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## Wounded Nature and Bounded Human (Foreword)

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## Foreword

# Wounded Nature and Bounded Human

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Nature is bountiful. She has her being in letting herself to be shared by all elements that constitute her so much so that she exists and thrives in a symbiotic relationship established among everything created. Her ability to give without reserve is unmatched. Whoever reaches out to her will not go empty handed, as her bounty never gets drained or dried out.

Being essentially part of and having a distinctive position within the nature, human beings have to assume greater responsibilities to protect and care for the whole creation. As human beings are endowed with the faculties of intellect and will, they are uniquely capable of enhancing the course and

content of nature through their ongoing creative involvement facilitated through better understanding and judicious choices.

The symbiotic relationship between the bountiful nature and creative human being is a fact that cannot be questioned or denied. The history of the universe, especially the history of human involvement in the evolution (spontaneous or agency-induced) of nature for millions of years, as they are gathered from different types of research carried out in recent years in different parts of the globe, attests to the fact that human presence was a blessing to the extent that they cared for the bountiful nature without adversely affecting her natural rhythm.

This story, however, is found to have taken a different course in the recent past, especially from the era of agricultural and industrial revolutions. As it happens with any revolution, there were ruptures to the rhythm of nature both in deregulated and artificially augmented agricultural and industrial production, where the bounty of nature, instead of being handled with care and concern by human beings, began to be exploited without reserve, leading to catastrophic depletion of many resources, some of them being pushed even to a point of no return.

A self-destructive drive was set in motion in the human approach to nature, directly or indirectly under the auspices of religious divinity and/or the tutelage of statutory majesty. Unfortunately, however, human beings many a time did not realize the obvious fact that the destruction of nature – even if it was reflected only in a particular element – was at the same time a destruction of their own lives. The unfortunate alienation of all non-human elements of nature by human beings, though had the ‘blessing’ and ‘justification’ from some organized religions, had accentuated the exploitation of nature. For example, the biblical sources were (*mis*)interpreted by some belonging to the Semitic religious traditions to licence unbridled human plundering of the nature. Moreover, as the capitalist economic doctrine was

found to be the most popular form of commerce, and as political powers leaned over to the capitalist free market economies for their advantage, the destruction of nature reached its climax. All the more, a misconceived alliance between the religious powers and economic powers, especially of western Christianity and economic capitalism as it was practised in Europe and North America, issued the death warrant to the whole nature, as they together could salvage any plan to exploit nature's bounty. Further progression (or *digression!*), more powerful than ever in the recorded history, in this regard took place through the ideological and political facilitation of globalization, whereby the destructive strategies of production and distribution have not only been made to go global, but has triggered a tantalizing of the human want to its extreme so much so that the extortion of almost all the natural resources available all through the bountiful nature would not suffice to meet the ever-increasing need and boundless greed of the people. Industries thrive, economies aim at two-digit annual growth, and men and women aim at all possible goods and services which can be manufactured and distributed by availing the limited resources in nature, which otherwise should have been cautiously used in view of sharing them with the future generations as well.

Although most of us are happy with the availability of goods and services (as and when they are needed), and the advanced gadgets and facilities to make our lives comfortable and career efficient, seldom do we realize that the production and distribution of these are done at a high price, the adverse impacts of which would go well beyond our generation, as the damage done makes the vulnerable nature wounded to the core and further derailed and distanced from its own course. Despite the fact that most of the things of the consumerist culture is taken for granted and life would seem too difficult, or almost impossible, in their absence, even moderate assessment of experts indicates that the pace of life in the second half of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century seems to have

lost its natural dynamics and organic rhythm. The new globalized world of sheer business and hardcore exploitation has an almost exclusive focus on economic growth, which has thwarted all other areas and diverse dynamics of life so much so that materialistic overtones and consumerist concerns tend to rule everyone and everything.

Despite the 'all is lost' impression and the overarching doom that descends upon almost all areas of creation and life, it must be borne in mind that the unique status of human beings enables us to hope for the best by, first, realizing the widespread and long-lasting harm done and, then, understanding their causes and committing to the corrective measures to set the course right. We must learn from our mistakes and make provisions to protect and preserve the nature in a sustainable manner, which would necessarily include protection and judicious use of natural resources. It would be possible only if we realize that the ecosystems, which include the animate and inanimate realities, are essential to the support of life in all forms.

It is heartening to note that the world at large is becoming increasingly aware of the havoc that has beheld the entire creation; at least at the level of knowing, many are acutely aware of the devastating effects of certain modern practices adopted by the human beings, individually and collectively. Of course, despite the international treaties drawn up by different governmental and non-governmental bodies, there are certain influential political powers that are not ready to make any significant reduction in their nature-degrading production practices or lifestyle changes, which would not only benefit themselves but the entire creation. However, the enhancement of human consciousness that goes beyond the political divide and national affiliations has emerged more powerful, setting the trend to initiate more nature-friendly policies and practices. Even if the political might seems to succeed for a while with their anti-

natural pro-economic drives, the intense awareness, firm conviction, and unwavering commitment of a minority initiate a catalyst effect upon the people at large, which seem to open the avenues of a symbiotic relationship among the creation, where nature would be priced far above the quick-buck seeking economic and political gimmick. Despite the imperfections shared by democratic political processes, where the *doctored* majority voice turns out to rule the box, it also offers us the opportunity for the people's voice being heard. As more and more people are aware of the issues involved in the exploitation and extermination of nature for vested interests of the economic and political mighty around the globe, the move to save the earth, environment, and life seems to gain momentum and impact.

