



## Re-territorializing Ecologies at Khoj Studio

The event was proposed as a contribution to the first Maldives Pavilion hosted by the 55th Venice Biennale. **Camilla Boemio** (Associate Curator at the Maldives Pavilion) invited **Ravi Agarwal** to realize a public event, in collaboration with **Khoj International Artists Association**, in New Delhi.

Ecology has been presented as a homogeneous term with the image of our fragile planet portrayed as a uniform sphere of action and activity. However the current ecological crises, which encompass forests, biodiversity, climate change, toxicity, land use, GM foods etc., have roots in the histories of colonization, progress and development. Local knowledge, cultures, and relationships have often been submerged in dominant ideas, which have shaped community relationships and geographies.

Eco aesthetics, as a response to this, has linkages in social political landscapes, anthropogenic and animistic concerns, and even challenges the category of 'nature' itself.

Engaging with ideas through critical artistic practices can help recover multiple ecologies, and possibly rethink ideas of 'progress' and even reshape them.

**An evening of art and discussion took place at 6:30 pm on May 8th at Khoj Studio, New Delhi with:**

**Navjot Altaf**

**Amar Kanwar**

**Ravi Agarwal**

**Prof. Vikram Soni**

**Ravi Sundaram** (moderator)

**Along with Camilla Boemio** (from Roma via Skype)



## Transcript of the Conversation

**Mr.Ravi Agarwal (A):** Thank you all very much for coming. This panel has emerged as an outcome of conversations with one of the curator's of the Maldives Pavilion, which is a part of the Venice Biennale 55, and starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of June in Venice. This is the first time Maldives is showing in Venice, and the pavilion is based on the idea of the climate emergency, because as you know if the water rises by 60 cm, most of the Maldives will be under water. The title of their Biennale is "Disappearance as Work in Progress — Approaches to Ecological Romanticism. The pavilion is also based on bringing in other activists, speakers, scientist, and people who are engaged with the idea of ecology and its crisis. So the pavilion is kind of inhabited by these kinds of conversations. I don't know what it's going to look like once it starts. But that is the proposition. We have here some artists and scientists and Ravi Sundaram who is going to moderate the panel. We also have one of the curators Camilla Boemio, who will join us on Skype. So let's see how it goes. All the people present here have something to do with direct engagements with ecology, how we define ecology, and what we think ecology is. So hopefully we will debate some of the issues right now. I will now introduce Ravi (Sundaram) to take this forward.

**Ravi Sundaram (S)** is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. In 2000 he founded the Sarai programme along with Monica Narula, Jeebesh Bagchi, Ravi Vasundevan and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. Sundaram has co-edited the Sarai Reader series, The Public Domain (2001), The Cities of Everyday Life (2002), Shaping Technologies (2003), Crisis Media (2004), and Frontiers (2007). He is the author of Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in Delhi (Routledge, London (2009) and No Limits: Media Studies from India, Oxford University Press (2013). Sundaram's current work is on contemporary fear after media modernity. He has been a visiting Professor at the School for Architecture and Planning, Delhi, and also taught in Princeton University, Johns Hopkins University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and University of Oxford.

So I hand it to Ravi (S) who will introduce the Maldives Pavilion in greater detail and I think there will be some opening remarks by some of the panelist.

**Ravi Sundaram –** Thank you, we are all very happy to be here.

What I want to do is lay out some of the key elements of our thematic. One of the keys is to see Maldives as a site, as a place, in a more interesting way. I think the way in which our discussion could move, is to

**"Disappearance As Work In Progress– Approaches To Ecological Romanticism"**



see Maldives as an allegory to disappearance, both disappearance and mobility, something that would encapsulate if you like the whole project of eco- aesthetics. The whole notion of Political Ecology as it has emerged in the 70s, 80s, 90s mobilizes social theories with the political ecology and social movements of recent years. I think Political Ecology emerges very suggestively at a particular constellation it moves, I think with two very interesting strands. One is I think, and there I refer to the writer Felix Guattari, whose notion of ecology is not just suggestive of nature but as a critique of 'nature' and opens up the new notions of the political, a dialogue between the human and the non human. What is important is, is to build a new archive of living, which includes both the human and the non-human. The second element- if you have seen it coming up in India from the 70s – is coming up from the new forest movement and the great debates from the 1990s onwards, which will open up the issue of air, issues of water, issues of forest, in a completely new constellation. And this new constellation is, if you think about it, is a shift from labor to life, intimating the social theory of eco-aesthetics. In the old days there were two important sites: one was labor and the other was land - and they continue to be important sites. I think what is still interesting, and this is the eco aesthetic intervention - these two elements have been merged into this - the idea of the archive of the living which includes life, includes work, includes land, to open up the larger domain. So very broadly these are to sites we open to discuss – labor, land and the archive of living.

Now before we start I want to introduce a very distinguished panel. I will start with Navjot Altaf, whom I have known from her works for many, many years.

**Navjot Altaf** has been engaged with interactive/cooperative/collaborative installation art practice with Indian and international artists, classical vocalists, documentary filmmakers, activists, students and technicians since 1002. Simultaneously, she has been engaged with projects in public spaces (inclusive of people's participation) in metro cities and ongoing site oriented projects with Adivasi artists in Bastar, Central India. The process deals with the questions related to collaborative processes as a negotiated strategy, representation, identity, gender and discourse regarding what is contemporary in contemporary art.

**Amar Kanwar** lives and works from New Delhi. His films and installations are multi-layered, contemporary experiences connecting intimate personal histories with the wider politics of power, violence, sexuality and justice. Kanwar's meditative film essays do not aim to represent trauma or political situations as much as to find ways through them to a more contemplative space. Characterized by a distinctly poetic approach to the social and political, Kanwar's work has been presented in several film



festivals and museums. Recent solo exhibitions have been at the Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and the Hus der Kunst, Munich. He has participated in Documenta 11, Documenta 12, and Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany and is also the recipient of the 1st Edvard Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway.

