgrim and his or her clothes. Ritual purity encompasses physical purity, but all that is physically clean is not ritually pure.²⁸ Even if a person is physically and ritually clean, the mere association with people and garb deemed ritually unclean or impure may be contagious enough to “pollute” him or her.

Given the pollution of India’s rivers, the traditional story about the River Ganga and the need of other rivers to purify themselves in its waters is particularly poignant. Rapid industrialization has produced dangerous levels of toxic waste in many of India’s rivers. The sacred rivers are often being used as latrines, despite the injunctions in the *dharma* texts against such a practice. The rivers that are supposed to purify stand stagnant, reflecting the rancid countenance of *adharma*, unrighteous behavior.

Veer Bhadra Mishra, a priest and engineer, works to keep his “Mother Ganga” free from more pollution. A *mahant* (spiritual and administrative head) of the second-largest temple in Varanasi, he educates people on why and how the holy River Ganges should be kept free of bacterial pollution. He notes that corpses,

not quite burnt from the funeral pyre, are dropped into the Ganga. "These people," says Mishra bitterly, "are trying to kill my Mother."²⁹ Mishra avers that there is a saying that Ganges grants us salvation; he added: "this culture will end if the people stop going to the river, and if the culture dies, the tradition dies, and the faith dies." It has been observed that "Mishra's blend of culture tradition and faith with science and technology could be what ultimately saves the Ganges."³⁰

Devotion and law have also come together in the saving of the Yamuna River. The Yamuna River is one of the most sacred in India, beloved for its close association with the life of Krishna. When Krishna was born, his father carried him across the river to a place of safety; growing up on the banks of this river, Krishna played with the cowherd girls and stole their clothes while they were bathing in the river. It was on the banks of the Yamuna that he played his magic flute and danced through the moonlit nights. And yet this is today one of the most polluted rivers in India, with tons of industrial dyes, sewage, and other pollutants being dumped into the sacred waters. Gopishwar Nath Chaturvedi, a traditional ritual leader for pilgrims and a resident of Mathura (the birthplace of Lord Krishna), has taken the lead in trying to save the river. Leading a group of pilgrims to the river for a ritual bath in 1985, he saw the water colored red and green from industrial dyes that had been dumped from the nearby mills. Dead fish covered the ground, and birds were picking at their flesh. This scene struck him as a desecration of his mother, the river Yamuna. Since then, Chaturvedi has been working to "save his mother" by filing several "Public Interest Litigation" (PIL) briefs in the Allahabad High Court. The legal counsel in these cases was M. C. Mehta, an attorney who has been at the forefront of cases dealing with the environment. After the court found in Sri Chaturvedi's favor, an Additional District Magistrate was appointed in Mathura to implement the court decision.³¹

One may also reflect briefly on the gender of the rivers. Though there are some exceptions, most of the rivers of India are considered to be female, while mountains are generally male. Rivers are perceived to be nurturing (and sometimes judgmental) mothers, feeding, nourishing, quenching, and when

angered flooding the earth. Rivers are also personified as deities; Ganga is sometimes portrayed as a consort of Lord Shiva. In the plains of Tamilnadu, Kaveri Amman (Mother Kaveri) is seen as a devotee and sometimes the consort of Lord Vishnu, and several temples (like Terazhundur, near Kumbakonam) have a striking image of this personified river in the innermost shrine. In the pre-eighth-century Vishnu temple at Tirucherai, a small village near Kumbakonam, the River Kaveri is seen as in a maternal posture with a child on her lap. When the Kaveri is swollen after the early monsoon rains, I have heard the residents of Srirangam (a large temple town on an island in the middle of the river) say she was pregnant. This is a wonderful celebration of her life-giving potential: the surging river, rich with the monsoon waters, sweeps into the plains, watering the newly planted crops in the Thanjavur delta, and giving birth to the food that will nourish the population. On the feast of *patinettam perukku*, the eighteenth day in the Tamil month of *Adi* (July 15–August 14), all those who live on the banks of Kaveri in the Tamilnadu celebrate the river's "pregnancy food cravings." They take a picnic to the banks of the river and eat there; Kaveri Amman is the guest at every picnic. Just as the food cravings of pregnant women are indulged by the family, Kaveri Amman's extended family celebrates her life-giving potential by picnicking with her. In some families, the oldest woman of the family "[leads] the festival and [throws] a handful of colored rices to satisfy the *macakkai* [food cravings during pregnancy] of the swiftly flowing Kaveri . . . as she hastened to the Lord's house."³² According to oral tradition and local *sthala puranams* (pamphlets that glorify a sacred place), bathing in the river Kaveri during a specific month of the year (generally held to be the Tamil month of *Aippasi*, October 15–November 14) washes away one's sins and gives a human being supreme liberation. Thus, according to some Hindu traditions, only Lord Vishnu or Mother Kaveri can give one both nourishment and salvation.

