

OUR COLLECTIVE VOICES

ONE YEAR OF

& India Climate
Collaborative

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The world is full of signs and wonders that come and go, and if you are lucky, you might be alive to see them.

When you drive through the vast, serrated and saw-toothed expanse that is Ladakh, you can almost feel the vibrations of millions of years of its ecological history. The breathtaking landscape stretches endlessly, beyond the shimmering horizon, while pregnant blue skies can give a pilgrim soul a singular sense of hope. You understand you are small, and the cosmos are infinite and measureless. Yet we are all connected, not fragmented or alone; just as each peak, each range is bound to the mountain, all of it eroding together. There is Sangam, or convergence, the Tamil form of the Sanskrit word “Sangha” to describe an assembly of poets, or a meeting of rivers. Much as the confluence of the Indus and Zanskar rivers, two opulent and opposing shades of blue, nestled amongst the mountains of Ladakh’s cold desert.

There are moments in life when it is no longer clear whether we dream our dreams or are dreamt by them — moments when reality presses against us with such intensity, acute and overwhelmingly real, that all we can do is sit on its sharp edge of uncertainty, feet dangling into a dream, hoping for clarity and fortitude. And then, on these dream-drenched feet, we get back up and march into the uncertainty, then soar over it on the wingspan of perspective we call hope.

It is this sort of optimism that animates our first anniversary book — optimism that feels not human but geologic, more kindred to the optimism of the Sangam, rooted in deep time, in strata of cultures and civilizations who all

lived and died, hoped and despaired, foraged for meaning; the optimism of togetherness in our uncertainty, the kind Václav Havel recognized as the willingness “to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.”

I hope you enjoy this small, miraculous book. As we at the India Climate Collaborative celebrate one year of Sangam, we see the interconnected threads of India’s climate movement woven slowly together, and so we have three thematic frames for this book. Three sets of stories — of self, of us, and of now — within which we can situate compelling pieces of writing and reporting about how climate change impacts us as individuals and communities, and what we can do about it.

Through these pages we invite you into the lacunae between self and world, between poetry and politics, between history and future, as we face the disquieting reality we live in, a reality of unrest and injustice, of ecological and moral collapse. But there is also something else; something buoyant that presses up. We ask you to deepen your resolve to build lasting solutions, unleash radical collaboration, the power of Sangam, and our collective voice, to advance climate action in India.

Rachel Carson once observed, “our origins are of the earth... so there is in us a deeply seated response to the natural universe, which is part of our humanity.” May this be the decade we rediscover who we really are.

For all of us who spend a planet and an epoch together,



Shloka Nath
Executive Director

Stories of Self

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.

— Rabindranath Tagore



Climate change is deeply personal. It affects our perception, reality and anchors. Our lives and livelihoods are being irrevocably altered by a warmer and more unpredictable world. This not only manifests itself through flooded cities, choking skies and degraded landscapes, but also in our sense of self, our repository of memories and prisms through which we process these times.

We travel with Pico Iyer who writes movingly about the inner work we must do to heal our wounded outer environment. He calls for introspection and reflection that could bring balance to our relationship with the world around us. Disha Shetty takes us on her journey as a climate journalist as she discovered a plethora of Indian scientists, reporters and local communities finding their own voices and telling their stories. Amitav Ghosh writes about the challenges of weaving the reality of climate change into fiction, wondering why authors of literature are falling short of grappling with this existential threat. He argues that apart from climate action requiring innovative new technologies and a restoration of ecological balance, it also calls for shifts in our culture and imagination.

The Inner Climate

by Pico Iyer

Publication:

Orion Magazine

Date:

August 2008

Artwork:

© Maanvi Kapur

via Current Conservation

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"Our outer environment can only begin to be healed by our inner, and I'm not sure we can ever truly tend to our polluted waters, our shrinking forests, the madness we've loosed on the air until we begin to try to clean up the inner waters, and attend to the embattled wild spaces within us. Action without reflection is what got us into this mess in the first place, and the only answer is not action, but, first, clearer reflection ... A commitment to the environment based only on what is outside of us forgets that the source of our problems — and solutions — is invisible, and that 'nature' is a word we apply to what's within as well as without."



