

## **Eco-centric Process Work**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is about the value of and some approaches to eco-centric process work – which has been so named since it is process work which includes our connect with Nature as the context we are embedded in.

Increasing involvement with issues concerning ecological living on Earth makes one thing clear - that human entrenchment in a largely anthropocentric view of life is at the root of many of the ecological and social crises that our modern civilization is facing, including long term sustainability. On the positive side, I believe along with many thinkers and researchers that solutions to humankind's most severe crises will only come from re-connecting with and understanding Nature and ecological principles.

These influences and ruminations led to the emergence of the Sankalan Programmes for self, community and Earth. The focus here is on a combination of human centric and eco-centric processes to support many individuals and communities who intuitively realize their importance for an ecologically wiser age that is needed for the survival of our civiisation.

In this paper I will be elaborating on the above and also on the design of the Sankalan Programmes and their value as perceived by participants and facilitator-colleagues..

## Acknowledgements

Mother Nature and our Indian culture which has so much of Nature-connectedness and Nature-sacredness embedded in it have certainly been great sources of inspiration and learning for evolving eco-centric process work. Dr. Pulin Garg's school of thought in process work was the foundation for much of the structure and design of the kind of eco-centric process work we do which is the subject of this paper. There have been many thinkers, doers, scientists, authors and others who have influenced me and the work on eco-centric thinking. Hence the name Sankalan – which means bringing together. Some of these pioneers have been named in the paper or in the notes at the end of this paper.

While it has been a minor obsession with me to work at unfolding some of the facets of eco-centric process work (there is much more to be unfolded, I am sure), I doubt if it would have been possible for me without many who joined me. I do feel blessed that many members of the Prakriya Green Wisdom School and Bhoomi College have joined me to invest their time and energy to make the idea of eco-centric process work come alive in Sankalan.

At the outset I would like to thank

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- And Bhoomi fellows and other participants of programmes – too many to name here – whose responses and enthusiasm for this work has been extremely heartwarming, opening up many possibilities.

# Eco-centric Process Work

## Introduction - Personal Story

There have been two major conscious influences that have helped me in evolving eco-centric process work. The first has been an enduring fascination with being in Nature, enjoying the ecstasies, the serenity, the sobering realities and the inextricable connections we have with her. This fascination also infused in me a need to understand and apply principles of ecology to many aspects of our lives.

The other major influence for me has been Pulin's school of process work. In a sense it is working with *our inner nature*, the nature of our minds and beings and the processes of our relating with ourselves, others, systems and the world at large.

Increasingly, thinkers and philosophers who are concerned about sustainability are clear that climate change and other crises we face today are not only crises outside us. They have their roots in the crises of **perception** inside us. Primarily in the human entrenchment in an anthropocentric perception of life and a disconnect from Nature making her something to be consumed or at best appreciated, not the greatest resource and source of learning and wisdom.

On the positive side, there is much literature by thinkers on sustainability that aver that solutions to humankind's most severe crises exist – and will only come from understanding Nature and ecological principles. Also by learning from indigenous and other people who have a closer connect with Nature. Whether this will happen through the spreading of awareness, spontaneous evolution, activism or political will or whether a series of calamities will wake us up, we still do not know. But there does seem to be the arising of the biggest movement in the world as it is sometimes called, of people wanting more sane living, a regenerative world and wellbeing rather than the bigger-is-better model of consumption and achievement that we have now.

Yet another influence which is really quite vast and will need a lot more work to integrate is the whole cultural phenomenon of India. The first verse of the Ishavasya Upanishad is *Ishavasyamidam sarvam* – it means that divinity/ the sacred exists in everything, everywhere, in every creature. From the Earth being considered a Goddess and Vedic mantras like the Gayatri Mantra to the idea of 5 elements that are the foundation of the interconnected Nature's web; from rivers that are considered to be Goddesses and innumerable temples on hill tops – in manifold ways the Hindu Dharma has provided the underpinnings of sustainable life in India.

This idea of Dharma, although considerably eroded through western cultural invasion, is still evident – people in diverse regions worship or care for various animals or birds; the idea of Nature being sacred is still alive and simple living is still valued by large numbers of people in the country.

