

Interwoven Ecology

Interaction across Disciplinary Difference

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The field of environmental humanities and ecology studies has become an important topic with respect to the marginalised communities as they suffer through multiple socio-environmental factors. The growing concerns of environment and ecology are a much discussed matter in the elite spaces and business houses. However, the philosophical and ethical discourse on the most affected beings—humans and non-humans—is absent in these spaces. The ecological complexities affect not just specific individuals or communities but all beings and society at large, directly or indirectly. Because of the continued industrialisation, cosmopolitan cultural elitism, and climate change, the burden of pollution impacts the downtrodden communities across geographies and socio-economic hierarchies.

The book, *Ecological Entanglements: Affect, Embodiment and Ethics of Care*, edited by Ambika Aiyadurai, Arka Chattopadhyay, and Nishaant Choksi, is a careful intervention in the interdisciplinary academic domain of ecology and allied studies. The book begins with a foreword by Sundar Sarukkai, followed by an introduction and 15 chapters divided into three different sections. Sarukkai believes that there are approaches which are primarily utilitarian in nature, therefore, this volume can be understood as an attempt to create a “green frontier” for the discipline of ecology. He argues that the borders and boundaries of disciplines that deal with nature in all its multiplicity cannot be encroached upon or taken over by hegemonic and dominant narratives (p vii).

The introductory chapter poses pertinent questions such as: How does the human and animal body express and situate itself? How does the body act and react in a particular way whenever affects are

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inscribed on one's body? Is there an affective embodiment link with larger ecological spaces? (p 2). The broader themes in the book pivot around social, material, cultural and linguistic dimensions of ecology. It is interesting how each contributory chapter deals with the wider critical quest of ecological text and context.

Care and the World of Ecology

The book discusses an important question of “what it means to care for others, and how an ethics of care can emerge from interactional and affective encounters within embodied spaces” (p 2). The first section, titled “Ecologies of Care,” deals with six chapters that bring ethnographies of ecological sensitivity and the processes that revolve around interdependence. It is about knowing and caring for the other.

The section opens with “Ethos, Pathos and Logos” (Chapter 1) by Ishika Ramakrishna, Ajith Kumar, Maan Barua and Anindya Sinha, who discuss the interaction between people and primates. They exemplify cases from the Great Nicobar part of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of the south-eastern coast of India and the endemic Nicobar long-tailed macaque. The chapter interprets and contextualises interactions between people and non-human species in reading historical, socio-economic, ecological, cultural and temperamental influences (pp 17–19). The authors argue at two levels: first, the way multispecies interact beyond humans to create their conjoint lifeworlds; and second, individuality of

human and non-human relationships (p 19). Documentation helps to understand the two different worlds that connect each other.

Krishnanunni Hari (Chapter 2) draws from Salim Ali and Laeeq Futehally's text *Common Birds* that focuses on ethical and political significance of practising attunement—a scientific method of observation and knowledge production—that makes birdwatcher competent to recognise and re-articulate “previously silenced avian agencies” (p 51). In “Feeling the Moss” (Chapter 3), Deborah Dutta states that with the help of environmental education, dominant cultural beliefs should be questioned along with developing alternative practices that are ecological and sustainable (p 55). The chapter draws from the perspective of the growing concern about the environmental crisis and about “collective inability” to respond (p 56). It argues that “close and sustained encounters with a ‘rooted’ practice ought to form a crucial aspect of environmental education through providing an ‘education in attention’” (p 56). Both these chapters talk about knowledge processes in a different manner that directs our attention towards environmental practices and education.

In “Reading the Elephant” (Chapter 4), Sayan Banerjee and Anindya Sinha discuss how Asian elephants are an effective agent in establishing dialogues across disciplines. They look at the disciplinary turns in environmental studies and then provide an alternate approach to understanding the lives and times of elephants in a world that we have come to share with them in increased proximity (p 73). They focus on affect and perception in the context of human–elephant relations. They do so by foregrounding alternative accounts by bringing situated knowledge and testimonies of the local communities, thereby encouraging decolonial thinking (p 75). In “Blindness and Canine Heroicisation” (Chapter 5), Krishna Kumar S emphasises the dynamics of trust and dependency that form the foundation of the relationship between dogs and

humans, challenging the exclusivist beliefs. The chapter examines Stephen Kuusisto's book *Have Dog, Will Travel: A Poet's Journey* (2018) and explores companionship, interdependence and mutuality of trust (p 88). In "Human and Animal" (Chapter 6), Ankit Kawade studies the nature of associations with the animal and the way it is reflected in the discourse and the everyday performance of the caste. He suggests that the invocation of animality is visible in the everydayness of caste to which Dalit thought and literature pose a political-philosophical problem that deserves consideration (p 101).