Women and Ecology

The despoliation of rivers in recent years is sometimes compared to the denigration of women at various times in many

civilizations. In India, the situation is complicated; there have been powerful women whose names are known as poets, patrons, performers, and philosophers; on the other hand, there have also been some androcentric texts and practices in which the lot of women has not been good. Although one cannot make a general statement that women have been dominated by men in the history of the Hindu tradition and that this corresponds to man's domination of nature (as is seen in many ecofeminist studies), it is hard not to draw a comparison between the rivers and the plight of women who are the target of crimes of greed and power.

At the same time, a number of Indian women have become active around ecological issues. In many parts of India, women are involved in the Chipko movement, which promotes the protection of trees.³³ Women are also involved in communicating the tragedy of ecological disasters, sometimes using such art forms as Bharata Natyam, a traditional Indian dance. The theory and practice of classical dance in India (*natya shastra*) is seen as a religious activity. In other words, dance—indeed, most performing arts—is a path to salvation within some Hindu traditions. Mallika Sarabhai, a noted dancer and feminist communicator, presents the story of the Chipko (or “tree-hugging”) movement in her dances entitled *Shakti: The Power of Women*.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan's compositions on ecological themes are choreographed by Rhadha, a well-known dance teacher in Chennai, and regularly performed by Suchitra Nitin and Sunanda Narayanan. One of Vijayaraghavan's pieces is particularly striking in this context. The song refers to a myth in which the God Shiva drank poison to save the universe. When the gods and the demons were churning the ocean of milk, using the serpent Vasuki as a rope, the snake spit out poisonous fumes, which overwhelmed the participants. Shiva saved them by consuming the poison and his neck turned blue. He is known as Nilakantha—the blue-throated one. The following song is set in the pattern of Karnatic music in the raga *Begada*:

O Nilakantha, lord, come here!
You have your work cut out for you;
I understand you consumed poison that day,

but will it do just to sip
a tiny bit of poison in your palm?

We have spread potent poison
all over this earth,
the waters of the sea, the air, everywhere.
O Shiva, be a sport, O Shiva, be a sport
—if you suck this poison out
you too will turn blue all over like Vishnu!³⁴

Notice that the references here are not to philosophical texts, but to a story from the Puranas that many Hindus would know. The tone of the song is teasing—a mood adopted in many classical Bharata Natyam songs, in which the young girl flirts with a god, frequently in a romantic situation. Here, Shiva is told that the sipping of a little poison at the time that the cosmic ocean of milk was churned is not enough; he is to suck out the poison from the whole world. The traditional context is preserved, but the message has been modified to draw attention to the poison that we have spread through our earth, water, and air. The mythic context enables the writer to use the strong word “poison,” rather than a more muted word like “pollution.”

The audience for these ecologically aware dance recitals is diverse. It includes the very government workers, industrialists, and management executives who are responsible, either directly or indirectly, for regulating pollution. Mallika Sarabhai dances in urban and rural areas where she is able to get the attention of multiple audiences. A particular strength of dance as a medium is its subtlety: without being strident, the songs and expressions convey a message that lingers long after the performance is over. To a large extent, I would argue, the performance does the work that theological texts once did: that of reshaping and transforming attitudes and perspectives in the Hindu context.

