

# Lecture 6:

## Themes in Indian Environmentalism - III

Course: Environment and Politics in India

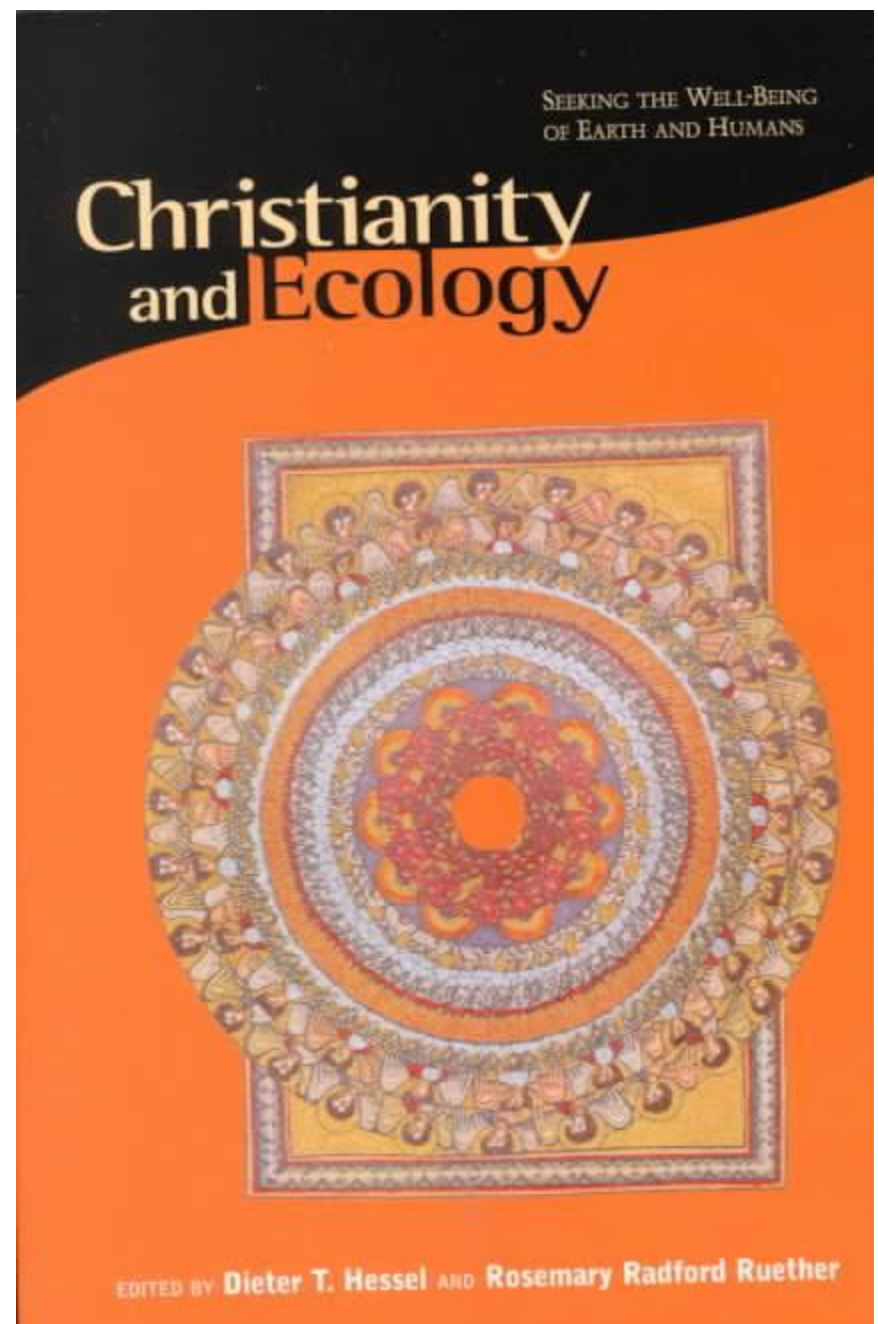
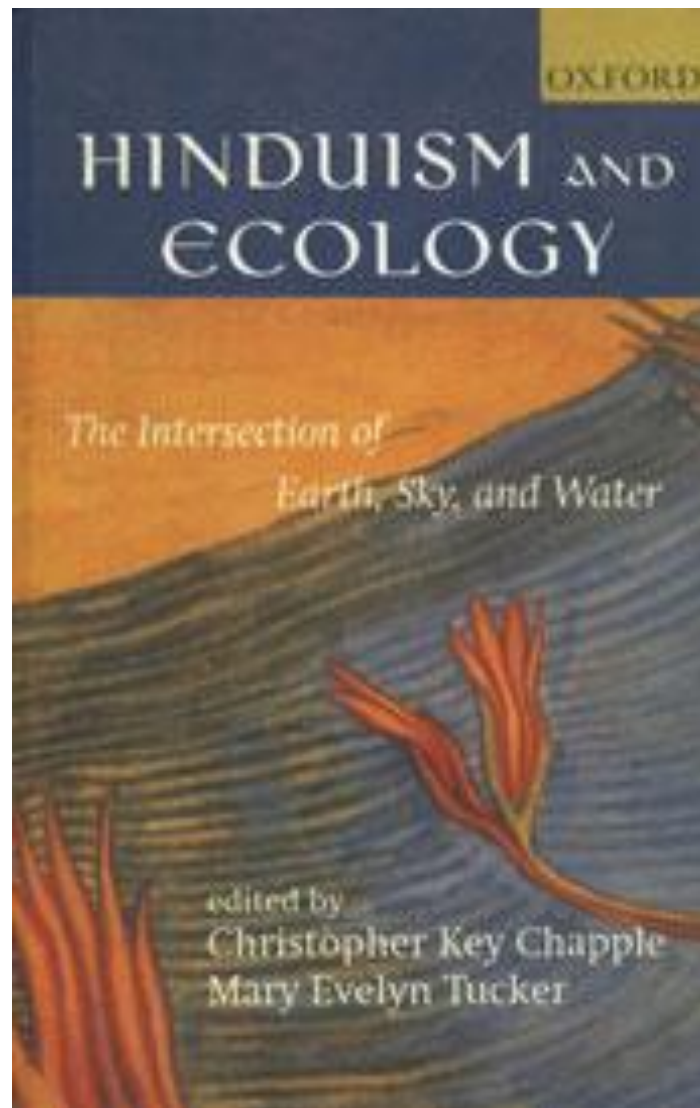
# ENVIRONMENT, IDENTITY AND POWER

