

Nature, Culture, and Ecological Awareness Narratives from the 'Other' World

JAISHREE KAK ODIN

The mainstream environmentalists in the west have generally devoted little attention to the plight of communities, affected the most by changes in the environment, whether through large scale displacement for environmental conservation or through capitalist exploitation of resources, or even through exposure to toxic materials. An exclusive focus on conservation has also taken the attention away from the pressing need for dealing with deeper issues underlying environmental degradation, for example, over-consumption by the First World citizenry and the Third World elite which is leading to increasing deforestation and depletion of ocean resources. The exploitation of natural resources for economic gain without regard to long-term impact on the environment has become a mantra of capitalist development. In a global economy, no region of the world has escaped the plunder of its resources by commercial and industrial interests. The consequences for the rural communities, including indigenous populations, which constitute a large part of third world population, have been devastating.

In this essay, I focus on two writers from two different parts of the world, the native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko and the Indian writer Mahasweta Devi, who have extensively dealt with the impact of capitalist development on indigenous peoples. Two different conceptions of nature are identified in their works—the forces of capitalist development and bureaucracy that view nature as something to be dominated and controlled and the indigineous perspectives where nature is seen as a part of human-nonhuman community. Their narratives can be seen as a rewriting of the Euro-American environmental narrative as they resist a dualistic perspective, which presents nature as the other of humans to be conquered and dominated. While Silko focuses on remembering cultural history to recover the identity of her people and connect them to their land,

Devi goes a step further to invite both the indigenous and mainstream culture to rethink their relationship with one another and with the natural world as she puts the question of the tribal relationship to their land in the broader ecological context.

The Idea of Nature

In the Euro-American environmental history nature has been seen traditionally as the other of humans and as something to be dominated and controlled. Out of this worldview emerges the establishment environmentalists' concern for preserving and protecting the environment in its pristine purity. The idea of 'national parks' materialized in North America as Indians were herded off to reservations and their land converted into federally protected wildlife reserves for tourists to enjoy. The American idea was transported to Third World countries where large tracts of land were emptied of their inhabitants to create wildlife sanctuaries. Project Tiger in India, funded by the Indian government and the World Wildlife Fund, is one such example. Without denying the importance of protecting forests as well as endangered species, such an exclusive emphasis on conservation does not pay attention to the tribal and agrarian communities whose lives are traumatically disrupted by these projects.

The idea of 'wilderness' untouched by humans, William Cronon writes, is a western construction. In the earlier era, wild nature was regarded as primitive and as such something to be afraid of. With the rise of the urban-industrial era, the wilderness came to be seen as an Edenic refuge where people experienced nature at its most sublime, even though it was the automobile, a product of civilization, which made the trip into wilderness possible. Similarly, the Amazonian rainforests, Slater writes, have become a part of the western imaginary of untouched nature and hence, in need of protection, often from its own inhabitants who have lived in ecological equilibrium in these forests for centuries. Cronon notes that dualist conceptions of a human-nature relationship do not convey the reality that humans have been an integral part of the nonhuman natural world since the dawn of civilization; even the so-called 'wildlife reserves,' are not truly wild, in that a layer of culture intervenes in their management.

Ramchandra Guha critiques the transplantation of western ideas of ecological conservation to India. The idea of wilderness, he writes,

has flourished in North America because of its economic dominance and its sparse population and it is due to this that 'America can simultaneously enjoy the material benefits of an expanding economy and the aesthetic benefits of unspoilt nature' (123). The idea of unspoiled wilderness is problematic for the Third World where a vast majority of population is rural. Turning commons into wildlife reserves deprives rural communities of their means of survival. In India where 'millions of people are heavily dependent on biomass sources for their daily existence, the destruction of the environment or any policy that reduces access to biomass resources—like the creation of a wildlife sanctuary or enforcement of forest conservation legislation—[has] an extremely adverse impact on the daily lives of the people' (Agarwal 44). Also, when environmentalists turn conservation into the top issue on their agenda, it makes other equally important environmental problems leading to pollution of cities and towns somehow less important. In addition, commercial and state interests can justify exploiting unprotected areas for resources as long as there are large tracts of government-protected land.

