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**EDUCATION FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
THROUGH
INTERNATIONALISATION**

Transnational Knowledge
Exchange and Global
Citizenship

Neera Handa



Palgrave Studies in Global Citizenship
Education and Democracy

Series Editor
Jason Laker
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Neera Handa

Education for Sustainability through Internationalisation

Transnational Knowledge Exchange
and Global Citizenship

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Cover illustration: Pattern adapted from an Indian cotton print produced in the 19th century

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“It is not education that will save us, but education of a certain kind”

PREFACE

If the aim of higher education is preparing responsible future global citizens, sustainability education is an effective way to develop graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitude required of them. Graduates with such attributes are needed to address the social, environmental, and ethical problems that face today's world. In keeping with Orr's thesis that "it is not education that will save us, but education of a certain kind" (2004, p. 8), this book presents innovative alternative solutions with which to do so. Establishing a link between educational internationalisation, and the ideal of global sustainability, it suggests, how the internationalisation of teaching and learning for sustainability can be a vehicle for a two-way flow of knowledge across national, cultural, linguistic, and theoretical boundaries for promoting social justice and global citizenship. As the Western capitalistic development model of globalisation has indoctrinated the world to a culture of consumerism, individualism, and competition, and away from such altruistic goals, a need to view the world through human potential for compassion, generosity, and self-control points to non-Western knowledge traditions. This book explores the potential of internationalised higher education to be an ethical agent of perspective transformation in fulfilling its promise to bring the good that is the highest, and the good that is for the common well-being in the world.

The subject matter of this book, which is an exploration of both Western and non-Western ideas, is not a religious debate or a mythology discussion. Neither is it an exhaustive exposition of all debates and discussions that have taken place in the field of education for sustainability. It certainly builds on them, but it does that to reach towards a venue which I believe has not been

explored. Most of the research and writing that has taken place in the field of sustainability education has certainly emphasised the need to change human behaviour. But the focus has usually been on changing people by changing the choices they make. This approach, however, leaves out one of the most important factors—that of the personal growth and spiritual development of individuals and societies, leaving the values behind these choices unchanged. Sustainable living, however, is more than changing the choices that are made; it is about changing the beliefs about what to choose. It requires the consciousness regarding the means to choose, and the impact of what is chosen, the circumstances of these choices, and the availability of these choices.¹ It requires the wisdom and compassion to understand and respond to the needs of others. Hence, to reject the choices which are being made available in today's capitalist-driven society, alternatives are needed, and if these alternatives are not available, they would need to be imagined.

A transcultural knowledge exchange, I believe, could be the way to these alternatives, opening new vistas of hope, and different social, economic, and environmental worldviews that “see the world anew”.

OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

There are eight chapters in this book. In each chapter, a different Indian concept² is introduced to bring a non-Western point of view to inform the topic of discussion. The concepts that I use in this book, in spite of their connection with Indian classic and religious texts, are not to be taken merely as “religious” symbols, neither are they used as such. They represent the wisdom of a knowledge tradition which flourished outside the West, but are also part of the lived experience and the collective consciousness of those who come from that culture. I use these concepts not as examples of incredible ancient “knowledge” from India but, rather as means to explore some much-needed theoretical alternatives for creating responsible citizens of a world that is facing sustainability issues.³ Western and non-Western terms are only used as a point of reference to show the two different knowledge systems, and not to insist on contradictions; labelling knowledge to be non-Western and Western can be problematic, of which I am well aware.⁴ In each chapter, therefore, both non-Western and Western concepts are engaged in a dialogue from which shared knowledge, together with knowledge which is new and relevant, can be gleaned.

I also do not aim to present the case of the domination of Western values over the ‘restern’ world, as “a moral outrage”,⁵ since dominion is never the doing of the doer only. It certainly is with the consent of those

who have participated in their dominion. Rather, I point to the dominion of these values and to a lack of agency on the part of most in the global society, who, according to Plato's analogy of cave people, see reality like a shadow on the wall, and are passive consumers of knowledge, as they are distant and disconnected from the process of knowledge creation. This passive reception of knowledge cannot be transformative. My aim here is to advance the argument for internationalisation being a process of transformative, transnational, and transcultural exchange.

