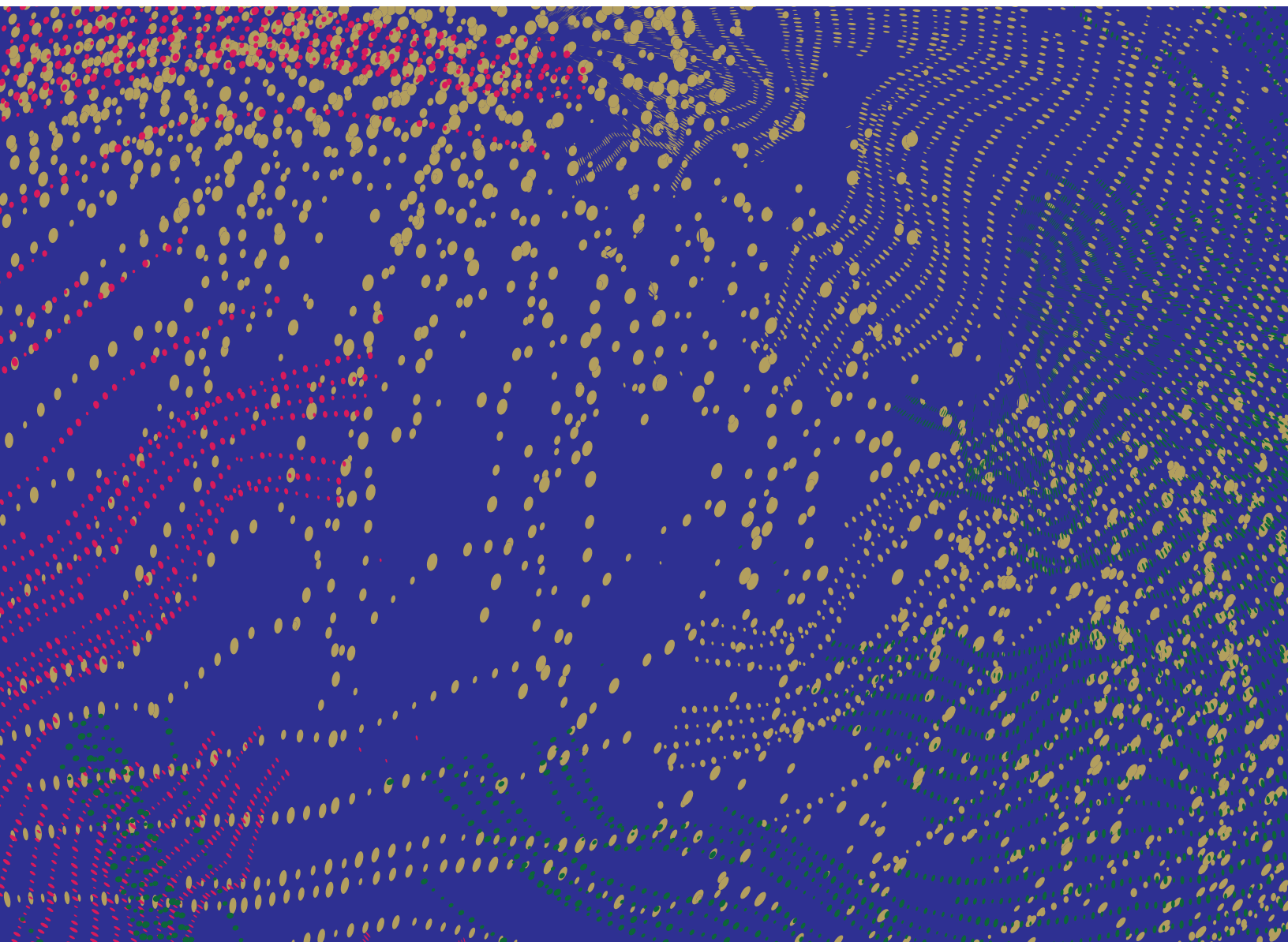


The World Humanities Report

The Ecohumanities in India, 1980–2020

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The Ecohumanities in India, 1980–2020

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It is true that we have nature writing and the imaginative treatment of entities other than human in literature; myths, narratives, and hymns about such entities (especially from a spiritual perspective) in religious texts; and theoretical discussions of the relationship between humans and entities other than human in philosophical systems. Yet no humanities discipline addresses this relationship the way the ecohumanities do, because the primary concern of the ecohumanities is not culture as such, as in the case of the other humanities disciplines, but the relationship mentioned above. By virtue of such a thematic focus, the ecohumanities are neither an entirely humanities discipline nor a science (ecology). By straddling two worlds, the ecohumanities menace the humanities, especially their anthropocentric preoccupation with culture, in a highly constructive way. The ecohumanities not only introduce a new approach to reality but also compel the humanities to introspect in earnest and critically review our presuppositions about the human, the scientific method, and, among other things, the well-being of all in the new areas of ecoliterature, ecocriticism, ecoaesthetics, ecotheory, ecophilosophy, ecoreligion, ecohistory, and ecoanthropology.

If the new areas mentioned above are the different branches, then the generic discipline, namely, the ecohumanities, is the base (unlike with natural trees, here the base emerged from the branches). I will not examine each of these disciplines in this essay, as my objective is only to outline the major trends of the Indian ecohumanities in each of the four decades covered here. Therefore, I will provide examples only when necessary to strengthen the discussion.

When the ecohumanities originated in Australia in 2004, they were called the “ecological humanities.”¹ Now they are widely known by the name “environmental humanities.” In this essay, I will call them by the shortened form of their original name, the “ecohumanities.”² Though this discipline has not yet

¹ Libby Robin and Deborah Bird Rose, “The Ecological Humanities in Action: An Invitation,” *Ecological Humanities* 31–32 (April 2004), <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2004/04/01/the-ecological-humanities-in-action-an-invitation/>.

² Nirmal Selvamony, “Considering the Humanities Ecotheoretically,” *Journal of Contemporary Thought* 40 (Winter 2014): 5–19.

found its niche in Indian academia,³ some of its subdisciplines—ecoliterature, ecocriticism, ecoreligion, for instance—are offered as academic courses. In fact, most of these subdisciplines (and the humanistic issues that breach strict disciplinary boundaries and have a bearing on the ecological) had engaged both Indian academics (especially in the humanities and the social sciences) and nonacademic individuals and organizations even before the emergence of the discipline.⁴ Here the term “ecohumanities” refers not only to the generic discourse and the individual subdisciplines that constitute that discourse but also to all forms of ecologically inflected humanities-related praxes, especially those of governmental and nongovernmental organizations committed to ecological matters.

I have chosen the term “nation” as the common denominator for the forty years covered in this essay (from 1980 to 2020) not merely because the subject here is Indian ecohumanities but also because ecological concerns are inseparable from the complexities engendered by nationhood. The definition of nation employed here, namely, a limited and sovereign imagined political community, is indebted to Benedict Anderson, who makes it clear that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.” If such a community is a free and imagined one, with finite boundaries, it is a nation.⁵ The rider Anderson adds to his definition of the nation, namely, the possibility of the primordial village also being an imagined community at times, does not negate the fact that primordial villages are not imagined communities; instead, that rider only makes a provision for the possibility of the absence of face-to-face contact (at times) even in a primordial village, which is predominantly a community where such contact among all its members is possible. Face-to-face contact is not a possibility in an imagined community such as the nation.

Nation, which is a cultural artifact, is often incompatible with ecological features such as ecosystems, biomes, climate, temperature, and natural elements such as air and water.⁶ Ecological entities overflow the anthropogenic and artifi-

³ Emily O’Gorman et al., “Teaching the Environmental Humanities: International Perspectives and Practices,” *Environmental Humanities* 11, no. 2 (November 2019): 427–60.

⁴ Nirmal Selvamony, “An Alternative Social Order,” in *Value Education Today: Explorations in Social Ethics*, ed. J. T. K. Daniel and Nirmal Selvamony (New Delhi: All-India Association for Christian Higher Education; Chennai: Madras Christian College, 1990), 215–36; A. Pushparajan, *Ecological Worldview for a Just Society* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992); Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); V. Karuppaiyan and K. Pari Murugan, eds., *Tribal Ecology and Development* (Chennai: University of Madras, 2001).

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1985), 15–16.

⁶ On nation as a cultural artifact, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 13.

cial national boundaries and make the nation a problematic entity.⁷ For example, the Dongria Kondhs regard Niyamgiri, a mountain range in southwestern Odisha, as their sacred home and ancestor, both of which are nonanthropogenic entities, while the government of India and the state of Odisha, which are political, anthropogenic entities, claim their right to mine the home/ancestor of the Dongria Kondhs. Though the conflict between the ecological and the national has been an ongoing one, it peaked in the last decade.⁸

Due to the prominence of the ecological in the lives of people such as the Dongria Kondhs, they have been called the “ecosystem people.”⁹ In fact, the locus of primal people is more a multibeing home than an ecosystem. The oldest theory of such a “home” is denoted by the Tamil term *tiṇai*, which is not easily rendered into English.¹⁰

In Tamil, *tiṇai* means, among other things, a kind of home of humans and other beings, including ancestral spirits in a biome-like land division.¹¹ According to *tiṇai* theory, the earth’s surface is divisible into four permanent biome-like land areas: scrubland, mountain, riverine plain, and seacoast. The arid land area is the impermanent hybridized fifth area. Each land division has its typical flora, fauna, spirit beings, and human groups, along with the cultural practices of the latter. Unlike biome, *tiṇai* includes typical human

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⁷ The issues arising from such incompatibility between natural and political boundaries are crucial ones in bioregional theory. See Peter Berg and Raymond F. Dasmann, “Reinhabiting California,” in *Reinhabiting a Separate Country: A Bioregional Anthology of Northern California*, ed. Peter Berg (San Francisco: Planet Drum, 1978), 217–20.

⁸ This conflict may also be seen as a kind of internal colonialism. See Charles Pinderhughes, “Toward a New Theory of Internal Colonialism,” *Socialism and Democracy* 25, no. 1 (March 2011): 235–56; Felix Padel, *Sacrificing People: Invasions of a Tribal Landscape* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009), 288, 308.

⁹ Raymond F. Dasmann, “The Threatened World of Nature,” Albright Lecture at Rausser College of Natural Resources, Berkeley, California, April 29, 1976, <https://nature.berkeley.edu/albright/19761976>; Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*.

¹⁰ Following the rules of the Tamil language, this essay does not capitalize any Tamil words (including *tiṇai*) even when in English they would be capitalized, as in the beginning of a sentence or in proper names. To distinguish the usage of *tiṇai* as a term (*tiṇai* studies, *tiṇai* theory) from “*tiṇai*” as part of proper names (e.g., the *tiṇai* movement), it is not italicized in the latter case.