Sathya Sai Baba and Clean Water Supply

Sathya Sai Baba is one of the most influential gurus in modern India. After he became aware that some parts of Rayalseema in Andhra Pradesh, India, had suffered drought conditions for

years, the guru announced in 1994 that a “Water Supply Project” would be undertaken by his Sathya Sai Central Trust. He drew the attention of the people and the prime minister to the forty-five-year-old water problem. Sai Baba clearly draws connections between the rivers, religion, and morality. He is quoted as saying: “Rivers are the gift of God. In rivers like the Krishna, the Godavari, a lot of water is allowed to flow into the sea. . . . If there is constraint of finance, I am prepared to meet the cost even if it is 100 or 200 crores [one crore is ten million] for fulfilling this dire need of the Rayalaseema people. The devotees are prepared to make any sacrifice but I have not stretched my hands to anyone.”³⁵

In attributing the lack of water to the decline of morality, Sai Baba also stated: “Water is getting scarcer every day. What is the reason? Because of the decline of morality among men, water is getting scarce in the world. For human life morality is the life breath. Morality makes humanness blossom. Because morals have been lost, water is getting scarce.”³⁶

The Water Project covers 20,000 square kilometers and includes 750 villages without water. Mobilizing his devotees and financial resources, Sai Baba has allegedly been able to increase the region’s supply of safe drinking water. His devotees regard the project as a gesture of Sai Baba’s “love and compassion”—as well as an implicit indictment of the government. Although the ecological impact of Sai Baba’s activities can be debated, the power of the teacher is undisputable. Gurus like Sai Baba may ultimately have in their hands the power to change the behavior of devotees.

Limitations and Constraints

Some environmental philosophers have argued that Western religious traditions encourage dominion and control over nature, and thus bear a special burden of responsibility for the tragic state of our natural environment today. Such environmental philosophers sometimes turn to Eastern traditions to seek spiritual resources to help Westerners abjure and embrace eco-friendly policies. But if Eastern traditions, including Hinduism, are so eco-friendly, why do the countries in which these

religions have been practiced have such a lamentable record of ecological disasters and rampant industrialization?

The answers are, obviously, complex. Rich as the devotional and *dharmic* resources have proven in India, Hinduism can be a source of complacency as well. Some Hindu values may impede ecological activism. Moreover, for Hindus, some texts are more effective than others in inspiring action. Articles on environmental philosophy furthermore often assume that there is a direct link between Hindu worldviews and practice. But in fact, there are competing forces that determine behavior within the Hindu tradition. Recent academic scholarship tends to blame Western thought and actions for the devastation of land in Third World countries. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames have suggested that Western intellectual colonization is responsible for the failures we see in eastern and southern Asia.³⁷ This view is also held by some Indian authors, like Vandana Shiva, an important figure in India's environmental movement. In evaluating her position, however, Lance Nelson notes that she "focuses almost entirely on the West, and the Third World's experience of colonialism, modernization, modernist developmentalism, and so on, as the root of her country's environmental devastation. She thus tends to ignore the pre-colonial aspects of the problem. . . . She also tends to give idealized readings of the environmental implications of certain aspects of Hindu thought."³⁸

The responsibility and blame, I believe, has to be spread around. There are passages and texts within the Hindu religious traditions that encourage the acquisition of wealth in certain contexts. One must keep in mind that in the Hindu hierarchy, *Bhu-Devi/Prithvi* (the Earth Goddess) is of less importance than *Sri/Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth and good fortune. *Lakshmi* has traditionally had a far greater hold on people's faith and aspirations than the Earth Goddess, and the quest for wealth seems to be more intense than reverence for the earth. In a world where good fortune seems to depend on consumer spending and industrial growth, the Earth Goddess faces some very stiff competition.

There are other strands in Hindu religious traditions that have helped contribute to the current ecological crisis. One is

the Hindu conviction that rivers like Ganga are so inherently pure that nothing can pollute them.³⁹ Others have quite correctly pointed to the notion of sacred space as contributing to pollution. If certain spots like Vrindavana are inherently sacred and ought to be kept clean, one may pollute the “profane earth which is not sacred, which is not attached to Puranic or devotional narratives.”⁴⁰

And then there is the focus on “individuality” in some of the Hindu traditions. Anil Agarwal notes: “Hinduism’s primary focus lies on the self, one’s immediate family, and one’s caste niche, to the neglect of the larger society and community. . . . Whereas the private sphere is carefully scripted in Hindu tradition, public life in India borders on and often descends into chaos. . . . A Hindu may go down to the Ganges River to purify himself or herself. The next moment, the same person will flush the toilet and discharge effluent into the very same sacred river. . . .”⁴¹ While this is more true in some Hindu communities than others, the emphasis on the “self” has to be noted, at least in some traditions.

