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## Shades of green

Shefali Kukreti



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Keya Acharya | Fredrick Noronha

**Book>> The Green Pen, Environmental Journalism in India and South Asia** • edited by *Keya Acharya and Fredrick Noronha*

In one of the essays in the book, journalist Lyla Bavadam quotes an African proverb: "Till lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter." This sums up the requirements of an environmental journalist. In times when corporates have the ear of the government, environmental journalists have to represent the environment to people who make laws.

As Richard Mahapatra writes in his essay, representing the environment is almost always about representing poverty. Every story written from an environmental angle also has global perspectives.

The environmental journalist must unravel how global developments impinge on villages in India.

Is the environmental journalist an activist with a pen then? Yes and no. Reports about mining giant Vedanta in a New Delhi newspaper can have visible reactions in the London Metal exchange. As Mahapatra writes global markets take note when reports of rising rates of suicide by groundnut farmers in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh appear.



ILLUSTRATION: DIVYA

We also live in times when the environment has gone mainstream. A sports or an urban affairs reporter today is likely to write a story on golf courses in Gurgaon using lots of water. If a reporter writes about the environmental aspects of a story in an intelligent fashion, most editors will carry the story. Today there is a strong case

for not ghettoizing environmental journalism by giving a page to the environment. It is a development this volume is alive to.

But there is also a flip side to environment going mainstream. In one of the finest essays in this volume, Kazimuddin Ahmed shows the quality of reports on the environment in the Northeast does not match the ecological richness of the region. The reportage by political journalists is largely about environmental degradation in the area.

Is there a market then in stories of environmental destruction? There is, but as Dionne Busha says only for certain kinds of stories. Media groups campaign to save the tiger but what about other species in India that are endangered? The Red Panda and the Namdapha flying squirrel are not as sexy as the tiger.

Green pen is an excellent primer to the evolution of environmental journalism in South Asia.

*Shefali Kukreti is in the Indian Administrative Service*



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