¹¹ Nirmal Selvamony, “*tiṇai* Studies,” in *tiṇai* 3, by Nirmaldasan and Nirmal Selvamony (Chennai: Persons for Alternative Social Order, 2004), 1, <https://www.angelfire.com/nd/nirmaldasan/tinai3.html>.

groups. Though *tiṇai* is a theory about the way the occupants of the earth are organized into different but interdependent “worlds,” it also denotes specific homes within each of these worlds and the way of life each home makes possible.

When the state society overran *tiṇai* in the Holocene epoch some *tiṇai* or *tiṇai*-like human groups continued to exist in the peripheries of the mainstream state societies.¹² The major difference between *tiṇai* and state society is the kind of relationship among the members of each. Contrary to state society, love-based harmony unites the human and other members of *tiṇai* home, as evident in the etymology of *tiṇai*; it derives from the Tamil word *iṇai*, which means “spousal harmony or harmony of the perfect fifth,” marked by both identity and difference, as in ideal spouses. As *tiṇai* is also a family or home, *iṇai* harmony ensures necessary diversity without jeopardizing the intrinsic value and identity of each member of the multibeing home. The harmony results from a heterarchical relationship among the members of the home, in which power flows both vertically and horizontally at the same time, ensuring authority as well as equality and sustaining the health and longevity of that home. Such a home is based on the ends of life, namely, happiness, value, and ethicality, and ultimately on love.

In stark contrast, the relationship between humans and entities other than human in the rationalist, market-oriented, modern industrial society is anarchically homoarchic (or ranked rigidly) because the more humans attempt to control their world, the more uncontrollable it becomes.¹³ This relationship, which may also be described as “failed dominance,” has resulted in ecological and social degradation, which has peaked during the time of the Great Acceleration of the current epoch, referred to as the Anthropocene.¹⁴

As interrelationship is the definitional feature of both the ecohumanities and the ecological, the difference between the two kinds of interrelationships is evident in their approaches to ecological issues; one is based on the industrial-social model, and the other on *tiṇai*. The two approaches are incompatible and in perpetual conflict with each other. When this conflict is viewed through the prism of nationhood, it is apparent that this conflict exists between those who enjoy a national identity and subscribe to the rationale of development and those who neither bear such an identity nor subscribe to such a rationale. The first group includes sections of society such as the poor, Dalits, women,

¹² Nirmal Selvamony, “From the Anthropocene to the Neo-*tiṇaicene*,” *Humanities Circle* 3, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 115–30.

¹³ On “anarchic homoarchy,” see D. M. Bondarenko, *Homoarchy: A Principle of Culture’s Organization; The 13th–19th Centuries Benin Kingdom as a Non-state Supercomplex Society* (Moscow: KomKniga, 2006).

¹⁴ Selvamony, “From the Anthropocene.”

and other marginalized people who are deprived of their legitimate share of the “development pie.” But I am concerned not so much with the question of effective development versus ineffective development as with development versus *antidevelopment*.¹⁵

Development in postindependence India has meant economic growth achieved through increased industrialization. Though industrialization in India had begun before the country became a British colony, it was the norm for mainstream society even in the 1980s, when the ecological became a generic national subject. But industrial development has always been at odds with the idea of the ecological in *tiṇai* societies.¹⁶ Consequently, the major concern for Indian ecological praxis and the ecohumanities has been the conflict between the industrial and *tiṇai* approaches to ecological issues.

Since ecological issues were largely perceived to be national ones, the trend of the ecohumanities during the 1980s is termed “intranational.” Though ecological issues were colored by the values and practices of the *tiṇai* people, the issues themselves were seen mainly from the perspective of the national mainstream. In the following decade, national ecological issues were seen from an international perspective; hence, the trend of the ecohumanities discourse of the 1990s has been characterized as “international.” When digital technology gained supremacy in the third decade, the 2000s, it did not so much annihilate the territorial nation altogether as underscore the fact that “nation” was an imagined community. The stakeholders of Indian ecological concerns in this decade were not necessarily those confined to the limited nation but included those who were part of an unlimited, global community. While ecological concerns were regarded as international even in the previous decade, ecological praxis itself crossed national boundaries in the third decade. Digital technology enabled people from other countries to participate in the ecological praxes of India. As the nonnational *tiṇai* people were also stakeholders in Indian ecological endeavors, we need to consider their role in these endeavors. To the *tiṇai* people, their habitat (usually forest rather than the national imagined community), which is their world, determines their identity. Therefore, for all practical purposes, they are nonnational people who do not have the power to challenge the mainstream forces that threaten their identity. The major challenge to nationhood, especially its limitedness (territoriality), thus came from digital technology. As nationhood manifested only in a partial form, the ecohumanities of this decade

¹⁵ Nirmal Selvamony, “De-development: A Case for Tradition,” in Daniel and Selvamony, *Value Education Today*, 86–97.

¹⁶ Padel, *Sacrificing People*, 303–14.

were “quasi-national.” In the last decade, the idea of nation was radically undermined by the realization that the ecological issues of the imagined or national community were inexorably related to the lives of the *tiṇai* people, who did not constitute such a community. While the previous decade problematized the nation by highlighting its limitedness, the fourth decade, the 2010s, underscored the central principle of nationhood itself, its imaginary existence. It was now evident that the ecological concerns of the mainstream nation (e.g., the value of ecological entities such as the forest, the mountain, and the soil) could not be separated from those of the nonnational *tiṇai* people, even though the interests of both parties had remained incompatible for ages. Only in this decade did *tiṇai* people counter the ecological praxis of the mainstream nation and win the battle. In some ways, the COVID-19 pandemic has devalorized nationhood and valorized the immediate ecosystem. But the nation ignored the message of the pandemic, ultimately, and returned to the old normal. Therefore, the primary challenge to the national has been *tiṇai* (which includes ecosystems such as the forest, the mountain, and the soil, as emphasized by the renowned Indian British ecologist Satish Kumar), which is the major determinant of the contranational trend of the ecohumanities of the 2010s.

Indian ecohumanities can thus be qualified in four different but meaningful ways—intranational, international, quasi-national, and contranational—that help the reader understand the changes this discourse has undergone between 1980 and 2020. The category of “nation” also helps us to see the direction in which the history of Indian ecohumanities has been progressing: from the ecological becoming a part of the national agenda and being understood primarily from a national perspective in the 1980s; to that which remained a national subject but that also had to be understood from an international perspective in the 1990s; to something that challenged the very rationale of nationhood (particularly through the mediation of digital technology) and became quasi-national in the 2000s; to that which conflicted with the very idea of nationhood, as ecological issues concerned not only the people who constituted a nation (an imagined community) but also those *tiṇai* people whose community was neither an imagined one nor a nation.¹⁷

The four periodizing rubrics are not theoretical straitjackets but vantage points from which to see patterns in the dynamic flow of life of humans and entities other than human in India. In fact, views of these dynamic flows are likely to vary depending upon where the viewer stands. I begin with the 1980s because it is in this decade that the ecological as such established itself in India,

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15.

resulting also in the coevolution of the ecohumanities. This essay is by no means exhaustive or even comprehensive. But it provides a bird's-eye view of how the ecohumanities have performed in India since 1980.

By limiting the scope of the discussion, this essay, perhaps for the first time, helps us not only to identify evidence of the new discourse and discuss it but also to consider the strengths and weaknesses of our humanities and our ecology, both of which still continue to remain discrete disciplines. Yet another point of emphasis in this essay is the conflict between the presuppositions of Western ecology and the worldview of the *tiṇai* people, especially of India, which is an intrinsic part of Indian ecohumanities. Though the Aboriginal worldview had its share of influence in the formation of Australian ecological humanities, it lost out to the worldview of the industrial society, which has yielded scientific ecology and environment. In India, unlike in the other traditions, the availability of the *tiṇai* worldview as *tiṇai* theory could help us cross-fertilize the humanities and its subdisciplines with this theory rather than with scientific ecology or environment.

The term “ecohumanities” and the conventional names of the subdisciplines have been adopted in this essay only as convenient labels to signpost the intended entities. The use of conventional names does not mean that this essay either is comfortable with them or concedes their being rooted in ecology and environment. Ultimately, Indian ecohumanities are riddled with the conflict between two modes of relation between human beings and entities other than human, the ontically discontinuous and the continuous. If the former informs scientific ecology and environment, the latter informs the *tiṇai* worldview and *tiṇai* theory. I hope this essay challenges Indian ecohumanities to both take the conflict between the two relational modes with the seriousness it deserves and reconfigure the field with full knowledge of our continuity with the world of entities other than human so that it may also provide a model for reconfiguring its Western counterpart. In light of these introductory remarks, let us see how the ecohumanities have been understood and how this discourse has fared in the last four decades in India.

Intranational Ecohumanities, 1980–1989

Until the 1980s, ecological initiatives of the Indian government focused on one specific ecological aspect or another. Only in the 1980s did the ecological become a national concern. Besides the burgeoning of ecological organizations and movements, the 1980s also saw the emergence of Indian ecohumanities

disciplines such as ecoreligion, ecotheology, ecoethics, and *tiṇai* studies, which is one of the earliest ecohumanities areas.¹⁸ The course in poetics offered in the 1980s at the Madras Christian College pioneered ecocriticism in the Indian university system and yielded an indigenous ecocritical theory that is now known as *puttiṇai* (neo-*tiṇai* poesis, formerly known as oikopoetics) and strengthened the *tiṇai* movement, which is traceable to the forum called *tiṇai* founded in 1980.¹⁹ As a movement, *tiṇai* draws inspiration from early Tamil texts such as the *tolkāppiyam* and the *caṅkam* songs, as well as from the *tiṇai* societies that have managed to survive in the margins of the mainstream society and that promote *tiṇai* as an alternative to the present-day industrial society.²⁰ In its emphasis on place and indigeneity, *tiṇai* resembles writer and linguist Bhalchandra Nemade's *deshivad*, or "nativism," which also emerged in the same decade, but in other respects the two are quite different.²¹ Also, the *tiṇai*-like tradition of Northeast

¹⁸ Here are a few examples of separate areas of social life that have ecological implications and the national organization(s) devoted to each of these areas: forest (Indian Council of Forest Research and Education, 1986, a unit of the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change), agriculture (Central Research Institute for Dryland Agriculture, 1985, a unit of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research), and water (Ministry of Water Resources, 1985). In 1985 the National Council for Environmental Policy and Planning evolved into the separate Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change. Some of the other significant ecological institutions launched in the 1980s are the Centre for Science and Environment (New Delhi, established in 1980), the Centre for Ecological Sciences (established in 1983 at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, set up in 1909), and the Centre for Environment Education (established in 1984 as part of Ministry of Environment and Forests). On ecoreligion, see O. P. Dwivedi, *Environmental Crisis and Hindu Religion* (Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing House, 1987); Nirmal Minz, "Religion, Culture and Education in the Context of Tribal Aspirations in India," *Journal of Dharma* 12, no. 2 (April–June 1987): 402–16; G. Naganathan, *Animal Welfare and Nature: Hindu Scriptural Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Center for Respect of Life and Environment, 1989). On ecotheology, see Long Chan Wati, "Deforestation in Nagaland: A Theological Response," *ETC Journal* 2, no. 1 (June–December 1988): 29–30; Eric J. Lott, "An Ecotheology for the Future: Resources from India's Past," in *Adventurous Faith and Transforming Vision*, ed. Arvind P. Nirmal (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College Research Institute, 1988), 29–52. On ecoethics, see B. Tirkey, "Oraon Ethical Values," *Sevartham* 9 (1984): 57–68.