Looking at the whole issue of exploiting and exterminating nature from a critical angle would clearly indicate that the humanity has arrived at this through a sheer selfish mode of existence and action. The capitalist thrust which has been identified by many as the 'successful' mode of conducting economic transactions focuses on the generation of profit *at any cost*. When the capitalist mode is wedded to a utilitarian philosophy, even cutthroat competition and exclusive thrust on profit are said to be justifiable provided that would facilitate the amassing of economic benefit for the parties who run the show; as long as they gain their best, without incurring any loss, anything, including the exploitation of anyone or anything is acceptable among the practitioners of capitalism. The rule of thumb is the gain of the self. One could go any extent, provided that would open up the avenues for more gain and more profit for oneself. The fact that the resource rich countries around the globe (for example, some countries in Asia, Africa, and South America) encounter the poorest of the living conditions and the mayhem in the areas of development, political instability, etc., is indicative of the worst that can be set in motion by those who are

intent on grabbing the best, even if the rest are left in the lurch of economic deprivation and social cohesion.

While the humanity has paved the way for the destruction of nature, the only way to salvage ourselves along with nature is to curb our selfishness, on the one hand, and to initiate positive measures of reinstating the nature to its mode of self-maintenance and protection through selfless action in favour of nature, on the other. As the symbiotic relationship existing in nature facilitates each one's mutual support and dependence, creating a mutually enhancing symbiotic network of relationship among the entire creation, including all animate and inanimate existences, is the need of the hour.

Nature is the most effective nurturing ground of all; in fact, apart from and beyond nature, no embodied existence can survive or nurture itself. As nature is devastated due to unbridled human carelessness and exploitation, it is increasingly becoming inhospitable (e.g., by unmatched increase in pollution, mostly consisting of emissions and effluents) and unmanageable (e.g., the global warming is known to have done irreparable damage and has reached almost a point of no return). In the context of emphasis being placed on more industrial output and furthering of sound economic growth rate, chances are quite high for further degradation of nature. Although this self-defeating process against nature (which includes the human beings) has been set in motion by human beings, an end to this can be brought about only through the same human beings, but only if they are ready to change. It should be a *metanoia* - change of heart - that runs through their thinking, speaking, and acting, inviting every human being to be infused by the true teachings of various religions.

True to their fundamental nature, religions have been facilitating a healthy relationship not only between human beings and God, but also between human beings and the nature. Despite some of the overtures on the part of these religions at

one time or the other in the history of humanity, religion, if employed properly and creatively, is an effective institution to initiate and sustain trendsetting changes among the people. Christian teaching, for example, offers a ray of hope in this regard through its centrality on the total self-giving for the other. Against the background of all-pervasive human selfishness having caused most of the exploitation and degradation of nature, a true understanding of the Christian perspective would call for the practice of sharing and self-giving for the sake of others. While all are interested in grabbing as much as possible for oneself or one's own, a true Christian will have to let go of everything for the sake of the other, including the nature. As we take part in the nature's bounty, each one, then, has a responsibility to give back to the nature and to others as much as one can; while all other living beings would give back to nature whatever they have received from nature (as their nature is such that they neither hold anything back to themselves, nor do they take more than they need), human beings have a responsibility to give back to nature much more than they receive. It is due to their endowments of intelligibility and conscience which place upon them a greater responsibility to remedy the harm already done either by themselves or by their forefathers. As Pope John Paul II has put it in his encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* ("Social Concerns of the Church," 1987), human society should pay attention to "the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development" (§26). This would become a reality only in the case of human beings, by employing their intellect and will, in being and becoming true human beings placed in the matrix of nature. A true Christian, then, will not participate in any action that would bring about the death or annihilation of nature, but would be an ardent participant in resetting the nature back to its healthy course, by giving back to nature much more than one receives from nature.

A careful and impartial analysis of the sources of almost all religions would indicate that there are enough and more ideals and ideological provisions for the mutually enhancing existence of all within the world, highlighting the prominent responsibilities of the humanity as a whole in this regard. Moreover, as international organizations such as the United Nations and various political sovereignties across the world claim the right to manage the affairs of the people for the realization of the common good, they too have a greater responsibility to see to it that nature is properly cared for, as they make provisions for its continued use (or *misuse!*). While the states claim their legitimacy through legislation, religions have their justification in offering inspiration to their votaries; together they could make a significant difference in the lives of human beings through proper legislations for the holistic development and sustenance of nature. In fact, these two core institutions of human society shall become effective only if they could initiate a different kind of thinking and life based on a set of values and attitudes that are based on the self-giving and other-enhancing worldview.