These influences and thoughts have been part of a fascinating journey for me to give shape to and work on the Prakriya Green Wisdom School, Bhoomi Network, Bhoomi College and the Sankalan Programmes. The institution for eco-centric process work is called Sankalan - for self, community and Earth. The focus in Sankalan programmes is on a combination of human centric and eco-centric processes to support many individuals and communities who realize its importance for an ecologically wiser age.

In this paper I will be elaborating on the above and also the design of the Sankalan Programmes and their value as perceived by participants and facilitators.

## Why Eco-centric Process work?

***“Look deeply to Nature and you will understand everything you need to”***

- Albert Einstein

***“Nature is an incomparable guide if you know how to follow her. She is like the needle of the compass pointing to the North, which is most useful... when you know how to navigate” [1]***

- C.G. Jung

**The first and most obvious reason** to engage in eco-centric process work is that it makes sense.

We are nature. We cannot live for more than a few minutes without Nature. It is our anthropocentric languages that make us think that we live on Earth. We actually live in Earth, inside the atmosphere. So it makes sense to take this into account in everything we do.

All life as we know it is embedded in the earth and the ecological processes of all its elements and innumerable life forms. Agriculture might have begun the process of shifting our perceptions from being part of Nature to being users of Nature. But it was modern civilization and the industrial age, developed largely by people in cities, that made us quite cut off from a strong awareness or at least acceptance of the complex realities of Nature. This separation from our roots has certainly been responsible for an increasing anthropocentric orientation over the centuries.

It is widely accepted that the European Renaissance was responsible for making the sense of separation from Nature strongly entrenched in human perception. The 16<sup>th</sup> Century French Scientist and Philosopher, Rene Descartes is said to have negotiated an understanding with the Church that scientists will work with ‘matter’ and the Church should restrict its domain to that of the spirit. Nature was considered an adversary to be tamed and conquered.

In innumerable ways this split has affected our understanding of ‘reality’. To give an example from science, biologists till the early twentieth century studied animals as if they were separate,

independent entities. An American scientist, Alfred Lotka, published in 1925 a book titled *Physical Biology* in which he expanded on this idea – that “*It is not so much the organism or the species that evolves, but the entire system, species and environment. The two are inseparable*”. Similarly, Psyche is a subset of ecology – and we cannot truly study psychology unless we include ecology.

This split between matter and spirit has been at the root of modern western development. In science, technology, economics, politics and other fields, particularly education, root level perceptions have been altered and made anthropocentric. Hence it is understandable that almost all modern human institutions - including institutions that are concerned with psychology or process work did not have much connection with Nature and Nature’s principles. Also in the 1960s and 1970s, when Pulin launched his school of process work, there was no climate emergency or innumerable ecological issues that could make a focus on eco-centric work important.

This overlooking of Nature’s principles has become a kind of civilizational blinkers that has led to the biggest crises faced by humankind in history – climate change - which can even cost the survival of modern civilisation if not of the human race. We must remember that six or more civilisations before ours have gone extinct because of the same civilisational vulnerability of wearing blinkers to ecological realities while pursuing some agenda of human excesses.

So, in these times of climate change, it seems like we have no option but to re-ecologise the world and ourselves; to include ecological values not only humanizing values, to heal the split between matter and spirit. We need a million ways to do this – and eco-centric process work is one.

**A second reason** to invest in eco-centric process work is a practical one. Both economics and ecology have the same root word, “*Oikos*” meaning ‘*home*’ in Greek. Ecology means *knowledge of the home*, and economics means *management of the home*. How can we have management of the home without knowledge of the home? This is the insanity of the economic system we have

today. This simple and elegant insight I owe to Satish Kumar [3], a pioneering visionary in ecological living who has inspired many ecological projects around the world.

Similarly, psyche, a root word for psychology is only a subset of ecology. Hence we need knowledge of our 'earth-home' if we want true knowledge of ourselves, our psyches. We need in fact to look at humans and other-than-humans in Earth as one integral whole.

**A third reason** to work on eco-centric process work is similar – to include in our understanding of ourselves, the largest context that we can reasonably include – the earth; as well as a deeper critical understanding of the most dominant context for humans - that of the man-made world of meanings, structures and culture.

I remember Pulin Garg once casually remarking, that if he hadn't settled for "process work" as a name for the kind of work he designed at ISISD [3], he would have called it "Contextology". Process work as we have known it, has involved re-looking at residues we hold and meanings we had given to our life experiences and the various relationships and contexts in our lives. It is clear that the focusing on interpersonal, intrapersonal, psycho-social and philosophical, institution and culture building processes can be extremely meaningful to us.