¹⁹ Both the forum called *tiṇai*, which I started in 1980, and the *tiṇai* movement can be traced to the discussion groups Dialogue, which I established in 1976, and Indian Knowledge Systems, which I launched in the late 1970s. My course Tamil Poetics was later named Ecoliterature. See Nirmal Selvamony, "An Overview of Dialogue in Madras Christian College," *Religion and Society* 26, no. 1 (March 1979): 88–90.

²⁰ Nirmal Selvamony, "*tiṇai* as Alternative Social Order" (online interview), *Sahapedia*, September 6, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPlfrGTLyA0>; see also, Selvamony, "An Alternative Social Order."

²¹ Bhalchandra Nemade, "Nativism in Literature," trans. Arvind Dixit, in *Nativism: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Makarand Paranjape (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1997), 233–54. Nemade's original essay in Marathi, titled "Sahityateel deshiyata," was first published in 1983. In some respects, *tiṇai* theory also resembles the concept of bioregionalism formulated by Berg and Dasmann in the 1970s and the concept of the biome from the late 1960s. See Selvamony, "An Alternative Social Order."

India was more visible in this decade when poets from this region began to publish in English.²²

Though India had to wait until 1992 for a “comprehensive” ecohistory, the seeds for it were sown in 1982, when Bridget Allchin and Raymond Allchin pointed out that during the 1960s, “South Asian history had moved into a new phase.... Recently ... there has been an increasing swing towards considering past cultures in their totality. This means finding out as much as possible about the ecological relationship between a human community or group and its environmental context.”²³ Employing the concept of “environment,” Tamil historian T. K. Venkata Subramanian brought out a history of early Tamil Nadu in which he dealt with *tiṇaikaḷ* (plural of *tiṇai*) briefly.²⁴

Environment was the theme of *The State of India's Environment: A Citizen's Report* (1982), which may be regarded as a milestone in the history of Indian ecology and the ecohumanities.²⁵ It was the first such report in the entire country. Problematizing the relationship between environment and development (which has been the fundamental issue in ecohumanities discourse), the report pointed out that the present-day idea of development, which was based on the Western consumerist model, had destroyed India's environment and was jeopardizing the lives of the poor and women.²⁶ True development, it averred, meant ensuring self-reliance and equity between the rich and the poor of the country. The authors were not averse to India's use of modern science and technology, but they were opposed to the baggage of values the latter brought with them.²⁷

In stark contrast to the values underlying modern science and technology, a traditional value such as reverence for lives other than human was evident in some of India's ecological practices. One such practice, namely, tree hugging, is traceable to the *tiṇai* epoch, or “*tiṇaicene*” (which precedes the Holocene),

²² Nirmal Selvamony, “Portable Homeland: Robin Ngangom's Take on the Dying *tiṇai* Tradition of the Indian North East,” *Kavyabharati* 20 (2008): 150–70; N. D. R. Chandra and Nigamananda Das, *Ecology, Myth and Mystery: Contemporary Poetry in English from Northeast India* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2007), 118.

²³ Bridget Allchin and Raymond Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

²⁴ T. K. Venkata Subramanian, *Environment and Urbanisation in Early Tamilakam* (Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1988).

²⁵ *The State of India's Environment: A Citizen's Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1982); A. Agarwal, R. Chopra, and K. Sharma, *intiyāviṇ curruccūlal [The State of India's Environment, 1982: A Citizen's Report]*, trans. pi. cuppiramaṇiyam (Chennai: Kre-A, 1982).

²⁶ See Rajni Kothari, “Environment and Alternative Development,” *Alternatives* 5, no. 4 (1980): 427–75; Claude Alvares and Ramesh Billorey, *Damming the Narmada: India's Greatest Planned Environmental Disaster* (Penang: Third World Network / APPN, 1988); Philip Viegas and Geeta Menon, *The Impact of Environmental Degradation on People* (New Delhi: ISI, 1989).

²⁷ Agarwal, Chopra, and Sharma, *intiyāviṇ curruccūlal*, 206–7.

during which trees were regarded as family members, at times more special than human family members themselves. Consider the following song from the coastal *tiṇai* of the early Tamil people:

We quite forgot about the ripe seed
my playmates and I had planted
in the white sand until it sprouted.
As we nurtured it fondly with ghee-mixed milk,
“more special than you, is your sister,”
said mother of the greatness
of the Alexandrian laurel.
Embarrassed am I to jest with you,
O koṇka, of the ghats with shiny water
in which call the sinistral white conches
like the *viḷari* music of the new musicians,
if you don’t mind,
there is plenty of dense shade elsewhere.²⁸

Inspired by an earlier, kinship-based society, in which the tree was a member of the family, the Bishnois of the eighteenth century, under the leadership of Amrita Devi, protected their *khejri* (*Prosopis cineraria*) trees by hugging them until the Bishnois lost their lives. Inspired by the Bishnois, members of Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS), launched by Chandi Prasad Bhatt in the early 1960s in Uttarakhand, embraced trees to protect them from the lumbermen, and female members tied *rakhi*, or the sacred thread, around the trees they wanted to protect as if the trees were their brothers. Later, DGSS came to be called Chipko (a Hindi word that means “to cling to”) due to the tree-hugging practice of its members. Inspired by this movement, in 1983 Pandurang Hegde organized the villagers in Karnataka into the group Appiko (the Kannada word for “to hug”), and in 1986 K. Venkatachalam (father of Arivudai Nambi, both key members of the *tiṇai* group) formed a group called Save Eastern Ghats Organisation (SEGO) in Tamil Nadu.²⁹ Tree hugging was both an affirmation of *tiṇai* lifeways and a form of protest against the form of development legitimized by modern science and technology.

²⁸ *nannan* [Excellent *tiṇai*], trans. Nirmal Selvamony, 172, <https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-natrinai-1-200/>.

²⁹ *nannan nāṭu* [*nannan*’s country] 2, no. 1 (October 1999): 1; S. Senthilir, “Everyone Should Join Hands to Save Environment,” *The Hindu*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/puducherry/everyone-should-join-hands-to-save-environment/article19255202.ece>.

The domestication of modern science and technology has not been an easy task for India. The Bhopal gas leak tragedy of 1984, one of the worst industrial disasters, cost the country dearly. Consequent to this catastrophe, the Ministry for the Environment was created in 1985, and the Environmental Protection Act passed in 1986. It was presumed that industrial development was necessary and that effective laws could protect people from the disastrous consequences of such development.

A basic question that underlies Indian ecohumanities is this: Can the story of the *tiṇai* lifeways be narrated by the humanities?

Another major contentious initiative of the nation was the largest river development project in the world, the Narmada Valley Project (some 500 kilometers southwest of Bhopal, the site of the gas leak tragedy), which planned to build thirty large dams and hundreds of small dams along the length of the Narmada River. Though this project was conceived in 1945–46, the construction of the largest dam, called Sardar Sarovar, only commenced in 1961. Concerned about the perilous consequences of dam-building, including the destruction of the habitat for humans and beings other than human, displacement of more than a million people, inundation of prime habitats, and destruction of rare species of organisms, social activist Medha Patkar, along with Indigenous or *tiṇai* activists in the region, started a movement called Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada) in the mid-1980s. This movement has “succeeded in generating a debate across the sub-continent, which has encapsulated the conflict between two opposing styles of development: one massively destructive of people and the environment in the quest for large-scale industrialisation; the other consisting of replicable small-scale decentralised, democratic and ecologically sustainable options and activities harmoniously integrated with both local communities and nature.”³⁰

No sooner had a new avatar of the discreditable concept of “development” called “sustainable development” appeared than the Indian ecologists and ecohumanities scholars embraced it eagerly in order to promote a rational, scien-

³⁰ “Medha Patkar and Baba Amte / Narmada Bachao Andolan (1991, India),” The Right Livelihood Foundation, <https://www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/laureates/medha-patkar-and-baba-amte-narmada-bachao-andolan/>.

ce-based modernity in India.³¹ Such modernity demanded, in Anil Agarwal's opinion, not the dismissal but the secularization of traditional Indian ecological practices, such as the nurture of sacred groves. Indeed, he was not the only one who believed that a secularized sacred grove would continue to be sacred enough to ensure the age-old harmony he found between India's tribal people and their forests.³² In this secularizing project, no small role was played by scientific ecology.³³

Unlike the widely prevalent science-based approach to the ecological, the approach of a few other ecologically oriented groups was radically critical of modern science and technology. Representatives of the latter approach included *tiṇai*, the group founded in Chennai in 1980, and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), founded by Vandana Shiva in 1984. If the *tiṇai* movement perceived modern science as being reductionist and antiecological, then RFSTE regarded it as being both, as well as androcentric and violent. While the two groups were critical of the industrial social model, *tiṇai* also envisaged "an alternative social order."³⁴ Radical criticism of development may be found in ecogender studies, ecotheology, ecoliterature, and *tiṇai* studies.³⁵

To sum up, when the ecological became a national concern in the 1980s, mainstream Indian society continued to pursue industrial development despite discontent with industrialism. The discontent was partly due to the conflict of industrialism with the practices and values traceable to the *tiṇai* society.

³¹ Donald Worster, "The Shaky Ground of Sustainability," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*, ed. George Sessions (Boston: Shambala, 1995), 417–27; Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, "Cultural Genocide and the Rhetoric of Sustainable Mining in East India," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3 (September 2010): 333–41. On "sustainable development," see World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³² Anil Agarwal, "An Indian Environmentalist's Credo," in *Social Ecology*, ed. Ramachandra Guha (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 382–83, 377.

³³ Selvamony, "Considering the Humanities Ecotheoretically."

³⁴ Vandana Shiva, "Reductionist Science as an Epistemological Violence," in *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity*, ed. Ashis Nandy (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nirmal Selvamony, "Sources of Indian Values," paper presented at the National Workshop on Value Education, Danishpet, Salem, June 15–22, 1987; Selvamony, "An Alternative Social Order."

³⁵ Shiva, "Reductionist Science"; Gabriella Dietrich, "Development, Ecology and Women's Struggles," *Social Action* 38, no. 1 (1988): 1–14; Wati, "Deforestation in Nagaland"; kōmal cāminātaṅ, *taṇṇīr taṇṇīr* [Water! Water!] (Chennai: vāṇati patippakam, 1981); Selvamony, "Sources of Indian Values"; Selvamony, "De-development."

