

Two-Day International Conference
on
Environmental Humanities and the Global South: Indian Perspectives for
Ecological Justice

Concept Note:

India's G20 Presidency provided a strategic window for steering the world towards inclusive and sustainable growth, culminating in the diplomatic milestone for India with the New Delhi Declaration of the G20 Members. Amidst the backdrop of the Ukraine war, the declaration is said to be India's diplomatic triumph focusing on many crucial issues like sustainable growth and climate change. In fact, during the Presidency, India has lead from front while promoting the *Amrit Kaal* initiatives, with a strong emphasis on fostering environmentally-conscious practices and encouraging a sustainable way of life for all. The preamble of the declaration opens with the idea of 'One Earth, One Family, and One Future' reaffirming India's belief in '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' imprinting India's mark on the future of the world.

A decade-long rebranding of India's non-alignment policy into a 'multi- alignment policy' has garnered worldwide approval. The tenure of G20 presidency was a litmus test for this multilateral persona of India, and India emerged triumphant while solidifying a prominent voice for the Global South through several impactful events, ultimately culminating in the inclusion of the African Union in the G20. Embracing this newfound role on the global stage, India has not only demonstrated the capacity for global leadership but also accepted a solemn responsibility to spearhead the charge against pressing global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development with a particular focus on championing the interests of the Global South nations. Therefore, India stands at the forefront of a new and vital responsibility of leading the Global South and among the various pathways to fulfilling this role, research and innovation emerge as key pillars.

Environmental Humanities, a rapidly progressing multidisciplinary research domain, has witnessed substantial growth in developed countries, while showing early signs of emergence in India and South Africa. As the threats posed by climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion extend beyond jeopardizing the delicate balance of ecosystems, well-being of human societies worldwide is also at significant risks. Effectively addressing these challenges necessitates expanding the scope of environmental discourses. This expansion is precisely what Environmental Humanities achieve by delving into the intricate connections between humans and the environment. It investigates the ethical, cultural, historical, and socio-political dimensions of environmental issues, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the complex interplay between human activities and the environment. However, in other Global South regions, notable advancements in this field are lacking. India holds the potential to exert a significant impact on environmental humanities, drawing from its culturally and spiritually rich heritage deeply entwined with scriptures and traditions. This heritage accentuates a deep inseparable connection between humanity and the environment, providing a unique perspective for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. In the aftermath of India's G20 Presidency, the two-day international conference on **Environmental Humanities and the Global South: Indian Perspectives for Ecological Justice** will be convened to explore potential of Indian Environmental Humanities to

shape a sustainable future, emphasizing India's crucial role in leading the Global South towards ecological justice.

Environmental Humanities in India

The essence of Environmental Humanities lies in exploring the intricate relations between humans and nature. Indian cultural heritage, spanning ancient Vedic scriptures, Dharmashastras, and the great Indian epics to modern expressions in arts and literature, offers diverse narratives reflecting the deep interconnection between humanity and the environment. The reverence for the planet Earth in India is deeply ingrained, considering it as a mother or goddess with names like Bhū, Bhūmī, Prithvī, Vasudhā, Vasundhara, and Avni. Vedic scriptures unequivocally declare the sacredness of the five major elements of nature - earth, water, fire, space, and air. Rivers, especially the Ganges, are held in high esteem, believed to offer salvation through bathing and the Rig-Veda is replete with hymns praising great rivers. Ancient practices, such as the 'festival of trees' celebrating tree planting in villages, were documented in texts like the Matsya Purana. Notably, Kautilya's Arthashastra delves not only into economic matters, but also prescribes fines for the destruction of trees, sacred groves, and forests.

This underscores the ancient Indian understanding of the profound interdependence between human societies and their natural environment, a wisdom that resonates through texts addressing economic, social, and ecological dimensions. Yet, our history bears witness to the consequences of ecological neglect. The downfall of great civilizations, including the Indus Valley culture, is attributed not solely to invading armies but also to ecological disasters. The eco-conscious heritage of India resonates through more recent history, as the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan stands out as the torchbearer of ecological consciousness. The Bishnois led the world's first recorded environmental movement by sacrificing their lives to protect trees from being felled for construction by a princely state. This pioneering movement laid the groundwork for future environmental activism in India, and during India's struggle for independence, Gandhian principles embraced ecological consciousness, and in the 1970s, the Chipko movement emerged as a grassroots environmental initiative, further highlighting the intrinsic connection between the Indian people and their natural surroundings. Then the colonial rule in India witnessed British environmental legislations primarily aimed at resource control and exploitation, contributing to the plundering of natural resources. In the postcolonial landscape, the imperative of reshaping environmental policies towards sustainable conservation practices looms large, as the awaited process of decolonization presents ongoing challenges.

Therefore, the discipline of Environmental Humanities in India has a potential to uniquely blend its diverse cultural heritage, religious philosophies, and ancient wisdom to shape a sustainable coexistence with the environment. Rooted in the profound ecological consciousness embedded in the scriptures, such as the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads, India's environmental ethos reflects a harmonious integration of humanity and nature. This rich tradition not only advocates for the sanctity of natural elements but also underscores ethical and sustainable living practices. Further, India's journey in Environmental Humanities carries the potential not only to illuminate its own path but to lead the Global South in attaining a distinct voice rooted in indigenous knowledge from the respective regions. By bridging traditional wisdom with contemporary sustainability practices, India can offer valuable insights for the Global South to address environmental challenges while preserving cultural identities.