But Process work in its broadest sense as I understand it is ever deepening our understanding of life and our relationship with it. It is taking into account deeper and deeper contexts that gave rise to our thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviour. Our minds have been colonized by city-based living and ideas of modern development. The biggest exploitative colonizer is not another nation, but modern development. The focus in eco-centric process work is to help us be conscious of this reality and own up the real source of our lives. – Nature. Own up Nature in which we are embedded and Nature which we have disowned. In a sense eco-centric process work can help us remove (as much as we can) our civilizational blinkers.



If we look at the context of our Indian heritage - and also of many other traditional cultures, there was a balance of eco-centric and anthropocentric worldviews. The reverence for Nature and the valuing of a unifying consciousness was a central theme that was enacted in daily life.

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## How is Eco-centric process work different?

In many aspects, eco-centric process work is similar to the school of process work that Pulin started. The basic tenets make sense for any kind of psychological exploration. Certain other interventions, like the four princes story are classic and again are meaningful to us too.

In Process work, primarily the focus is to decode identities held within and rework meanings, choice making etc; in eco-centric process work, we look at decoding identities and also at how our anthropocentric worldview and perceptions affect our thought-feeling-action and wellbeing.

Since we are immersed in an anthropocentric system this is not easy; but questioning various aspects of it is an unavoidable part of this work if we want to seek long term wellbeing. As J.Krishnamurthy said, *"It is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society"*.<sup>[4]</sup> Hence Eco-centric process work is different in all the concepts, frameworks and processes that I have added to critique our "sick society" as well as understand nature. *Sankalan* means bringing together; and processes and wisdom from many people including ourselves have been brought together in Sankalan.

Although the intellectual content is large, we ensure that we do not compromise on unstructured experiential process work, and steadily add the concepts and processes that we believe are useful to foster eco-wisdom. This also becomes a collective process as participants join in with their contributions and modern media facilitates such sharing beyond the formal group time. It is also different in that we focus on human, community and ecological wellbeing as a direction.

Today, climate change as well as increasing social crises are giving us a message to rework fundamentals. But this not in the least bit easy since the global / macro culture is a juggernaut flowing in an anthropocentric direction. Also humans have an innate compulsion to “do what the others do” and we are captives of our subconscious minds. Hence we have given a lot of importance to evolving “micro culture” in place-based communities as well as networks, making it easier to “live out” rather than only mentally understand a more eco-centric way of living. Often those who join in find it easier to get off the rat race, work with more cooperation and collaboration rather than competition and feel more free to experiment with alternative careers and life-style.

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## **About eco-centric process work in Sankalan Programmes**

The map is not the territory. What I give here is a very rough idea of the map of eco-centric process work we engage in.

We have been offering the one week long residential programmes on Inner and Outer Ecology during the last 10 years; the set of programmes which are now offered under the Sankalan internship banner are:

1. Inner and Outer Ecology
2. Identity, Roles and Systems for Wellbeing.
3. Wholistic Leadership and Organization as Ecosystem
4. Deep Ecology (held in the Sharavathi Rainforest)
5. Creating Eco-wise Community
6. Spiritual Sutras for Holistic Facilitation

## 1. Vision of Sankalan:

*The vision of Sankalan is to facilitate and support the search for wellbeing and ecologically wise living on Earth. To foster this vision, we believe we need to:*

- foster **faith** in following Nature's principles and a sense of connectedness with Nature.
- help own up a **Prakruthik Dharma**
- discover **Sadhana** that supports us to foster faith in a *Prakrutik Dharma*
- own up **Elderhood** and the importance of **community** for wellbeing.

The Sankalan Internship was designed primarily to support the learning and growth of any person who wishes to be an anchor of an eco-community space, be a facilitator for eco-centric process work, or for living in consonance with Nature.

## 2. Processes, Concepts and Frameworks we use/have developed for eco-centric process work

During our 6 day Sankalan programmes, as part of the process design, we include time every day before breakfast (at least 45 minutes) for Nature meditation and spending time in Nature, with or without a brief to support the process. For many it can be a beginning of taking up a sadhana of connecting with Nature in various ways.