International Ecohumanities, 1990–1999

Industrialism gained momentum in the 1990s with the enforcement of the New Economic Policy of 1991. The policy of globalization, with its capitalistic ideology, internationalized the Indian economy and impacted all aspects of Indian life, including the ecological. The first cover of *Down to Earth*, a magazine about “the ecological globalisation in the inter-connected world,” anticipated the perspective of the Earth Summit, held between June 3 and 14, 1992.³⁶ As of 1992, the Earth Summit was the largest international ecological conference, with attendees (including national leaders) from 178 countries. One hundred Indian NGOs interested in ecological praxis participated in the summit, which signposted “the new international ecological order.”³⁷ Globalization of the economy by means of the 1991 policy and the ecological cannot be viewed as discrete phenomena.

To some Indian ecologists, the new international ecological order smacked of “environmental colonialism” and was inseparable from the major ecoethical problem, namely, overconsumption.³⁸ Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain located the problem in extranational space, primarily, the Global North.³⁹ While ecological equity had been a national concern in the previous decade too, now it was part of an international ideal: equity between the Global North and the Global South.⁴⁰ In this scenario, Agarwal chose to champion the cause of a science-based ecological praxis of the poor, a category that included (in his thinking) the primal people.⁴¹ By successfully flagging the issue of the displacement of more than two million Indigenous and *tinai* people, ecoactivists such as Patkar and others problematized the ecological impact of large dams and were instrumen-

³⁶ Sunita Narain, “About Us,” *Down to Earth*, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/page/about-us-50353>. This print magazine was devoted to ecological issues and was launched by the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi in May 1992.

³⁷ David Gosling, *Religion and Ecology in India and Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2001), 181–88; Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, *Towards a Green World: Should Global Environmental Management Be Built on Legal Conventions or Human Rights?* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1992), 1.

³⁸ Agarwal and Narain, *Towards a Green World*, v–vi, 1; Ramachandra Guha, “The Environmentalist of the Poor: Anil Agarwal,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 19, 2002, 204–7; Guha, *Environmentalism*, 138–45.

³⁹ Agarwal and Narain, *Towards a Green World*, v.

⁴⁰ Agarwal, Chopra, and Sharma, *intiyāvin curruccūlal*, 206–7; Agarwal and Narain, *Towards a Green World*; Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995).

⁴¹ Guha, “The Environmentalist of the Poor”; Agarwal, “An Indian Environmentalist’s Credo,” 377.

tal in the cancellation of a part of the loan from the World Bank in 1993.⁴² Though the Narmada Valley Project was an internationally aided one from the 1980s, only in the 1990s was the true nature of the project brought to light, made possible only by an international independent review commissioned by the World Bank. The review made it apparent that the issue—noncompliance with bank policies—was an ethical one.⁴³

Dam-building and habitat destruction were the central issues in Vikram Seth's fable "The Elephant and the Tragopan." In the paradisaical Bingle Valley of Seth's fable,

The tragopan last week had heard
The rumour from another bird
.....
That man had hatched a crazy scheme
To mar their land and dam their stream,
To flood the earth on which they stood,
And cut the woods down for their wood.⁴⁴

Note the words "crazy" and "mar," which show how the issue is not only ecological but also ethical.

Ecoethical discussions have long been part of ecophilosophical, ecoliterary,

⁴² Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Arundhati Roy, "The Greater Common Good: The Human Cost of Big Dams," *Frontline*, June 4, 1999, 4–29.

⁴³ World Bank Operations Evaluation Department, "Learning from Narmada," *OED Precis* 88 (May 1995), <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/777211468249297544/pdf>.

⁴⁴ Vikram Seth, "The Elephant and the Tragopan," in *The Collected Poems* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999), 337–63, 337.

ecothetical/ecocritical, ecoreligious, and ecotheological discourses.⁴⁵ Now, ecotheology has yielded a subdiscipline, ecofeminist theology, a subarea within ecogender studies like ecofeminism.⁴⁶ Indian ecohistory came of age in this decade, with several scholars entering this field. National ecohistory was now narrated not from the perspective of India per se but from that of India's relation to its colonizer or from that of the wider domain of South Asia and Southeast Asia.⁴⁷

Discussing the problem of equity, Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha were not hopeful that Indian environmentalists could help usher in an equitable society. Therefore, they advanced their own brand of environmentalism, called "conservative-liberal-socialism," which would create a more egalitarian society by permitting socially responsible private enterprise, encouraging modern science and technology, and internationalizing India by integrating it with the

⁴⁵ On ecophilosophy, see S. N. Ghosh, "Living in Tune with Nature," in Daniel and Selvamony, *Value Education Today*, 98–105; Pushparajan, *The Ecological Worldview for a Just Society* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1992); Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*; George A. James, ed., *Ethical Perspectives on Environmental Issues in India* (Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 1999). On the ecoliterary, see Sujata Bhatt, *Monkey Shadows* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1991); A. K. Ramanujan, *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*, ed. Stuart Blackburn and Alan Dundes (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1997); Seth, "The Elephant and the Tragopan." On ecotheory and ecocriticism, see Nemade, "Nativism in Literature"; Nirmal Selvamony and A. Rukmani, "Land Health: The Bioethical Approach of the Foragers," in *Bioethics in India: Proceedings of the International Bioethics Workshop in Madras; Biomanagement of Biogeoresources, 16–19 Jan. 1997*, University of Madras, ed. Jayapaul Azariah, Hilda Azariah, and Darryl R. J. Macer, <https://www.eubios.info/india/BII78.HTM>. On ecoreligion, see Vasudha Narayanan, "One Tree Is Equal to Ten Sons: Hindu Responses to the Problems of Ecology, Population, and Consumption," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 2 (1997): 291–332. On ecotheology, see Daniel D. Chetti, ed., *Ecology and Development: Theological Issues* (Madras: United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, 1991); K. C. Abraham, *Eco-justice: A New Agenda for Church's Mission* (Bombay: Bombay Urban Industrial League for Development, 1992); Johnson Vadakumchery, "The Earth Mother and the Indigenous People of India," *Journal of Dharma* 18, no. 1 (January–March 1993): 85–94.

⁴⁶ On ecofeminist theology, see Aruna Gnanadason, "Women and Spirituality in Asia," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 351–60. On ecofeminism, see Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Janet Chawla, "Gendered Representations of Seed, Earth and Grain: A Woman-Centred Perspective on the Conflation on Women and Earth," *Journal of Dharma* 18, no. 3 (July–September 1993): 237–42.

⁴⁷ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*; K. Sivaramkrishnan, *Modern Forests: State Making and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Mahesh Rangarajan, "Environmental Histories of South Asia: A Review Essay," *Environment and History* 2, no. 2 (1996): 129–43; S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing Nature: Forestry and Imperial Eco-development 1800–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). And see David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

advanced Global North.⁴⁸

Relying on the presumptive global credibility of scientized environmentalism, Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier denounced “deep ecology” as “specious nonsense about the equal rights of all species.”⁴⁹ Since deep ecological categories were not serviceable for Gadgil and Guha, they used shallow ecological categories such as “resource,” “biomass,” and “management” to trace “the broad contours of eco-cultural revolution in India.”⁵⁰ According to them, struggles for resource use (which had been ongoing during the colonial and postcolonial eras) had only left the country a fissured land: “There seemed no realistic hope of emulating Europeans or New World modes of industrial development.” Nevertheless, “a new mode of resource use and a new belief system” were major concerns of the collection *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India, Attitudes to the Environment*.⁵¹ New subareas of *tiṇai* studies, such as *tiṇai* musicology (ecomusicology) and *tiṇai* philosophy (within *tiṇai* studies) emerged, and *tiṇai* theory spread to other countries in this decade.⁵² Despite rapid industrialization, the *tiṇai* people finally found their intercessor in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, set up in 1999.

In sum, we find evidence of internationalization of the ecological praxis of industrialism. The affirmation of the lifeways of the *tiṇai* people was responsible for much of the disaffection with industrialism.⁵³ But nothing could persuade the international ecohumanities of this decade to reject industrialism or its terminology completely.

⁴⁸ Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, 132.

⁴⁹ However, Guha’s idea that deep ecology cannot deal with contemporary problems such as overconsumption and militarization ignores the (deep ecological) platform principle of avoidance of excessive human interference. Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107, 95.

⁵⁰ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 239.

⁵¹ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 245; Geeti Sen, ed., *Indigenous Vision: Peoples of India, Attitudes to the Environment* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992).

⁵² Nirmal Selvamony, “*tolkāppiyat tamiḷ icai iyal*” [Tamil musicology in *tolkāppiyam*], in *Annual Report of the paṇ (Raga) Research Conference* (Chennai: tamiḷ icai caṅkam, 1991), 77–96.

⁵³ Radical criticism of industrialism informed my lectures in the United States on *tiṇai* in 1994–95 and my performance of Tamil *tiṇai* songs individually and in a group performance titled “Dreaming of Home” held at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina, in 1995, in which poetry from Indigenous cultures other than Tamil contextualized the Tamil *tiṇai* songs I had set to music in *tiṇai* musical modes called *paṅkal*. In the internationalization of Indian ecohumanities and the strengthening of the *tiṇai* movement, these initiatives have also made their contribution: Emily Simmons, “Dreaming of Home: Departments Collaborate in a Unique Celebration of Cross-Cultural Music and Poetry,” *The Davidsonian*, April 3, 1995, 10.

Quasi-National Ecohumanities, 2000–2009

Internationalization in the previous decade had not rendered the idea of nationhood irrelevant. It was in the first decade of the new millennium, despite evidence of nationalism, that the nation as an idea was challenged effectively by the digital revolution of the 2000s. Now the nation was both real and hyperreal. The worldwide web delinked knowledge and action from nationhood and the ecohumanities. Using digital communication modes, people across the world have, in their own ways, intervened to affirm the rights of humans and entities other than human by signing petitions, sending messages, and documenting events. For example, international organizations such as Survival International, ActionAid, Amnesty International, Avaaz, and the Norwegian Council on Ethics have been effective ecological whistleblowers.⁵⁴

During this decade, the ecohumanities disciplines and their organizational structures took special interest in the Indigenous people to whom nationhood had always been irrelevant. Indigeneity was already a major component of the new discipline, the ecological humanities, launched in this decade by Libby Robin and Deborah Rose.⁵⁵ This discipline brought under one academic umbrella all the disciplines that had already been engaging with the relation between humans and entities other than human (see above). In the new discipline, the theme of indigeneity was an important one, though its complex relation to the ecological and the national remained an area for further exploration.

Nationhood has been challenged by the *tiṇai* people, whose habitat, usually the forest, determines their identity. Because they do not participate directly in most national social institutions, such as the economy, the polity, education, and communication, their lifeways are quite unlike that of mainstream society, which constitutes the imagined community we call “nation.” However, they were not powerful enough either to challenge the developmental measures of the mainstream nation or to affirm their nonnational ecological worldview and praxis vis-à-vis the mainstream or the national ecological worldview and praxis. The major challenge to the national ecological came not from the *tiṇai* people but from digital technology, which rendered the national ecological and the ecohumanities of this decade partly national or quasi-national.