TEXTS ON *DHARMA* AND TEXTS ON THEOLOGY:
BIMORPHIC WORLDVIEWS

Classical Hindu texts in the beginning of the Common Era enumerate the goals—or matters of value—of a human being. These are *dharma*, *artha* (wealth, power), *kama* (sensual pleasure), and *moksha* (liberation from the circle of life and death).⁴² While *dharma*, wealth, and sensual pleasure are usually seen as this-worldly, *moksha* is liberation from this world and the repeated rebirths of a soul. There are texts that deal with *dharma*, wealth, sensual pleasure, and liberation. The multiple Hindu traditions do differ from other world religions in having this variety of goals and the array of texts that accompany them. This means that Hinduism presents adherents with several competing conceptual systems, intersecting but distinct.

The texts that deal with *moksha*, or liberation, are generally concerned with three issues: the nature of reality, including the supreme being and the human soul; the way to the supreme goal; and the nature of the supreme goal. Generally the nature

of reality is called *tattva* (truth) and corresponds with the term “theology.” These texts do not focus much on ethics or righteous behavior in this world; that is the province of *dharma* texts.

The theological texts or sections that deal with *tattva* focus on weaning a human being from the earthly pursuit of happiness to what they consider to be the supreme goal of liberation (*moksha*) from this life. It is important to keep this taxonomy in mind, because theological doctrines that are oriented to liberation do not necessarily trickle down into *dharmic* or ethical injunctions; in many Hindu traditions, in fact, there is a disjunction between *dharma* and *moksha*.

Indeed, J. A. B. van Buitenen says that there is a fundamental opposition between them: “*Mokṣa*, ‘release,’ is release from the entire realm which is governed by *dharma*. . . . It stands, therefore, in opposition to *dharma*. . . . *Mokṣa*, however, is the abandonment of the established order, not in favor of anarchy, but in favor of a self-realization which is precluded in the realm of *dharma*.”⁴³ While Daniel Ingalls disagrees on the sharp nature of the cleavage described by van Buitenen, he does acknowledge that “[a]lways there were some men, and a few of them among India’s greatest religious leaders, who insisted on the contradiction between *dharma* and *moksha*.”⁴⁴ *Dharma* texts promote righteous behavior on Earth, and *moksha* texts encourage one to be detached from such concerns. A few texts like the *Bhagavadgita* have tried to bridge *dharma* and *moksha* paradigms.

Thus, a theology that emphasizes the world as a body of God, a pervasive pan-Indian belief that Goddess Earth (Prithvi, Vasundhara, Bhu Devi) is also a consort of Vishnu, or the notion that the Mother Goddess (Amba, Durga) is synonymous with Nature (*prakriti*) does not necessarily translate to eco-friendly behavior. Likewise, renunciation, celibacy, and detachment are laudable virtues for one who seeks liberation from the cycle of life and death, but the texts on *dharma* say that begetting children is necessary for salvation. These bimorphic worldviews have to be kept in mind if we are to see the relevance for the Hindu traditions of Western viewpoints

such as deep ecology. On another front, the dissonance between *dharma* and *tattva/moksha* texts also accounts in part for the fact that while some Hindu traditions hold the Goddess to be supreme, women may not necessarily hold a high position in society.