We begin sessions in groups on most days with a concept session in the whole community, or sometimes in small groups. In the first two programmes, these concepts often form a backdrop to explorations for some; for some others, certain concepts may become central to their explorations.

As participants engage in the last 3 or 4 programmes that are part of the internship requirement, they discover the synergies between these concepts and frameworks and how they help form a

sense of the “whole”. For most of the day, participants work in small groups, sharing, exploring and sometimes engaging in exercises as is usual in process work settings in ISISD or Aastha.

The concepts and frameworks that are an integral part of eco-centric process work include:

**a. The Gaia Hypothesis:** James Lovelock was an atmospheric chemist who researched and travelled for over 20 years and wrote his path breaking book “Gaia” [5], about how the Earth is a “living, self-organising, self-regulating planet”. The Earth was born 4.6 billion years ago and life is said to have begun a billion years later. The Earth is considered an extremely rare planet where life exists. As the Earth evolved, its surface has been kept habitable for life through unceasing interactions between all its parts, elements and living beings. There seems to have been a deliberate process to keep oxygen, carbon, alkalinity, salinity etc. at levels suitable for life. That the Earth is a rock, a “non-living thing” on which life happened is integral to the anthropocentric paradigm. The eco-centric paradigm holds that Gaia / Earth is an amazingly wonderful, dynamic self-organising “system” that is still evolving. This book unravels the science underlying the Earth’s evolutionary processes.

This understanding of Gaia – a paradigm shift from considering her as a space for us to live on to looking at ourselves as expressions of Gaia - forms part of the backdrop for our inner and outer ecology programmes as well as for what we call Gaia Meditation.

I share here a poem by Tagore [6] which I think captures the essence of Gaia.

***The same stream of life that runs through my veins, night and day, runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.***

*It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean – cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow. I feel my limbs made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.*

#### **b. Using Nature's Principles for learning:**

- Accepting and understanding diversity
- Understanding complexity and emergence
- Seeing the flow of resources, (also thoughts, feelings, actions), interconnections and interdependence
- Owning up significance of cyclical flow of resources; recycling psychological residues too.
- Self-organization, Self-regulation and cybernetics [7]
- Seeing and fostering the flow of energy, including embodied energy, potential.
- Seeing the dynamics between part and the whole, infinite and the finite and acknowledging the sacred and the mysterious.

#### **c. Complexity theory, Emergence and Systems thinking:**

An undeniable reality about Nature and about human minds is that they are both so incredibly complex. When a system is complex, it is not predictable. cause and effect, input and output cannot be controlled as in a machine. We can only work with ground conditions, where certain kind of emergence *may* be predictable. Examples are eco-systems, the economy, developing embryo, the human brain, living soil etc.

An example of neglect of complexity is the way science simplified soil and growth of crops, fertilisers and pesticides became the celebrated solution. We realize now that these do not support sustainable agriculture. If we do not want land degradation we need to value the complexity of live soil with zillions of organisms in it.

Similarly, the Western Scientific approach has not recognized the complexity of our bodies, our food systems and even of children when it comes to Education and the innumerable problems created by this approach are part of the story of mankind.

Fritjof Capra, the quantum physicist/ philosopher, in “The Systems View of Life” [8] talks about many of the characteristics of complex living systems and why it is essential to look at our lives and human activities on our planet with an understanding of how complex systems function.

Reductionist science that has been a dominant force, during the last 3 centuries particularly, has colonized human minds. This has moved us away from a holistic view; linear thinking in almost every sphere has become the order of the day. Today there is a body of work that critiques the limitations of reductionist science and attempts to understand and spell out the critical importance of holistic science, non-linear thinking and understanding of complex systems. A fundamental difference between reductionist and holistic science is the need to view systems as not just parts put together, but as a whole and parts, a huge process of on-going relationships; as processes more than as a collection of objects. Understanding these concepts helps shift perceptions not only of the physical world but of the psychological world too.

I quote these lines from an essay by Jules Cashford: “...there were two different words for ‘knowledge’ [in Greek]. *Gnosis* was knowledge won through relationship and love: the way you know a person, animal, plant, a garden, landscape, poem, story or myth. It engages the whole personality, in contrast to *episteme*, which was knowledge *about* something, a term which gives

us *epistemology*. It is a way of knowing which engages primarily the rational mind” [9]. To get to terms with complexity we would have to invest in Gnosis, not only episteme.