Stories about the ecosystem people surviving the Asian tsunami of 2004 and

⁵⁴ Toby Nicholas, *Mine: Story of a Sacred Mountain* (short film), Survival International, 2009, www.survivalinternational.org/films/mine; “Amnesty Petition on Vedanta,” June 1, 2010, <https://londonminingnetwork.org/2010/06/amnesty-petition-on-vedanta/>; Council on Ethics, Norwegian Government Pension Fund, *Report on Vedanta Resources PLC* (Oslo: Ministry of Finance, 2007).

⁵⁵ Robin and Rose, “The Ecological Humanities.”

the mainstream people perishing in it reaffirmed the theory that the relationship between the *tiṇai* people and their ecosystem was a far more secure one than the one between the people of the industrial society and their “environment.”⁵⁶ Leaders of mainstream India responded to the disaster by passing the Disaster Management Act of 2005 and building institutions around it.

When the ecoanthropologists showed interest in the lifeways of the nonnational *tiṇai* people, they chose to view the latter through the lens of the concept of development.⁵⁷ Interest in the nonnational values of those who were earlier excluded from the national mainstream were expressed in ecoliterary texts.⁵⁸ Though ecoreligious studies did not express direct concern with nonnational values, the ecological values they discussed critiqued the industrialist values either explicitly or implicitly. While Christopher Chapple and Geetha Ramanujam focused on the ecological values inherent in Jainism, Pragati Sahni focused on those in Buddhism, David Gosling on those in both Hinduism and Buddhism, and R. Narayan and J. Kumar on those in Jainism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism.⁵⁹

As for ecohistory, the international perspective of the previous decade resulted in an approach that helped critique nationalist ecohistory radically and review the question of exclusion of some groups of people (women, Dalits, the ecosystem people, the “ecological refugees,” and others) from national ecological theory and practice.⁶⁰ Though the exclusion of women had been already proble-

⁵⁶ Neelesh Misra, “Stone Age Culture Survives Tsunami Waves,” NBC News, January 5, 2005, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6786476>; Steve Curwood and Sophie Grig, “Tsunami Survival: The Isolated Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands,” *Living on Earth*, January 7, 2005, <https://www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?programID=05-P13-00001&segmentID=1>.

⁵⁷ Karuppaiyan and Murugan, *Tribal Ecology*.

⁵⁸ *kōmal cāmināṭaṇ*, *Water!*, trans. Subramanian Shankar (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2001); Nirmaldasan and Nirmal Selvamony, *tiṇai 1* (Chennai: Persons for Alternative Social Order, 2001), <https://www.angelfire.com/nd/nirmaldasan/tinai.html>; G. N. Devy, ed., *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002); Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004); C. K. Janu, *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004); Joe D’Cruz, *aḷi cūḷ ulaku* [World surrounded by the ocean] (Chennai: *tamiḷini*, 2004); Robin Ngangom, *The Desire of Roots* (Cuttack: Chandrabhaga, 2006).

⁵⁹ Christopher Key Chapple, *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2006); Geetha Ramanujam, *Environmental Awareness in Jainism* (Chennai: Department of Jainology, University of Madras, 2006); Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtual Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Gosling, *Religion and Ecology in India*; R. Narayan and J. Kumar, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Concepts in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 2003).

⁶⁰ Gunnell Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005). For brief summaries of environmental history in India, see Donald Hughes, *What Is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), and chapter 7 of Christopher Hill, *South Asia: An Environmental History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2008).

matized in the 1980s by Vandana Shiva, such exclusion could now be viewed afresh (especially from the angle of authorial bias) along with the “invisibilizing” of Dalits and other minorities.⁶¹

When the Indian political gaze fell upon the primal people, it resulted in the passing of one of the most important ecolegal acts in the history of the country, namely, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006, or the Forest Rights Act (FRA).⁶² While previous forest acts in India (which date from the nineteenth century) considered the forest from the perspective of the mainstream people, the FRA, for the first time, looked upon the forest as the habitat of the forest-dweller. Though forests would be recognized internationally as an important ecosystem only in the next decade, a few other ecosystems did receive international attention in this decade (2002 was the year of mountains, 2003 of freshwater, and 2006 of deserts) despite the Global North’s relentless promotion of industrial development, especially in the ecosystems of the Global South.

It was in this decade that the economic gaze of India fell upon the ecosystems of Northeast India, and in order to “develop” and “mainstream” that part of the country, in 2001 the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region was created. The following lines clearly show how the persona of the poem, “Jorhat,” by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, a Khasi poet, looks upon development in Kaziranga:

Let me speak of the half-submerged huts
like malignant growths in the heart of Kaziranga,
and of the highway cutting through its torso
like a surgical scar.⁶³

⁶¹ Mukul Sharma, “Where Are Dalits in Indian Environmentalism?,” paper presented at the National Seminar on Dalit Studies and Higher Education, “Exploring Content Material for a New Discipline,” Delhi, February 28, 2004; Debnarayan Sarker and Nimai Das, “Women’s Participation in Forestry: Some Theoretical Issues,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 26–November 1, 2002, 4407–12.

⁶² The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, <https://www.fra.org.in/document/FRA%20ACT-Eng.pdf>.

⁶³ Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, *The Yearning of Seeds: Poems* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011), 124. In another poem, entitled “Khangchen-Dzonga,” Nongkynrih’s persona says how development has only been a threat to the Khasis in the following lines: “We who offer the same reverence to mountains / Sohpet Bneng shall we offer our land / to vultures too? Will the dark impenetrable / mist of time shroud our lives forever?” (Nongkynrih, *The Yearning of Seeds*, 26). Sohpet Bneng is a mountain in Meghalaya that is sacred to the Khasis.

The mainstreaming of people often involved exploiting and damaging the world (perhaps an undisturbed *tiṇai*) those people inhabited. For example, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Onge people were “encouraged to give up their way of life for a more settled one, so as to open up a larger chunk of the forest for exploitation.”⁶⁴ The *tiṇai* people had not yet found strategies to successfully assert their rights and challenge the mainstream nation. The inadequacy of human rights was already a concern of the *tiṇai* group. In order to be fair to the whole ecological home, I have argued elsewhere that it was not enough to privilege the rights of just one member of that multibeing home. Rather, the rights of the whole home had to be affirmed, necessitating a shift from human rights to ecorights.⁶⁵

Indian ecohumanities should consider basing itself not on Haeckelian ecology and environment . . . but on the indigenous, contranational, and protoecological theory of *tiṇai*.

The interests of the ecological home had also been a central concern of *tiṇai* criticism. To promote *tiṇai* criticism and ecocriticism, under my leadership, a forum for ecocriticism was founded in 2005 that came to be called the Organisation for Studies in Literature and Environment–India (OSLE-India) in 2006.

The founding of this forum marked a significant stage of *tiṇai* movement. In 2007 this forum brought out the first volume on ecocriticism in India that demonstrated the relation between *tiṇai* criticism and the environment-based ecocriticism of the industrial nations.⁶⁶ Online publications by *tiṇai* disseminated *puttiṇai* (neo-*tiṇai*, a theory I formulated) and furthered the cause of *tiṇai*

⁶⁴ Indra Munshi, ed., *The Adivasi Question: Issues of Land, Forest, and Livelihoods* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, EPW & TISS, 2012), 16; When Air Marshal Kukreja said, “The Andaman and Nicobar Islands need to be developed into a viable security and economic asset of the nation, thus integrating them with the mainstream” he was, arguably, voicing the opinion of those who subscribe to the industrialist worldview. See Dhiraj Kukreja, “Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Security Challenge for India,” *Indian Defence Review* 28, no. 1 (January–March 2013), <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/andaman-and-nicobar-islands-a-security-challenge-for-india/2/>.

⁶⁵ Nirmal Selvamony, “Ecorights,” in *Current Issues in Bioethics and Environment*, ed. M. Gabriel, K. Joshua, and Jayapaul Azariah (Chennai: Department of Philosophy, Madras Christian College, 2001), 265–91.

⁶⁶ Nirmal Selvamony, Nirmaldasan, and Rayson K. Alex, *Essays in Ecocriticism* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2012).

as an alternative to the industrial social order.⁶⁷ To promote the interests of the *tiṇai* people, in 2009 OSLE-India changed its name to *tiṇai* and reaffirmed its continuity with the *tiṇai* movement, which had commenced in 1980.

Unlike in the previous two decades, in the third the Indian government itself recognized the rights of the *tiṇai* people. But such recognition was expressed only in an ambivalent manner in the ecohumanities, which at once affirm and devalue the values of the *tiṇai* people.

Contranational Ecohumanities, 2010–2020

The second decade of the twenty-first century will go down in Indian history as the time when one of the groups of *tiṇai* people in the country became extinct. When the last survivor of the Bo tribe (which is one of the ten branches of the Great Andamanese), Boa Senior, died on February 5, 2010, in Andaman, along with her died the beautiful songs she sang, her language, and her *tiṇai*. The surviving nine tribes of “the Great Andamanese depended largely on the Indian government for food and shelter.”⁶⁸ Despite the rhetoric about preservation of cultures, the policy of mainstreaming, which had commenced in the Nehruvian era, persisted in this decade also.⁶⁹ In the Himalayan region, particularly in the northeastern tribal state of Manipur, the cost of mainstreaming included, among other things, anthropogenic landslides.⁷⁰

Despite this mainstreaming of *tiṇai* societies, Indian ecohistory showed academic interest in studying *tiṇai*.⁷¹ In *The Adivasi Question*, Indra Munshi discusses at length issues of land, forest, and livelihood.⁷² Indian ecoscholars for the first time earned their doctorates by studying *tiṇai* people such as the Mudu-

⁶⁷ Nirmaldasan and Nirmal Selvamony, *tiṇai* 1; Nirmaldasan and Nirmal Selvamony, *tiṇai* 2 (Chennai: Persons for Alternative Social Order, 2002), <https://www.angelfire.com/nd/nirmaldasan/tinai2.html>; Nirmaldasan and Nirmal Selvamony, *tiṇai* 3.

⁶⁸ “Extinct: Andaman Tribe’s Extermination Complete as Last Member Dies,” Survival International, February 4, 2010, <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/5509>.

⁶⁹ Kukreja, “Andaman and Nicobar Islands.”

⁷⁰ Press Trust of India, “Most Landslides in Manipur Caused by Anthropogenic Factors: Env. Ministry,” *Business Standard*, August 12, 2018, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/most-landslides-in-manipur-caused-by-anthropogenic-factors-env-ministry-118081200108_1.html.

⁷¹ Kapur, *Environmental History*.

⁷² Munshi, *The Adivasi Question*.

gar, Kāṇi, and Māvilaṅ and bioregional ecosystems.⁷³ The ecosystem was also a major theme in several ecoliterary works.⁷⁴ In 2010 OSLE-India (now known as tiṇai) launched the Mudugar-Kurumbar Research Centre in the Attapady Reserve Forest (Kerala), in 2012 it adopted the name tiṇai for its ecocritical forum, and in 2014 it founded the tiṇai Eco-Film Festival to focus on films pertaining to the *tiṇai* people.