It is quite correct to say that some theological/*tattva* texts speak of certain kinds of “oneness” of the universe and, in some cases, the “oneness” of all creation. Some, though not most, *tattva* texts speak of the absolute identity between the supreme being and the human soul (*atman*)—an identity that in fact transcends the concept of equality of many distinct souls. This philosophical system of nonduality is discussed by Western philosophers as an important resource in ecology. Eliot Deutsch writes, “. . . what does it mean to affirm continuity between man and the rest of life? Vedanta would maintain that this means the recognition that fundamentally all life is one, that in essence everything is reality, and that this oneness finds its natural expression in a reverence for all things.”⁴⁵ The main thrust of the arguments made by Deutsch, Callicott, and others is to show that Hindu philosophy emphasizes that all creation is ultimately Brahman, or the supreme being, and therefore, if we hurt someone we hurt ourselves.

While the “oneness” doctrine and its ecological implications are underscored by Callicott, Lance Nelson has recently argued that the *advaita* (“non-dualism”) conceptual system does *not* promote eco-friendly behavior.⁴⁶ Nelson shows how the doctrine developed by the Hindu philosopher Shankara (c. seventh century) actually *devalues* nature. He concludes that non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy “is not the kind of non-dualism that those searching for ecologically supportive modes of thought might wish it to be.”⁴⁷

The philosophies of Shankara and Ramanuja are relevant to those who seek liberation, but not to those seeking moral rules to govern everyday behavior. Hindu communities and customs are established not on the sense of oneness or equality found in *moksha*, but on many differences and hierarchies based on gender, caste, age, economic class, and so on. With all their limitations and richness, therefore, we have had to deal with

the texts, narratives, and traditions of *dharmā* rather than the rule of *moksha* for actions leading to prosperity of the earth.

What I am urging is a shift in our perspective from the *tattva/moksha* texts to the resources that have a more direct relevance to worldly behavior. These are the popular practices embodied in the *dharmic* tradition and in the *bhakti*/devotional rituals. *Dharma* texts and narratives are in some ways like law codes in other countries: sometimes followed, sometimes flouted, sometimes ignored, sometimes evaded—and sometimes taken to heart as the right thing to do to maintain social stability. In addition to *dharmā* texts, devotional (*bhakti*) exercises seem to be the greatest potential resource for ecological activists in India. As we have seen, devotion to Krishna or to Mother Ganga or Yamuna has impelled some people to take action to supply safe drinking water, plant and protect trees, and clean up rivers.

What can we learn from such success stories? Clearly, some Hindu texts, traditions, and rituals can inspire eco-friendly behavior. Narratives like the story of Shiva and Ganga, Parvati and the saplings seem to have more impact than talking about the universe as the body of God. The sanctity of rivers as Mother Goddesses has evoked great passion and inspired the cleaning up of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers; other rivers, one hopes, will be taken care of soon. Gurus and teachers can mobilize awareness and organize action, and these teachers may hold the key to avoiding ecological tragedy. It is when leaders, whether they are from the priestly families like Chaturvedi and Mishra, or gurus, or heads of environmental institutions like Dr. Purohit, team up with temples, scientists, and lawyers that Hindu ecological activists have the greatest potential for success.

Stories, gurus and goddesses, hagiographic literature, and *dharmic* models will all have to be pressed into service before we can make further progress. Prithvi Devi, or Mother Earth, can protect us if we protect her. If she is abused, she can transform herself from a nourishing mother into a wrathful deity.

One of the goals of the Hindu texts is to encourage human beings to seek enlightenment. Vairamuthu, a composer and

poet popular in South India, recently wrote a song on the beauty of a tree. In the last line, he urges us to have the right attitude toward the tree. Every tree, he says, is a Bodhi tree. The Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree: now every tree in the world can enlighten us about the burden on Mother Earth.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Some paragraphs in this essay appeared in an earlier paper of mine, "One Tree is Equal to Ten Sons: Some Hindu Responses to the Problems of Ecology, Population and Consumption," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 (2) (June 1997): 291–332.
- ²Two of the most important books that have highlighted the many answers to this question are Lance Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God: Religion and Ecology in Hindu India* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1998) and Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water* (Cambridge: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2000). For an overview of early Indian literature, see Purushottama Bilimoria, "Environmental Ethics of Indian Religious Traditions," at <<http://www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/RELIGION/faculty/bilimoria/paper.htm>>.
- ³*Kurma Purana*, 1.27.16–57. Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, *Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 39.
- ⁴J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans., *The Mahabharata: The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 586–589, 595–596; emphasis added.
- ⁵Richard Lariviere, "Justices and *Panditas*: Some Ironies in Contemporary Readings of the Hindu Legal Past," *Journal of Asian Studies* 48 (4) (1989): 757–769.
- ⁶Gerald J. Larson, "Conceptual Resources in South Asia for 'Environmental Ethics,'" in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 267–277.
- ⁷For a typical hymn of this genre and its connection to environmental ethics, see O. P. Dwivedi, "Dharmic Ecology," in Chapple and Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology*, 10–11. Christopher Key Chapple summarizes the literature on ecology and the Vedas in his article "Towards an Indigenous Indian Environmentalism," in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*.
- ⁸"Ahimsa paramo dharma" ("Nonviolence is the highest form of *dharmā*" *Mahabharata*, Anusasana Parva 115.1.). "Lack of malice to all beings in