Discovering a climate science beat in India

by Disha Shetty

Publication:
The Open Notebook

Date:
December 2020

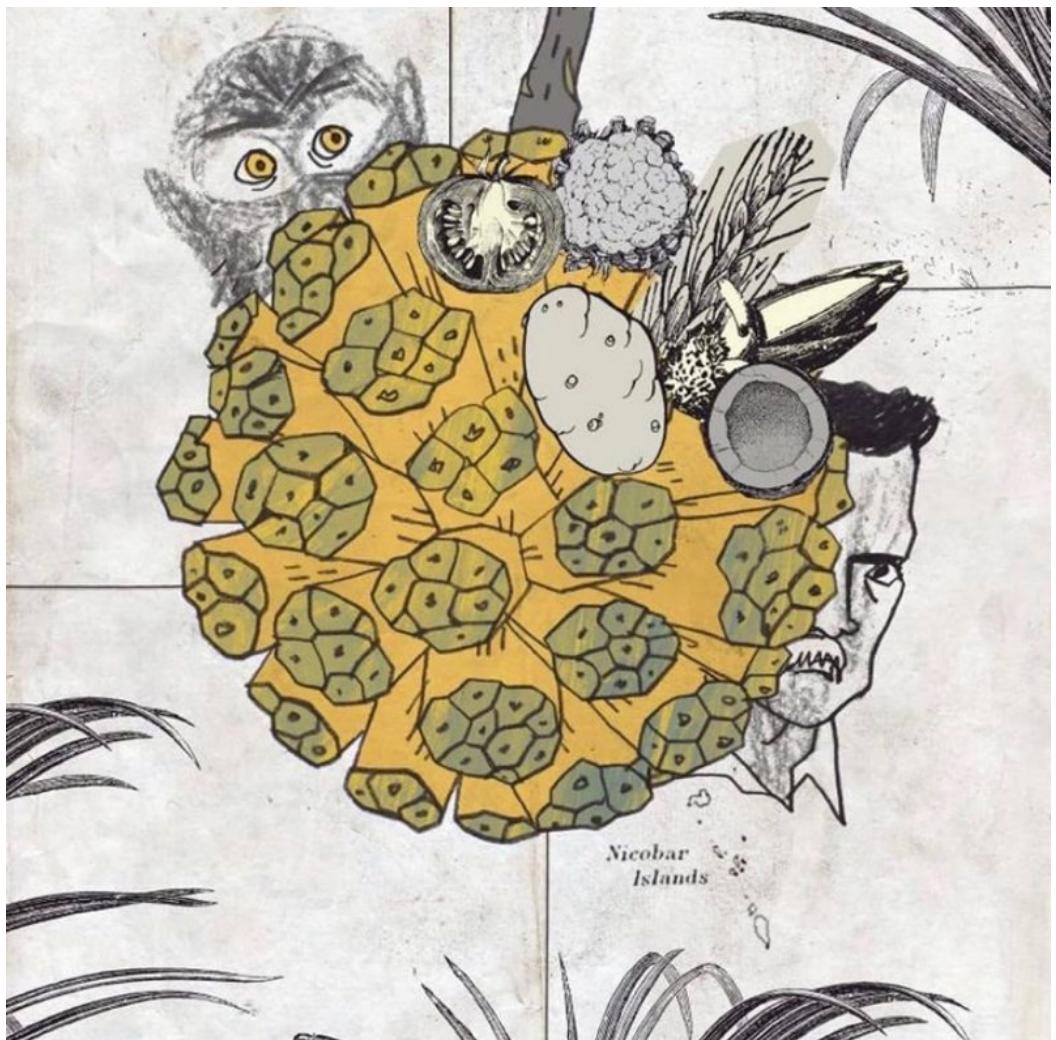
Artwork:
© Prabha Mallya
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"I had hoped my reporting would help drive awareness on climate change. But I found that it created a new awareness within me as well."

"That realization dawned on me while I was reporting the penultimate story of my series. I had traveled to India's northeastern region, to a state called Meghalaya, to report on how climate change is impacting the region's forest groves. In Meghalaya, the language, the cuisine, the dress, and people's facial features and skin tones are different than in my hometown of Navi Mumbai. As I walked down the streets of Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, a journalist friend from the region who had dropped in to meet with me turned to me and asked, 'Do you feel out of place here?'

"'No,' I said. 'I feel at home.' After so much time reporting on climate change, home no longer felt like just a city, a state, or a country, but the entire planet. And I've come to realize that this home is changing beyond repair. In India and throughout the developing world, local journalists must tell the story."



Where is the fiction about climate change?

by Amitav Ghosh

Publication:

The Guardian

Date:

October 2016

Artwork:

© Megha Vishwanath
via Current Conservation

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"In his seminal essay 'The Climate of History', Dipesh Chakrabarty observes that historians will have to revise many of their fundamental assumptions and procedures in this era of the Anthropocene, in which 'humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the Earth'. I would go further and add that the Anthropocene presents a challenge not only to the arts and humanities, but also to our common sense understandings and beyond that to contemporary culture in general."



Stories of Us

For we have always understood that when times change, so must we, that fidelity to our founding principles requires new responses to new challenges, that preserving our individual freedoms ultimately requires collective action.