The voice of the *tiṇai* people was never louder than when they vetoed industrial development in their own ecosystem. Mining was prohibited in the Niyamgiri mountain range (in Odisha) by India's first ecological referendum in 2013. This mountain range has been the home of the Dongria Kondh tribe, with about 8,000 people living in a hundred villages. To these people the mountain is their god Niyamraja, who created them and sustains them, as the following song, "Song for Niyamgiri," of Rajkishor, a singer-activist in Odisha, affirms:

We will never leave the mountain, stream, forest and our home.
We will not give up the struggle, even if we have to sacrifice our lives.
Dear friends, we will not leave the struggle.
.....
Our *devata* [god] is the one 'who always gives'—our god is our life.
Dear friends, the mountain, forest, land and streams are our gods.
It is our Bha-ga-ban: 'bha' for *bhoomi* [land], 'ga' for *gagan* [sky],
'ba' for *baayu* [air] and 'na' for *neer* [water].
.....
Our land is full of forest, fruits, roots and animals.
We are neither Hindu nor Muslim nor Christians.
We are the tribes and worshipers of nature.⁷⁵

⁷³ For the Mudugar, see Rayson Alex, "Symbiosis in the Songs of Mudugar" (PhD diss., University of Madras, 2010); Padini Nirmal, "Disembodiment and Deworlding: Taking Feminist Political Ecology to Ground in Attapady, Kerala" (PhD diss., Clark University, 2017); for the *kāṇi*, see Siffo Kumeds, "Kāṇi Songs: An Oikocritical Study" (PhD diss., Bharatidasan University, 2014), and for the *māvilaṅ*, see Lilykutty Abraham, "The Songs of māvilaṅ Tribe: An Ecocritical Analysis" (PhD diss., Kannur University, 2018). See also Subarna De, "A Bioregional Reading of Select Novels on Coorg" (PhD diss., Central University of Tamil Nadu, 2018).

⁷⁴ Ruskin Bond, "Monkey on the Roof," in *Funny Side Up* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2010); Kaveri Nambisan, *The Scent of Pepper* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010); Sarita Mandanna, *Tiger Hills* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011); Sarah Joseph, *Gift in Green*, trans. Valsan Thampu (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2011); Vikram Seth, *The Rivered Earth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011); Nongkynrih, *The Yearning of Seeds*; K. Satchidanandan, *Songs from the Seashore: Poetry from the Indian Ocean Rim* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2014).

⁷⁵ Purusottam Thakur, "The Mountain, Forest and Streams Are Our Gods," People's Archive of Rural India, April 20, 2018, <https://ruralindiaonline.org/articles/the-mountain-forest-and-streams-are-our-gods/>.

Without the FRA, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and the support of several agencies and individuals, the referendum would not have been possible. The battle was won. But what about the war? When the *tiṇai* people and other minorities are invisible, the question is a burning one. Mukul Sharma has argued that ecocasteism blinded environmentalists from seeing the bleak future of the Dalits, especially the forest-dwelling Dalit communities that had not benefited from the FRA.⁷⁶ The absence of women in forestry institutions was also debated in the ecohumanities discourse.⁷⁷

The most crucial questions raised by the war waged by developmentalists on *tiṇai* people such as the Dongria Kondh were ecoethical ones. With regard to the ecoethical choice between the lifeways of the industrial and of the *tiṇai* people, Alyssa Luboff made a provocative assertion: “We cannot live in the rainforest like the natives before colonization.”⁷⁸ She seemed to suggest that upholding the lifeways of the natives (*tiṇai* people) was as absolutist as Lynn White identifying the dualism of humans and nature inherent in Christian theology as the root cause of the ecological crisis.⁷⁹ If anyone (including Luboff) was of the view that life within a *tiṇai* society was a stunted one, Vandana Shiva challenged it by affirming, “Everything I need to know I learned in the forest.”⁸⁰

Besides *tiṇai* people and their lifeways, the ecological home of entities other than human has also been the subject of discussion in the contranational ecohumanities of this decade. Those beings we call “nature” stood in a complex power relationship to culture.⁸¹ To Satish Kumar, of the three fundamentals of life, namely, soil, soul, and society, the most basic one was soil or humus (from which the word “human” is derived).⁸² Emphasizing the need to revive our kinship with the earth and its occupants, Amitav Ghosh wrote:

⁷⁶ Mukul Sharma, “Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 9, 2012, 46–52; Mukul Sharma, *Green and Saffron: Hindu Nationalism and Indian Environmental Politics* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012); Arpitha Kodiveri, “Narratives of Dalit Inclusion and Exclusion in Formulating and Implementing the Forest Rights Act, 2006,” Hindu Centre for Politics and Policy, Policy Report No. 17, 2016.

⁷⁷ Bina Agarwal, *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women’s Presence within and beyond Community Forestry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ Alyssa Luboff, “Relativism, Realism, and the Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” in *Ecocultural Ethics: Critical Essays*, ed. Rayson K. Alex, Susan Deborah, Reena Cheruvalath, and Gyan Prakash (Lexington Books, 2017), 73.

⁷⁹ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, March 10, 1967, 1203–7.

⁸⁰ Vandana Shiva, “Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the Forest,” *Eternal Bhoomi* 5, no. 3 (July–September 2014): 12–14.

⁸¹ Amita Baviskar, *Contested Grounds: Essays on Nature, Culture and Power* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸² Satish Kumar, “Satish Kumar: The Link between Soil, Soul and Society,” *The Guardian*, September 16, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/satish-kumar-soil-soul-society>.

But I would like to believe that out of this struggle will be born a generation that will be able to look upon the world with clearer eyes than those that preceded it; that they will be able to transcend the isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the time of its derangement; that they will rediscover their kinship with other beings, and that this vision, at once new and ancient, will find expression in a transformed and renewed art and literature.... How else do we account for the interest in the non-human that has been burgeoning in the humanities over the last decade and over a range of disciplines, from philosophy to anthropology and literary criticism.⁸³

Never did entities other than human stare in the face of humans as uncannily as they did when COVID-19 broke out in China. For the first time, humans had to reckon with another member of the ecosystem, a virus, however villainous its role was in an ecological plot that challenged the normal and provoked humans to imagine “the new normal.”⁸⁴ At least to those who did not want to return to the old normal, a new normal was an urgent need. But what could the new normal be? To think this through, we may begin with the “lockdown,” one of the unique consequences of this pandemic. What was locked down was “the big,” what Raymond Dasmann called “the biosphere.” What was not locked down was “the small,” or what Dasmann called “the ecosystem,” which accommodates the small shops that sell essentials to the people of adjacent small communities.⁸⁵ In order to keep people alive and healthy, the ecosystem had to be privileged over the biosphere. The prime minister of India, in one of his television addresses to the country during the lockdown, put it in a different way. He said health was more important than the economy, something we had not heard in a long time from anyone either abroad or in India. Probably, he meant that to be alive and healthy, the ecosystem was sufficient. Therefore, a government could legitimately lock people out of their biosphere but not out of their ecosystem. However, if “the ocean is our enemy ... sky, mountains, animals are our enemy ... germs are enemies,” as Bishnu Mohapatra put it, can we

⁸³ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 216–17.

⁸⁴ *Collins Dictionary*, “The new normal,” <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/submission/22302/the+new+normal>; Arundhati Roy, “The Pandemic Is a Portal,” *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>.

⁸⁵ Dasmann, “The Threatened World.”

effectively lock out these members of our ecosystem?⁸⁶ By visiting humans and carrying them off in large numbers, the virus has ushered in at least a discussion of the new normal, perhaps the contranational, which will be, probably for a long time to come, the burden of our ecohumanities.

The new normal of the 2020s will have to reckon with the problem of membership in the *tiṇai* family: members other than human entities such as a sacred mountain (Niyamgiri), soil (as brought to our attention by Satish Kumar), and even microorganisms that turn pathogenic due to a foul relationship between humans and entities other than human.⁸⁷ Each of these has, in its own way, challenged the national. Debriefing the mainstream's truce with the industrialist old normal, the contranational ecohumanities discourse of this decade has both affirmed and dismissed evidence of healthy relationships among the *tiṇai* people, their habitat, and the mainstream society.

Discussion

The Ecological Home: Lifeways of the *tiṇai* and the Industrial

One of the central themes of Indian ecohumanities is the relationship between the members of the ecological home. This relationship cannot be reduced to the four modes of resource use: hunting-gathering, nomadic pastoralism, settled cultivation, and industry.⁸⁸ These modes manifest only part of the relationship between the members of the ecological home. They do not consider the relationships among the humans themselves, who engage with entities other than human as either hunters or gatherers or as pastoralists or cultivators or people of industrial society. The relationship between all the members (including the humans) of the ecological home is the big picture in which any single detail of that picture (hunting, gathering, pastoralism, cultivation, and industrial production) has to be viewed.

While the relationship between the members of the ecological home serves as an effective critical category in *puttiṇai*, ecocriticism, ecotheory, ecogender

⁸⁶ Bishnu Mohapatra, "Rain in Coronatime," translated from Odia by Aparna Uppaluri and Bishnu Mohapatra, *Scroll*, May 2, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/960798/when-isolation-is-considered-a-virtue-poetry-reveals-the-play-of-intimacy-and-distance>; Manohar Shetty, "The Art of Solitude: 'Quarantine Blues,'" *Scroll*, May 2, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/960802/the-art-of-solitude-quarantine-blues-a-poem-by-manohar-shetty>.

⁸⁷ UNEP *Frontiers 2016 Report: Emerging Issues of Environmental Concern*, chapter 2, p. 22, <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/36614/FB16ch2.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 11–68; for a historical and critical account of the modes of resource use, see David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2021), 5, 59–61.

studies, ecophilosophy, and ecotheology, it is practically absent in ecohistory. Since ecological categories are not seen in relation to the modes of power relations, the exploitation of humans and entities other than human inherent in a stratified society is ignored to the extent of projecting (caste-based) peasant society as an ecologically sound one. Rarely do you find acknowledgment of the fact that domination of some humans by others goes hand in hand with the domination of entities other than human. In ecohistory, those scholars who speak for excluded social groups such as women and Dalits point out that the failure to address the issue of power in the case of ecological issues has resulted in “ecocasteism.”⁸⁹

Agarwal’s seemingly noble ecological theory of the excluded group, namely, the poor, was plagued by contradictions: radical critique along with an acceptance of the science-based industrial development model and an attempt to find an ethical basis for such a theory by means of dominant ecological praxis (involving management and development), which would be unethical from the perspective of the *tiṇai* people. Further, an “environmentalism of the poor” is inadequate because such a discourse views the mode of relation from the perspective of a single aspect of the ecological home (namely, the economy) rather than considering the entire home (which includes ethical-political praxis). As if the ideal of true ecological worldview and praxis, particularly of the *tiṇai* people, were becoming rich! Such an ideal could only be the well-being of the ecological home, which could be ensured only by *tiṇai* lifeways. Since the *tiṇai* people are self-reliant, they need neither democracy nor development nor scientific modernity nor conservative-liberal-socialism nor even Gandhism. Ecohistorians themselves acknowledge that the industrial model pursued by India for more than seventy years is a failed one. The failure of this model is inextricable from the problematic nature of key concepts such as “development” and “environment,” which are foundational to this model.⁹⁰ With the failure of the industrial model and the ethically unacceptable dominant agricultural model, we are left only with the model of the *tiṇai* lifeways, which have lasted the longest in human history.

