

Echoes of Eco



October, 2012

Vivekananda Kendra- nardep Newsletter

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One Grand Organic Whole



In 1876 Alfred Russel Wallace, co-progenitor with Charles Darwin of the theory of evolution by natural selection, wrote in his classic book, 'The Geographical Distribution of Animals', that those naturalists, "who are disposed to turn aside from the beaten track of research may find . . . a study which will surely lead them to an increased appreciation of the complex relations and mutual interdependence." These, he continued, "link together every animal and vegetable form, with the ever-changing Earth which supports them, into one grand organic whole".

One could hardly find a more succinct description of Gaia than "one grand organic whole." It submits that biota and their environments have been integral since the early eons of our ancient water world. It provides for feedback on multiple scales—from global processes like climate change and biogeochemical cycles to the minutiae of local environments. It highlights the primary impact of living beings and processes on the physiognomy of that world that even observers from the outer reaches of the galaxy would recognize as a life-bearing planet.

It describes Gaia in a language of consilience that both scientists and religious thinkers can understand.

It underscores the unity and grandeur of the Earth by choosing the capital "E" spelling over the lowercase alternative that, regrettably, is still in extensive use.

Gaia theory honors systems thinking on a planetary scale. James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis established the foundations of the paradigm decades ago, working assiduously and collaborating since those founding days to show its applicability across disciplines and even in everyday society.

The Gaian perspective emerged from the observation that physical and chemical conditions on Earth are inseparable from life's ubiquitous presence. Powerful influences crisscross living and nonliving domains binding them inextricably. With the birth of Gaian science some forty years ago, this intuitively grasped integration became the empirical subject matter of an ever-burgeoning body of researchers.

At a theoretical level, the integration of living and nonliving domains was conceptualized as an amalgamation so profound as to form a biogeochemical entity that behaves as a self-regulating system.

[Excerpt from an article titled 'One Grand Organic Whole' by Eileen Crist and H. Bruce Rinker in the anthology 'Gaia in Turmoil' edited by them, MIT Press, 2010]

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Giver of Life



Food is a manifestation of the Primeval Being. Food is the source of creation. Food is suffused with all creation; and all living beings are suffused with food. Food is life. It is through food that the living beings are born. The whole world is based upon food. And, therefore, food is regarded as the highest. Because life is sustained by food and food is life, to give food to others is like giving life to them. And whoever gives food is known verily as the giver of life.

-Mahabharatha





Only through the extremity of the weather are we brought to notice the uncanny power and presence of the unseen medium, and so compelled to remember our thorough immersion within the life of this breathing planet.
– David Abram



This Month ...



This Month ...



This month...



Workshop on Azolla cultivation was conducted at the Technology Resource Center (TRC) of Vivekananda Kendra – NARDEP, on 20th. Dr. Kamalasanan Pillai and sister Premalatha were the resource persons. 4 farmers attended and benefitted,

Pudiya Thalaimurai TV – telecasted programme on Azolla technology on 2nd, 3rd and 5th of this month. It featured Dr.P.Kamalasanan Pillai and farmers of Andarkulam.

[Right] Dr.Pillai being awarded the Societal Innovation Award for the Backyard Azolla Technology by NRDC at the function held at Mumbai a few months ago.

Water was tested from 14 wells in Kanyakumari Dist – programme of Central Ground Water Board, Chennai.

Green Health Home at Vivekanandapuram functioned for 8 days and treated 141 patients.



Networking Activities



Networking Activities



Done with DST core support

Exposure visit and Training programme were organized by Agricultural Engineering Department, Madurai. The training was held at Gramodaya Park, Vivekanandapuram on 12th of this month, for 100 beneficiaries. The resource persons were Sis.V.Saraswathy, S.Rajamony, and S.Premalatha.

Exposure visit to Gramodaya Park was organized by the District Watershed Development Agency, Virudhunagar on 4th of this month.

80 members of SHGs attended the exposure programme of various eco-technologies at the Gramodaya Park. Sis.V.Saraswathy was the resource person.



Newsletter Release

Programme regarding the release of the Newsletter by the Department of Botany of the Vivekananda College, Agasteeswaram was held on 10th Oct. 50 students participated in the programme. Sri.Vasudeo and Dr.Kamalasanan Pillai were guests at the function. Dr.Pillai gave valuable inputs to the students on the subject.

Have you done the Online Tour of Gramodaya? Park...



Participants of exposure programme in an open-air session with sister. Saraswathi.



Dear Friends, Do not forget to log on to www.vkgramodaya.org and experience online the different eco-technologies and principles behind them which can usher in Sustainable development. This is a great learning experience.