Historically speaking, the separation of humans from non-humans in the natural world reflects colonial thinking, most vividly embodied in travel narratives of the colonial period which describe the newly discovered lands as representations of fauna, flora, and inhabitants, paying little attention to how they fit in the history, economy, and the symbolic system of the cultures from which they were uprooted. This colonialism combined with scientific reductionism¹ reduced the complex relationship between nature and culture into topographically fixed material phenomena which can be subject to objective analysis through separation and division. Marie Louis Pratt (1992) notes that the nature and content of informational travel narratives was transformed as these began to be written by members of scientific expeditions involved in the classificatory project of natural history. Specimens were literally and metaphorically pulled out of their ecological relations in the environment and subject to the classification scheme of the scientist who was seen as someone who brought order to the chaos in the world. The discursive configuration present in the majority of the travel writing of the nineteenth century written from the colonized lands including the Americas

¹effaces the European presence and textually splits off indigenous inhabitants from habitat. It is a material configuration which, in (mis)recognition of

what was materially underway or in anticipation of what was to come, verbally depopulates landscapes. Indigenous peoples are relocated in separate manners-and-customs chapters as if in textual homelands or reservations, where they are pulled out of time to be preserved, contained, studied, admired, detested, pitied, mourned. Meanwhile, the now empty landscape is personified as the metaphorical 'face of the country'—a more tractable face that returns the European's gaze, echoes his words, and accepts his caress' (Pratt 1986, 145-46).

The division, fragmentation, and separation of humans from nonhumans in the natural world tells us more about nature as 'place' rather than nature as 'space,' as it leaves out the culture that binds humans and non-humans in the natural world into complex configurations in the tapestry we call life.

Any discussion of nature must take into consideration the cultural history of the place and the social and ecological impact of colonial and neocolonial practices. Vandana Shiva writes that forests and trees always had a special place in Indian culture and forestry as a sustainable practice, was well developed in ancient India. This knowledge survives today in the form of indigenous forestry practices. The western agro-forestry, serving the commercial interests of local or global elite, she argues, has eroded the complex relationship that forest dwellers have had with land for centuries. Take the case of large scale planting of eucalyptus trees in India which replaced the indigenous trees and plants that for generations had served to maintain the soil and water ecology in balance while at the same time contributing towards the food needs of various communities. The local people and their interaction with the natural world was an integral part of this ecological balance. Eucalyptus trees bear no fruit, consume more water, and produce little or no humus to replenish the soil. In this case, Shiva notes, the complex vegetation of the forest is reduced to eucalyptus trees, and the trees to pulp for the paper industry. Such practices, whether in Asia, Africa or the Americas, have turned once fertile land into desert and destroyed the livelihood of communities who depend on land for survival.

The privileging of scientific thinking has resulted over the centuries in suppressing non-Western modes of knowledge, which in some cases are more ecologically sustainable solutions to current environmental problems. Indigenous people all over the world regard nature as an integral part of the human-nonhuman community and hence, as such it exists as much in itself as it does in its relationship

with humans. This contrasts the Judeo-Christian worldview according to which man is superior to God's other creation and hence, nature is to be dominated and controlled to serve the interests of man. While comparing the Native American worldview with that of mainstream culture, Patricia Smith and Paula Gunn Allen write: 'Nontribal people often perceive the land as an object, as something faintly or greatly inimical, to be controlled, reshaped, painted, or feared. Tribal people see it as something mysterious, certainly beyond human domination, and yet as something to be met and spoken with rather than confronted. For them, the land is not just collection of objects you do things *to*, nor is it merely a place you do things *in*, a stage-set for human action' (118). Like native Americans, the tribal and agrarian communities in India regard nature as an interactive transforming space that takes shapes in their daily practices as opposed to a place that just exists out there to be occupied, lived in, exploited, protected from exploitation or simply left alone for aesthetic enjoyment. The land and natural environment are an integral part of survival for these communities. In Indian cosmology, nature or *prakriti* includes both humans and nonhumans in the natural world and both are seen as permeated with the same creative primordial energy. Nature as *prakriti* is not an abstract concept but a living complex reality of which humans are just one part.