**Ravi Agarwal** is a photographer, artist, writer, curator and environmentalist. He explores issues of urban space, ecology, capital in an interrelated way, working with photographs, video, on-site installations, and public art. Agarwal has participated in several international curated shows including Sharjah Biennial 11 (2013), Document XI (Kassel 2002), Horn Please (Berne 2007), Newtopia (Brussels, 2012), as well as several solo shows. He co-curated the twin city Yamuna Elbe public art project (2012), and has authored/edited books and writes extensively on ecological issues. He is also the founder director of the leading environmental NGO, Toxics Link.

**Prof. Vikram Soni** is an astrophysicist by profession. Simultaneously he has been deeply engaged in issues concerning environmental degradation and the irreversible harm being caused to the planet. He has authored many papers on environmental issues – many of them have been published in reputed journals – and has also supported the led campaigns for environmental protection.

**Camilla Boemio** is an Italian writer, a University consultant for special projects in Art/Science (e.g. The ISWA European Project), and a curator. She focuses between disciplines: how science, architecture and political science relate to art. The exhibitions she has curated include MNEMOSYNE – L' Atlante delle immagini (group show) Centro Arti Visive Pescheria 2009, CITIES – Places Visionaries (group show) Auditorium Arte Parco della Musiaca preview of the Festa dell' Architettura Rome 2009, ISWA European Project of Art – Science – 'After the Crash' (group show) Orto Botanico Museum , Rome 2011 and 'Before the Crash' (group show) Exeter UK 2011, "CITIES" TAM, CA.



I invite Navjot to open the conversation:

**Navjot Altaf:** First of all I would like to thank Ravi (A) for inviting me to be a part of the discussion. And I would like to read a paper, which is about 13- 14 minutes, and show a video, which is about four minutes. I have based this paper on my living experience in Bastar and on some of the writings by some of the writers which have helped me to understand the shift required to look at how ecology and its relationship with sustenance in a critical context. I have titled my paper 'Art Ecology Sustenance.'

The readings of a philosopher Edger Morin, whose approach is called "Complex Thought," referring to 'science of complexity' or his exploration of a method of inquiry that is multifaceted enough not to reduce reality, but rather honor and engage its complexity.

As I understand, complexity rejects singular logic, it needs multiple logics to explain how it is neither separated from each other nor integrating with one another but enters into conflicting relations /tensions in both reality and in the nature.

And how the need is to learn to articulate "the disjointed points of view of knowledge into an active cycle".

Physicist Fritjof Capra's idea of Eco Literacy" (1999) - generated by context, relationships and complex systems that include analytical methods of understanding the world. "The essence of deep ecology," to ask deeper questions, which is the essence of a paradigm shift. As he points out "We need to be prepared to question every single aspect of the old paradigm...

Thirdly, Perception of the "necessity, for an awareness of being part of relational contexts... persons, groups, populations, genders, species etc. by an anthropologist

Gregory Bateson for whom this necessity is for a major cultural shift.

He was after the very principles of organization that informed the thinking of our culture as a whole, he was engaged in what following Morin might now be called transdisciplinary work, whose nature it is not merely to cross disciplinary boundaries - but to rearrange our mental landscape, He described "Aesthetics as the sensibility to the pattern which connects." Which is complex inter-dependence.

My engagement and exposure to these writings have made me think about the shift required to look at the critical aspects of 'Art Ecology and its relationship to Sustainability'. "From an ecological perspective:

**"Disappearance As Work In Progress- Approaches To Ecological Romanticism"**



from the perspective of our relationships to one another, generations to come, and to the web of life of which we are a part”

I would like to share, an experience of an area specific performance ‘Kokerenge’ –performed by Muria community in Bastar to appease /pacify Lingopen or Budda Dev who represents entire earth. For this they travel from village to village every year after the harvest. (Screening) This sensibility towards art, not disjointed from living, psychic and social systems produces sensorial intimacy and reciprocity with more than human terrain. I sense that artistic and creative productions are expressions opening a dialogue and opening oneself to a range of visionary experiences in a culture, where the aesthetic experience is not only an individual but also a cultural phenomenon.

The experience reminds me of John Dewey’s insistence on the “ significance of artistic expressions as articulating the significance of life for a certain culture... ..Their judgment upon the quality of a civilization... and what a society considers as a meaningful and satisfying life. The idea of the “world as open to transformation by human intervention” is one aspect of modernity which interests me a great deal but we are also aware how technology, Technological system which make people believe that every problem is a technical problem, and economic dimensions of the western development model on almost all cultures – world over have led civilizations to ‘estrangement from life-world experiences, (i.e. subjective and intersubjective, pre-conceptual lived experience of human subjects)

Despite people from different parts of the world, seriously working towards sustainable technologies, eco-literate industrial revolutions, and using Eco design principles to redesign cities - Capra views that “one of the greatest obstacles on the road toward sustainability is the continuing increase in consumerism, material consumption still growing in 21st centuries in spite of all the emphasis on our new economy on information processing knowledge generation and other intangibles, the main goal of these innovations is to increase productivity, which ultimately increases the flow of material goods. Hyper consumption and how accumulation of material goods is considered the royal road to happiness ... the glorification of material consumption has deep ideological roots that go far beyond economies and politics...The association of manhood with the accumulation of possession fits well with other values that are favored and rewarded in patriarchal culture –expansion, competition, and an ‘object centered ‘consciousness ...”

