



WORLD
ANTHROPOLOGY
CONGRESS

Organized by



Hosted by



In Association with



WORLD ANTHROPOLOGY CONGRESS-2023

BHUBANESWAR, INDIA | 9-14 AUGUST 2023

CTD: 01GT- GENERAL THEMATIC DOMAIN
SUB-DOMAIN: GENERAL TRACK

PANEL TITLE:
NATURE IN SPIRITUALISM:
ANTHROPOLOGY IN SEARCH OF RESILIENT ENVIRONMENTALISM

CONVENOR: PROF. SHALINA MEHTA
CO-CONVENERS: TASHI SMANLA & VIJAY BODH

ABSTRACT

Nature and spiritualism are intimately intertwined. From ancient texts in Sanskrit to Buddhist scriptures, assertion of equal rights of non-human species, from plants to animals on mother earth is symbolic of this intersecting perception. It is also reflected in liberation theology that weaves morality with sanctity of nature. Ecological movements starting with philosopher Anne Naess's (1973) construction of deep ecology rooted in ecocentrism to genesis of Earth First's ethics (1980), this intersectionality is eminent. Some of these movements, beginning with 'Earth first', have also critiqued monotheism that negates the value of the biosphere in its search for panacea (Toynbee 1972; White 1967). The discipline of anthropology in its pursuit of religious studies have recognised religious diversity, even when it was erroneously placed in an evolutionary context. This contestation is addressed by Bron Raymond Taylor (1995) as visualization of priority of anthropocentrism vis-à-vis biocentrism, resulting in mass destruction of the planet. From ancient philosophies to emerging ecological movements, there is preponderance of belief to evolve 'nature-based ritualizing' (Seed, 1994). From Buddhist philosophy to radical environmentalism, there is concurrence on it being the most effective instrument for environment protection. But there are questions raised on abiding by it as a solitary recourse to confront the crisis that not only humanity, but the entire biosphere is facing. In our academic journeys as ethnographic researchers, we have also refuted western romanticism of nature as solitary spaces that were responsible for policies of IUCN, visualizing conservation of endangered fauna by displacing human habitats from protected Tiger reserves from Madhya Pradesh and from other states from regions marked for wildlife protection. Now the same strategy is used for the protection of Bio-diversity from the heartland of Buddhism-Ladakh. Human habitations are shifted from Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary, but Ecotourism is allowed to flourish. Sacred spaces are now freely available for profane luxuries.

We propose this panel by citing one of the most famous scholars of environmentalism Bron Taylor (348:1995) observations, "should we (italics ours) propose-synthesize such primal spiritualities with more scientifically respectable notion like the Gaia hypothesis, and the "new physics" to create new religious stories capable of promoting the kind of trans-border (trans-species) loyalty to the earth and its creatures that seems so desperately needed?" Anthropologists in their search for resilient environmentalism are looking for such stories that come from students of environment across disciplines to enrich this debate.

Keywords: Spiritualism, Nature, Ecological movements, resilient environmentalism

Pre- and Post-Congress In Collaboration with