The words *Gnanam* and *Vidya/ Nyaya* are possibly words in Sanskrit close to Gnosis and Epistemology in Greek. Traditional Western Psychology has developed more with an epistemological approach.; Process work has been developed as Gnanam or Gnosis; and in eco-centric process work Gnanam is directed not only toward humans and their organisations but also to Nature and her mind-boggling complex expressions.

#### **d. The power of the subconscious mind**

Our brain-minds are complex systems... with over a billion neurons and trillions of neural connections. Neuro scientists tell us that 95 to 99% of our behavior is governed by our subconscious minds. In other words, we are creatures of habit and deep psychic entrenchments more than we realise. This is a major reason why change is difficult, including shifts in our world-view.

The rational understanding of the realities of our subconscious mind is useful to understand ourselves and especially valuable to those engaged in parenting or in education; also, it helps to understand the realities of the man-made world, and to any possible extent add on experiences to make some shifts in our subconscious minds.

#### **e. The web of Nature and the Man-made world**

The man-made world has given us countless comforts, conveniences and much enjoyment of various kinds. It has also evolved in ways that changed our environment significantly during the last 12000 years since agriculture began. Villages, towns and civilisations arose and have made us experience an increasing sense of “separation” from Nature, from the Earth. Agrarian people have some kind of connect with and reverence for Nature, but urban living and the modern economist’s view of humans as largely materialistic beings has widened the disconnect.

Humans today have an impact on the Earth which is unprecedented in history and many have begun calling it the Anthropocene Era, the Era of Man. Humans have created quite a complex web of their products, organisations, institutions, etc. And alongside, these have led to humans creating a web of meanings, beliefs and world-view as well.

We have seen in programmes that a person's views of success and failure, smallness, inadequacies, shame and guilt etc. can change dramatically when they are looked at as arising from benchmarks of the man-made world. The distinguishing of meanings from the man-made or Nature's world, help to take charge of one's wellbeing and often to re-work aspirations in a more ecologically wise direction. While re-connecting with Nature, deep consciousness and faith in Nature increases, and it often becomes easier to let go of meanings from the man-made world that erode our wellbeing; and the beckoning is to invest more in those meanings from the man-made world, as well as in "receiving from nature" that add to our sense of wellness, creativity and regenerative thinking and living.

#### **f. The Journey of the Hero**

Joseph Campbell's Hero's journey [10] is about the individual hero; I have adapted it to include the finding of one's flock or co-travellers to value the importance of networking and community in our world. The modern world has hyped up the individual hero, which in a sense is an ecological aberration – in the sense that their high achievement was valued even if it trashed the Earth. Again the context was almost always the man-made world, not the world of Nature.

The basic premise of this intervention is that every person can be a hero unto him / herself. In the case of people who want to move away from the mainstream and go on a path less travelled, the Hero's journey provides an amazing framework that is at once exciting and settling. Exciting to give one's struggles a new meaning as part of being on a heroic path; and settling because the negative meanings that might have been given to one's victimhood, struggles, anger, non-



acceptance by kith and kin, helplessness and so on are dissolved. These feelings that often rein in our exuberance for the journey, or misguide us, can be made wholesome and dignified. The significant events/ phases during the Journey of the Hero, taken together, offer a story, a direction and possibilities of a life with purpose, that make it easier for a person to accept for herself the pathos of existence.

### **g. Understanding the sources of our feelings**

Feelings are often accepted as sacrosanct. Our feelings may arise from experiences, our biologically dictated fight or flight or other responses, our identities and meaning making patterns, our introjects, frameworks and directions celebrated in the man-made world, aspirations or visions. But a clear acceptance that our feelings have certain sources and that they are part of our complex mind-world often helps in working with them and dissolving some of our angst and negative residues.

The understanding the source of our feelings also re-inforces the process of having a spectator unto ourselves.

### **h. Wholeness and Holistic Enquiry**

The words holy, whole and holistic have the same root. While the search for a sense of wholeness has been universal in most religions and spiritual traditions, the powerful institutions of the modern world push for the American dream – increasing consumption as the best possible search for human beings. The issue to consider is not only consumerism or a fragmented psyche or world, but looking deeply at how linear and reductionist thinking is fostered by the education, health, economic and various systems in our world.

