

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Ethics and Environment**

A. Ranga Reddy, ed., 2009, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, ISBN 81-8324-326-6, hard cover, pp.xxii+411, price: Rs. 1095

Environment and its ethical concerns have encompassed almost every sphere of human activity and a plethora of literature on the issues has been coming out recently. These pieces of literature, cutting across different disciplines, deal with various aspects of environment - theoretical deliberations, policies and legislations, and field practices of environment care. They appear in the form of books, monographs, filed reports, research papers and conference proceedings. The book under review is an edited volume of papers of a national conference on the theme of ethics and environment, organised by the department of Economics, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, India in March 2008. The editor of the book has organised the articles under five themes, each of which forms a section.

The first section of the book, titled ethics and environment, deals with the linkage of ethical issues in environment with concerns of sustainable development. The section has ten articles presenting certain fundamental concepts regarding ethics and environment. They deal with the concept of ethics, environmental ethics, ecological security, equity, issues in decline in ethics, sustainable development, ethical issues in environmental management and ethical empowerment. The articles shed light on some of the core issues of environment degradation, environmental ethics, sustainable development and climate change, and on the international conventions and practices related to these issues. They are informative, some of them with scientific data on the alarming situation of ecological degradation, water availability, pollution and other important issues of environment. A few of the articles discuss environmental ethics with reference to the growing corruption, the polity

and the religions in India. One of the articles adds to the contemporary debate on ethics in the genetically modified food, cloning, pharmaceuticals and stem cells.

The second section of the book on the theme of ethics, poverty and rural development touches upon an important global issue of increasing poverty caused by the depletion of natural resources. This is especially true of countries like India where the population is predominantly agricultural and maintains a binding relationship with environment. There are twelve articles in this section of the book. A major ethical issue discussed in this section is that of empowerment of the rural poor for sustainable livelihood. One notable contribution in this section is the article on a case study that illustrates how joint forest management helps the poor. A second article of this nature is on empowering the tribal people for their development. Half of the twelve articles in this section discuss the environmental and ethical implications in agriculture. They cover a variety of related topics, like size of land holdings, sources of credit, implication of trade policies such as World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and legislations on food safety, technology, biodiversity and genetically modified food. However, this section does not touch the allied sectors of agriculture like animal husbandry.

One major area of environmental ethics of serious discussion and debate today is the linkage to industrialisation. Considerations of environmental ethics in relation to industrialisation can be considered to be realised when the industry is economically viable, environmentally compatible and socially responsible. The third section of the book is on this theme of linkage between environmental ethics and industry. The four articles in this section discuss four different topics. While the first article of the section presents the concerns in industry over intellectual property rights, patent, TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), the second gives in a nutshell the state of the performance of small and medium enterprises in the task of environmental protection. The third article shows how biotechnology could

be a tool for sustainable development. The last article in the section, one of the lengthy articles of the book, gives an appraisal of a project for waste management in Hyderabad.

The fourth section of the book on ethics and services deals with ethics in relation to education, philosophy, literature and employment. One foremost area where ethics plays a significant role is education. Four articles in this section, two of them just notes, elucidate the need and strategies for integrating ethics with education in the globalised world. Another article of this section discusses the contemporary significance of ethics in the Gandhian philosophy of trusteeship. The sixth article deals with the ethical values in economic development as enunciated by J. K. Mehta. Another two articles discuss ethics and environment as found in Telugu and Hindi literature. In the final article of the section the issue of ethics and employment is presented.

The last section of the book discusses ethics and environment with reference to globalisation. Three articles of this section throw light on the place of ethics in the process of globalisation. Another article describes the struggle of aboriginals in Australia for their rights, which is presented as typical of the struggles of all aboriginal communities in the present globalised world. There are two articles in the section that discuss the issue of international trade and ethics in the context of globalised economy. However, considering the vastness of the area of the ethics, environment and globalisation, this section does not seem to have done justice to the topic.

The editor has more or less systematically categorised the different articles under five pertinent themes. However, there are statements that seem to be confusing, misleading or unsubstantiated. For instance, the editor in his own article states that “in 20<sup>th</sup> century, when giants like M.K. Gandhi and Sardar Patel dominated politics we found that there has been a distinct fall in moral or ethical standards” (page 46). Although moral or ethical standards are relative, a statement of this sort without substantiation or explanation can be misleading or confusing, if not incorrect.

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There is a growing trend in India of publishing papers presented in conferences as edited volume. It gives the opportunity to young scholars to write and publish academic articles. However, many a time such books do not maintain a reasonable level of quality in academic standards and scientific rigour. The publishers, who bring out such books as commercial enterprises, may not pay much attention to academic quality. It is the academics, involved in the publication, especially the organisers of the conference and the editor who should take prime responsibility in the matter. As far as the quality of the present volume is concerned, the articles in the book are of varying academic standard and quality. While some are of reasonably good standard, others lack substantial discussion and academic rigour.