Representation of Nature and the Indigenous Experience

Indigenous writers or writers who have written on behalf of these populations, resist the colonial and neocolonial approaches to nature. The colonial approach describes nature as place rather than as the dynamic space of experience that arises in the interaction between the human and nonhuman world. To clarify the difference between the terms 'place' and 'space', I turn to Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. He describes place as consisting of individual components in topographically fixed positions with respect to one another, but 'space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities' (117). As people go around performing activities it results in the creation of the space of experience. Taking spatializing practices as the starting point of understanding the environment takes

attention away from structures to actions and from place to space. Whereas place is represented by a topographical map, space is represented by a topological itinerary. With the ascendance of scientific discourse, De Certeau notes, maps slowly replaced itineraries, even though the latter made them possible. The cartographic representations thus define, categorize, and immobilize the spaces in which people move. The shift from 'place' to 'space' and 'maps' to 'actions' brings out the complex multi-layered relationship between people and the environment that they inhabit.

Spatial practices can be seen as stories that people perform as they interact with their environment and as such they are intricately linked to cultural history. In *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton argues that the social memory of a community is conveyed and sustained through ritual performances as manifest in rites, rituals, and commemorative ceremonies. The myths and rituals encode the cultural values and in their ritual enactment, these values become part of the lived experience of the community. Through ritual ceremonies, repetitive and expressive, people are reminded of their identity as part of the community. The ceremonies are not simply stories told or myths recited about the past long gone by, but these constitute the actual enactment of the people or events of the past and are thus performative in nature. 'For if ceremonies are to work for their participants, if they are to be persuasive to them, then those participants must be not simply cognitively competent to execute the performance; they must be habituated to those performances' (Connerton 71). Thus, there is a living component to the ceremonies; in that the participants relive their relationship to their cultural history as they experience the signs and symbols directly. The rituals and ceremonies of the indigenous people are outside the dominant discourse, and hence, provide lines of flight along which they can explore their subjectivity and identity.

Leslie Silko: The Ritual Enactment of Stories

The importance of rituals in the native American culture is reflected in the literature they produce. In Silko's novel *Ceremony*, the protagonist Tayo's experience of his healing is directly linked to the place which is drawn into the circle of experience through a ritual performance. The Navajo medicine man performs the ceremony by drawing sand paintings of the mountains surrounding them. After the ceremony, Tayo looked around and 'remembered the black of

the sand paintings on the floor of the Hogan; the hills and mountains were the mountains and hills they had painted in sand. He [takes] a deep breath of cold mountain air: there were no boundaries; the world below and the sand paintings inside became the same that night. The mountains from all the directions had been gathered there that night' (Silko 1977: 145). The stars, the bespotted cattle, the mountain and the woman come together as the ceremony continues. The sand paintings as picture writing gather the threads that connect the psychological realm with the natural world. Tayo's re-cognition of what he sees depicted in the pictures reflects his remembering the present with the past that holds together the history of his people in an empowering relationship with the reality of the present and connects him to the land of his ancestors. As Smith and Allen note 'People and the land hold dialogue within the structure of ritual, in order to ensure balance and harmony' (118).