THEMES

1. **Environmental History of India:** This theme engages with the multifaceted environmental narratives spanning precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras within India. It recognizes the rich history of interactions between Indian community and their environments, exploring the evolution of ecological consciousness, practices, and responses to environment. Spanning from Ancient, Classical, and Medieval India to the responses to the colonial exploitation and the contemporary struggles for conservation and environmental justice, this theme unearths the multi-layered histories that have shaped the environmental landscape of India.

Sub-themes:

- Ancient India's ecological consciousness, sustainable practices, and community-environment interactions.
 - Environmental impacts, societal dynamics, adaptive responses, and the intertwined relations between historical marvels and ecological transformations during the medieval period in India
 - Environmental consequences of colonial laws and responses of forest-dwelling communities and ecological transformations during colonial eras.
 - Contemporary struggles for conservation and environmental justice in India's postcolonial landscape.
 - Indian religious sects, tribal communities, and history of their environmentalisms (Chipko, Bishnoi, Sikh, Bhakti movements etc.).
2. **Ecological Expressions in Indian Art and Literature:** This theme traverses through the expansive landscape of Indian artistic and literary traditions, encompassing ancient scriptures, epics, Dharmashastras, Indian classical and folk music, and literature. It extends its exploration to modern arts and literature, unraveling the evolving relationship between human creativity and the environment across different eras in India.

Sub-themes:

- Ecological consciousness/ insights within diverse ancient scriptures- Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas-fostering reverence for nature and spiritual connection.
 - Timeless ecological wisdom embedded in the great Indian epics- the Mahabharata and Ramayana.
 - Dharmic ecological ethics, values and principles in Dharmashastras shaping ethical environmental conduct.
 - Ecological harmony and resonances in Indian arts including paintings, Indian classical music, expression of nature's harmony through ragas and rhythms.
 - Environmental reflections in Indian literature in English and regional languages capturing diverse perspectives on nature.
3. **Indian Environmental Laws, Policies and Governance:** This theme engages with the intricate dynamics that shape the relationship between law, policy, politics, environmental economics, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and sustainable development in the context of India as a leader of the Global South. It encompasses a multifaceted exploration of the interplay between economic activities and nation-building influences environmental governance, legal regulation, and resource management in the postcolonial era. This theme opens opportunities for insights into decolonizing environmentalism and the broader quest for sustainable development and environmental justice in India and the Global South.

Sub-themes:

- Colonial legacy of environmental laws in India and control vs conservation of Indian forests.
- Amendments to environmental legislations, Indian policies' impact on growth, environment, and political economy, as India leads decolonization from the Global South.
- Indian legal frameworks, institutions, and effectiveness in safeguarding and conserving resources under India's leadership.
- Indian environmental policy discourse and community resilience and scarcity of resources, conflicts, and environmental justice.
- Balancing development, conservation, and justice, and navigating the complexities of sustainability in a postcolonial context.

4. Environmental Consciousness and Education in the Global South: This theme intricately examines the interplay of environmental awareness and education, emphasizing India's leadership. Diving into ancient wisdom, artistic expressions, legal frameworks, and educational initiatives across the Global South, it envisions India as a guiding force for sustainable practices and environmental justice, shaping a harmonious future.

Sub-themes:

- Environmental teachings embedded in ancient texts and cultural practices across the Global South and their relevance to contemporary ecological consciousness.
- Artistic creations across diverse Global South cultures and their environmental messages, and the role of art in fostering awareness and sustainability.
- Legal landscapes in various Global South regions vis-à-vis India's exemplary legal initiatives, to understand the regulatory frameworks shaping environmental education and practices.
- Innovative educational approaches in the Global South, with a special emphasis on governmental and non-governmental initiatives in India and the integration of diverse voices and perspectives for a sustainable and just society.
- India's role as an innovator in environmental education, lessons and insights that can be applied by other Global South nations, India's potential to lead the way towards a harmonious and sustainable future.

Note: The provided sub-themes are suggestive, and researchers are encouraged to explore ideas that align with the overarching themes of the conference.

Call for Papers

A limited number of participants will be invited for the Conference. Those interested in participating should send (preferably by email) an abstract (500 words) of the proposed paper in English only along with their C.V. (One page) directly to **Dr. Sopan Shinde**, Assistant Professor, Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur on his **Email: sopanshinde108@gmail.com** **Mobile: 9673772206** and copy to **Shri Prem Chand, Librarian/Academic Resource Officer (AC)**, Indian institute of Advanced Study, Shimla on his **Email: aro@ias.ac.in** **Tel: 0177-2831385**. The last date for submission of abstract (500 words) is till **20th April 2024 05:00 PM**. The Institute intends to send Invitation letters to selected participants by the **25th April, 2024**.

It is the policy of the Institute to publish the papers not proceedings of the conference it organizes. Hence, all invited participants will be expected to submit complete papers, hitherto unpublished and original, with citations in place, along with a reference section, to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla– 171005 by 30th May, 2024.

The IAS, Shimla will be glad to extend its hospitality (free hospitality is provided only to the Conference participant) during the seminar period and is willing to reimburse, if required, rail or air travel expenses from the place of current residence in India, or the port of arrival in India, and back.

Note: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and the Institute reserves the right to cancel the selection /participation of a candidate found guilty at any stage.

Important Dates:

Abstract: April 20, 2024

Communication of Acceptance, April 25, 2024

Paper Submission: May 30, 2024

Conference Dates: June 21-22, 2024

ORGANIZING TEAM

Convener:

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