Further, *tiṇai* lifeways form an inseparable whole. The economy, the polity, ideology, and social organization are, after all, parts of the whole. Gadgil and

⁸⁹ Mukul Sharma, *Caste and Nature: Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁹⁰ G. N. Devy writes, “It is true that most tribals are underprivileged (with the exception of some in the Northeast), but they can be called ‘underdeveloped’ only if development is understood in the inappropriate terms dictated by international development agencies, terms by which the rest of India looks equally underdeveloped” (*Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature* [New Delhi: Penguin, 2002], ix).

Guha understand this: “First, one must remember that *jhum* is not merely an economic system with certain ecological effects; to its practitioners it is a way of life, the core of their material as well as mental culture.”⁹¹ Other than as a passing mention, however, the holistic view is not much in evidence in Gadgil and Guha’s discourse. For example, when they advocate their own brand of environmental philosophy (namely, conservative-liberal-socialism), they do not see that the wisdom they want to isolate from those other things they do not want from the ecosystem-centered *tinai* people is, in fact, inseparable from the latter’s way of life.⁹² First, they assume that they can separate one element (wisdom) from the whole (the lifeways of ecosystem people), and second, they presume that after such separation, that separated element will continue to be the same as it was in its original state. Third, Gadgil and Guha believe that after combining the separated element with elements from entirely dissimilar systems such as Marxism and liberal capitalism, the former element will continue to work the way it did in its original state.

As the elements of a lifeway are inseparable, those of one lifeway cannot be attributed to another. But scholars of the ecohumanities not infrequently do so; we may call such a practice “attributional fallacy.” Most of the writings that constitute the Indian ecohumanities discourse employ a language replete with concepts such as environment, development, resources, management, manipulation, and exploitation, all borrowed from the very same industrial model of development these writings reject.⁹³ For example, the tree was a resource to the scientifically trained ecologists, but to several Indian villagers, she (rather than “it”) was their loved one who deserved to be hugged and protected from any molester. Management, manipulation, and exploitation are different forms of dominance that characterize industrial rather than *tinai* society. Often, Indian

⁹¹ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 219.

⁹² Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*, 123–32.

⁹³ On environment, see Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 16–18, 26; Agarwal and Narain, *Towards a Green World*. On development, see Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, *Towards Green Villages: A Strategy for Environmentally Sound and Participatory Rural Development* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1990), vii, 1, 6. On resources, see Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 15, 17–18, 20. On management, see Agarwal and Narain, *Towards a Green World*; Agarwal and Narain, *Towards Green Villages*, vi. On manipulation, see Guha and Martinez-Alier, *Varieties of Environmentalism*, 97. On exploitation, see Agarwal and Narain, *Towards Green Villages*, 42; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*. Concepts such as these, which the authors of ecohumanities discourse apply to the so-called ecosystem people, may be applicable to the industrial societies but not to the former. Ironically, “Vikas Chahiye, Vinash Nahin” (We want development, not destruction) was a slogan of Narmada Bachao Andolan, which had stood up for the cause of 25,000 tribal families displaced by a large dam on the Narmada River. This is a shining example of attributional fallacy.

ecologists embrace Western concepts such as environment and development from the industrial–social model and attribute them to the *tiṇai* society.⁹⁴

Attributional fallacy occurs in Indian ecotheological discourse also. From *tiṇai* literature in Tamil and from existing social practice, we learn that nurturing a *kāvu* (sacred grove) in Tamil Nadu is a form of spiritual praxis intrinsic to *tiṇai* society. A patch of forest was sacred because the spirits of ancestors lived in it. Later, when state society emerged, a single tree in the temple (instead of an entire grove) was regarded as sacred (*tala maram*, literally, “place tree”) probably because members of the state society believed that the spirit of the deity of the temple lived in that tree.⁹⁵ While the temple tree is a feature of the state society, *kāvu* is of the *tiṇai* society. As we know, the spirituality of *tiṇai* society cannot be identified with a major religion (such as Hinduism) of a state society. As the “Song for Niyamgiri” says, “We are neither Hindu nor Muslim nor Christians / We are the tribes and worshipers of nature.”⁹⁶ The spiritual tradition of the *tiṇai* society, of affirming the harmonious kinship with the ancestor tree, is at odds with the institutional religion of state societies. While the sacred groves have disappeared wholly in several industrial nations, some of them still survive in some science–centered industrial societies, including Tamil Nadu.

In a discussion of the sacred groves of Tamil Nadu, Nanditha Krishna avers,

A scientific understanding of a tree is not reason enough to hug her when an axe falls on her.

“The sacred groves of Tamil Nadu are a part of the local folklore and religion.”⁹⁷ As we know, the term “folk” could refer to people of all societies, including the

urbanites of industrial societies. By using a convenient term such as “folk,” the writer avoids specifying the intended (*tiṇai*) society, and by choosing to represent the sacred grove as a part of religion (which is a feature of state society) rather than *tiṇai* spirituality, by a sleight of hand the author moves the sacred

⁹⁴ On environment, see Sen, *Indigenous Vision*. On development, see Karuppaiyan and Murugan, *Tribal Ecology*. In a discussion after her keynote address at a conference held at Madras Christian College, Chennai, on September 24, 2009, I asked Medha Patkar (who was fighting for the rights of the tribal people) whether she would reject modern, scientific development or not, and she came her reply, which legitimated the slogan of Narmada Bachao Andolan: “We want development, not destruction.” She admitted that if she rejected development, she would not be able to have any negotiation at all with the government.

⁹⁵ cuntara cōpitarācu, *talamaraṅkaḷ* [Temple trees] (Chennai: cōpitam, 1994).

⁹⁶ Thakur, “The Mountain, Forest and Streams.”

⁹⁷ Nanditha Krishna, ed., *Ecological Traditions of Tamil Nadu* (Chennai: C. P. R. Environmental Education Centre, 2005), 10.

grove to a society other than the one to which it actually belongs. The features of *tiṇai* societies that occur in state societies are not parts of the latter but only survivals from the former.

Similarly, there is no attempt to examine the compatibility between Gandhian concepts such as *swaraj* (self-rule) and the terminology of Western political theory. For example, the theory of socialist democracy, which is not necessarily anti-industrialist, is not at all compatible with Gandhian *swaraj*. International ecological theory and praxis based on the industrialist model may be compatible with the Nehruvian idea of development. But in the 1980s Indian ecohumanities denounced the Nehruvian model and attempted to embrace the Gandhian one.⁹⁸ Ironically, this denunciation was couched in industrialist terminology (referring to the environment, management, and resources). Because this terminology had made the Nehruvian model possible in the first place, a Gandhian ecological vision in the same idiom can only undermine the efforts of national ecology and the ecohumanities.

Another unsuitable theory invoked in Indian ecohumanities is that of human rights. Based on a liberal humanist philosophical anthropology, which privileges the idea of a psychosomatic individual, the idea of the human in human rights discourse is not compatible with the idea of human either in the worldview of the *tiṇai* people or in that of Gandhi.⁹⁹ As in Gandhian thought, the human in the worldview of the *tiṇai* people is a “communitarian” being. This does not mean, however, that the Gandhian worldview is synonymous with the worldview of the *tiṇai* people.

The worldviews and lifeways of the *tiṇai* people and of Gandhi are generally thought to be impracticable. No one has expressed this view as bluntly as Luboff has. In fact, she has identified the crux of the ecohumanities discourse of the four decades we just glanced through. The first and second decades (the 1980s and 1990s) anticipated the contranational ecohumanities, the third acknowledged it (note the word “recognition” in the full name of the FRA), and the fourth affirmed it by confronting it.¹⁰⁰ However, the caveat is this: even when scholars of Indian ecohumanities represent the lifeways of the *tiṇai* society in a positive light, their industrialist language vitiates the representation.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Agarwal, Chopra, and Sharma, *intiyāvin currucūlal*.

⁹⁹ Judith M. Brown, “Gandhi and Human Rights: In Search of True Humanity,” in *Gandhi, Freedom, and Self-Rule*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 87–102, https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Gandhi_Freedom_and_Self_rule.html?id=sErf-DzVI9EC.

¹⁰⁰ Luboff, “Relativism.”

¹⁰¹ Agarwal, “An Indian Environmentalist’s Credo,” 377; Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 20.

The Problematic Presupposition of the Humanities

A basic question that underlies Indian ecohumanities is this: Can the story of the *tiṇai* lifeway be narrated by the humanities? The greatest deterrent to this narrative is its philosophical-anthropological presupposition about the nature of the human. As Judith Brown has pointed out, the center of Gandhi's worldview was not the human individual but the community.¹⁰² We might surmise that Gandhi's worldview was derived not so much from his Western education as from his traditional roots in Jainism and Indian traditional knowledge, in which the human is imagined not as an individual but as a communitarian being.

Unlike in Indian traditional knowledge (such as that of the *tiṇai* people), the human in the humanities is a liberal humanist being, a psychosomatic individual rather than a communitarian member defined by the other members of the community.¹⁰³ The individual-based philosophical-anthropological assumption, which informs much of Indian ecohumanities, is nowhere more evident than in Indian ecolegal discourses that are concerned with the question of rights. As the theory of human rights is based on liberal humanistic philosophical anthropology, Indian ecohumanities should uphold a theory of rights (shall we say, ecorights) for the communitarian Indian inseparable from her or his multibeing home (*tiṇai*).

Ecology: Some Problems

Like the humanities, scientific ecology is also based on the individualist ideology of Enlightenment liberalism. This is evident not only in the theory of ecological levels of organization, in which the individual (in fact, an ecological fiction!) is the lowest level, but also in the notion of "environment," which is a world that has an existence independent of the individual organism. When the world of entities other than human is seen as an environment of which humans are not an intrinsic part, it becomes a resource that can be exploited. Some striking examples are the older forest acts of 1865, 1878, and 1927. Though the FRA has recognized the rights of the forest dwellers, it does not see the forest the way the forest dwellers do—as a being with a life and rights of "its" own. "Right" still means "right to exploit." The consequence of such exploitation is ecological degradation, and its worst forms are human-made disasters that might inconvenience the rich but destroy the poor. This means that ecological degradation is inseparably linked to the dualistic definition of ecology, in which organisms

¹⁰² Brown, "Gandhi and Human Rights."

