

## SERIES PREFACE

The Anil Agarwal Reader series seeks to put together the intensely argumentative writings of Anil Agarwal, an environmentalist who always preferred to call himself a journalist. You are invited to browse through the second of the series: a set of articles, written 1995-1998, that first appeared in a column called 'Editor's Page' in the science and environment fortnightly *Down To Earth*.

The series can be characterised as a 're-collection'. The term enables a dual articulation. In one sense, it 'collects' — brings together — what Anil Agarwal wrote, weekly, self-respecting journalist he was. In another sense, it 'recollects' — brings together again; remembers, but also challenges you to re-memory. The series puts his thoughts together: thus, you are (a) taken through a gamut of issues relevant to the environment-development problematic of the late 1980s through the 1990s; a critique of the politics, practices and discourse of development and their consequences for the environment and the people most dependent on the environment for their survival; (b) you now live in the 21st century; you will find eerie echoes — pointed, painful, darkly humorous now and then — of how the environment-development problematic, as Anil Agarwal enunciated it in the last decade of the twentieth century, still holds true today.

In this sense, what he commented upon and demanded, or desired, is still to reach completion, or satisfaction. Often caught up with what happens week after week, in India and abroad, his imagination continues to unfold. For what is realised in this series — because it is realised in the content this series consists of — is not so much the dead and gone past of how the environment-development problematic emerged, muddily, from the margins of reportage and governance, as discursive sewage that had to be recognised, indeed taken urgent note of. What is realised in this series is not so much the what-has-been in what transpired in the last decade in India; for instance, the birth of a ministry devoted to the environment, devoted to pre-conceived burial, or, for instance, the fact



that poor people do not degrade the environment, or, even, the fact that Bangladesh cannot tell the US what the US ought to do to combat global warming. What is realised in the series is a tendency to strain towards the future, to point to what shall have been, from the environment-development perspective, as India develops.

There is much repetition in the writing you might like to peruse. It is inevitable: here is a person maniacally committed to explaining Everything Related to the Environment as and when it happens, or as and when it ought to happen, a person completely impatient about why it is not happening the way it can happen. It is inevitable: here is a person devoted to positive clarification through real-life examples, but is unable to find, and therefore cite, as many as he would like. But a better way to characterise this habit is to call it not 'repetition' but 'insistence.'

There is acuity, too, in the writing, by the by. Rant, vision, a sense of not being understood, non-acceptance at being baulked, arrogance, analysis, political economy, insight, a sense that truth isn't all that far off. Certainly, it cannot be evaded.

The writings possess another explicit intention: all that can be perceived, understood, abstracted or put into a pattern — or prose — is communicable. There exists much matter that must be placed in the public domain, preferably in a form that people find approachable. Journalism is a strategic profession, but also a tactical vocation. So it is that these writings rely on a healthy non-conformism: before you become an environmentalist, travel through your country. India is amazing in its variety. You will be amazed by her cultures and her ecosystems.

Ergo, you can only become a reporter. ■