My practice in Bastar, inclusive of people’s participation through dialogical processes... over a decade now, has exposed me to the complexities of the community based culture that they practice, their close relationship and association with natural elements and belief in 'reciprocal touching ... gestures that bring together, receive, welcome and which belong to the maintenance of being'. But how over the centuries,

**“Disappearance As Work In Progress– Approaches To Ecological Romanticism”**



different rules, and present ongoing anti Naxal operation on one hand and hazardous development projects such as, mining and industries (by the State authorities/ corporate/multinationals) have been imposing violence by forcibly acquiring or grabbing their land, territory and rights over natural resources, ...leading to de-gradation of both cultural and biotic diversity, and depletion of soils and denying them their identity and knowledge to sustain... which is breaking the indigenous communities, their life world and nuanced understanding of ecology and sustenance. Those men and women involved in the long struggle are being strategically destroyed, thrown out of their land they have been living on for centuries in the most violent and inhumane manner.

While listening to Mehtaram Kashyap, a farmer; and a Sarpanch (village head) in Takraguda village in Lohndi guda block and two artists Lakmu and Manglu Baghel who make 'memorial pillars' and other villagers speak about the loss, or giving away of fertile land and rights over natural resources I have been a witness to a traumatic protest process of how Adivasi farmers communities and other poor families condemned a proposal of a steel project signed between Chhattisgarh government and Tata Steel in the Lohandiguda block covering 10 villages near Indrāvati River, one of the most fertile areas in Bastar region, I could sense that it is difficult to understand within the commonly accepted notions of ownership and property, their relationship to land, forest or water. Relationship is rooted in very different conceptual frameworks. The belief in cyclical processes of nature / in inter-connectedness inter-dependence of living beings has been part of the wisdom of people for centuries, which has been transmitted orally across generations as I mentioned above 'art is not disjointed from living, psychic and social systems'. 'Kokerenge' /cock like walk symbolizes that.

I am sensitized to different knowledge systems / tacit knowledge which is not always known explicitly and oral cultures encouraging the participatory life of the senses, which is linked to the concept of relationship with all life and its potential to create experience at several levels of consciousness and in the subconscious mind. The process of being there, looking in and listening produces the moments of interaction. And a sense of creation not restricted to the product alone.

Rural indigenous areas cannot be seen as remote isolated places and undeveloped. Insensitive / unlimited development there as well as in urban areas, with excessive local and global economic investment and belief in 'Technological System' cannot be ignored, as the belief of such development is to control and the goal of global economy is to maximize the wealth and power of its elites. Whereas the need of the planet is to maximize the sustainability of the web of life and If we really are concerned about the real issue of ecology and culture of sustainability, then " the new technologies need to understand



nature's subtle designs, and use them as models and integrate ecological knowledge into the design of materials and technological processes, learning from plants, animals and microorganisms, how to manufacture fibers, plastics and chemicals that are non toxic, completely biodegradable , and subject to continual recycling” . Concept of “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” or the concept of – “Do more with less in order to minimize damage” is one of the crucial beliefs to be put in action. As we know Gandhi's popular saying, “Land provides enough to feed all but not to meet the greed of all’.

So instead of aesthetics which are isolationist, separate the aesthetics (sensibilities) from the social, the “Eco-feminist philosophy which stresses on notion of care and relationship with all life” and its potential to create experience, make relationships and expand mental activity beyond the linear confines of purposive consciousness “which is insensible to complex interdependences” to me makes sense, more than ever.

I would like to end the paper with a quote from Edger Morin – “Hope lies in the existence of creative capacities which exist in all individuals and in all societies, these capacities are put to sleep, because the individuals are domesticated in ossified societies. At the margins of societies, artists, poets, musicians and inventors keep these creative capacities. Crisis can trigger regression and disasters, but also awaken, wake creation, imagination and invention”. (Morin 2009)

According to Edgar Morin to bring in change - “only ecology based politics seems capable of seeing such a project through... The new avenues could converge towards a historic meta-morphosis of society”... How can the sense of the quality and “poetry of life” be raised?

Can I play the audio; it's a very short one. This I have borrowed actually I have never short a video there. It's a very quiet place and lot of people, lot of groups collect there from different villages and local people organize dance competition. This ‘Kokerenge’ never used to a part of the dance competition and these people after everything got over these people used to start at around one ‘ o Clock till four o’ clock in the morning. But now the municipality has enforced this that they can do this only if they participate to their contributions. The government officials going right in there and taking pictures, it's like somebody else entering into that space because the number of groups from different villages they keep coming and singing and then they form a huge circle, and right in the end there is a co- ordination in the sound which you can sense in the audio which I had recorded in 1999. And also now in all kinds of *naat* like *Oriya naat* is also in the same place. Their place has been taken away.





*Ravi Sundaram- I would now call upon Amar.*

**Amar Kanwar** – Thank you for inviting me. I thought probably we would have more of a conversation. It's not that I have a formal presentation, but may be just a few thoughts, a few questions, and may be a little introduction to some of the things I have been trying to do. So I hope that probably we will have a kind of an interactive session between the panelists.

Just a set of thoughts I would like to share, which we could probably take further. It's actually a kind of peculiar situation we are in for the last ten years. At one level you can say we are at ecological degradation and there is nothing new about it. It's all been happening for the last hundred years. Nevertheless, it's still hard to relate to it and also it's quiet peculiar in the way it has been happening in the last 10- 15 years in India. For anybody who would travel across the country, one of the things which strikes you immediately is the severity of it, is the speed of it, is the extent of it, is the scale of it. A sense of dismantling and its severity and that's very hard to deal with it. There is a dismantling of, in the sense that agriculture is linked to keeping the ecosystem intact, keeping the wilderness intact, the catchment area intact. And you know the preservation is very critical to the nutrients of soil, and are very critical to the nature of the agriculture. The availability of water, the availability of rain, the availability of irrigation, these are things that in a sense are common knowledge. But what we see in the last ten or fifteen years is a kind of the very dismantling of agricultural economy, the agricultural systems and agricultural populations in the country. It always brings a question of "why it is happening, how it is happening, what is the logic for making this happen, who is responsible for it to happen?"