In her more recent novel *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko singles out capitalist modes of operation as one of the major factors responsible for the continued exploitation of the native Americans and their land. In this novel, actions take place in literal as well as metaphorical borderlands which separate the US from Mexico. Silko's borderlands represent a world where people of heterogeneous histories come together, occupying the fringes of psychological, emotional and social landscape. They are engaged in different discourses, threads of which run across the borderline, extending deep into the regions of Mexico, over to the edges of Central America. The common thread of these discourses is the capitalist exploitation of the native people, their land and resources—the stories of those who are being exploited and those who exploit. In a world of transnational capitalism, it is not national boundaries but the pathways of capital that determine who occupy zones of political, cultural, as well as economic marginalization. In *Almanac*, this is testified by Rambo's Homeless Army on this side of the US Mexico border and El Feo's Army of the Poor People on the other side. The members of both armies are outside the cycle of both production as well as consumption and thus are the 'subaltern' of the Americas. Oppressed people, *Almanac* proposes, especially the indigenous people of Americas, can forge alliances across the borders and fight the hegemonic forces that are destroying their culture and their land.

Silko's works bring out the significance of storytelling to empower her people and to connect them to their land. Her stories are grounded in the Pueblo Indian oral tradition, which encodes the cultural

experience of her people. Silko (1996) notes that 'the ancient Pueblo people depended upon collective memory through successive generations to maintain and transmit an entire culture, a worldview complete with proven strategies of survival. The oral narrative, or story, became the medium through which the complex of Pueblo knowledge and belief was maintained' (Silko 1996: 30). The precise description and location of the geographical place is important in the stories, because the unexpected turn it takes is caused by the intervention from some part of the landscape—a rock, a boulder, a tree or a plant. Thus, 'the continuity and accuracy of the oral narratives are reinforced by the landscape' (Silko 1996: 35).

The role of storytelling is important in *Almanac* (1993). Calabazas remembers his aunts and uncles' storytelling to which everyone 'contributed some detail or opinion or alternative version. The story they told did not run in a line for the horizon but circled and spiraled instead like the red-tailed hawk' (224). Unlike Calabazas' storytellers up in the mountains where each story multiplies into many stories, the storytellers in Sterling's Laguna reservation reduce all stories to one story. The Tribal Council's worldview is frozen in time and they have lost the ability to make new stories that would fit the current times and rejuvenate the culture from within. It is finally the characters who are capable of remembering multiple versions of the same story rather than those who turn all stories into one story, who are capable of change and growth.

In a world of violence, Lecha's remembering of the forgotten cultural history becomes an act of deliverance of life in the barren terrain where death mimics life. As the transcriber and decoder of the old almanac, Lecha becomes the guardian of the collective memory, thereby becoming the tribe's storyteller. It is Lecha's stories, Sterling remembers, as he walks to the snake shrine. Her ghost armies march in his head. In Sterling, thus, Lecha finds her first listener whose life is transformed through the power of stories. Silko herself assumes the role of tribal storyteller who in writing her *Almanac* wants the reader to listen to her stories.

In mapping out the topological terrain of native American experience as she brings out the native American experience from multidimensional perspectives, Silko's work operates at the level of dreams for a better life for her people. She makes a skillful use of the oral tradition to express the reality of her people that is forever stretching in two directions, one impacted by the oppressive forces

of capitalism which fragments space and the other the indigenous cultural forces which unite people and the land they inhabit.

Mahashweta Devi: Ecological Awareness and the Mainstream Culture

Whereas Silko transforms the topographical places of native American land into topological spaces in her stories to resist neocolonial and capitalist forces destroying her people, Mahashweta Devi's 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha' (translated from Bengali into English by Gayatri Spivak) expands the scope of tribal struggle and puts it in the broader context of the need for a change in attitude on both sides—the indigenous populations and the mainstream culture. Devi is an activist, a journalist, and a fiction writer and has extensively worked for tribal causes in India. As an outsider to the indigenous tribes and yet someone who has worked very closely with them all over India, she occupies an in-between space. She is well informed of both the nature of tribal exploitation by the dominant culture and of tribal disempowerment and this double positioning, as both an insider and an outsider, allows her to write on behalf of the Indian tribal populations in an empowering manner.