Expressions of Affect

The second section brings four chapters in dialogue that talk about "affective expression." They focus on the everydayness of affect in terms of indignity, language and literacy in eastern parts of India. In Chapter 7, "Expressiveness and Affect," Nathan Badenoch and Toshiki Osada discuss expressive language as an important aspect of feeling and emotion that is conveyed not just as a person's experience of their "sensuous surroundings" but as an emotional inference of hearers' expressive performance (p 118). The authors argue that "evocative ethnographic accounts of language use, giving full voice to native speaker's linguistic performances, are key to uncovering the entanglements of expressiveness, affect and ecology" (p 121). In mainstream language and narratives, there is an absence of linguistically marginalised voices. Thereby, to get the ground realities of ecology, it is important to take account of native speakers and their performances of linguistics. In the same line, Choksi, in "Songs of Script" (Chapter 8), draws through the fieldwork that he has conducted in the Santal-dominated area of south-western West Bengal, between 2009 and 2011. The chapter argues that the Santali community's script and writings not only represent spoken language but everyday environmental realities (p 141).

In "Winding Spools and Speaking Stones" (Chapter 9), Asijit Datta focuses on two plays, Michael Handke's *Till Day You Do Part* and Samuel Beckett's

Krapp's Last Tape. The chapter states that there is a temporal structure of Krapp's recording device that erases memory and effective engagement, while Handke's petrified "stone woman" creates a relational subjectivity. The chapter looks at human and non-human relations through varied symbols. In "Embodying the *Birangona*" (Chapter 10), Antara Ghatak examines the narrative of rape victims and survivors along with their sufferings, which is a result of essentially carrying the burden of biological inequity and gender (p 166). Drawing on the experiences of Ferdousi Priyabhashini (1947–2018) Ghatak engages with the politics of embodiment and expression. The chapter deals with the history and memory of the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971, highlighting the complex and critical understanding of the altered environment.

Embodiment, Space and the Discourse

In Chapter 11, "Becoming Thylacine," Mark Byron explores the writings on extinction and its ability to elicit contemplation on systems and events, such as global mass extinctions, climate change and genocide. The chapter centres around the discovery and killing of thylacine, or Tasmanian Tiger, for its genetic and reproductive material as described in Julia Leigh's novel *The Hunter* (p 181). In Chapter 12, "Walking on a Tightrope," Pradosh Bhattacharya offers new perspective on the travelling circus that goes beyond its organisational and structural framework and attempts to interact with its visceral aspects, in a "capillary critique" (critical analysis) of the cultural discourses surrounding enhanced corporeality (pp 195–96). The chapter highlights cultural apparatuses that connect human and non-human relationships. In "Imperial Malady" (Chapter 13), Anuparna Mukherjee illustrates nostalgia and the nexus of ecological medical discourses to explain the ways in which the concept of palliative care and treatment are related differently with the affective dimensions of colonial modernity (p 209). Throughout the chapter, the focus is on "urban ecology" and "colonial modernity." It is important to

note that ecology provides care and remedy for both human and non-human species.

Antaripa Bharali, in "Between Space and the Body" (Chapter 14), writes how space both reproduces social relations of caste relations of caste through socio-religious sanctions in a caste society (p 224). Caste is a social reality that defines access to the space through which the body of a particular person functions. It forms a relation of the functionality of the body and space. In Chapter 15 of "A Sense of Waste," Samrat Sengupta explains that anti-modernist practices may arise outside Western epistemological responses to the modernity of the capital goods industry. In this relation, the narrative can be seen as an attempt to break the hierarchy between the human and the environment to challenge the man in the story (p 239). The chapter uses an experimental methodology of storytelling to redefine the relationship between humans and the environment.

In Conclusion

Whether this book is trying to build a green frontier, as Sarukkai mentions in his foreword, is an altogether different topic, but it certainly breaks the dominant and hegemonic narrative structure prevalent in environmental studies. Readers might see the theoretical and pragmatic complexities in the book but it is also a renewed way of doing ecology studies. The book illustrates the philosophical quest of ecology, methodology and epistemology to understand the human and non-human entanglements, along with the nature of the scientific method. It opens up the question of embodiment as a critical component for the conception of ecology. In addition, it draws connections with the larger domain of ecology to form a meaningful dialogue about the future.

[The contributors' chapter titles are shortened in this book review.]

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