On the other hand, how do communities relate to suddenly being aware of the fact that follows, that all the rivers, all the lands, that they have been associated with the living, owning, feeling, growing up with, are no longer within their control or no longer accessible to them. When the communities are suddenly told that the region is out of bonds, even when they have a very complex relationship with it for over several hundred years, it's very hard to comprehend what is happening. And I think it is also necessary to know that when this is happening there are human beings acting around this in different ways, in the sense that you have various communities resisting it, you have various organizations implementing it, acting against it, so you have many, whether the police, the government or the corporation. I mean there are very large numbers of people who are actually engaged in it and acting around the process of degradation in the process of destruction, in the process of dismantling, each one of them is playing different kind of roles. At one level it is possible to understand this, it has happened in different parts of the world, at another level

**"Disappearance As Work In Progress– Approaches To Ecological Romanticism"**



when we get close to it, it completely confounds you and it's very hard to comprehend how it can happen right before your eyes.

There is a clip, it's a very disturbing clip, it's a shocking clip and I am not showing it in the context of shocking you. But it's a news clip; it's an unfinished news clip made by KBJ News, a local news channel, shot I think on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April. It is shocking in the sense that it gives you a kind of insight into what is happening at a point, which is not far away, or remote from us. And how do you deal with this kind of situation? It is not the question of dealing with violence. But it is dealing with the fact that it is unfolding in various parts of the country. How do you deal with the fact that there could be a community or a village where 70-80% of them have not come out their village for more than two years, for the fear of being arrested? How do you deal with the fact that the children, women, old women and many people in the village, all of them having criminal cases filed against them? You have people, communities protesting against the nuclear plants all over the world, How do you deal with the fact that you have people protesting against in a certain regions and are charged under sedition in one district. In a sense we are complacent, this is our government, our state, and they are representing us. So if my government files sedition against thousands of people in one district to protect my nation, then in some way, I am involved and need to understand how that can happen? You are all aware of the recent judgment of the Supreme Court. So let's take a look at the clip and then we will come back to this.

At one level, unfortunately, we are not familiar with images like this. It is not that we are not seeing these happening around us. And at another level it's very harmful for you as some of them are people who are willing to take compensation and leave the land. This entire region is very fertile, it's very rich in nutrients, agriculture, vegetables, and forest and has a very rich and fertile ecosystem that has existed for many, many years, and there is no end to this. If a community is not willing to leave, despite how the government reacts, you can see how sick it can be, it closes all the schools, hospitals post-offices and you are in a sense marooned.

You can get whole lot of information of what is happening here. The point is that how do you relate to this. For me working in a situation like this where there are scores of incidences like that. We are not talking about one steel plant or two steel plants or one power plant or two but we are talking about 40 of them. It is mind-boggling. At one level you can say it's a losing battle, it is going to be dismantled, it is going to be destroyed, it is going to be consumed, at another level you will find that be it five years back or ten years back, it hasn't succeeded, there are areas, pockets in the past where it hasn't succeeded, and so there is some form of resistance and it does succeed. So then how do you comprehend?

**“Disappearance As Work In Progress– Approaches To Ecological Romanticism”**



For me, after filming and working for many years, I actually found myself stuck with two fundamental questions. In many parts of the country I found that there is incredibly large amount of information that was available to understand ecologically, rationally, scientifically, economically, in whatever way you want to look at it, there are credible sources of information. Even scientifically sometimes you cannot think of how to respond to it. And if this kind of information is available then surely you can understand that this is the method, trajectory that is bound to inflow, in a sense that it is romantic, utopian, where you could imagine that people sustain. So if that spectrum of knowledge is not working then what is wrong, what is going to work? And then we come to the basic question that perhaps we don't understand Perhaps we don't understand what is happening is because there cannot be any other way of analyzing this. And if we start understanding, then we will also be able to understand the interdependence that we have referred to. This has been the nature of land, of agriculture, of economy and living systems consciously or subs consciously. But if we are not able to understand then there is some problem. In that sense I think that actually, perhaps we do not understand the meaning of disappearance, we have lost it even in vocabulary and are even unable to comprehend as to what is disappearance forget how to relate to it. So if we do not have the vocabulary to understand what is disappearing, then we can't even respond to the fact that it is disappearing. And so in that context I felt that whatever work one does, whatever intervention one does, whatever aesthetics, our artistic work or any kind of work in some sense be able to develop, initiate, catalyze, bring together some form of multiple vocabularies, which actually equips us to comprehend, the meaning, the extent, the depth, the multiplicity of these disappearance. If we are able to do that then perhaps we may be able to have a response.

You (Ravi S) spoke about the archive of living, now again this vocabulary can only lead to the archive of living. Because if it is not possible to understand how, then it is also not possible to bring anything together in one place. It is actually ironical that we are in a position where we are talking about something conceptually as something as an archive of life, it is so ironical, because we are all living, we are all existing, yet feel the need for the archive of life, how absurd, but it is so revealing as well. So much of my work in Orissa and other parts have been actually to, for instance, I had to present poetry to a forensic understanding or a rational understanding or a scientific understanding. I mean there is a scientific understanding of disappearance, you can calculate, it you can measure it, you can prove it, but does that work? And so poetry in its multiple forms could be placed adjacent to the scientific comprehension of disappearance, which is being done. And it is then that we and proceed anywhere towards the archive of living.