For holistic enquiry and wellbeing the owning up of intuition in perceiving Nature as well as of healing by nature is immensely valuable. But also, decoding and understanding linear and non-linear thinking can be a rational route to holistic enquiry.

**Linear Thinking:**

- Focus on parts
- Largely seeing action, objects, not processes etc.
- Seeing single meanings
- Analysing within closed circles
- Seeing simple cause and effect relationships
- Seeing organisations as task oriented, pyramidal structures only.

**Non-linear or Holistic Thinking**

- Focus on whole & parts
- Seeing, processes, patterns, habits, trends
- Seeing multiple meanings
- Looking at contexts and influence of macro issues.
- Seeing complexity and emergence; cyclical and other relationships.
- Seeing organisations as eco-systems.

**i. Yoga of Community**

Humans are social creatures – we have always lived in communities. Communities are the natural immediate context that we live in and hence it becomes an essential focus area in eco-centric process work. But during the last few centuries there has been an increasing focus on materialistic growth, money and the globalized economic system which have destroyed a sense of community for large populations. Charles Eisenstien in his famous book, “Sacred Economics”<sup>[11]</sup>, as well as many others have elaborated on this as well as the significance of connectedness to community for personal wellbeing.

We can also remind ourselves that all of Nature – both flora and fauna live in communities.

As is well known, Yoga means union. In the programme on building eco-wise communities, we look at community building as a path of loving and giving, a yogic path towards creating a sense

of unifying with the Earth. The underlying belief is in the importance of localization and communities for wellbeing, care of the commons and a realistic focus on place-based work to care for ecological wellbeing.

There is also a focus on looking upon community as an eco-system of which we are a part. Leadership then is eco-system leadership as distinct from leadership in an organization with a pyramidal structure and centralized governance.

### **j. Deep Ecology**

Deep Ecology is a concept first articulated by Arne Naess [12], a Norwegian philosopher. His view of deep ecology is a departure from looking at ecology as outside of us and includes humans and *other-than-humans* on Earth as one integrated whole. His work has promoted the inherent worth of living beings regardless of their instrumental utility to human needs.

Deep Ecology is the focus of a 6 day programme in a rain forest which affords great opportunities to explore our embeddedness in Earth through immersive experiences in the wilderness; and also explore stillness, mindfulness and wholeness and other ways to have a deep connect with Mother Earth.

### **k. Spiritual Sutras for Facilitation**

There are the Vedic Mahavakyas like Aham Brahmasmi, Tatwam Asi, Pragnyanam Brahma and Ishavasyamidam sarvam which encapsulate much of the ideas in Eco-centric process work. Exploring these, the five elements as well as Sutras from other Buddhist, Sufi and other traditions can be meaningful to connect with Nature and her principles.

We have conducted only one programme on Spiritual Sutras for facilitation. This is an idea that needs more exploration to help design one's Sadhanas for wellbeing.

## **Participants share their experience of Sankalan programmes**

In the initial programmes participants are more or less caught up with working with interpersonal and intrapersonal issues as in the process work labs. Gradually, even from the first “Inner and Outer Ecology” programme, the world view shifts can be significant for some participants too. These are some of the transformative experiences that participants have experienced during or after Sankalan Programmes:

- Getting out of the rat race is a major shift that is often experienced by participants when ones worldview changes in a major way and helps deal with a whole lot of sources of non-wellbeing.
- Finding a community of people where they experience a great sense of “settle”, and often a faith in humanness as well as Nature.
- Understanding structural violence and the structural roots of non-wellbeing adds to being able to see the world with new eyes, as well as to take charge of their own well-being. It makes forgiveness and acceptance of others easier.

The sense of settling within oneself, one’s community is palpable. For some this sense of being completely comfortable with oneself includes the acceptance of oneself as an ordinary member of the biotic community in Earth.

## **The facilitators’ experience of the Sankalan programmes.**

The facilitators who have become part of Sankalan as an institution have all come in because they felt a deep connect with Nature and hence coming to Sankalan was coming home. Inner and outer ecology, the perspective on the man-made world, the hero’s journey, the idea of Gaia – all these were most valued by the facilitators. In fact, it is the concepts and frameworks that we use additionally in eco-centric process work that the facilitator community find significant in deepening and enriching the scope of process work. Extracts from statements made by facilitators is given in Annexure 1.