I do not have all the answers, but do have a fruitful avenue of inquiry in order for education to become transformative. My scope is to open up the field, the broad endeavour. By exemplifying the process of internationalising education for sustainability,⁶ I show how multiple epistemologies, philosophies of knowledge, can cohabit to create a space for us to ponder the situation that Harding, in her excellent discussion of non-Western sciences claims, "if we had acknowledged non-Western knowledge traditions along with the Western traditions ... [W]e could have created very different systems of knowledge", and hoping with her that, "We can still do so".⁷

Sydney, Australia

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NOTES

1. The market driven society means the choices that are made are driven by market values, and not through any ethical or moral considerations. What is needed, however, is awareness of, as well as consideration for the preservation of "social, cultural and environmental stability and integrity" (Mazzocchi 2006, p. 463).
2. Concepts, as Gagne (cited in Marzano and Kendall 2007, p. 26) points out, are "synonymous with generalization, a particular kind of rule, a rule that classifies".
3. An American academic, Nanda (2003), gives a scathing critique of those who are looking backward through the lenses of nationalism, Hinduism and Hindu science in India, calling them prophets facing backward. However, this book is not a eulogy in praise of a knowledge tradition, I borrow Radhakrishnan's disclaimer in his book on Indian philosophy, when he writes that his book was not: "a defence of any specific religion, but only a tentative attempt to discover truth (and discuss its bearings on the general religious attitude). I am aware that the full implications of the problem are not followed out in detail" (Radhakrishnan 1947, pp. 9–10).

As one of the educators in my research had said that when identifying "Indian knowledge", there is a tendency to revert to some long-gone times, almost uncanny like incredible India". To explain what I mean by non-

Western knowledge, I again echo her words, “Being an Indian is both, my lived experiences of modernity in India, and my intellectual resources, a system of thinking grounded in my culture and not imbibed in mystery!”

4. Others have agreed that “beginning with the fact that setting up dichotomies in the first place is a very Western activity. Further, many indigenous peoples live in Western countries” (Merriam and Young 2008, p. 72). Moreover, not everyone living in the Western countries destroys nature, and not all non-Western, or indigenous people live in harmony with nature (Mazzocchi 2006).
5. Hegemony (Gramsci 1971), is never the doing of the doer only. It certainly is with the consent of those who it is done to, or who participated in their dominion.

Moral outrage, as Benjamin (1988, p. 10) writes, cannot substitute analysis. Those who were dominated were not untouched by their domination. She argues that “this has been a weakness of radical politics: to idealize the oppressed, as if their politics and culture were untouched by the system of domination, as if people did not participate in their own submission. To reduce domination to a simple relation of doer and done-to is to substitute moral outrage for analysis” (Benjamin 1988, pp. 9–10).

6. Internationalisation of higher education, as a transnational knowledge exchange, is taken to mean an exchange of high order knowledge concepts, theories, and perspectives “the exchange of theories, models and methods for academic or practical purposes among countries” (O’Donoghue 1994, p. 73).
7. Harding (2006, p. 49).

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One Dark Night of the Full Moon

Abstract The Introductory chapter starts with a reading of the story told in an Australian film, *One Night the Moon*, which illustrates the tragedy that ensues from monocultural ignorance and insularity. The consequences of a white Australian farmer's refusal to recognise or engage with the expertise of Aboriginal Australians, as the frantic search for a lost girl unfolds, are tragic. Just as the Aboriginal Australian tradition has a deep understanding of the land that could allow the wider populace to live better in harmony with the land, so the wealth of cultural and philosophical traditions that flourished outside the modern Western world have potential to provide knowledge that would facilitate a richer and better balanced, sustainable engagement with the environment in the so-called first or the third world. Indeed, it has potential to alter our very understanding of the concept of knowledge.

Keywords Colonisation • Disjuncture with nature • Non-Western knowledge • Alternative perspectives • Holistic knowledge • Sustainability • Transcultural knowledge exchange • Educational internationalisation

The child lost on a moonlit night was not found as those looking for her could see the terrain, but failed to read the signs, and the black man who could read the signs was not asked, and they went the wrong way!

INTRODUCTION

The tragic story of a child lost on a moonlit night depicted in the Australian film *One Night the Moon*,¹ is based on a true event that took place in 1932, when a child went missing from an Australian outback station. In the film, as in the original story, the father of the lost child, a white man, refuses to accept the help of an Aboriginal local tracker to find his daughter. Not allowing the Aboriginal man on his land, the white man rejects the black man's knowledge of the land and, in spite of having a large search party, fails to track the path the little girl might have taken.