Lastly the only thing I want to say is, that whatever form of intervention aesthetic, artistic intervention, it must be in mind that it has to exist in a context of the people. Unfortunately we have a context of a spectrum of interest, who are playing this ecological degradation game, so you have the extreme left, the militant left and the non armed left and the old militant left and you can have the Gandhian and the civil society and the NGO, the politician and the local people, you have to deal with the context in all planes

And so that's all. Thank You.

### **Ravi S. I now call upon Vikram**

**Vikram Soni:** Ravi asked me to come. Well I do science but when it comes to application, I do science with natural wisdom. I think there is a bit problem with science. You know science and technology come without any wisdom. Technology today is doing invention for the sake of invention. And it's captive to the market for example, you have more and more cell phones, more and more electronic equipment more and more cameras, more and more everything and you are kind of moved to continuous consumption by planned obsolescence.

And there is a very simple reason that science does not come with wisdom. And science is just an act of creation like art. When we are working with the planet, then you need natural wisdom. As scientist we have to try and change that; we cannot have science without natural wisdom, we cannot have technology without natural wisdom. Every technology in the last 200 years is exploiting the earth. There is no technology, which does not leave waste behind; they only look at the product, and not the byproduct.

Perhaps I should make some interconnections.

So, let me just say a little bit about climate change and the Maldives, that is the subject today. Of course, the subject will spill over to life and the archive of life. The largest danger for Maldives is that it may not be around for more than a hundred years because of the rise in sea level.

Most of the rise in sea level comes from the heating of the water, the fact that water expands when it is heated, and the sea is the heat sink for global warming with a time constant of 50 years – so will keep on heating even if we stop emissions today. Over 60- 70 % of the rise in sea level is connected with heating of the ocean.



But the interesting thing, which I want to talk about, is perhaps something you don't know. India pulls out 30 % of the world's ground water every year. Look at how much ground water India has lost (after the green revolution) which is part of the entire water crisis. I think it is interesting to put into perspective the sea rise that affects the Maldives, 5- 10 % of the entire rise in sea level of the planet comes from the loss of the Indian ground water. Just think about the connection – the image.

This 5- 10 % of the water ultimately goes up in the atmosphere and finally ends up in the sea. So understand that at some level how interconnected the planet is. That due to agriculture, the green revolution, you grow basmati in Punjab and Haryana and Rajasthan and certainly you pull out more and more ground water and that ground water goes away once and for all. So there is a relationship between the groundwater you pull up right here and the Maldives.

Now I will talk a little about identity.

Democracy is a very troubled ideal and so is conservation is a very troubled notion. Like the forest in the last 20- 30 years, the forest depts. have increased 20 times while the forest has gone down to less than a half. Similarly, more and more conservation organizations come up. But something is not going in the right. Because finally if you look at it, you will have only forest staff and no forest, and only conservation organizations with nothing to conserve. So somewhere it has to balance out. You can't carry out in this mode.

Democracy gives people the right to freedom of expression and is arguably the most representative form of people's participation in governance. In parliamentary democracy, when people elect their representatives everyone is equal in the sense of one person one vote. Parliaments and courts then set up a framework of laws that are supposed to be fair and just. Even so, they often do not deliver social justice. And whilst many countries in the Middle East and the Mediterranean ring are going through an exhilarating and liberating transformation to freedoms and democracy, several democratic countries are experiencing crippling financial stress and corruption. Democracy, in present times, is a troubled ideal. So, perhaps we need to expand perspective.

#### The Three Identities

An individual has a personal identity as well as a larger identity, which encompasses the society, and in addition a still larger identity that encompasses the planet on which we live.



Even the most developed democracies today have lost reach and are contracting into a selfish zone of individuals protecting their rights and freedoms and assets and insulating themselves from the rest of society. If we have the freedom to decide then we must also accept the responsibility for the decisions. The responsibility is not just to oneself but also to the society at large.

The present worldwide economic downturn is an irresistible example, with the petrol billionaires hiking the price of oil, for no reason, and skimming off billions of dollars to set the first course for the financial crash of 2008. The crisis originated from corporate trading and banks siphoning off huge sums from innocent investors. The internet, that makes bank transfers instantaneous, abets monopoly trading – just a few individuals own and are privy to the goings on that transfer over a trillion dollars on the net each day - which is more than the GDP of all but a single digit handful of countries. Large moneys are moved in seconds by a few controllers who quickly pick up the profits, while all the public investors bob up and down in the big wave. Is it surprising that the gap between the rich and the poor gets wider and wider? Technology moves so fast that laws and regulations cannot catch up with changing times and mores. This is the breakdown of the link between the first two identities that of the individual and society.

The identity of a nation is like an individual identity. Powerful nations exercise their freedoms in a similar way. Not only do they fight wars for oil but have an eye on all the natural resources of the planet. In a peculiar way the emasculation of the United Nations - the society of nations – parallels the emasculation of simple, innocent human beings.

In the same way that individual freedoms need to be tempered by moderation so do the freedoms that make society want more and more consumer goods. The developing countries are taking their cue from the developed nations. In a biblical sense, ‘Love what thy neighbor has’. More and more consumption has little to do with quality of life. With such an ethos, the very existence of a healthy planet is already in peril. This is the schism between the society and yet larger identity of the planet.

It goes something like this: The basis of the global market is profit and in turn more profit comes from more sales and more products. And it is technology that is used to create more and more products, which are sold through more technology – free press, free television, and free Internet. This is how consumption has grown beyond the capacities of the planet. There is no stopping it – it is a runaway. Regrettably, this means that there is also no limit to the waste that has been accumulating. The scale of the market and the waste it leaves behind has exceeded the scale of the planet and that is what has translated into Climate Change.



## Non Invasive

Unilateral freedoms can become invasive. Too much individual freedom can concentrate power and money in too few hands. Too much freedom to invent and consume for the society can invade the planet from which it is sourced. These are the paradoxes we are seized by today.