The book in its five sections has covered a good number of pertinent issues related to ethics and environment. As a compilation of papers, the book offers the reader a reasonably good idea on several issues of ethics and environment, although many of the articles have not pursued any serious theoretical discussion or used research based data. The authors of the articles on the whole tend to be concerned about the impact of the issues of environmental ethics on the downtrodden in the country. This is a point of appreciation of the book.

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### **Hazard Ecology: Approaches and Technology**

B.W. Pandey, ed., 2010, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, ISBN 81-8324-105-0, hard cover, pp. xxiv+392, price: Rs.1250

The subject matter of ecology in its varied aspects, such as its scope, challenges and research has been substantially dealt with in the past. Contributions to the particular stream of knowledge base have come primarily from natural sciences, focussing on biodiversity and other issues of environment. Different approaches and techniques have been tried to address the related issues through different disciplines such as life sciences, environmental sciences and earth sciences. However, natural events, and deliberations and discussions in the recent years pointed out the need to evaluate their efficiency. Deterioration in ecosystems across the globe is a fact that has made the common persons as well as the scholars of social and natural sciences to think of addressing its consequences. This in turn has resulted in evolving newer perspectives in the field of ecology, particularly with reference to human development. A major factor contributing to the evolution of this scenario is the growing interdisciplinary interest in environmental hazards, which has involved interplay of natural and social sciences along with technologies as enablers. The efforts of systematically applying the emerging techniques to understand natural and human-made disasters, their impact on development, and the role of human activities began in the developing nations only towards the end of the twentieth century. The book under review *Hazard Ecology - Approaches and Techniques* can be viewed as a case of response to the above trend.

The book is an edited volume of twenty-six papers, contributed by scholars from different academic and research institutions in India, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and Italy. The papers in the book cover a wide range of topics related to the interface between hazard sciences and ecology in the context of sustainable development. However, since the subject matter

of hazard ecology itself is in its nascent stage of development in India, the readers may view the book as one among the initial efforts in the field. In the preface of the book the author rightly views hazard as the potential interaction between an extreme event and susceptibility/vulnerability of the community affected by it. Thereafter the book begins with a paper on the role of technological application as a novel approach to the faunal-floral combinations in the regeneration of forests, an important environmental concern today. The book ends with the chapter on the current hot theme of global warming, which is a potential threat to humanity and ecosystems.

The book covers a good range of the issues under disaster management spectrum. Overall eight major hazards (flood, soil erosion, land slide, drought, cyclone, forest fire, pollution and global warming) have been addressed in the book. The ecosystems covered by the different papers in the book belong to the ecological zones of ravine, forest land, wet land/estuary, flood plain, mountainous region and glacier.

Some of the papers in the book are reports of field-based research studies. A few of them are based on purely quantitative research data, while the authors of majority of the contributions have used both quantitative and qualitative data in their respective papers. A few of the papers are focussed on theoretical discussion of the issues of hazard ecology, while the others tend to be more practical and look for methods of intervention for hazard management.

The research based papers on the whole deal with issues of local and regional hazards, studied by their authors. These research studies on which the papers of the book are based were conducted in Europe and India by scholars from Europe and Asia. Some of the papers are based on the reports of internationally funded research projects. The data of the research based papers of the book are from the studies conducted during the period of 1998-2006, wherein some studies have used secondary data of the past couple of decades. However, authors of a few research based papers have not provided the information on the date of the data they have used in their papers.

From the point of view of ecology, two papers in the book make some specific contribution for dealing with the ecological issue of flora and fauna. They have adopted a solution-based approach to the issue of flora and fauna with the help of technological advancements. They have advocated application of modern tools and methods such as GIS (geographic information systems) and Remote Sensing which are increasingly getting the attention of scholars in interdisciplinary research. Although these papers which deal with modern approaches and techniques are from elsewhere in the world, their contents are relevant and useful to the Indian context as well, particularly in the programmes of reforestation, forest fire mitigation and drought mitigation.

Maps, figures and tables in some of the papers could have been better presented in order to ensure their clarity and easy understanding by the readers. For instance, readability of legends in many of the maps is very low. The volume as a whole lacks a central theme in hazard ecology for holding the different contributions together. Organisation of the chapters in the book would have been better if there were a unifying theme. The lack of logical organisation of chapters, which would have ensured a sequential flow of ideas, is a drawback of the book.

The different chapters/papers in the volume differ in the level of their discussion on hazard ecology from the point of view of solution-oriented understanding of the issue. Yet, in view of the fact that the complexity of the issue has been brought out to a great extent by the different scholars, the book is a useful contribution to the development of literature in the subject matter of hazard ecology.

The book is a welcome addition to the academic literature in hazard ecology. It can be considered as a piece of academic work that interfaces the books written under the approaches and techniques prior to the advent of the modern information technology and those based on research under the influence of the current information revolution witnessed generally after the year 2005. The book would help the students of hazard science in

understanding the different approaches and techniques in the development of the disaster management discipline.

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