Because the Earth system in the wider context in which our social, political, and economic systems operate, and because our actions now have planetary consequences, we are increasingly compelled to develop forms of governance that are compatible with the larger system that environs and sustains us. – Karen Litfin



Happenings: This month



Villagers of Perumselvavillai, Kanyakumari dist. underwent training in Poultry Management at Central Poultry Research Institute, Bangalore. The training was part of the Village Development Plan of NABARD from 1st to 5th of this month. 30 villagers participated in the programmed. Dr. Kamalasanan pillai co-ordainated the visit.



Happenings: This month

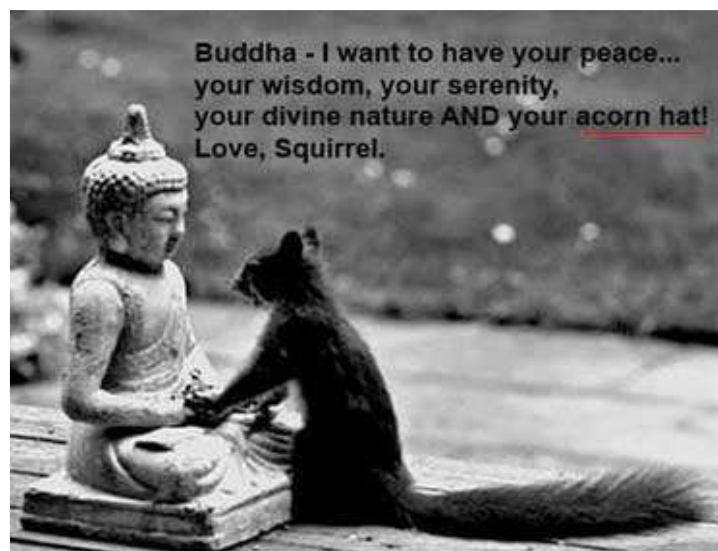
A 'Workshop on Herbal Garden Development' was held by Southern Railway, Chennai on 9th of this month and 45 officials attended. Dr.V.Ganapathy was the resource person. He gave a lecture on herbal gardens and how common ailments can be treated effectively through a home herbal garden and how to integrate that with daily life.



Participants of Bio-Methanation plant training programme listening to a multimedia session and undergoing a hands-on exposure to bio-methanation plant assembling.



Traditional bone-fracture treatment in practice at Green Health Home of VK-nardep. Dr.Ganapathi is applying bandage for the 5th meta-torsal bone fracture for a patient.



From a Gaian perspective our blue planet functions much like an organism—a self-contained living system embedded in the larger solar system, with internal metabolic systems of temperature and chemical modulation and an atmospheric membrane that separates it from outer space. – Karen Letfin



Happenings: This month

One day Workshop on "Kitchen Waste based Bio-Methanation Plant (Shakti Surabhi) was conducted at Technology Resource Center, Kalluvillai on 20th of this month. The programme was supported by DST Core support. 25 persons attended the programme and benefitted. Shri.V.Ramakrishnan was the resource person.

National Seminar on Sustainable Resource Management was conducted at St. Mary's College, Thoothukudi on 4th of this month. 300 students and staff attended the lecture and presentation by Shri.V.Ramakrishnan titled "Waste to Wealth" in which he introduced the Bio-Methanation plant, *Shakthi Surabhi*.

Commissioning of Biogas Plants this month:

Two portable Bio-methanation plants of 4 cum and 0.5 cum capacity were sent to Bangalore for commissioning.



[I]t is at least not impossible to regard the earth's parts—soils, mountains, rivers, atmosphere, etc.—as organs or parts of organs, of a coordinated whole, each part with a definite function.
 — Leopold



Philosophy and General Theory



Ostrich : Increased production! Increased wealth! Greater enjoyment! India like America! Scientific solution to all the problems! Science is the panacea! Science! More science!

Swan : Mass based production! Reduced personal possession! Enjoyment not dependent upon external objects. India like India. Science with Philosophy Wisdom, Peace! Compassion! Creativity!

Parrot : Balance! Balance Balance! Ecology with economics Balance American science with India.. philosophy.

Swan : Ecology cannot be balanced by economics. If man has to survive, he has to survive along with all other living species, plants and animals. Already man has destroyed too much of his environment for the sake of his stupid ideas of economic development. Any more economic progress has to come by man's ingenuity, compassion, capacity to share the existing wealth. Tapping human goodness, resourcefulness, spiritual wealth, capacity to manage with less material wealth is going to be the real economics of ecology.

Ostrich: What about my dreams of making India like another America ?

Swan : India is never going to be an America. Each American takes away the share of 16 others of the world kitty. India does not want to exploit 1600 crores of people of the world for its own survival.