A few days after the fruitless search has been abandoned, the mother, suffering from the loss of her child and not knowing what had happened to her little girl, finally defies her husband by going to the Aboriginal man to find her. Along with him, she eventually finds her daughter's decayed body not very far from the house from which she had disappeared. The tragedy in the film worsens: the white man, having lost his self-confidence at his failure to find his daughter and having lost his wife's trust and love, kills himself.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE MOON ON A DARK NIGHT

This story of the lost child is a tragedy for each of the three characters who wanted to find her, but could not. The tragedy of the white man depicted in his failure to comprehend what he thinks is "my land", is about his inability to communicate with the land and his arrogant rejection of the native Aboriginal's knowledge, which result in him losing everything. The tragedy of the Aboriginal tracker, depicted in his plea "this land is me", is about the lost opportunity for reconciliation and his longing to share his knowledge with the white man.² The tragedy of the girl's mother, depicted in her own inability to challenge her husband's decisions, is about her failure to act on her intuition. She finally *does* act but, by then, it is too late. A failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of knowledge that is either unknown to—or, at best, seemingly incompatible with—the Western, empirical, modern and masculine ways thus brings dismal consequences for all concerned.

This tragedy, along with similar incidents of dire consequences for both the white settlers and Aboriginals, could certainly have been avoided. Perkins, the director of the film, who herself is an Aboriginal Australian, calls this "a tragedy of knowledge offered and knowledge rejected", as this

process of loss has been repeated across a range of areas due to a rejection of the diversity of viewpoints and a lack of holistic knowledge.³ Had there been a recognition and acceptance of multiple ways of knowing, the child could have been saved. If “the space between black and white Australians”⁴—which, according to Perkins, this story is about—had been a place to share and exchange knowledge and expertise, there would have been respect and acceptance leading to reconciliation, rather than antagonism and loss.

In Australia, it is true that the land has been a point of contention between the white settlers and the Aboriginal people.⁵ However, it has been much more than their respective claims on territory; it is a clash of worldviews.⁶ With the Aboriginals claiming that they belong to the land, and the colonisers claiming that the land belongs to them, there is little wonder there has not been reconciliation between the two. The knowledge of the custodians of this land, who managed to live in harmony with nature for thousands of years, has continuously been rejected by the European colonisers who, believing in only the utility of the land, have managed to destroy native fauna and flora, and the pristine environment, in just 200 years.

Perkins bemoans the loss of native Aboriginals’ knowledge, the “250 languages, the knowledge of country, landscapes, spiritualism that’s been offered and hasn’t been taken up by Australia”.⁷ The deep relationship that the Aborigines have had with the land, their reciprocity and respect for nature, have been neither understood nor respected by the colonisers. For them, the land they had occupied was nothing more than a territory that had to be emptied so as to be tilled, mined and developed.⁸

Atrocities, such as forcing the natives out of their land, their ‘country’, and separating Aboriginal children from their parents in order to be cultured in Western ways, took place. Western colonisation thus not only took indigenous people away from their land and their culture, but also terminated their relationship with nature.⁹ By rejecting their indigenous values, their knowledge of the land, Western colonisation silenced their stories.¹⁰

And this seems to have been the case everywhere in the world. Wherever European colonisers have gone and captured new lands, those who were indigenous to these lands were killed, captured, or displaced. Colonial ways, and Western culture, justified by the mantra of “cultural” superiority, were imposed on the colonised people. Western colonisation and European exploration have thus left their legacy in devastated ecology and in displaced indigenous societies throughout the world.¹¹

In accordance with the economic development standards set by the Western colonial powers, this onslaught of modernity continues. Western

development, in the name of modernity, has been vent upon people and nature everywhere in the world. Both continue to be “tamed and manipulated” in the name of development. Concepts such as living with nature, and living within one’s means are ignored, and those who believed in these concepts have not been permitted to contribute to this global discourse of economic growth and development.