thought, word, and deed; this is the essence of the eternal faith.” *Mahabharata*, Shanti Parva, quoted in Pandurang Vaman Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)* (Poona, India: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1958).

⁹*Manu Smriti*, 4:56.

¹⁰*Manu Smriti*, 2:17–23; adapted from Georg Buhler, *The Laws of Manu* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), 32–33.

¹¹See David Kinsley, “Learning the Story of the Land: Reflections on the Liberating Power of Geography and Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition,” in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*, 225–246.

¹²See, for instance, Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women), 1988, and Kapila Vatsyayan, *Prakriti: The Integral Vision*, 5 vols. (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts), 1995. For a revisionistic Tantric view, see Rita DasGupta Sherma, “Sacred Immanence: Reflections of Ecofeminism in Hindu Tantra,” in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*, 89–132.

¹³K. Seshagiri Rao, “The Five Great Elements (*Pañcamahābhūta*): An Ecological Perspective,” in Chapple and Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology*, 23–38.

¹⁴John Carman, *The Theology of Ramanuja* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 124–133.

¹⁵S. S. Raghavachar, trans., *Vedārtha Saṅgraha of Sri Rāmānujācārya* (Mysore: Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, 1968), 11, 13.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷*Matsya Puranam*, chap. 154, 506–512. Adapted from “A Taluqdar of Oudh,” *Matsya Puranam*, pt. 2 (Allahabad: Surendra Natha Vasu of Bhuvaneshwari Asrama, Bahadurganj, 1917).

¹⁸Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, vol. V, pt. 1, 415–416.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 415.

²⁰Shamasastri, trans., Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* (Mysore: Mysore Printing and Publishing House, 1967), 225.

²¹Choodie Shivaram, “Court Decree Retires Tirupati Temple’s Hereditary Priests,” *Hinduism Today* 18 (6) (1996): 1.

²²Pamphlet of T. T. Devasthanam, n.d., available in the information office of T. T. Devasthanam. For general information see <http://www.tirumala.org/vana_schemes_p7htm>.

²³Edwin Bernbaum, “Badrinath’s Trees: Local Forests Being Restored as Pilgrims Now Plant Trees as Offering to God,” *Hinduism Today*, May 1999, and at <<http://www.hinduismtoday.com/1999/5/#gen382>>. G. B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development is located at Kosi-Kat Armal, Almora, Uttar Pradesh, India.