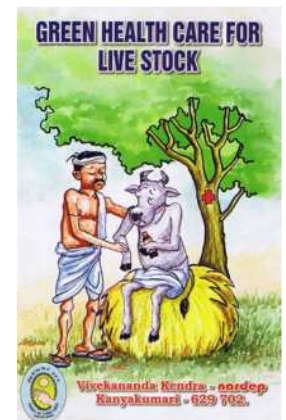
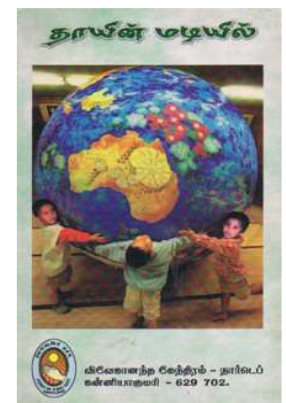
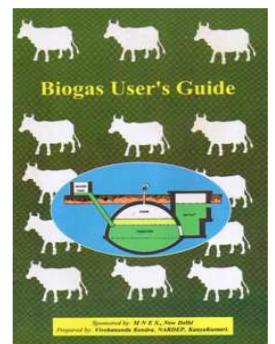
Parrot: OK. Let us compromise. Strike an average.

Swan : You cannot strike a balance between good and bad. The model we are talking about is based on value system where man draws energy from within! A relaxed man, a healthy man, an efficient man, a satisfied man, a wise man, an intelligent man, an ethical man, needs very few things from outside for his survival, happiness and self-expression. The ultimate resource is a wise man: acting as a part of his community, behaving like a strand in the web of life, a star in the firmament of all existence.

[From the classic
 'Akshaya Vikas'
 sustainable development]



From our Publications





God is Truth, but God is many other things also. That is why I say Truth is God.... Truth is not one of the many qualities that we name. It is the living embodiment of God, it is the only Life, and I identify Truth with the fullest life, and that is how it becomes a concrete thing, for God is His whole creation, the whole Existence, and service of all that exists-Truth-is service of God.- Mahatma Gandhi

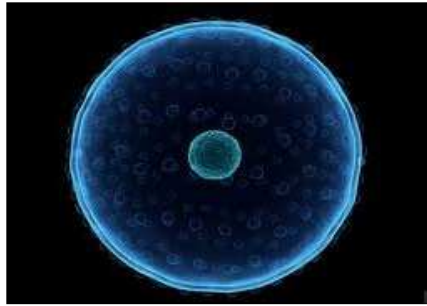


Satyam – Impersonal Truth

To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word, for He knows that we often do not mean it, some knowingly and others unknowingly. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth, above all. If it is possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that, for myself, God is Truth. ... I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz., that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. ... I found too that love in the sense of ahimsa had only a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. In their passion for discovering truth, the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God-from their own point of view, rightly. Because of this reasoning that I saw that, rather than say that God is Truth, I should say that Truth is God.



-Mahatma Gandhi



Sivam – Primordial Goodness

Life is a fundamentally imbricating phenomenon, an elaborate edifice of nestings that stabilize for extended periods into complex, in-flux equilibrated states (e.g., of atmospheric composition, climate regimes, life-forms, or ecosystems). The intricate webbing of life has happened, and continues to occur, from the most intimate dimension of endo-symbioses that created and sustain complex life, to the exchange of nutrients via the trading zones of air, water, and soil. Gaia is this interconnected flux, what Darwin called the “entangled bank.” Strictly speaking, there is no selfishness or cooperation in life’s activities within the biosphere—only a whirl of obligate inter-connectedness. For some, the absence of selfishness and cooperation may be testimony to a morally indifferent natural world, one neutral to direction, outcome, and relationship. And yet, the obligate interconnectedness of life, from which mutual benefit is constantly flowing to all, can also be interpreted as evidence that goodness is profoundly rooted in a pri-mordial and objective condition of being. Goodness, in other words, can be understood as the distilled concept and conscious practice of what life does simply as a matter of fact. In this light, human ethics (for which service and benevolence are universal ideals) are continuous with, not extrinsic or epiphenomenal to, Nature’s ways.



-Eileen Ceist
Eco-Sociologist



Sundaram-Intrinsic Beauty

The UN Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty, hunger, and child mortality by 2015 cannot be met unless ecosystems are nurtured and protected, since it is the poor who are most directly dependent on their services, particularly for freshwater and protein from wild fish and game. Furthermore it has become clear from a handful of successful projects that the way forward lies with encouraging local people to become involved in protecting their own ecosystems. ... It is very much in our own interest to maintain as much of our planet’s biodiversity as possible. At the same time utilitarian arguments for protecting biodiversity may not prevent it from being seriously degraded, for ultimately we may not be able to save what we do not love. If we are to develop a worldview that has any chance of achieving genuine ecological sustainability, we will need to move away from valuing everything around us only in terms of what we can get out of it, recognizing instead that all life has intrinsic value regardless of its use to us. Scientific and economic arguments such as those we have been exploring for protecting biodiversity can help a great deal, but on their own they are not enough. We need, as a matter of the utmost urgency, to recover the ancient view of Gaia as a fully integrated, living being consisting of all her life-forms, air, rocks, soil, oceans, lakes, and rivers if we are ever to halt the latest, and possibly greatest, mass extinction.



-Stephen Harding
Ecologist