Devi's text deals with two issues: the need for the tribal people to integrate into modern Indian culture as speaking subjects and the need for the mainstream culture to learn from the tribal heritage especially as it relates to their relationship with nature. Devi thus draws the outsiders into the circle of tribal mythmaking and invites them to rethink their connection to the tribal people, to nature and even to the current socio-economic practices. She also brings out the importance of creating new stories. If they are to enter history and end their exiled status in modern India, the tribals must create new stories and bury the old ones that don't work anymore. 'Pterodactyl' consists of four interwoven themes or perspectives: the bureaucratic, the tribal, the ecological, and the journalistic. The bureaucratic perspective exposes the forces and mechanisms at work where even the so-called 'good' officials are complicit in perpetuating the deprivation of the tribal people. The government funds allocated for them are used for capitalist projects purposely meant to displace and dislocate them. Some local officials understand their plight and want to help them, and yet they continue to serve as cogs in the exploitative bureaucratic machinery that perpetuates their dispossession and displacement in the name of development and progress.

The tribal perspective exposes the lives of the famine stricken

villagers of Pirtha who live on the fringes of society in abject poverty and destitution. The forces of modernization have directly impacted the bond they have had with the land they inhabit. The narrative opens with the triangulation of the tribal subject along three directions, the exploitation by the bureaucratic and capitalist forces, the silenced tribal life of abject poverty and destitution, and the pull towards one's own tribal heritage as reflected in the dancing figures in the underground caves. Shankar, the only literate member of the village, recounts the story of the tribe in a trance-like state as if direct narration is impossible for a tribe totally outside the current social, economic and political structures. Shankar begins with 'Once there was forest, hill, river, and us' (119) and then foreigners came and took everything away. The dominant language that he is forced to use to communicate with the non-tribals is inadequate to express the experiences of his people.

Whereas Shankar laments the present plight of his people in a trance-like state reflecting the voicelessness of the subaltern subject,² his nephew Bikhia, who refuses to speak after viewing the pterodactyl, makes a move towards becoming a subject by claiming a part of his tribal history through his engraving of the pterodactyl on the stonewall. Bikhia, the village youth, thus circumvents the dominant language by directly expressing through a picture the most significant event in the recent history of the tribe. The appearance of the prehistoric pterodactyl is an empirical impossibility for the non-tribals but a fact for the tribals. The villagers see the winged pterodactyl as their ancestral soul on its last flight as it mourns the plight of its descendants. Its presence needs to be acknowledged by the community and put to rest in order for them to forge a new relationship with the outside world.

Bikhia performs the burial ritual in which the ancestral soul is put to rest. In this the visiting journalist Puran accompanies him. In allowing an outsider, a caste-Brahmin, to participate in the ritual, the outside world is integrated into the life of the community and the huge dark space where tribals can write their story, is opened up. Spivak writes:

'[The burial ritual] can be situated in a community of longing. The particularity in this case is that the scene is one of internal colonization in the name of decolonization. A caste-Hindu, a remote outsider in a new Hindu-majority land, earns the right to assist at the laying to rest of a previous civilization, in a rhetorical space that is textually separate from a frame narrative that may as well be the central narrative, of the separate agendas of tribal and journalistic resistances to development, each aporetic to other side of a dilemma' (205).

Bikhia's creation of a new myth for his tribe is then a rewriting of the old view where tribals saw themselves as complete outsiders in modern Indian culture and as such, mute and voiceless. The ritual thus marks the end of the exiled state for the tribe. The community can be integrated into the outside world as they develop a new awareness of their cultural heritage and their relationship to their land, while at the same time forge alliances with the outside world to resist their exploitation.