LOSS OF MYSTERY AND SANCTITY OF NATURE

It is not to say that people in Western cultures have never had a close relationship with nature, as rituals to celebrate the relationship between human and nature have been integral to both Eastern and Western mythos. Nature, or earth, the Magna Mater, the Great Mother that humanity had clung to for survival,¹² had been worshipped in some form in most of the pre-scientific world. In India, Earth was a mystical feminine spirit dwelling in the universe, sustaining every living and non-living being in her bosom.¹³ For the Chinese, it was the mother goddess Tao, and for the Greeks, the Earth Goddess Gaia.¹⁴

However, in today’s modern world, other than indigenous peoples who continue to eulogise nature, wanting to live close to it, for most people, whether in the Western or the non-Western world, earth is no more than a territory. It is just an object of materialistic gains,¹⁵ a quarry of resources to be claimed and exploited.¹⁶

This break in the relationship between humans and nature, according to scholars, can be reported back to the spread of Abrahamic religious ideologies.¹⁷ The ideology of God creating the world and putting humans (especially men) in charge of nature, established the separation of nature from God, it was also the start of patriarchy.¹⁸ It was the beginning, some say, of the passing of the enchantment and the mystic glow of nature, to be replaced by the cold knowledge of exploration and experimentation that finally increased the distance between nature and human experience. Industrialisation fueled by the need for, as well as due to, the profits of colonisation, was lent support by experimental and empirical science,¹⁹ which was to become the only viable method of understanding the world. This masculine, empirical ideology, bequeathed by pragmatic scientists such as Frances Bacon to conquer nature by exploring its inner courts,²⁰ reduced nature to an instrument, to be studied and exploited.²¹ With the mysteries of nature becoming subject for experimentation and dissection, the feminine qualities of emotion, intuition, and subjectivity were suppressed and ousted.^{22,23}

Hence, Western modernity, which came in the wake of evidence-based scientific inquiry and its reductionism, made any other philosophical explorations of mind, archaic and dated.²⁴

Since then, humanity, armed with these reductionist ways of rational analysis, has been on a mission to wield “absolute, uncontrolled authority” over nature.²⁵ Western perspectives, as a result of the victory of the Western utilitarian attitude towards nature, have promoted a selfish, monocultural approach in which human values for nature and its diversity are lost.

In this paradigm humans are the superior species; other forms of life—animals, plants, fishes, forests, rivers, oceans, mountains, the entire natural world—are there to serve the economic needs of ever-growing human numbers...²⁶

In this human-centred era in which we live today, when human activities have wrought havoc on the earth’s ecosystems, ideologies that are needed to capture the essence and holistic view of nature have been silenced.²⁷ Re-ordering nature for human needs, the eradication of the divine connection between human and nature is complete.

DISJUNCTURE A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

In the postmodern globalised world of today, the above ideologies have culminated in a colonial utilitarian attitude towards nature; capitalistic values such as individualism, competition, and consumerism have captivated the human imagination.²⁸ In this capitalist worldview, a future that is unpredictable and unknown is built on a myopic illusion of prosperity, a *maya*, fluid and changing,²⁹ where everything seems possible. Fortune seems within reach of those who can run faster, compete with others, trample over others to reach their goal. But there is not enough substance to hold this false prosperity.³⁰ Discontent is growing with this discourse of economic development and growth, which previously had shown such promise.

In this discourse, where Western perspectives and values have created a distance between nature and humanity,³¹ sustainability or sustainable development has become an oxymoron, contradicting itself, something that cannot be achieved. The growing disparities in global society are

making people realise the futility of unending, unsustainable development. In this society, where individualised material success is the measure of development, competition is the virtue and where consumption is the only dominant understanding of development, more people consider themselves to be poor, not because their basic needs are not met, but because their wants beyond their means are not fulfilled.³²

The resultant unhappiness and alienation at both societal and individual levels have jolted humanity into realising that human progress and development are not the “be all and end all” of this creation.³³ Scientists are finding that nature, which certainly has been a benevolent provider, is also an evolving organism; that nature continues to change and grow; that the rise of humanity on the face of the earth may actually be one of nature’s evolutionary stages. Similarly, the extinction of humanity also could have been meticulously planned by nature itself.³⁴ Climate change, with its erratic weather patterns, is already showing evidence that fortifies such concerns.