What role do identities play in ecological debates?  
What is the relationship between power and identities?

Relationship between 'TRADITION' and ECOLOGY







A BESTOWED  
TRUST

# Islam and Ecology



EDITED BY Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny,  
and Azizan Baharuddin

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin

Foreword by Congressman Keith Ellison

# GreenDeen

What **Islam** Teaches  
About Protecting the  
Planet





Islamic Circles with MADE present

# Quran, Conservation and Ecology



With **Fazlun Khalid** [Islamic Foundation For Ecology & Environmental Sciences]  
**Professor Mohammed Abdel Haleem** [SOAS]  
**Professor Mawil Izzi Dien** [University of Wales]

Date: Saturday 14th June 2014 Time: 9am - 5pm  
Venue: Birkbeck College, Malet St, London WC1E 7HX

## The workshop will look at:

Islamic Environmental hermeneutics [Ilm ul Khalq] • Islamic Law and Environmental Ethics • Development of Islamic Environmentalism • Institutional frameworks, methodology and strategies • Animal Rights in Islam • Modernity and contemporary challenges - Climate Change • And more.

All welcome, limited spaces, pre-registration required!

**DEADLINE FOR BOOKINGS APPLY** after which prices increase



CALL: 07956 983 609



[www.islamiccourses.org](http://www.islamiccourses.org)

## Buddhism & Environment



### • The interdependence of all things

- strongly emphasizes the **interdependence** of all entities and events. There is no entity animate or inanimate and no event however trivial which is not in some way interconnected with every other.