As Puran enters the world of Pirtha, the modern and non-modern worldviews are brought into direct confrontation. Puran's education has not prepared him for understanding the tribal experience. The trappings of modernity have cut him off from direct experience as everything he has experienced has been through the mediation of written literature. Puran, alienated from his own heritage, enters into a doubling relationship with Bikhia. This doubling relationship serves to remove the blockages in his own experience as an alienated person while at the same time contributing to the unfolding drama of the tribal experience. He feels connected to nature as he caresses the plants and the stones. He admits to himself that Bikhia had some 'experience' which made him initiate the tribal ritual, but the phenomenon of the pterodactyl is 'much more ancient more originary than [Bikhia's] experience, both [their] existences are in great danger' (156). As he opens himself to this experience, he reflects that from the ancient times the Aryans and non-Aryans, the Brahmins and the tribals, both the living and the dead, have walked on parallel paths, which never converged. Now the boundaries seem to be transgressed; those on parallel paths are communicating. In the old days forests were forests and cities were cities—the two spaces were radically different and could co-exist. With increasing development, that reality is changing fast as people from different zones come into close contact with one-another.

Puran's experiences in Pirtha is a rewriting of his grandfather's *tirtha* (pilgrimage). His birth was seen as the fulfillment of his grandfather's prayers at a Hindu holy shrine; hence, his name Puran Prarthana (Fulfillment of Prayers). The grandson's journey to Pirtha, however, turns out to be a pilgrimage of a different kind as he feels reconnected to the world around him, which leads to his spiritual rebirth. Devi's text shows a reversal in this rewriting of the tribal experience, but this could be regarded as necessary to expose the forces of neo-colonial and caste-based cultural and power structures which tend to perpetuate the exiled status of the tribals and their

cultural traditions. But her text also points to the need to go beyond such reversals as she emphasizes the subjective nature of this experience. The text resists romanticizing or essentializing the tribal experience. The pterodactyl does not point to any metaphysical reality, unique to the tribals or for that matter a romanticized notion of human relationship to nature. The figure of pterodactyl is thus created and erased at the same time.

Just as Pirtha's inhabitants must enter history, so does the outside world need to step outside history to experience the connection with the natural forces which are more primeval than the humans. The outsiders or non-tribals can be transformed by encountering the tribal experience on its own terms—and not as filtered through the lenses of modernity. The solution to the indigenous people's plight is thus not to present their culture as prehistoric novelty that must be preserved as such, separate from the history that has taken place all around it. The text offers an invitation to the reader to think of the issues related to indigenous population in the broader ecological context; in that their plight is a symptom of a broader problem of modernity which divides reality into discrete components and ignores the complex relationship that people have with their environment.

The mainstream culture is oblivious of the tragedy of the lives of the indigenous people, even as the indigenous people are unaware of the broader picture of the nature of their exploitation. The indigenous people must look backward to recuperate and reclaim their history, which has been suppressed for so long by the mainstream culture, and they must look forward in order to integrate themselves into the outside world, so they become part of modern history. An effective and sustainable solution then lies in a two-way communication between modern cultures and the tribal populations where each can benefit from the other. Putting the phenomenon of pterodactyl in the broader ecological framework, the pterodactyl's message concerns the endangering of the collective life force of the planet through the destruction of both, the human and non-human communities in the natural world. The figure of the pterodactyl thus expresses the sustaining forces that link humans to nature at the material as well as psychological level. The phenomenon of the pterodactyl, the text insists, is not an object of scientific analysis, but only a subject of experience. As Spivak writes, 'the pterodactyl is not only the ungraspable other but also the ghost of the ancestors that haunts our present and our future. We must learn 'love' (a simple name for ethical responsibility) in singularity, as Puran does in

'Pterodactyl', in view of the impossibility of communication' (Spivak 1995: 200).

The environmental justice movements throughout the world have challenged mainstream environmentalism; in that it is based on a fundamental dichotomy between humans and nonhumans in the natural world. The idea of nature in such movements is intimately linked 'to ideas of community, history, ethnic identity, and cultural survival which include relationships to the land that express particular ways of life' (De Chiro 318). This view puts the environmental debate in a totally new perspective as it makes visible the communities affected by environmental changes the most, thereby providing openings for social justice that they deserve. As Guha notes, environmental movements in India are primarily centered on what constitutes an equitable use of resources by a large rural sector and a powerful commercial sector. 'These include opposition to large dams by displaced peasants, the conflict between small artisan fishing and large-scale trawler fishing for export, the country wide movement against commercial forest operation, and opposition to industrial pollution among downstream agricultural and fishing communities' (Guha 125).