There is also disenchantment with the rational, scientific scepticism which had created dichotomies that put divisions between nature and humanity in the first place.³⁵ Disillusioned with the one-dimensional view of the world that has driven society since modernity hit it, humanity has finally come to realise that cultural diversity and biodiversity are both crucial for survival.^{36,37}

Among scientists, educationists, and scholars in every field of knowledge, too, there seems to be an almost unanimous decision that sustainability as social, economic, and environmental well-being can only be envisaged if there is a shift in attitudes and behaviours of modern society.³⁸ It is clearly being understood that with what humanity is doing to the environment, consuming ‘nature’ at a rate which is unsustainable, would be disastrous for the future of humanity itself.³⁹ Climate change—which has, to a large extent, been attributed to human activities—is one of the alarm bells. The devastating consequences of humanity’s copious consumption and conspicuous greed are reflected in the ecological crisis that the world is facing today.⁴⁰ Disillusioned with the Western utilitarian attitude towards nature,⁴¹ there is a search for alternatives, as people are looking for a holistic approach to living. An alternative understanding is finally dawning upon this consumerist society that human relationship with nature is reciprocal.⁴²

As said, vehemently, by an Aboriginal:

This lone development model has shown us that it is not sustainable: it is a failure and has placed our Mother Earth and her children, human beings, in grave crisis and in danger of extinction. We, the indigenous peoples, have

said that we are different and diverse, and every people, based on the teachings and footprints of our ancestors, has built development models based on knowledge of its habitat that we call the land.⁴³

It is thus time to go back to those indigenous ideologies in which human and nature have an undying bond—they are a part *of* and not apart *from* each other.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Non-Western knowledge traditions hold the physical and the metaphysical together and consider humans to be part of nature.^{44,45} In contrast to the reductionism inherent in Western empiricism—formed by a fragmented, dualistic view of the universe, where everything is isolated, and separate—non-Western knowledge systems have “a complex understanding of the world”.⁴⁶ Knowledge in these systems is a unified physical and spiritual understanding that contributes to create a particular sense of being in the world. This knowledge— for example, expressed in words, symbols, rituals, images, metaphors and such—endorses principles of reciprocity and respect for nature.⁴⁷ These knowledge traditions, which reflect respect for nature and its diversity, need a place in the universal conversation to repair the delicate relationship between people and nature.⁴⁸

This is a declaration from indigenous peoples in the world on a similar principle that was made at the United Nations’ forum:

We, the indigenous peoples, have a way of living with the vegetable and animal species of the forests. The forest is our natural habitat, the place where we obtain all the necessary basic elements to ensure our subsistence and cultural development: That way of life enabled us to develop an ancestral self-sufficient system of knowledge about our habitat: land, its management, the management and use of natural resources, based on an ancestral knowledge to meet the needs of our peoples.⁴⁹

This says that environment is not a gift of nature to us but, rather, an inheritance to be passed on to future generations. It is this recognition and acknowledgment of alternatives in terms of society’s understanding of human life that can take the global future either towards sustainability, or towards precarity—which at this stage seems imminent.^{50,51}

TRANSCULTURAL EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

My proposition is that, in an intercultural dialogue between Western and non-Western knowledge traditions, an exchange of knowledge can take place, and alternatives beyond Western-dominated interpretations of the world can be created. An engagement with those who possess such knowledge or who can access these knowledge systems requires venues for a mutual exchange of knowledge between the Western and the non-Western knowledge systems. This “transcultural” knowledge can provide means to create alternatives to what we think, how we behave, and what we consider our joint future to be.⁵²

By transcultural, I mean interaction and integration of ideas between cultures, “building a true and lasting rapprochement of cultures”.⁵³ For example, a co-creation of knowledge for sustainability means a transcultural understanding through “the promotion of cultural diversity, of intercultural dialogue”.⁵⁴ Such a dialogue between cultural traditions, as claimed, “can become a tool for social cohabitation, as well as for discovering and enhancing knowledge”.⁵⁵ It opens a window of opportunity to listen to those who have been silenced in the global discourse of Western capitalist development.

Sustainability, therefore, as a co-creation of knowledge, will be about creating a global culture different than the discourse of development that is currently being created. In a world divided by the developed countries and countries aspiring to develop, if capitalist development is the only dominant understanding of development, there will be insufficient resources for development. Creating a balance between human consumption and the capacity of the earth’s ecosystems to renew themselves⁵⁶ would actually require contraction, rather than more development.⁵⁷ In that case, “equality”, if considered from the liberal point of view, and based on rising levels of consumption, may not be universally possible. There is a need for restraint, a need for sharing what is already available, and a need for acceptance and tolerance for the needs of the others.^{58,59} Sustainability is at the heart of that knowledge. It is the change that people make in choosing how they live, how they consume, and how they relate to one another. It is a change in the worldview.

