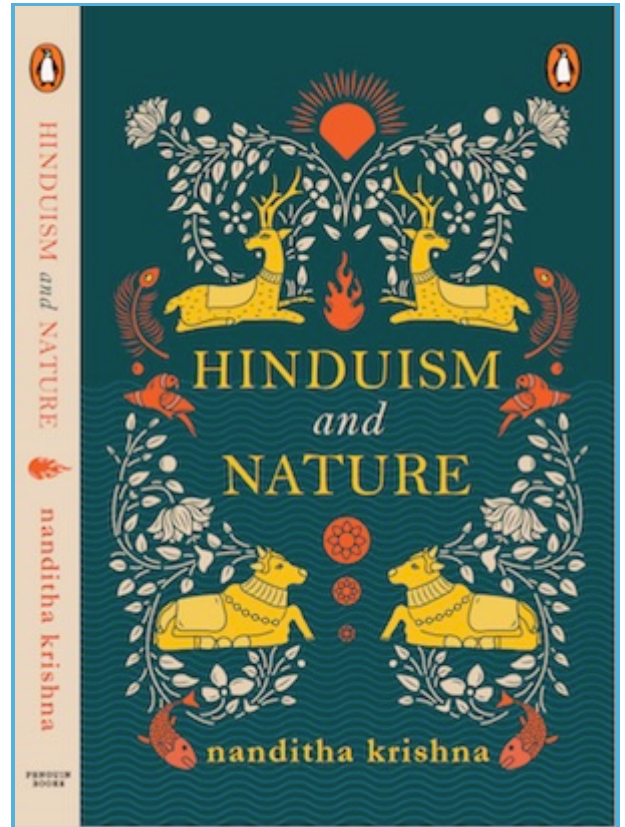


By : www.arc.org.

Penguin India publishes important new book on Hinduism and Nature



We have just received our copy of Penguin India on *Hinduism and Nature* by historian, environmentalist (and good friend of ARC) Dr Nanditha Krishna.

The book, published by Penguin India, is about the mythical stories and religious significance of many forests and mountains, lakes, rivers (and a few flat bits) of India's varied landscapes. And how those stories and significances are one of the things that can and might protect India's animals and places from the bulldozers of progress.

The basis of Hinduism is righteousness, or dharma, she argues, and the great epic texts of Hinduism show a clear appreciation of the natural world by people in India 5,000 years go. Even then, writers and thinkers wanted to urge people to manage natural resources and protect animals. "I fell in love with sacred groves attached to Hindu temples," Dr Krishna said to explain how she came to write the book. They were places "where not a twig may be broken and which are the remnants of ancient forests where sages lived in harmony with nature."

She also was inspired by "rivers that gush from the hills and meander through the land; with the sacred tanks attached to each temple, the sacred plants and the animals respected by my religion;

with the awe-inspiring mountains which reach up to the skies and where the Gods live.”.

In her long career as an environmentalist, the Chennai-based author of *Sacred Plants of India* and *Sacred Animals of India* has explored the divine relationship between human beings, plants and animals, “which are an essential part of every Hindu prayer.”



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“The Earth is my mother and I am her child,” says the hymn to the Earth in the Atharva Veda. The human ability to merge with nature was the measure of cultural evolution. Hinduism believes that the earth and all life forms – human, animal and plant – are a part of Divinity, each dependant on the other for sustenance and survival. All of nature must be treated with reverence and respect. If the forests, clean water and fresh air disappear, so will all life as we know it on earth.

An Excerpt

“Forests have always been central to Indian civilization, representing the feminine principle in prakriti. They are the primary source of life and fertility, a refuge for the wanderer and a home for the seeker, and have always been viewed as a model for societal and civilizational evolution.

“Forests were places of retreat, a source of inspiration, for all Vedic literature was revealed to the sages here. Rama’s entire journey from Ayodhya to Lanka was through forests. In the Mahabharata, the big war is for urbanization and to capture the cities of Mathura, Hastinapur and Indraprastha. Yet the Pandavas spent their years of exile in the forest and made marriage alliances with forest

tribes, a move that would help them later in the Kurukshetra war. They also learnt several important lessons from living in the forest, which became a source of knowledge and a place for learning higher truths. There were several classifications of the forest.

“The ancient forests have survived as the sacred groves of modern India. The seals of the Indus civilization contain figures of wild animals such as the elephant, water buffalo, rhinoceros, deer, gazelle, antelope, wild sheep and goat and ibex and tiger, which means that the area was once covered with dense forests. Rhino habitat ranges from open savannah to dense forest, while tigers live in swamps, grasslands and among trees, bushes and tall grass which camouflage them. Elephants are found in savannah and forests, where they can find fresh water to cool their thick dark skins. The large number of such seals suggests that the Indus-Sarasvati region was once a thick forest, not the agricultural fields or deserts we see today.



Hindu Environment week is one of the eco initiatives by Hindus today, inspired by the insights of their faith

The Vedas were composed in the Indus-Sarasvati region. In these texts, there is a fundamental sense of harmony with nature, which, in turn, nurtured a civilizational value. Forests were the primary source of life and inspiration, not a wilderness to be feared or conquered. The Vedas were written by sages living in the forest who saw it as a home and a source of revelation, exaltation and creativity. Some of the greatest verses of philosophy were written in forests. People drew intellectual, emotional and spiritual sustenance from the twin concepts of srishti and prakriti.

'So may the mountains, the waters, the liberal (wives of the gods), the plants, also heaven and earth, consentient with the Forest Lord (Vanaspati) and both the heaven and earth preserve for us those riches'

READ Clean and Healthy Planet, the Hindu way

One of the most beautiful hymns of the Rig Veda is dedicated to Aranyani, the goddess of the forest. She is an elusive spirit, fond of solitude, and fearless. The poet asks her to explain how she can wander so far from civilization without fear or loneliness. He creates a beautiful image of the village at sunset, with the sounds of the grasshopper and the cicada and the cowherd calling his cattle. She is a mysterious sprite, never seen, but her presence is felt by the tinkling of her anklets and her generosity in feeding both man and animal:

*Aranyani Aranyani, who are, as it were, perishing there, why do you not ask of the village? Does not fear assail you?
When the chichchika (bird) replies to the crying grasshopper,
Aranyani is exalted, resonant, as with cymbals.
It is as if cows were grazing, and it looks like a dwelling, and
Aranyani, at eventide, as it were, dismissed the wagons.
This man calls his cow, another cuts down the timber,
tarrying in the forest at eventide, one thinks there is a cry.
But Aranyani injures no one unless some other assails;
feeding upon the sweet fruit, she penetrates at will.
I praise the musk-scented, fragrant, fertile, uncultivated
Aranyani, the mother of wild animals
(Rig Veda, X.146. 1-6)*

LINKS

Find Hinduism and Nature on Good Reads.

Penguin India on *Hinduism and Nature*

The Hindu Newspaper features vital work on green pilgrimage by ARC's partner organisation in India

ARC's partner organisation in India, ATREE

Building Stewardship in the buffer zone to protect biodiversity - Clean KMTR Campaign

(Source : www.arc.org)

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