## **About other work similar to eco-centric process work.**

While trying to look for work done around the world similar to the eco-centric process work, eco-psychology is the closest in philosophical moorings that I could find. Theodore Roszak [13] is credited with having coined the term eco-psychology, which has spawned a lot of work in the West. Bill Plotkin is another author who is known for Eco-psychology. In his book *Wild Mind* [14], he offers a 'Nature based map of the human psyche' that can help explore our "wholeness and potential magnificence" as well as the dragons within to heal ourselves and the world. He also conducts workshops which are essentially for intrapersonal work

Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy [15] has been conducting workshops to help people have an emotional and spiritual connect with Nature and other-than-humans. Many others have begun similar work inspired by her and Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher and naturalist who first wrote about Deep Ecology. (Incidentally, he was a Sanskrit scholar – so he might have well been influenced by the Upanishads and other scriptures which have a significant "deep ecology" element – but I do not have evidence of the same yet)

Leonardo da Vinci, the German scientist, poet and philosopher Goethe, C.G. Jung, Rousseau, Rabindranath Tagore, J. Krishnamurthy, Aurobindo Ghosh, Satish Kumar, Brian Goodwin, Stephan Harding from Schumacher College, UK and many others have written about the necessity of integrating Nature based work and holistic living/thinking into our lives. But most of them have focused on conceptual clarity – not on anything similar to eco-centric process work which involves group participative explorations.

It is quite possible that there are people working with groups to connect Nature with Psyche in various ways. However I have not come across any traditions of work where inter-personal and intrapersonal work as well as learning from Nature and Nature's principles are all part of the exploration.

## Future Directions

Although the very first inner and outer ecology programme was held more than 20 years ago, it is only in the last 8 years or so that a set of programmes has been evolved to support those who wish to be anchor persons of eco-centric process work in internship programmes or in communities and organisations.

We have a long way to go to introduce such work in more spaces as well as to evolve more programmes, meta labs and concepts that help deepen the work. *In particular, since our education has conditioned us to linear thinking and application of conclusions and theories, we need to give more importance to explorations in nature, responding to observations and unfolding holistic views, rather than to applying known frameworks to “understand” them.*

An important area of work that needs to be undertaken in India is concerned with eco-feminising and eco-spiritual process work. With roots in the Vedas and Upanishads, India has innumerable traditions of “inner growth”. Looking at various civilisations that have arisen on Earth, humans have minds which makes growth of some kind natural and inevitable. The Indian, Chinese and certain other cultures have invested considerably in “Inner Growth”, and balanced the need for outer growth. We don’t have any other alternative today than to attempt the same.

The balance of anthropocentric and eco-centric orientations has been responsible for four thousand or more years of a sustainable civilisation in India. India can play an important role in bringing back an eco-centric orientation. A project that can be undertaken in the future will be to work with ourselves to explore one’s eco-centric orientation more; conduct some programmes and undertake documentation on integrating traditional ecological wisdom in our learning and living processes.

## Notes

1. C.G. Jung, letter written in 1940, in *The Earth has a Soul: C.G. Jung on Nature, Technology and Modern Life*, ed. Meredith Sabina (Berkeley, California, North Atlantic Books, 2008) p 219
2. Alfred Lotka,
2. Satish Kumar, co-founder of Schumacher College, UK, from his speech at the *Bhoomi Conference on Food, Health and Climate Change*, 2009, Bangalore.
3. Dr. Pulin Garg was a Professor of Organisational Behaviour who was the founder of ISISD, The *Indian Society for Individual and Social Development*; this statement was made by him during a summer programme of ISISD; exact date not known
4. J. Krishnamurthy (quote sourced from [www.brainyquotes.com](http://www.brainyquotes.com); source of quote not known)
5. James Lovelock, *Gaia*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press) 1979
6. Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali*, (Calcutta, Macmillan and Co.) 1913
7. Some of these principles are mentioned in Fritjof Capra's book on *Systems View of Life- A Unifying Vision*, .(UK, Cambridge University Press) 2014 , page 21
8. Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life- A Unifying Vision*.(UK, Cambridge University Press) 2014
9. Jules Cashford, *Gaia: From Story of Origin to Universe Story*, ed. Stephan Harding, *Grow Small, Think Beautiful* (Edinburgh, Floris Books, 2011) pg 55
10. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With the Thousand Faces* (Princeton, US, Princeton University Press) 1949