A DIFFERENT WORLD, A NEW WORLDVIEW

For my explanation of sharing a worldview, I am guided by Geraldine Brooks’s 2011 Boyer lecture. These lectures are delivered each year by prominent Australians as an analysis of human nature and how to live in

today's world. Brooks, speaking about the idea of "Home", draws a vivid image of seeing another's world through their eyes:

Once I set aside my firm belief that I could not comprehend her, something happened ... I understood her vision. I realised I had lived, until that moment, in an airlock, and that she was prising open the heavy door, just a crack. In a shaft of light, I glimpsed a sliver of the world beyond, the world in which she lived ... I could imagine what it is to see with her eyes, to feel with her heart, to inhabit a place in which the language was not particular and national, but infinite and universal.⁶⁰

To see how "others" see the world requires one to become detached from one's own views.^{61,62} Therefore, the first step in moving from a monologic to a dialogic, or even multilogic, construction of knowledge would be to set aside one's belief that one cannot understand and to become open to what others see and what they know.⁶³

In this book, I invite teacher educators to look through new eyes at this world that is facing sustainability issues, and the role that the internationalisation of higher education, which brings people together, plays, or may play, in this world. I propose that a transcultural and transnational exchange of knowledge—which has become possible through the internationalisation of higher education—opens a window of opportunity to listen to those who have previously been silenced in the global discourse of Western capitalist development. It allows us to see what they see.

I present a process of transcultural and transnational knowledge exchange, exploring and integrating non-Western knowledge in sustainability education to produce a holistic and transformative knowledge. This process of creating transformative knowledge is, I believe, the key to both empowerment and spiritual development.⁶⁴

Here, we are talking about holistic knowledge, not about the semblance or shadow of truth—which, according to Plato, is the reality perceived by people in a cave.^{65,66} The creation of holistic and transformative knowledge can be considered in the light of an Indian concept, *tri-vid*, which is a process of forming knowledge through which those seeking to know are united with the object of their knowledge.

HOLISTIC KNOWLEDGE

Tri-vid is the threefold unification of knowledge^{67,68} in which the knower, the object of the knowledge, and the process or means through which knowledge is created come together to create holistic, *Sampurn*

knowledge⁶⁹—knowledge that transforms.^{70,71} In this process, those who are seeking knowledge are transformed by the very act of knowledge creation. They are empowered by their knowledge, as they own the objective and the consequence of their knowledge.

In the tragedy of the lost child, in terms of the *tri-vid*, the process of knowledge creation was inadequate at every step. First, the connection between the object and the knowers/knowledge seeker was not made—whether it was the white man, who lacked the means, the knowledge of the land on which he had to find his daughter, or the Aboriginal Australian, who had the means to find the child but, not being asked to join the search, had lacked an objective to engage his knowledge of the land. Then, there is lack of agency—for example, the mother’s inability to choose to follow her intuition to look for alternatives, which added to this loss, as the woman could see that an exchange of knowledge might have saved her daughter, but could not contradict her husband.

At the heart of *One Night the Moon*, therefore, was this tragedy of a lack of holistic knowledge and a loss of agency. In the absence of agency in all of the characters, in terms of the *tri-vid*, no empowerment took place. What could have helped to connect them all with the object of their search, the lost child, was the holistic and *SampurN* knowledge, which could have empowered them to change the situation.

If we look at the foundation of the tragedy that is unfolding everywhere in today’s global world, we find the same insolence of dominant knowledge, and a lack of agency in terms of what needs to be done and what needs to be known. With no awareness of social justice, or environmental and social well-being, people are ready to exploit the human and natural resources to their limits to fulfil their never-ending needs. Lack of dialogue in the dominant discourse of economic progress and development—which is the driving force in today’s global society—has left no room for alternative perspectives. A lack of agency on the part of those who live by its dominant ideologies is at the heart of its unsustainability.⁷²

Sustainable living is not a notion which can be imposed on people. It is a choice that people, unencumbered by the belief systems that others impose on them, naturally make. To be able to “discover” it, a new world has to be imagined. It requires new perspectives about consumption and preservation, and a clear understanding about what is to be achieved, and what can be achieved. It requires the wisdom and compassion to understand and respond to the needs of nature and its rights, and knowledge about “what actually matters” is the answer. A change in perspectives requires more than changing the choices that we make. It is a change in our beliefs about the world we want to live in.^{73,74}