### • Coexistence rather than Conquest

- The aim that Buddhism instills in every individual mind is **emancipation** from suffering.
- Conquest of the natural environment, of other species or of other groups of the human family is hence the very reverse of the ideals which Buddhism teaches.
- **Co-existence is vital** and this requires a recognition and respect of those other species and groups and not an attempt at dominance.

• 11

## Hinduism & Environment



### • 1. Ecological Awareness in Hinduism

- It is clear that the most ancient texts on Hinduism demonstrate through the praise of the deities an ecological awareness and great respect for the natural world.

*"Do not cut trees, because they remove pollution."*  
(Rig Veda, 6:48:17)

*"Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere."* (Yajur Veda, 5:43)

*Destruction of forests is taken as destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty.*

(Charak Sanhita)

• 19

# Identity and Environmentalism

QUESTION: Do environmental discourses (over)READ ecological rationale in 'traditions'?

Madhav Gadgil's ideas on Ecology and Caste:

- Castes are ecological niches, they encode and transmit ecological wisdom across generations. i.e. Nature mandates the caste system.
- Endogamy makes castes appear like natural species:
  - Exclusive occupations/specialization
  - Adaptation to ecological niches

How does one explain:

- Occupational flexibility
- Permeability between castes
- Territorial and environmental mobility through time

# Sacred Groves in Kerala

- *Kavu*: Garden/forestland dedicated for the exclusive use of a deity.
- Is this an example of environmental conservation?
- Evidence:
  - Human encroachment/disturbance, resource exploitation allowed
  - Variety of rules in different *kavus*
  - Unexploited forests, Cultivated toddy palms, Shrubbery on laterite hillocks, Tanks in the middle of paddy fields
  - Sites for a variety of activities. Uses/Diet's 'needs' are defined by CULTURE

READ Rich Freeman's *Folk Models of the Forest Environment* (172-173)



# Religious attitudes towards forests

‘Religious’ attitudes towards the forest environment?

- POWER struggle between humans and individual ‘beings’ in trees/plants/animals.
- Protective ‘rites’ against individual trees/plants/animals.
- Ambivalent attitude towards individual trees/plants/animals: Fear/reverence, hunting/worshipping.

EXAMPLE: *Theyyam* worship (spirit-worship, ancestor-worship, worship of Bhagwathi (Mother Goddess)/ tree/animal/serpent/Goddesses of disease/*Gramadevata* (Village-Deity)

*Overwhelming sentiment: NOT reverence/devotion/gratitude but STRUGGLE to wrest a living*

# Social claims on ordinary forests

Do COMMONS really exist?

Often:

- Commons are 'wastelands'. Rented out by 'owners'/managers
- Hunting allowed under conditions
- Swidden/agriculture allowed after cash payments/share of crop
- Killing of poachers/*adivasis* for breaching this contract

Existence of cultural narratives of lower-caste/tribal RESISTANCE to upper-caste domination of forest/commons/'nature' (Freeman's *Folk Models of the Forest Environment*, 184-185).

Is there HEIRARCHY, COERCION and POWER in accessing 'commons'?

# Adivasis and 'Subsistence' Activity

Have tribes really roamed around forests, cutting trees/hunting as they wished?

*Evidence of tribes/lower castes being bound to 'owners'.*

*Restricted use of the forest.*

Do tribes have an 'ecologically sane' relationship with the forest?

*Evidence of axe felling, killing of trees through stripping of bark, burning (for ash/fertilizing).*



# Adivasis as ‘forest dwellers’

Have *adivasis* ONLY lived/depended on forests? Do they NEVER plough land?

For EXAMPLE: Have Gonds/Baigas ALWAYS lived in the forests?

- Gonds/Baigas moved INTO the forests as a result of a TWO-stage process:
  - Control/colonisation of fertile lands by upper-caste Hindu peasants under the patronage of the Marathas.  
Political/economic instability.
  - British intervention, permanent settlement of zamindari lands.  
END of movement of *adivasis* BETWEEN highlands and plains.
- Gonds/Baigas practiced a MIX of jhum/swidden agriculture and trade. Part of local/regional economic networks.
- Gonds/Baigas were converted from being permanent cultivators being INTO hunters/gatherers.