It is such a realization in the context of an acute awareness of the environmental problems that are encountered by the whole creation and a systematic analysis of their complicated causes that is at the source of this amazing book *Rush to Riches: The War on Creation*. Rayappa A. Kasi, an eco-warrior in his own right and commitment, offers us an incisive analysis of the present plight of the world focused exclusively on a rush to riches by waging an incessant war on creation, which is beset by many ills ranging from mysterious illnesses to catastrophic climatic conditions, unpredictability of weather to unprecedented global warming, and ruthless human greed to hopeless lethargy of political sovereignties. To cite an example, Kasi writes: "The holy land of India is stripped, raped, abused, and pillaged. Violence has been perpetrated to the extreme on the land of *ahimsa* in the form of modernization,

industrialization, westernization, globalization, and contamination. Guess what? India is losing in the war of rush to riches" (329). After having depicted the maladies that the nature faces, which do not seem to be showing any sign of immediate improvement, and knowing well from his scientific expertise and immense experience that there is no alternative for a sustainable development which will be good both for the humanity and for the rest of creation, *Rush to Riches* dwells on the creative role that different religions should play in inaugurating a new era against the war on creation. According to Kasi, human beings have to respond to the plea of nature, which is obviously visible and audible in themselves, by changing their approaches and attitudes.

The proposal of *Rush to Riches* is not any temporary small-scale solution. In fact, its author does not believe in any cosmetic rearrangements or a hand-to-mouth solution. Instead, the proposal is for a total revamp of human approach to nature, by challenging a number of contemporary practices that seem to go against ourselves and our nature. According to Rayappa A. Kasi, "What may be hoped for is that humanity, on account of her fine and scientific intellect, will realize the obvious and retrace her steps and, from the demoralizing industrialism, she will find a way out. It will not necessarily be a return to the old absolute simplicity. But it will have to be a reorganization in which *village life or simple life will predominate*, and in which brute and material force will be subordinated to the spiritual force..." (241).

Although he calls for swifter human action (compared to the almost ten thousand years long agricultural revolution and two-centuries long industrial revolution, the environmental revolution should have a momentum, if it should succeed, compressed into a few decades), "the heart of environmental revolution is a change in values, one that derives from a growing appreciation of our dependence on nature. Without it there is no

hope. In simple terms, we cannot restore our own health, our sense of wellbeing, unless we restore the health of the planet” (296). It is this process that is referred to as the new mode of sustainable development. Without halting the progress that humanity has been making, it proposes a more intelligent planning and execution of developmental paradigms that would protect and preserve the entire creation for the good of itself. In the given context of our contemporary economic and industrial practices, Rayappa proposes an intelligent understanding of sustainable development and an action plan to be adopted: “Sustainable development is defined as balancing the fulfilment of human needs with the protection of the natural environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. It means development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Thus, to save the environment, it is not necessary to sacrifice our economic growth but it is necessary to adapt our economic growth in order to protect the environment” (409).

Indeed, the call is to creatively involve in facilitating the growth of everything, be it a plant or tree, a tiny insect or animal, or a human baby or a grown up: everything should have its due place in nature, even if one may not always understand the implication or relevance of the other elements or agents within a given context. Both the presence and absence of anything can set in motion a ‘butterfly-effect’, which may have positive or negative impact upon everything in the world.

Hoping for a positive catalyst effect from both the concerned and the unconcerned about the plight of nature, Kasi offers an intense personal invitation to all his readers. He writes: “As a Catholic priest, I believe that addressing this imbalance at its roots requires more than public policy, regulation, or legislation. It will require a collective psychological process (a global consciousness or noosphere) to heal us, technological

peoples, who, through a mechanized culture, have lost touch with the natural world... We seek to reclaim the wisdom of native peoples and reconnect the noosphere to the primal matrix of the earth. A species smart enough to discover the double helix should be wise enough to leave unsustainable ... technology and development" (351) and should seek other modes and paradigms to live a holistic life, a life and its amenities which would be through and through *pro-nature*. More than an invitation, here is a passionate appeal to save the planet earth. It is not something that one would do by oneself; it needs our collective will and concerted action plans.

Both religious and political powers have to contribute their might in this regard, as they are the most conspicuous and powerful agencies that can change the world for bad or for good. Even if we realize that their powers have been identified at the base of almost all the problems we confront today, they do have the potential for impacting positive and constructive changes. Hence, hoping against hope, *Rush to Riches* envisages that the war on creation can be halted and a post-war reconstruction of the whole nature can slowly but steadily be effected by the personal and collective involvement of every human being. Instead of grabbing every opportunity for selfish gains, humanity has to tune in itself to a new philosophy of sharing, where one would not hold anything back to oneself, but would give away for the other, even to the extent of giving away all that one has and, hopefully, much more than what one has... Indeed, everything is not lost, as long as humanity has not lost itself!

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