How can industry be non invasive? If I find an industry in a virgin forest area with crystal pure water streams, I would have to say that first you should never be destroying an area which took evolution millions of years to make, that is so richly bio diverse, that gives us pure water and that cannot be created by engineering– this is invasive to the planet.

Next, what about industrial waste? Industry must think as creatively of the byproduct as they think about the product and carry on doing so till they eliminate waste or make it minimal or benign. You may say that this is just not possible, yet, if you look at the biggest production system, nature or the planet, it has no waste - it is all recycled. There is hardly any technology that we have invented that has not left toxic waste on the planet. We need more than science to choose our technology, we need natural wisdom to make technology non invasive.

Moreover, once the business community realizes that current practices are unsustainable. Hence “bad for business” in the long run, a new rationale for a business ethics grounded in natural wisdom may be seen as practical.

It is an interesting quirk of history that twenty-five hundred years ago, the Buddha ran into this dilemma. In addition to the *sangha*, the democratic society that settled issues by free public debate, he introduced responsibilities through the code of conduct he called the *dharma*. The concept of *ahimsa*, which calls for non-violence towards all living creatures, unified the three identities: personal, communal and global. This simple model of interconnection between self, community and environment can support the ideals of true democracy.

What we have found out is that freedoms have to practice with responsibility, care, self-restraint and natural sense. It is clear that if we need to respect all three identities together - the right of the earth to remain healthy, the right of the society to remain equitable and the right of the individual to remain true to themselves, or we will not find a workable democratic solution.

Now today we have all this going on about corruption but even if you stop the corruption are you going to stop the trillion dollars spend in one go. No. If today we have a law, which says that you can't spend money on the net, everybody will be up in arms. So, now the point is that if you can't have laws which





can take care of what is happening in reality so what do you do? So I don't think laws are going to work. We need an ethical value system.

We have done a few things in Delhi, We have a on the flood plains of Delhi, where we can pull out only that much water which can be recharged and at the same time preserve it, it's called ' **preserve and use**' and thus have a noninvasive, sustainable source of water, on the flood plain. It can provide 1500 crores of water a year if valued at the cost of water supplied by tankers. We have a similar perennial solution for local mineral water from the ridge, which will be worth a billion dollars a year at 1/8 the price of Indian Mineral water.

We use nature but we do not preserve it at all and each of these is a bounty. What you can do is actually use resources in '**preserve and use**' ways and if you can do that, I think you might be able to create sensitivity and sensibility and an ethical value system. I don't think you can create an ethical value system by law. In terms of Orissa I think the value of what there is, is so much greater than the value of what there will be.

Thank you.

**Ravi S:** *I now call upon Ravi A.*

**Ravi Agarwal:** I will keep it very short; I just want to talk about my struggle of, environmentally trying to engage with some campaigns and also to make sense in all this. And I think I would like to raise the issue of Institutions. I have engaged with urban ecology for over twenty years and I am often engaged with large institutions and the constant battle has been how to recover the idea of the self, of what I believe or what you might believe as an individual about something, be it trees, rivers or forest or about anything which you might consider of value. How does that become a battle of, trying to change institutional space to retain that value?

Somehow there has been legitimization of anything that is institutional. If something is legitimate it becomes institutional. So we have the U.N body, the corporate bodies, and these are legitimate states. But what do they hold, and what value do they hold, what are their imaginations, we do not enquire about that and when you try and battle them and you try and reform them, they are not often aware of what you are trying to deal with.

**“Disappearance As Work In Progress– Approaches To Ecological Romanticism”**





And I will give you two examples based on the idea of institutions. The first is the animistic part, when you forget the animistic part of the ecology. And I would come to the idea of ecology itself.

I would give the example of the decimation of the vultures, which I think that is a powerful story of disappearance written in institutional power and corporate power.

The story of the vultures is well known by now. Very briefly it is a story of a more than million year old species decimated in the past fifteen years - killed by just one chemical – a pill, a painkiller. It was introduced in the 1980s in India and by the 1990s we had already decimated three of the species of vultures by 97%. From tens of lakhs of vultures to a few thousand!

So how did this happen? How is it possible that a species, which belonged to the times of dinosaurs, seen on Cleopatra's crown, mentioned in Ramayana, has been decimated beyond recovery? The Vulture Recovery program, the BNHS is saying it's not possible to recover. They are trying to breed 150 pairs of 3 species of vultures. 97% decimation in ten years by just one drug is an incomprehensible story of disappearance, how does that happen? It is a mind-boggling story of disappearance.

This disappearance we could see, and what we cannot see we don't even know.

And if you examine the story, it's a story of the anthropogenic nature of science, about how do you look at human welfare as primary goal, how do you put out untested products, how institutions manipulate ideas of what is safe and what is unsafe, how governments collaborate keeping the markets intact, as the drug is still not banned in India, it is still available in doses which can kill the vulture. So how is it possible that it happens despite overwhelming evidences? I think here lies the story of the politics of capital, the politics of power, the politics of market and the politics of institutions. So that's one story.

The second story is of the Yamuna Flood Plains, which is another story of institutions. The flood plain was not in anybody's mind till the 1990's because Delhi was not such an expensive city and the lands were not so expensive, thus you found all the junk on the flood plain. You found all the poor people living on the flood plain who were considered as junk that (whom) nobody wanted. The Yamuna Pushta had over a hundred thousand people living there, in slums, dhobi ghats, priests; there were whole lot of communities living on the flood plain because nobody wanted that land. From 2000, the city expanded beyond the Yamuna, the land suddenly became extremely expensive and so everything was pushed out, the junk men were pushed out; the dhobi ghats were pushed out, the whole place was cleaned up within ten days almost hundred thousand people were pushed out from the Yamuna Pushta. How does it



happen? Why does this happen in such a short period of ten years and how does the land become something else? Here lies the story of institutions, which is not a simple story.

