

EDITORIAL

The Journal: A Relook After Five Years

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It was five years ago that we joined our colleague Jayanta Bandhopadhyaya (later succeeded by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt) as editors of this journal. Our terms come to an end in early 2023. It has been an exciting journey. We wish to take this opportunity to briefly reflect on the past, present, and future.

The journal has been privileged to have the support of leading scholars from all over the world by way of contributions. It has also evolved into an attractive and preferred destination of publication for younger scholars. Its different sections cover important issues ranging from energy transitions to challenges facing agro-ecological farming and a great deal in between. Special sections have also covered a range of issues from new epistemologies of water to a revisit of the commons. Further, its papers use diverse methodologies ranging from those of standard environmental economics to social metabolism and material import–export focused ones.

The current issue follows the same tradition by including papers that span a wide variety of both themes and methodologies. The two commentaries address the questions of a green recovery and clean energy transition through a macro-opinion piece and an in-depth micro perspective, respectively. One research paper examines agricultural sustainability using a livelihood security index. Another attempts a critical analysis of ‘discounting disaster’ by focusing on land markets and climate change in the Sundarbans region. A third studies the political economy of the water commons in

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Kerala. The range covered is wide by any reckoning. Similarly, the books reviewed also cover subjects as far apart as ‘entropy law and sustainability from an economist’s perspective’ and ‘a study of Adivasi struggles in the Narmada valley’. The diversity persists and creates a niche for the journal.

Has the journal made a difference?

Five years is too short a period to observe and measure the impact. We certainly have widened our reach. EES moved to Open Journal Systems in May 2020. This helped the journal secure a membership with Crossref and made it possible for it to be archived at Ag-Econ, LOCKSS (through PKP), and the Environment and Society portal. The journal is now being listed by Scopus and has obtained the DOAJ Seal.

During the last few years, the environmental problems covered by the journal have become more acute. The pandemic has imposed additional burdens on society, slowed progress, and reduced the resources available to deal with environmental crises. At the same time, rigorous analyses of environmental and socioeconomic trends have revealed that our problems are more severe than we had thought. Clearly, therefore, more communication on the themes that are the subject of this journal is needed.

Fortuitously, over the last few years, we have also seen the emergence of consensus that we must view issues such as climate change, the decline in biodiversity and ecosystem services, land degradation, and equity and injustice through a common lens. The causes underlying these major problems are the same: the pursuit of models of economic growth that disregard nature and how natural systems work, population expansion, inequitable and unjust development, insatiable consumption, and poor governance. Not only are the causes the same, but the solutions to resolve these problems also have a common root in nature, and so are called nature-based solutions.

Consequently, journals such as ours, for which integration is the key pillar, have a tremendous potential to foster interdisciplinarity and serve as a platform to weave narratives into a common framework for a sustainable world. This is especially important for our region.

The training of our academics and their research enterprises falls short of the requirements of contemporary sustainability science, as pointed out by the authors in one of the Conversations sections devoted to the issue in the journal. Neither the fundamental training, nor the career incentives offered to scholars, are directed toward fostering the needed institutional changes.

Furthermore, as we noted earlier, our environmental challenges are becoming more acute. Public policies at the intersection of ecology,

economy, and society continue to downplay the downward trends in the quality and quantity of natural resources. Regulatory regimes to access and conserve such resources in recent years have also softened.

We hope that by publishing pieces using different methodologies side-by-side, we will encourage researchers to follow the difficult but intellectually exciting path of interdisciplinarity and advocating for policies based on knowledge and evidence.

Thus, the journal can justifiably be proud of the ground it has covered. Although our focus has been India, we hope that the journal will grow in its geographical coverage. We face common problems with our neighbours and beyond. Furthermore, within South Asia, we are bound together with a common geography, history, and culture. Across the region, the same issues confront many societies. Thus, while retaining the Indian perspective, the journal and its readership could benefit from a greater engagement with regional scholars to realize the vision of a just and sustainable society in the region.

Finally, it has been a privilege and honour to work with our associate editors, managing editors, members of the editorial board, and many authors and reviewers. We are grateful for the support, advice, and counsel we have received. We have been fortunate to be part of the founding editorial team and thank our colleagues at the Indian Society of Ecological Economics for giving us this opportunity.