11. Charles Eisenstein, *Sacred Economics- Money, Gift and Society in the Age of Transition* (Berkeley, California North Atlantic Books ) 2011

12. Arne Nesse, a Norwegian who coined the phrase “Deep Ecology”, was adept at Sanskrit and also a follower of Gandhi. He is the author of about 30 books, one of the most popular ones being “*Life’s Philosophy: reason and feeling in a deeper world*” (2002)

13. Theodore Roszac, *The Voice of the Earth – An Exploration in Eco-psychology* (Phanes Press) 2002

14. Bill Plotkin, *Wild Mind – A Field Guide to the Human Psyche* (Novato, California, New World Library) April 2013

15. Joanna Macy is an eco-philosopher, a scholar of Buddhism and author of books like *Coming Back to Life, Active Hope* and *Pass it On*.

## Annexure -1

### Condensed versions of the statements by the facilitators

**Anupama Thakkar:** This constant flow between the inner and outer worlds is complex; one cannot look at either in isolation. While experiencing deep listening, sharing and magical connections with people who appeared strangers just a little while ago, IoE provides broader perspectives by looking at Man-made web that determines rules and norms *vis-à-vis* Nature’s web which allows for everyone to be.



**Geetha Prabhu:** I look forward to the Deep Ecology programme every year. The silence and the sounds, the open spaces and the dense canopies, the flow and the gush of the river, the birds, the snakes... the beauty and the mystery of the forest is for one to experience. The 'wilderness solo' adds powerful insights to one's experiences... The concept sessions focusing on human wisdom and Nature's wisdom take the learnings to a much deeper level.

**Durga Sitaraman:** Eco-centric process work has given me the opportunity to see how the issues of self worth, materialism, achievement (which are the drivers of the man-made web) translates into how I view the natural world and my relationship with it. That this man-made web is embedded in a natural world makes it all the more important that I understand where I am located in the man-made web. If I embrace the embeddedness, then my relationship and responsibility towards the natural world changes. It can change the patterns of thought, feeling and action.

**Ishita:** Deep Ecology is like the call of the wild within and connections there on. That humans were not meant to be in concrete jungles as we all live today, is a strong message that has come my way. Sometimes when as humans we are unable to see things in perspective, nature's principles can help bail us out and look beyond only being a human in a micro context to being a part of a whole eco system.

**Kalpana:** Being part of this programme is a privilege, to see some of the co-travellers undergoing startling transformations...hate melting into love, sickness evolved into health, aggression turned into acceptance. My own transformation- I feel more alive and am planting more seeds of love, faith, trust; and the journey of discovering and rediscovering myself continues...

**Padmavathi Rao:** When Nature became the inspiration, the ever present Mother to me, I find reality became bearable even meaningful. Which tree ever shed tears over the barrenness brought by fall ? The awareness of inner and outer ecology has led to the discovery of a different dimension of the self and made a difference to the way I approach process work.

**Reva Malik:** The experience of being a part of these programmes for me has been like fish is to water. The content, the context and us would all seamlessly flow being a part of the larger umbrella of the planet that we are a part of. An identity of being the child of the soil brings up a whole lot in me, and I have seen the same happening with others too. Much of the socio-cultural crisis that we face currently stems from overlooking it. We seem to be addressing this through these programmes.

**Rema:** The anchoring of process work in an ecological framework has been meaningful. Nature meditations, weaving in nature's principles, concepts to question assumptions of the anthropocentric paradigm added to process work, in my experience enables people to anchor more deeply as beings not just in our human communities but a larger earth community. This fosters deeper understanding of our struggles and challenges, places things in perspective to own our hero's s journey.

**Sudha Ravi:** I experienced the process as an expansion of the lenses through which we see the world and ourselves. A shift from engaging with limited perspectives to expanded and embedded perspectives, helped me in releasing myself from the certain compulsions of the past. The programs helped process workers to look at sources of emotions beyond the links of thought, feeling action and belief. To tap into underlying interconnections, that allows us to work with non- well- being from a root level. In particular, engaging with the principle of transformation of energy in nature (dung to manure and the cyclical aspects), enabled me to engage with my disowned self, humanise others and self, as well as to offer myself as a resource while facilitating.