— Barack Obama



The climate crisis is too big, too complex and too entrenched to be solved by isolated, individual actions. In order to rise to this challenge, we must mobilise communities, galvanise relationships between stakeholders, and build new coalitions. Through the power of collective action, we can shape a country and world where both people and nature can thrive.

From a range of stalwarts in the ICC community, we share published works by our partners at the Centre for Policy Research, MacArthur Foundation and World Resources Institute. Channeling lessons from the India in a Warming World, a volume of essays he edited, Navroz Dubash compellingly advocates for the co-benefits lens India must build to focus on climate action and its core development goals. Moutushi Sengupta calls for design and execution of climate change policies and practices that centre around the most marginalised and vulnerable, arguing for compassionate and inclusive normative and practical shifts. Ruchika Singh et. al. leverage insights from their work on ecological restoration to indicate how this could build rural resilience, support millions of livelihoods and help India achieve its climate targets. The role and importance of community is a core theme in each of these pieces.

Climate change is real. There is a way for India to deal with it, smartly

by Navroz Dubash

"While India has historically, and justifiably, focused on our immediate development concerns — eradicating poverty, providing jobs and livelihoods, enhancing access to energy services — it is increasingly clear that climate is salient to development. There is no longer a pathway to development innocent of climate change. The Indian policy conversation has to shift decisively from whether to address climate change to how to do so, but as part of a larger development challenge."

Publication:
Hindustan Times

Date:
November 2019

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What will it take to prioritise climate change?

by Moutushi Sengupta

Publication:
India Development Review (IDR)

Date:
August 2020

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via Current Conservation

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"All the measures we take in our work on climate change need to first be rooted and built within the values of equity and social justice. Our efforts to create a clean and green future can be fully endorsed only if and when they become a reality for everyone in India, including those households and marginalised communities that currently exist on the fringes, or below the boundaries set by official poverty lines. This will require special attention at the stages of design and execution of climate change policies and practices."



Restoring Landscapes In India for Climate and Communities

by the World Resources Institute
(Ruchika Singh, Karishma Shelar,
Rohini Chaturvedi, Marie Duraisami
and Rajendra Singh Gautam)

Publication:
World Resources Institute

Date:
December 2020

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"In India, more than 700 million people depend on forests and agriculture for their livelihoods. And over 250 million, mostly tribal and indigenous communities, women, and marginal farmers, need forests for fuelwood, animal fodder, food security, and income. But these natural resources are under threat.

"Climate change will only make the situation worse, potentially reducing agricultural incomes by up to 25% each year. This will leave more than 50% of India's workforce vulnerable and its largely rural workforce in extreme distress.

"That damage, though, can be reversed. More than 40% of the country's territory, over 140 million hectares, could benefit from protecting forests and restoring farms, forests, and other landscapes. That's how India can sequester 3 to 4.5 gigatons of above-ground carbon by 2040 and make progress toward achieving its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement on climate change."



Story of Now

What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.

— Mahatma Gandhi



In order to confront the climate crisis, we must look at the urgent issues and examine key policy choices. In this section, we bring the present moment into focus by engaging with the evidence base about how climate change is already impacting India. We also look at some possibilities to build a cleaner and more equitable development trajectory. Joydeep Gupta analyses the Indian government's first comprehensive study of climate change, which presents a stark picture unless we rapidly move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Bhasker Tripathi and Prathamesh Mulye respectively assess climate's interlinkages with public health and the economy, arguing that the pandemic has provided a preview of how health and financial systems could be completely overwhelmed by climate impacts.

However, India has a narrow window within which it can drive ambitious climate action that could also provide immense economic and social value. Given India's anticipated urbanisation, cities must be reimagined to be greener and more equitable. Ramachandra Guha's wonderful essay outlines how the town planner Patrick Geddes' planning principles could form a template for more habitable urban spaces. Much like how we have an opportunity to develop greener built form and infrastructure, Shreeshan V argues that India is uniquely positioned to adopt low-carbon technologies, foster innovation and mainstream sustainability into market considerations. Much of this work will require reimagining capitalism, and Mark Kramer's review of Rebecca Henderson's pathbreaking book outlines the structural changes that could leverages research and technology towards the triple bottom line. Ultimately, the story of now must be marked by hope. India undoubtedly faces daunting challenges but its decisions at this critical juncture could secure a better future for its citizens and the world.

Climate change is making India less liveable

by Joydeep Gupta

"With industry and transport restarting after the lockdown forced by the Covid-19 pandemic, India and the world have the best chance right now to control greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Failure will mean a country with worse heatwaves, droughts, cloudbursts, floods and a more degraded coastline, according to the Indian government's first comprehensive report on current climate change impacts and future scenarios till the end of the century."

