

["We are at War with the Earth!" - Satish Kumar, Visionary Ecologist](#)

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## "We are at War with the Earth!" - Satish Kumar, Visionary Ecologist

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He became a Jain monk at nine. At 18, he left that way of life and walked 8,000 miles from Delhi to London - for peace. Now 54, Satish, a soul of the soil, delivers one of the most stinging indictments of modern man's addiction to a lifestyle of making and amassing "things," and his criminal acts of raping, using and abusing the earth to support his habit.

"Mankind is a threat to nature!" Satish pronounces. Waves of fighting passion and cool, Gandhian self-control overlap and ripple through his high, clear voice: "The way we live in our industrial, scientific, technological civilization is a threat. The amount of waste we create is so much this earth cannot sustain it. We go on grabbing, grabbing, grabbing for more economic growth. This is where the Hindu tradition of the Upanishads comes in; it is fundamentally a philosophy of ecology. Environmentalism is enshrined in Hindu thinking."

But Satish isn't happy just castigating his fellow man for numb ecological stupor. He also wields a clear vision of what has to be done if man is to live on our blue-green earth without despoiling it. First, the trend toward multi-conglomerate corporations must end. These modern-day monsters are so big they hardly see, or feel, the life forms they crush in their pursuit of profit. But when business is small, it is responsive to its environment. Consequences of actions are visible. "Small is beautiful!" Satish proclaims is the enlightened way of the future - small towns, small decentralized economies and local governing systems with a return to fine craftsmanship as the work ethic and deeper friendships as the social norm.

Today Satish lives in England with his wife June and two children in an old brick

farmhouse on the outskirts of Hartland - a village "not on the way to anywhere except the sea." Foxgloves and honeysuckle cleave to nearby corrugated cliffs and chilly Atlantic salt air rips across Devon's treeless tracts. "Hartland has everything - a baker and forge, chairmakers, potters, pubs and a primary school," Satish says. But, there was no nearby secondary school for his son, Mukti, then 11. So Satish started his own new school. For the last eight years, Small School has been this Hindu brahmin's joyous personal experiment of making his brand of Upanishadic environmentalism a practical reality to humanity's future - kids.

But that's the "local side" of an international thinker. From the austere rooms of his cottage, he hammers out his ecological message through a very handsome gloss/color magazine, Resurgence. Its editor for the last 18 years, Satish has sifted through the most creative streams of environmental thought that converge on his small, oak desk. Year after year, Resurgence, like his cows, gets his daily affectionate attention.

His Tweed cap, ascot and Argyle sweater are worlds apart from the dhoti and bare-chest days back in India as a penniless Jain monk, living on alms. "Making peace within myself was my goal then," says Satish. "Then I joined the Gandhian movement trying to bring social peace in my life, and protested the arms race. That was my second attempt for peace. Then I discovered we need peace with nature. But now I clearly see we need the holistic approach of all three."

My Thoughts:

On Agriculture: "Since we have lost contact with the soil, our souls are starved." He feels more and more people need to farm, employing three rules: 1) his methods must bring him satisfaction; 2) farming must not cause disturbance to one's neighbor and community; 3) do nothing that will harm the soil.

On Peace: "Peace is not an absence of war. It is a positive way of life on three levels: 1) peace with yourself; 2) peace with your neighbor, community and other nations; and 3) peace with nature - returning to way of life that is in tune with nature."

On Economics: "We must not try to save labour, we must save resources. Human labour is infinite; resources are finite. There will be jobs with things that will take longer to make. Instead of making things quickly that don't last, make things well that will last. That is good economic growth. Everything should be a pleasure to make, use and enjoy."

On Ecology: "We must think in terms of 'sustainability.' Our activities should be able to go on and on without bringing damage to the environment. Also restraint, samyama. Then 'replenishment.' What we take we replenish. Not replacement than you found it. Also we need to plan our cities and towns so that we can go to temple, school, shopping or work within walking distances so we don't waste vast amounts of energy in unnecessary mobility."

Oneness: "My greatest inspiration comes from the Isha Vasyopanishad. It says we should see the whole universe is the body of Isha, the Creator. In every leaf, drop of water or ant, there is God."

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### Small School

"Not that I'm a racist," says Hartland resident Mrs. D., "but he was the first one we'd had here. Coloured I mean. Gave you a bit of a shock, it did, see'n 'im thar on 'igh Street." Satish calmly weathered a few years of British color phobia and cold air and then one day decided to build a secondary school. Just like that after the local government turned down his requests for funds, he raised them privately. Today, Small School has 32 children. It is operated on Satish's Human Scale Education theory where "small" allows a child's unique abilities and interests to be nurtured - impossible when herded through school like cattle. Children learn what is practical and learn it through doing. Parrot-like memorization, unbendable schedules, static syllabuses and a competition mentality are all taboo.

"We try to bring nature and environment into the direct experience of the children so they are not stuck in a classroom studying the sea and trees from pictures in

books," explains Satish. "So, for example, we take children out to the sea and into the woods and valleys to learn rural and marine science - how life actually works. We study by watching the rivers, the colors of the polluted water, do conservation work and tree planting. And since education should have the element of service, we teach farming because we are in a farming community."

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