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## **Book review: Ecosystem Management mocks 'runaway consumerism'**

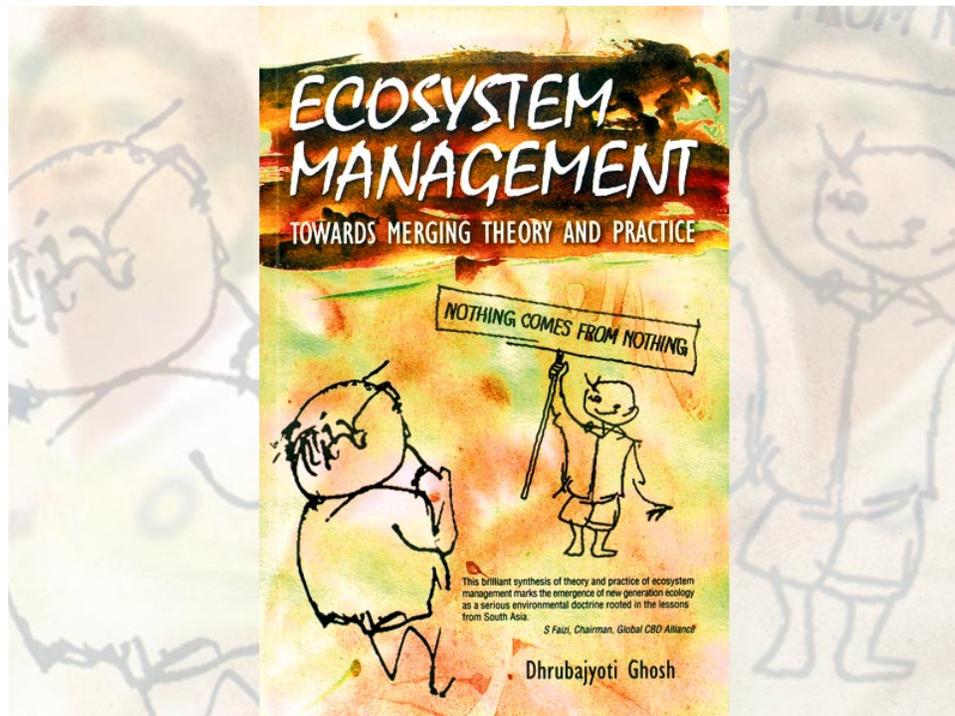
[Sankar Ray](#), Hindustan Times December 06, 2014

**Ecosystem Management: Towards Merging Theory and Practice**

**Dhrubajyoti Ghosh**

**Nimby Books**

**Rs 390, PP 270**



This Dhrubajyoti Ghosh book touches on ecological theories and natural resource management projects.

The fish farmers, who formulated the East Kolkata wetlands that are famous across the world, were mostly illiterate. Despite that, they left, for posterity, a highly-perfected scientific heritage based on oral wisdom and trial and error. They were an 'underprivileged', 'uneducated', 'non-literate' local assembly of natural ecologists, who helped bio-scientists unlearn the notion that wastewater is a pollutant. Indeed, exactly the opposite happens in the backwaters of Kolkata.

Dhrubajyoti Ghosh learnt from this 'tutorial ecosystem' which mocks 'runaway consumerism' and visualises sewage as nutrients. Working on the subject has made him a crusader and his book encapsulates his three-decade long battle against the systematic destruction of the East Kolkata Wetlands, whose resource-recovery features he discovered and documented. For this he was internationally recognised by the Ramsar Convention of 2002.

But even before that, his paper on Resource-conserving traditions and waste disposal: the garbage farms and sewage-fed fisheries of Calcutta, which he published with Christine Furedy in

Conservation & Recycling in 1984 had made his work and this instance of community empowerment familiar to scientists across the world. His work also earned Ghosh a position on the list of UN Global 500 Laureates. The first Indian to be honoured in this way after the late Anil Agarwal, who received the UNEP-introduced investiture in 1987, Ghosh believes ecological thinking "is all about living creatively with nature".

The decision to write this 270-page book is judicious especially as the construction lobby in West Bengal's capital has ganged up with vested interests comprising land sharks, political leaders, who subscribe to both right and leftwing 'ideologies', and bureaucrats to destroy the sociocultural system.

About the book: in five chapters, Ghosh apprises readers of old and new theories pertaining to ecology and ecosystems, international projects of and experiences in natural resource management, their history, and the merger of theories with trial-and-error through the ages. There is also a separate chapter on the East Kolkata Wetlands.

In a 2011 review of traditional agricultural practices in China, Japan and Korea published in 2011, Francis Hiram King stated that many find it unbelievable that 500 million Chinese thrived mainly on 'products of an area smaller than improved farmlands of the US'. Take the 'farmer-managed subsistence irrigation practice' in the Purulia district of West Bengal, which comprises in-built canal maintenance with water-sharing protocols (recalcitrance being punishable) and voluntary labour but no formal leadership. The exemplary ecosystem developed by Damodarji in Sandh Kumari village of Maoist-infested Chhattisgarh, where he has successfully restored a 100-acre sacred grove, is highly educative.

As the head of the panchayat, Damodarji was inspired by the 35-year experience of ethnobotanist Madhu Ramnath. Remember Rabindranath Tagore's term, sammilito atmokortitwa (collective self-activity) and Karl Marx's 'collective self-activity (in the communist or socialist system he envisioned)?

Ghosh has cited several examples of the threat to these systems. The wife of a madrasa teacher in a village in Kannur district, Kerala, has been protesting against sand-mining (On average, 11.73 million tonnes of sand and gravel are extracted every year in Kerala. This depresses the river bed by 7-15 cm annually).

The author has vividly written about the pauperisation of subalterns like Nanhe Ram due to the Korba dam. Incidentally, a victim of Left establishmentarian vested interests himself, Ghosh was denied his pension by the CPI(M)-led Left Front government. He is now the regional chair for South-Asia, Commission on Ecosystem Management, IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

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