- ²⁴For discussions on the involvement of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness with ecological schemes and the philosophical background, see Ranchor Prime, *Hinduism and Ecology: Seeds of Truth* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), and Michael A. Cremona and Mukunda Goswami, *Divine Nature: A Spiritual Perspective on the Environmental Crisis* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1995). The ecological efforts in Vrindavana and the textual sources that inspire such activities are also discussed in Bruce M. Sullivan's detailed article "Theology and Ecology at the Birthplace of Kṛṣṇa," in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*, 247–267.
- ²⁵Swami BV Parivrajak, "Where is 'That' Vrindavan?" (15 January 1999) in VINA (Vaishnava Internet News Agency) at <http://www.vina.org/articles/where_is_that_vrindavan.html>.
- ²⁶Professor Diana Eck, Harvard University, personal communication.
- ²⁷Vasudha Narayanan, "The Two Levels of Auspiciousness in Srivaisnava Ritual and Literature," *Journal of Developing Societies* 1 (1) (1985): 57.
- ²⁸Kelly D. Alley, "Idioms of Degeneracy: Assessing Ganga's Purity and Pollution," in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*.
- ²⁹Meenakshi Ganguly, "Veer Bhadra Mishra: Holy War for 'My Mother,'" *Time Magazine*, 2 August 1999, 81.
- ³⁰Robert Sanders, "Saving the 'Mother of India': Berkeley Technology May Clean Up Ganges River," <<http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/1998/1118/india.html>>.
- ³¹I am indebted to David Haberman for this information. Professor Haberman's work on the Yamuna River will be published in his forthcoming book, *Yamuna: River of Love in an Age of Pollution*.
- ³²V. Sadagopan, personal communication.
- ³³Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1988); J. Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994), 220–221; Bart Gruzalski, "The Chipko Movement: A Gandhian Approach to Ecological Sustainability and Liberation from Economic Colonisation," in *Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India*, ed. Ninian Smart and Shivesh Thakur (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 100–125. See also Mark Shepard, "'Hug the Trees!': Chandi Prasad Bhatt and the Chipko Movement," at <http://www.markshep.com/nonviolence/GT_Chipko.html>.
- ³⁴Sujatha Vijayaraghavan, "Neelakanthare Varum Ayya," song in *Begada* raga, unpublished, personal communication.
- ³⁵*Sanathana Sarathi*, December 1994, 323; quoted in "The Sathya Sai Water Project: The Acute Need for Water," at <<http://members.aol.com/introsai/works/water.htm>>.
- ³⁶"The Sathya Sai Water Project," as above.

- ³⁷J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames, *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 281.
- ³⁸Nelson, "The Dualism of Non-Dualism," in *Purifying the Earthly Body*, 82–83, n. 16.
- ³⁹See the excellent article by Kelly Alley, "Idioms of Degeneracy: Assessing Ganga's Purity and Pollution," in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*, 297–330.
- ⁴⁰David Kinsley, "Learning the Story of the Land: Reflections on the Liberating Power of Geography and Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition," in Nelson, ed., *Purifying the Earthly Body of God*, 242.
- ⁴¹Anil Agarwal, "Can Hindu Beliefs and Values Help India Meet its Ecological Crisis?" in Chapple and Tucker, eds., *Hinduism and Ecology*, 174.
- ⁴²Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra (Ancient and Mediaeval Religious and Civil Law)*, vol. II, pt. 1, 2d ed. (Poona, India: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1974), 8–9.
- ⁴³J. A. B. van Buitenen, "Dharma and Mokṣa," *Philosophy East and West: A Journal of Oriental and Comparative Thought* 7 (1) (1957): 33–40; 7 (2) (1957): 37.
- ⁴⁴Ingalls, "Dharma and Mokṣa," in *ibid.*, 48.
- ⁴⁵Eliot Deutsch, quoted in J. Baird Callicott, *Earth's Insights: A Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49.
- ⁴⁶Callicott, *Earth's Insights*, 50; Nelson, "The Dualism of Non-Dualism."
- ⁴⁷Nelson, "The Dualism of Non-Dualism," 65.

The significant increase in water pumped out of the Naquifer, dramatically affected the drinkability of the water from the springs and wells connected to the Naquifer. Before the significant increase of pumping, the water was clean enough to drink without any kind of purification. Another result of the pumping is the noticeable drop in the water levels of the springs and wells.Â Narayanan, Vasudha. 2001 Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions. Daedalus 130 (4):179â€“206. Nelson, Lance E. 2008 "Ecology". From the cradle that is a babyâ€™s first bed to the cremation pyre that is the last resting place for the body in many Hindu traditions, wood is an integral part of Hindu lives. From home hearths to religious sacraments, wood and fire are conspicuously present. Hindu weddings take place in front of a sacred fire that is considered to be an eternal witness; at death, the bodies are consigned to the fire. The ashes of the cremated body are immersed in holy watersâ€”the same rivers that feed and irrigate paddy fields; the same water that cooks the rice and bathes the dead before cremation. From cradl