There have been ideas of what a city should be and what rivers should be; there should be beautiful landscapes. That why the Commonwealth Games happened on the riverfront, as an aesthetic view or ecology as a functional idea of something. All conversations about the Yamuna flood plain are either aesthetic or functional. Either it's beautiful to look at or it is something we must preserve as it gives the city water. We have no other way of dealing with the ecology of the flood plain. Does it have any other existence, existence maybe for its own self, existence outside our realm of thinking, existence of the larger ecology of the planet, of the river systems, of water?

If you look at the latest Ganga Action Plan made by Roorkee University or IIT Delhi, they (engineers) have no clue about ecology, they are talking about water use and they want to use every drop of water. The land is controlled by the Urban Planning department and the river by the Flood Control Body, How much more functional can it get? And that's the way the DDA is constructed and that's the way the flood and irrigation department is constructed. But the river is also a border; it is a border between water and river, a wetland, and a whole ecological system by itself.

The river also has wetlands; we have no institutions, which have invested, in the wetlands, which say that it will protect the wetland. Thus, we have reduced the idea of nature as completely functional. What is this idea of Nature? The idea of nature is a complex one. In the institutions space, we only think of cost benefit, and we only think of the benefits or of reductionist nature. If you look at the recent reports on Western Ghats, which have talked about 90% conservation, and another report, which talked about 30% conservation, how can there be such different values of what should be conserved and what should not be conserved. It's about what model you apply, what interest you are vested in, and what you think is more important.

How do we recover from this? If I say I have a personal sense of ecology, personal sense of relationship with something, which is far too complex to be reduced in one concept or the other, then how do I recover that as a 'self.'?

But if we are unable to do that then we are completely stuck in a complex trajectory. You see the trajectory of climate change, which is manmade, is not a trajectory outside from where you are. It is not something alien to us; it is not outside the trajectory in which we ourselves are. It's an expected outcome of what's going to happen; it's like buying vehicles and thus bringing in vehicular pollution it's an expected



trajectory. One can do various marketing, talk about carbon credits or that you are going to reduce emission per car. But we are not doing fundamental trajectory shifts. Today climate change brings us back to the idea of limits, and says that if we do this in a particular way then you are going to bring catastrophe. You see 5deg C degree temperature rises in the next hundred years. This planet will not survive. We have very finely tuned temperature based body, it's completely a thermal energy based equation. Why are we shaped like this? This is our mass; we are balancing very fine ecological thermal exchange. Temperature is one of the key parameters of existence we know.

So I think we are playing with very fundamental ideas here. And I fear if we don't raise fundamental questions about the institutions, about what is informing them and how they have become what they are, then we can have no way of moving forward.

I will just end with a simple thing, which I learnt three months back from a book called the **Flora's Empire**, written by an American anthropologist, where two images of Taj Mahal are shown. One as Shah Jahan had made it –an image of the Taj surrounded by 30 mt. high trees. He never wanted Taj Mahal, to be seen from a distance, he wanted it to appear suddenly. But Lord Curzon did not like it, when he became the Vice Chancellor of India in 1905, and he cut all the trees and made it a garden and that codified in the archeological survey of India as horticulture Manual. Even today all horticulture gardens across the country are made in the same manner. This is what institutions do. This is what cultural imaginations based on power do.

How are they made? They are not made by God, they are human made and if we don't engage politically with these institutions, we cannot break the cycle we are locked in.

We are like in a Truman's world trying to find solutions but we are not able to step out of the situations in which we are located. We have nothing to grab on and say I step out of this. Because we can only step out if we have the imaginations and the thoughts to step out.

Amar told me something very interesting a couple of years back. He said that "by the time I find out about it, it is a done deal, by the time I know this is happening, it has already happened and it has been has been decided way back." By the time I come across what is called destruction it has already happened and there is no going back. Unless we are able to know what is happening and to feel that, we have no way of recovering ecology or taking about it except in theoretical abstractness.



**Ravi S: I now call upon Camilla from Rome via Skype:**

**Camilla Boemio (on Skype) –**

I am really happy. ...It's a great moment. It's so important to realize some things. Maldives Pavilion have different approach and different ideas, different opinion, but on the same topic. It can be a great project. The pavilion a new starting and a new opportunity.

Maldives is undergoing a moment of change a big change and may we will not disappear the next year so it is imperative to change minds and look for a new approach. Without a multi approach you cannot change. Climate change is a global problem and needs to be addressed urgently.

The international situation is dramatic . China is now the largest emitter of gas / carbon dioxide, but Americans have been consuming fossil fuels extensively for far longer, and experts say the United States is more responsible than any other nation for the high level.

Carbon dioxide rises and falls on a seasonal cycle, and the level will dip below 400 this summer as leaf growth in the Northern Hemisphere pulls about 10 billion tons of carbon out of the air. But experts say that will be a brief reprieve — the moment is approaching when no measurement of the ambient air anywhere on earth, in any season, will produce a reading below 400.

From studying air bubbles trapped in Antarctic ice, scientists know that going back 800,000 years, the carbon dioxide level oscillated in a tight band, from about 180 parts per million in the depths of ice ages to about 280 during the warm periods between. The evidence shows that global temperatures and CO2 levels are tightly linked.

For the entire period of human civilization, roughly 8,000 years, the carbon dioxide level was relatively stable near that upper bound. But the burning of fossil fuels has caused a 41 percent increase in the heat-trapping gas since the Industrial Revolution, a mere geological instant, and scientists say the climate is beginning to react, though they expect far larger changes in the future.