In order to ensure long-term global survival, ecological consciousness is essential, especially as the capitalistic forces of development destroy vast spaces of the globe in their drive to put both the land and the resources into an unending cycle of production and consumption. The broader significance of Devi's text is, then, to evoke in the writer, the reader, and the protagonist an awareness that the destruction of tribal communities who survive on land they occupy is tantamount to the destruction of their own world.

To conclude, both Leslie Silko and Mahesweta Devi's narratives aim at creating a new order and a new world out of fragmentation and chaos. Silko works at the level of stories as she makes a skillful use of the native American oral tradition to express the reality of native American experience that is forever stretching in two directions, one impacted by the oppressive forces of capitalism and the other leading to their indigenous cultural heritage. Devi, in conveying the Indian tribal experiences, approaches the issue from yet another perspective, as she must go even beyond words and stories to carve out a separate rhetorical space in which the tribal subaltern, so totally outside the economic, social, political and bureaucratic machinery of modern India, can become a speaking subject. Central to both these writers is the representation of 'nature'

or 'land' and how it is integrally linked to cultural history. The 'nature' in their works does not exist in abstract time and space, to be conquered, controlled, or renamed, but it is intricately interwoven with the spatial practices of the people. The ritualized practices join the people and the land while at the same time creating an alternative thread to the competing dominant discourse that fragments space and suppresses difference. These narratives ultimately invite the reader, both the insiders and outsiders, to contemplate the ecological consequences of technocratic rationality embodied in an unmitigated capitalist development which has disastrous consequences for the ecological health of the earth and its inhabitants, both locally and globally. Both writers remind us of the ethical responsibility all of us have towards protecting the environment and the communities that depend on it. The techno-rationality privileged in contemporary society blocks out the experience of the primordial relationship humans have had with nature since the dawn of civilization. The corrective can be applied through developing accountability towards nature which has always been the other half of human experience for eons and it is finally this accountability that will serve as a lightning rod to bring justice to people who have suffered the most through worldwide deforestation and environmental pollution. A more comprehensive way of protecting the environment is to promote ecological awareness not only as it applies to wildlife conservation, but also as it manifests in the daily act of living, both in urban centres as well as rural communities. In this respect we can learn a great deal from the indigenous populations from all over the world for whom nature is sacred and not something to be exploited or dominated.

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NOTES

1. Bruno Latour's critique of modernity shows how scientific networks implicate in their very existence an unacknowledged existence of two related practices, that of 'translation' and 'purification.' Scientific experiments are practices of 'translation,' that socialize nature as new discoveries are made. The practice of 'purification' assign scientific

discoveries a universal status as they are shown to exist independent of human, scientific, and cultural networks of which they are a part. Although practices of purification are important for scientific progress, Latour reminds us, it is important to remember that all scientific discoveries are an integral part of scientific and cultural networks, without which they would be meaningless.

2. The reinscription of the liberal humanist model of agency for the subaltern subject by the Subaltern Studies Group, Spivak notes, reflects an epistemic fracture in that it reinscribes dominant models of the colonial and neocolonial discourse to the subaltern. The inscription of the subaltern consciousness as pure difference, unaffected by the power structures in which it materializes, is a 'theoretical fiction' necessary for 'the project of reading'. The 'strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' is acceptable as long as the concept is always kept under erasure and not accepted as a universal truth (Spivak 1988: 205). The reversal of positivistic essentialism must be seen only as a strategic move to pave the way for displacement where both the dominant and the minority classification as binary opposites are subject to a process that destabilize them from within and changes their meaning.