¹⁰³ Selvamony, "Considering the Humanities Ecotheoretically."

(including humans) and the world are two discrete entities.¹⁰⁴

Indian ecological understanding and praxis as well as Indian ecohumanities have adopted the conventional definition of ecology. Ernst Haeckel's 1866 concept of scientific ecology, which studies the relationship between the organism and the environment, as ecologist C. S. Holling has shown, is a science of parts that does not show us the whole picture.¹⁰⁵ The problem with ecology being a quantitative science of parts is this: ecology defeats the very purpose of its divergence from biology. While the focus of biology is the individual organism, that of ecology is interrelationship. Interrelationship requires looking beyond the individual into the dynamic web of relationships. Such an interrelationship, unfortunately, cannot be quantified, and that is why, as scholars have pointed out, our "knowledge" of individual organisms exceeds our knowledge of ecosystems and ecosystemic interrelationships. As Gadgil and Guha admit, modern science (especially ecology) is inadequate to understand "complex community interactions."¹⁰⁶

The inadequacy of ecology is traceable to the attribution fallacy involved in its definition. The primal society (*tiṇai*) was being explained in terms of a concept (the environment) from industrial society. Such a definition has grossly misinformed generations of scholars of the true nature of the organism and its interrelationship with its ecosystem. This has also resulted in scholars using the terms "ecology" and "environment" interchangeably, even though such usage in formal discourse causes confusion and inflicts injustice on the organism.

Of all the subdisciplines of the ecohumanities, the one most impacted by this definitional quandary that is menacing for ecology is ecocriticism. Though the discipline had been defined by William Rueckert (the scholar who coined the term "ecocriticism" in 1978) as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature," a later definition, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," suggested by Cheryll Glotfelty, has become more popular, as scholars all over the world seem to be more comfortable with "environment" than with "ecology."¹⁰⁷

The concept of environment is not only anthropocentric and dualistic, as

¹⁰⁴ Neil Evernden, "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place and the Pathetic Fallacy," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 92–104.

¹⁰⁵ C. S. Holling, "Two Cultures of Ecology," *Conservation Ecology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 4, <http://www.consecol.org/vol2/iss2/art4/>.

¹⁰⁶ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 49–51.

¹⁰⁷ William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," in Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 107; and Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii.

Glotfelty herself points out, but also a product of industrial society and for that reason inextricable from it.¹⁰⁸ Since the industrialist society model is destructive, Indian ecohumanities should consider basing themselves not on the Haeckelian concept of ecology and environment (which are products of the industrial society and which will only perpetuate the values and ideology of the industrial model) but on the indigenous, contranational, and protoecological theory of *tiṅai*.¹⁰⁹ Yet another industrialist feature of both ecology and environment studies is Western science.

Western Science: Some Issues

Evidently, several ecological organizations that promote the values and objectives of the ecohumanities and ecohistory have adopted the scientific method, often uncritically. To ecologists, one of the parameters of development includes protecting the relationship people have with their habitat.¹¹⁰ In the case of the *tiṅai* people, this relationship is often described as a kind of kinship. Thus, the sacred grove they preserve involves an acknowledgment of the existence of spirit beings. In fact, Agarwal himself has averred that such people have lived “in total harmony with the forests.”¹¹¹ Now if development involves, as Agarwal and Narain argue, protection of such a metaphysical relationship with nature, then how do ecologists account for it in scientific terms?¹¹²

Ecohumanities scholars are not ignorant of the role played by science in the degradation of the environment. As Gadgil and Guha have pointed out, “There exist a whole range of supposedly scientific prescriptions for deliberately destroying certain resources.”¹¹³ They highlight, for instance, how modern science aided the destruction of humans and entities other than human in the Narmada Valley for the sake of irrigation and the generation of hydroelectric power. Science’s harmfulness is matched by its inadequacy (referred to earlier), which stems from the reductionism (i.e., how it reduces complex organisms to the levels of their cellular, molecular, and atomic constitution) and androcentrism of its manipulative approach to nature.¹¹⁴ The most strident criticism of Western science has come from the ecofeminists and a few ecologists, who show how

¹⁰⁸ Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xx.

¹⁰⁹ On the destructive industrialist society model, see Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 245.

¹¹⁰ Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, *The State of India’s Environment 1984–85: The Second Citizen’s Report* (Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1986), 207.

¹¹¹ Agarwal, “An Indian Environmentalist’s Credo,” 377.

¹¹² Agarwal and Narain, *The State of India’s Environment*.

¹¹³ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 47–48.

¹¹⁴ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 49–51; Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1992), chapter 2.

a variety of scientific knowledge and practices have been instrumental in the degradation of the ecological.¹¹⁵ Seeking an alternative to such science, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva recommend an “ecologically sound, feminist, subsistence science and technology.”¹¹⁶

Gosling, who has examined some ecological issues from the perspective of Buddhist and Hindu traditions, on the other hand, does not find Western science intrinsically perilous. But he would not recommend it to developing countries either, as the United Nations does, because it could (as in the case of scientific forestry) have “disastrous long-term consequences.”¹¹⁷ He therefore recommends “public interest science,” which might remain reductionist but will serve the Global South better.

Ironically, despite the radical criticism of modern science, several ecological organizations and some ecoactivists are only too willing to assign to it a salvific role.¹¹⁸ In this context, it may be fitting to remind them that the first major ecological movement in India, Chipko, had its roots not in modern science but in a worldview that would be deemed “a-scientific.”¹¹⁹ The members of this movement regarded, in a very “unscientific” manner, the tree as a family member who stood in need of protection from a potential molester with evil designs. A scientific understanding of a tree is not reason enough to hug her when an axe falls on her.

¹¹⁵ Shiva, *Staying Alive*; Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*; Aruna Gnanadason, “Towards a Feminist Theology for India,” in Chetti, *Ecology and Development*, 32; Ghosh, “Living in Tune with Nature.”

¹¹⁶ Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, 320.

¹¹⁷ According to Gosling, “The United Nations report on environment and development, which paved the way for the Earth Summit was extremely optimistic about the role of science and technology in developing countries: ‘Blends of traditional and modern technologies offer possibilities for improving nutrition and increasing rural employment on a sustainable basis. Biotechnology,... microelectronics, computer sciences, satellite imagery and communication technology are all aspects of frontier technologies that can improve agricultural productivity and resource management.’ It is therefore unfortunate that so many environmentalists, especially in the West, have come to regard science and technology as harmful” (Gosling, *Religion and Ecology*, 171). See also page 169.

¹¹⁸ Arun Nedunchezian, *cūlaliyal aṭippaivātam* [Ecological fundamentalism] (Chennai: Red Book Publication, 2017).

¹¹⁹ A newspaper published a photograph of an ecoactivist embracing a tree that had been cut down for the Metrorail project in Mumbai and weeping over it. See “maraṅkaḷ veṭṭappaṭuvatai etirttu[p] pōrāṭṭam” [Protest against the cutting down of trees], *intu tamilticai*, October 6, 2019. As I was writing this essay, I found, in the street behind my house, a neem tree dressed up like a woman, with offerings at its base.

Future Directions for Indian Ecohumanities

Scholars in the field of Indian ecohumanities may consider pursuing the following recommendations:

To redeem ecology from the muddle of its disciplinary founding, we need to redefine it as the study of an organism in relation to its home, consisting of humans and entities other than human, including ancestral spirit beings. Such a definition has not guided the ecohumanities and the Indian ecology, which is a major limitation in the ecohumanities.

As Indian ecohumanities are a part of the whole discourse of ecological humanities, it is necessary to show how the part is related to the whole. In order to do so, we may put the existing whole discourse into three types: Haeckelian ecohumanities, deep ecological humanities, and *tiṇai*-based humanities. These types will help show how any variety of ecohumanities (such as Indian ecohumanities or Australian ecohumanities) falls under any one of these types or has features of more than one type.

The humanities have to be understood not as disciplines that study the culture of liberal humanist individuals (as Mikhail Epstein did) but as those that study the lifeways of the human organisms who interact with the other members of their ecosystem (*tiṇai*).¹²⁰ Each discipline in the humanities will deal with different aspects of these lifeways—language, art, philosophy, religion, and history.

In lieu of the Western scientific method, indigenous epistemic methodologies should be identified and adopted in all disciplines, including those of the ecohumanities. In this regard, indigenous logical traditions could be of great help.¹²¹

Radical ethicization of ecological events is necessary. It is not enough to mention in passing that human greed could be a cause of anthropogenic disasters.¹²² Rather, it is necessary to identify the human activities born of greed and deal with those activities strictly. If laying a road was the greed-based activity that caused a landslide in a state in Northeast India, that specific activity should be regarded as the cause of the disaster, and all those concerned with that activity should be held responsible for the disaster. Rehabilitation should be based on a clear understanding of the lifeways that will ensure a lasting, harmonious relationship between the humans and entities other than human of the community in question.

As all ecological interventions (in the areas of research, education, and conservation) of all individuals and organizations depend on the philosophy of ecology

¹²⁰ Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012).

¹²¹ Sundar Sarukkai and Mihir Chakraborty, *Handbook of Logical Thought in India* (New Delhi: Springer Nature, 2020).

¹²² Press Trust of India, “Most Landslides in Manipur Caused by Anthropogenic Factors.”

and ecological intervention, such a philosophy ought to fall within the purview of ecohumanities and not ecology as such. The lack of collaboration between ecology and ecohumanities has been a great disadvantage to all stakeholders, particularly the marginalized.

The philosophy of *tiṇai* must be introduced at all levels of ecological education, beginning with primary education, and must form a part of ecological studies as well. The decentralization of disciplinary formulation is essential in order to contextualize knowledge and to ensure success in all governmental ecological interventions, such as conservation efforts.

Appropriate terminology for the ecohumanities has to be evolved to suit different “ecological” contexts, a task that philosophers of *tiṇai* may be entrusted with. This is necessary to check the indiscriminate use of technical terms, which often results in confusion and misinformation.

Indian ecohumanities disciplines should base themselves on the indigenous protoecological theory of *tiṇai* rather than on problematic Haeckelian ecology, and a history of *tiṇai* in India, covering both the prehistoric and historic periods, is a necessary substitute for “environmental” histories of India.

Conclusion

The ecohumanities discourse and the ecological organizations of the last four decades evince a conflict between industrialist and *tiṇai* lifeways. Despite evidence of the rejection of industrial lifeways and notwithstanding the significant moves made in the direction of *tiṇai* lifeways, signs of the persistence of the industrial ecological (in whatever mutated forms) loom large on the Indian horizon.¹²³ This is particularly evident in the country’s response to the pandemic, the redoubled eagerness to return to the old normal. However, such a return will not in any way erase the persisting conflict between the ecologically degrading industrial lifeways and the time-tested, ecologically sound *tiṇai* lifeways, because even after the elimination of all the *tiṇai* societies in the country, the lifeways of each community are always already an indelible part of India’s cultural memory. Thankfully, there is no technology yet to erase cultural memory!

¹²³ Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*, 245.

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