Experts fear that humanity may be precipitating a return to such extreme conditions — except this time, billions of people are in harm's way.

This is the moment to be conscious and act !

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About the structure of the Maldives Pavilion curated by the CPS – It will offer partially capitalize on their diverse cultural identities from Europe and the Middle East suggesting the overlap of international cultures that coexist on this paradise island. On the one hand Western thoughts concerning nature has been marked by dualism, the notion of the opposition of nature and culture. On the other hand Eastern thoughts consider nature a guide / source of intellectual and spiritual inspiration, because in the Eastern thoughts the natural world simply “is” the law, and human activities are adjusted according to its mechanisms. The collaboration we wish to capture is to prove the duality between art/culture and its interdependencies with environmental causes. It is only through such activities are we able to regulate interests into ways of sustainably developing positive impacts that will help avoid negative impacts on our own cultural ecologies. By bringing awareness to the activities happening in the Maldives, do we wish to break away from allowing such losses of land happening in this advanced digital age; Observation is what converts possibility into reality.

#### **Discussion with audience:**

Ravi Sundaram – What I have gathered from the discussion is that we have a very a troubled notion of eco aesthetics.

I think at one level eco aesthetics as politics addresses states, regimes, radical movements, and art practices have reflected that in a very powerful way, which was not possible 30 years ago.

I think the great challenge is what I call is the challenge of catastrophe. I think it is a great challenge because this is a new thing, which comes specifically with the ecological crisis.

And if we are inexorably heading to a catastrophic situation, confounded by political events and media spectacles, we are being pushed into this abyss of the end. What is the appropriate politics for this eco-aesthetic conundrum?

The one thing, which I really liked, was when Navjot played the video in the end, suddenly, I could see, everything that we spoke and it also I think opened up the whole notion of complexity in a very interesting way. The question would be, as an artist, how you would revisit the audio as the future of eco- aesthetics and where you would place the challenge.



Walter Benjamin mentions nature as a memory of childhood. What we see as nature is all gone; there has been violence since the colonial period, using the land acquisition act, the forest act.

**Navjot-** the reason for showing that video was that when we talk about these tribal areas, they are seen as remote, underdeveloped areas. You know we understand everything, we understand systems, we understand technology, and information is so easily available. The challenge is I think that we are able to believe in any community practicing something which we consider good for the planet, even if it is something as simple as shifting cultivation. Why are we then not paying attention to that?

The reason why I showed this one-minute video was that when the entire performance is reduced to competition, where actually they used to go from village to village, to connect with another village, it was also a kind of social interaction and ecological and artistic, that has now been interrupted. I think we need to relook at scientific experimentation and other experimentation. And the challenge lies there.

**Ravi** – Good for planet, I am not sure if there is a common understanding of that. I here want to bring in the idea of equity and access, when something is good for the planet it not necessarily means that it is good for everybody on the planet.

I am supporting what you are saying but what I am saying is when we use these words ethically, democratically, and the methods of how these act are far from the images. Delhi has different liters of water per day and Mehrauli has 10- 15 liters of water per day. And the total water available in Delhi is more than per capita. So I am talking about the political structure in which description of the good could be expressed.

**Ravi Sundaram-** I would address a question to Amar.

Amar, I would like you to address the catastrophic element in your presentation, because it opens up serious questions of the future.

**Amar Kanwar** – My relationship with catastrophe is only something that compels you to respond and you run into the whole series of going beyond catastrophe. How do you archive catastrophe? Archiving catastrophe, archiving life is actually a method to go beyond the catastrophe. It's not an archive of suffering.



**Ravi Sundaram** – People from science are raising their voice, they are opening up; so do we have to revisit the relation between science and nature or do we have to open up to the whole idea of whose voice do we listen to. You see people from science today are talking about water engineering, nuclear power, air. I wonder where these institutions are coming up.

**Amar Kanwar**- I don't think there is anything wrong with the scientist they are just curious human beings. When they enter an institution, their career graph gets a set pattern and they follow that, to get out of that is not an easy thing. Science is about the unknown and there is infinity of what is unknown, how do you deal with that. Temperature, pressure, blood loss, dehydration ...Do you know how a single cell works?

You have to be responsible if science is affecting the planet. When you are faced with a scale of science and the scale of technology that are affecting the planet, you can't just act as curious human beings, you have to be responsible and that's where natural wisdom comes. And how can one work with the planet for the planet's interest?

Institutions today are not only managing nature but also the power lobbies.

**Ravi Agarwal** - Science is brought in as the touchstone for the institutions to act, but actually these institutions are acting completely politically and thus there is politicization of science and the way the institutions are behaving.

Institutions are there to serve our needs; we cannot be serving the combined needs of institutional conflicts. We are in complete crisis of being crushed as individuals, as people, who might be totally different from the institutional space. As individuals we are in a completely different world.

If you critically examine India's economical growth rate you are not talking about sustainable development.

**Amar Kanwar**- Institutions are not always visible, sometimes they are just there as close observant and are passed on from generation to generation.

In the past if there was a method to allow the circulation of water and rivers, for a certain period of time, that's was a community institution which was specifically designed for a particular area by a particular community.



**Navjot** – If you look at the forest and the nature within it, there is diversity. And we call that power lobby. Power has been there even in the natural world. I want to ask why we are not talking about certain areas where certain kind of cultural practices is still alive, which have harmed the environment in a lesser way than technology has.

Why are we not talking about that? People call it remote, it might be remote but people living there have an advanced life in many ways. The civilization is developed and somebody else is deciding that it is not developed.

**Participant-** I think there is a need to work with the idea of the shift from labor to life, as there is a sense of estrangement, which brings along with it a sense of alienation and that, is being opposed. There is also a need for emergent collectiveness.