AN ALTERNATIVE VISION

The ethics of sustainability not only demand “stewardship” in managing the earth, but also an “uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation”.⁷⁵ It requires humanity to grow up to take its responsibility⁷⁶ to honour the reciprocal loving and nurturing relationship that humanity has with nature. One-dimensional scientific understanding cannot capture all the dimensions of life, and nature and human relationship.^{77,78} Along with empirical reasoning, we need the dimension of “poetry and the emotion” which “moves us”⁷⁹ and makes us humane. This holistic view of life can certainly bring about the changes that people need to live anew.

There is a need to revoke contentment and kindness; there is a need to establish a holistic understanding of sustainability and its relation to the human and natural reciprocal bond. For example, according to the *Vedantic* philosophy of non-duality, which I can access due to my intellectual heritage, there exists a unified, transcendental reality in the universe. In this philosophical tradition, which takes a holistic view of the world, the highest truth, the only truth of this universe, is celebrated as “*Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (“the-True-that-is-Moral-that-is-Beautiful”),⁸⁰ and the realisation of this “truth” is the aim of human existence.⁸¹ Similar notions which inspire humans to develop themselves while in tune with their surroundings are found in almost all indigenous cultures where nature and human relationship is celebrated, and where development or growth, as such, is not an outward phenomenon that one must seek—it is inward progress and self-development.⁸²

Hence, alternatives are needed to challenge what is thought and valued in today’s modern society, to bring about a transformation in how this society, which sees reality like a shadow on the wall, perceives its future. Only a society, armed with the human potential for compassion, generosity and self-control can choose to move towards creating a just, harmonious, and peaceful world.⁸³ As Orr (2011, p. 67) reminds us, “A world divided by narrow, exclusive, and intense allegiances to ideology or ethnicity cannot be sustained, because its people will have too little humour, compassion, forgiveness, and wisdom to save themselves”. With the wisdom and compassion to understand and respond to the needs of nature and its rights, a new world has to be imagined in which environmental and social justice are to be valued above economic growth and development. This move—which global society needs to make for its own sustainability—demands alternatives in terms of different social, economic, and environmental worldviews, to own a different type of growth as development: sustainability as contentment.

CONCLUSION

For an alternative, probable, and preferable future for this world, what humanity requires is transformative knowledge, as knowledge for a sustainable world cannot be created by shutting oneself in a dark cave about sustainability issues. This passive reception of knowledge cannot be transformative. Those who are distant from the process of knowledge creation do not own their knowledge; disconnected from the process of knowledge creation, they are passive consumers of knowledge. It is only those who are actively involved in the construction of their knowledge, and who are ready to own both the objective and the consequences of their actions, that can lead the world away from its precarity. Hence, a different type of education is needed—an education that builds and is built on transformative knowledge.⁸⁴ Knowledge that can be owned by the knower. Such knowledge requires inspiration and willingness to learn, as truth can only be illuminated.⁸⁵

Chapter 2 is about such an illuminating experience. Some years ago in India, on the banks of the holy river, Ganga, I gained further insights into Om—the most well-known symbol of Indian spirituality, which I had thought I already knew. That day, in a casual conversation with my cousin Ram, while walking on the banks of the river Ganga, I finally understood what Om stands for, and found how this symbol of creation holds the truth I had been seeking! It was the most unexpected lesson in *Advaita* (non-dual) Vedic knowledge, as I experienced that space within me which always yearns for harmony with oneself, resonating with Om⁸⁶! And that showed, clearly, what I believe, had been missing—the need for spiritual development for sustainability, the missing ingredient in sustainability education discourse.

NOTES

1. Perkins, 2001. *One Night the Moon* is an Australian film by Rachel Perkins, who herself is an Aboriginal woman.
2. Probyn (March, 2002). “This Land is Mine/This Land is Me”: Reconciling Harmonies in *One Night the Moon*. *Australian Cinema and Culture Issue 19*.
3. Due to “the arrogance of white attempts to ‘own’ it through pastoral care the lost child story to be reduced to a puzzle without an answer” (Probyn, March 2002. http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/australian-cinema-and-culture/this_land/).
4. Source:<http://www.creativespirits.info/resources/movies/one-night-the-moon#ixzz3pa0YqoD7>.