Publication:

India Climate Dialogue

Date:

December 2020

Artwork:

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via Current Conservation

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COVID Shows Health Systems Can't Handle Climate Crisis

by Bhasker Tripathi

Publication:
IndiaSpend

Date:
December 2020

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Gouri Nandana,
Aura Guha
via Current Conservation

"The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that a global health crisis can bring entire countries to a standstill and without urgent action, climate change too can cause similar damage to lives and livelihoods [according to the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change published in December 2020]. Just like the ongoing pandemic, climate change can overwhelm healthcare systems across the world.

"Whether the world can limit global temperature increase to below 2°C will depend on how countries deal with the post-pandemic recovery, the report said--by aligning both climate and pandemic recovery, the world can deliver near-term and long-term health benefits. A green recovery requires that countries invest in climate-friendly projects that reduce/avoid fossil fuel use and promote clean transport, buildings and so on."

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How climate change will hurt India's already wounded economy

by Prathamesh Mulye

Publication:

Quartz India

Date:

September 2020

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via Current Conservation

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"Tropical countries like India will continue to suffer from climate change and this will subsequently lead to a reduction in food production as crop yield drops. If the food production falls and uncertainty in the agri-sector rises, the RBI's job of controlling inflation and boosting the economy could become even harder.

"Long term impacts of climate change on food prices can be substantial. Climate change is causing soil erosion, land degradation, desertification, increasing frequency of droughts, and warming temperatures, all of which will pose food security challenges in the long term,' warns Ram Ranjan, associate professor at the department of economics at Shiv Nadar University."



Making Indian Cities Habitable: The Legacy of Patrick Geddes

by Ramachandra Guha

Publication:

The India Forum

Date:

June 2020

Artwork:

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via Current Conservation

"The pace of urbanisation in India has increased dramatically in recent decades. At independence, one in six Indians lived in towns or cities; now the proportion is closer to one in three. This massive increase in our urban population has placed enormous burdens on the social and environmental fabric, raising a series of important questions for citizens and planners alike. How can we provide safe, secure, and pleasant housing for the different social classes in the city? What forms of transport will city residents use to commute to and from their workplace? Where will the water and energy to sustain them come from? Can one reconcile growth and development with environmental sustainability and with aesthetics? In sum, how can we make the lives of city residents more habitable, in all senses of the word? This essay argues that many of the social and environmental problems of a rapidly urbanising India were strikingly anticipated by Patrick Geddes, a Scottish town planner who worked in the subcontinent a century ago."

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Is it time for India to update its climate game?

by Shreeshan V

Publication:

Carbon Copy

Date:

December 2020

Artwork:

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via Current Conservation

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"Why has India enjoyed such success in terms of meeting its goals when other large economies of the world appear to be struggling? The answer, to an extent, may lie in India's peculiar position on the development spectrum. For one, with an economy decades away from peaking and a large young demographic with low per-capita emission levels, India rightfully still has space to grow under a global climate regime. With India projected to set up new capacity in energy and industry, the costs of course correction towards low-carbon technologies are arguably lesser than those of its more developed counterparts. Timing is the other factor that has worked in India's favour. Its aggressive expansion of Renewable Energy and improvements in emission intensity have coincided with and been aided by precipitous price drops and favourable cost-benefit assessments in each of these sectors.

"Unlike much of the developed world, which has to retrofit low-carbon technologies within existing systems, India is still in the process of capacity additions and so is in a better position to adopt new low-carbon technologies. This is true especially in the power sector where the recent shift in tide has come on top of decades of policy level groundwork that prioritised energy security. Adding to this, the favourable market forces in the past decade, and enhanced public recognition of the benefits of sustainability has created somewhat a perfect storm for India,' says Amir Bazaz, a senior researcher working on climate change response strategies at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements."



Big Structural Change

by Mark Kramer, a review of Reimagining Capitalism in a World on Fire by Rebecca Henderson

Publication:
Stanford Social Innovation Review

Date:
Summer 2020

Artwork:
© Chaaya Prabhat
via Current Conservation

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"In engaging and refreshingly candid writing, Henderson sets out her vision of equitable and sustainable capitalism and enumerates the changes needed to get us there. Companies need to embrace a sense of purpose beyond maximizing profits, find new business opportunities to meet society's needs, and consider the welfare of all stakeholders. Investors need to focus on the long term and consider social and environmental impact. Governments need to regulate the market more strictly and impose a tax on carbon. Finally, all sectors need to work together to address global challenges through collective action. Not only would these changes create a better world, Henderson asserts, but also they would lead to more profitable companies and a stronger economy."





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