



Quest for Planetary Well-Being

Essays in Honour of
M.V. Nadkarni

Edited by
Ananta Kumar Giri
R. S. Deshpande

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“A gem of a collection—and a tribute to a thinker who deserves far wider recognition. M. V. Nadkarni stands in the lineage of India’s great integrative economists like Radhakamal Mukerjee and J.C. Kumarappa. His work represents the future of economics many of us hope for: more grounded in lived realities, more attuned to ecological limits, more politically critical, and more spiritually expansive. At a time when religion is so often instrumentalised for power, Professor Nadkarni reclaims its ethical and healing dimensions. Following in the spirit of Kumarappa, he articulates his own vision of an ‘economy of permanence’, anchored in the possibility of prosperity without growth at any cost. This volume is the finest gateway to his thought—indispensable for anyone seeking to decolonise the social sciences while holding fast to the ideals of justice, sustainability, and human dignity.”

—Dr. Julien-François Gerber, *International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague*

“Our world is in a polycrisis that requires new visions and practices of well-being, creativity and transformations. *Quest for Planetary Well-Being* helps us in this epochal journey. It engages with the works of MV Nadkarni, a deep transdisciplinary thinker and practitioner of economics, literature and philosophy, and the wider challenges of our contemporary human condition. The book directly addresses what the founders of The Club of Rome referred to as the ‘human problematique’: the survival of humans on earth. It also resonates with our Earth for All (2022) report and is an outstanding contribution to thoughtful, transformative action! A must-read for all those who are concerned about the present and future of Humanity and Planet Earth.”

—Dr. Paul Shrivastava, *Co-President, The Club of Rome*

“Today, when the world is burdened by so many problems that threaten actually each and every person on the Earth, a ‘quest for planetary well-being’ may be especially timely. The contributors to the volume discuss different aspects of the problem of well-being and thus give the reader a hope that our world can once become a better place for life than it is now.”

—Dmitri M. Bondarenko, *Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow*

Ananta Kumar Giri · R. S. Deshpande
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ISBN 978-981-95-2076-3 ISBN 978-981-95-2077-0 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-95-2077-0>

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Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2026

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The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

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FOREWORD: BUILDING ENLIGHTENMENT BRIDGES

Scholars are way-finders charting pathways for others to follow. For some, their map-making focuses on a local patch of epistemic territory whilst for others they offer grand vistas of planetary possibility. We need both, of course, and things get very exciting when courageous editors bring such scholars into a collaboration such as this book. In this rich and diverse text, Ananta Kumar Giri and R. S. Deshpande have curated a remarkable collection of essays. The centre of gravity for the book is the work of the interdisciplinary visionary economist M. V. Nadkarni. Many essays pay tribute to this thinker's life and work. But the essays go beyond this to explore issues pertaining to the 'good life' and 'planetary well-being'.

Giri captures this expansiveness well in his chapter on the 'Goodlife and Evolutionary Flourishing' where he notes that:

Our journey with Good Lives needs to now make Enlightenment Bridges with Nature and the Divine. Nurturing a good life, therefore, needs simultaneous engagement with Good, Rights, Rites, Divine/Transcendence, and Nature.

The metaphor of the Enlightenment Bridge ably captures the spirit of these essays and their collation into this book. The essays, singly, act as points on the map, but together add a third depth dimension. They generate a synergy of thinking, probing, dreaming, and analysing that brings the reader, who invests their time and energy in engaging with this rich bridge building, into a new world of possibilities.

I am reminded here of the democratisation of thinking that our world has engaged in over the past century or so. In this work, we are all invited to be rishis. I know this is a grand claim. However, if we take examples from this book and place them side by side, we can see that the potential for expanded consciousness comes from the encounter between such thinkers. To illustrate this, I place the chapter by Ori Z. Soltes alongside that from Minati Pradhan, and triangulate both with the thoughtful reflection on Nadkarni's *Parisara-niti-shatakam* (PSN) from Man Bahadur Khattri. Here a site such a Nepal becomes also a map for predicaments, we all face across the planet. Khattri's focus on the inner work we are all called to engage with as emergent rishis allows him to note that:

The PSN advocates for people, environmentally friendly technology, and the mother earth, which must be placed at the centre. High-level spirituality, which deeply thinks and acts for the future generation.

In this, he echoes Giri's focus on the 'Good, Rights, Rites, Divine/Transcendence, and Nature.' The power of the delivery of Nadkarni's message in Sanskrit cannot be underestimated. The mantric quality of the PNS enables language to serve consciousness transformation. Thus, language and literature accompany us in this journey as Pradhan notes:

Literature has a unique ability to shape minds, evoke emotions, and inspire actions. Literary works are more than just a means of amusement or artistic expression; they have the profound power to alter attitudes, raise concerns about conventions and shed light on injustices.

The mantric nature of literature is something Sri Aurobindo notes and is linked to the rishi-like nature we are being invited to foster through our encounters with thinkers and the world. Both the thinking and the doing, that 'bridge' again, are important. It is present in this reflection from Pradhan and amplified through such multifaceted encounters as found in this text. Solti, looking to language also and by inference, the mantric, notes.

The problem of language—of the question of what constitutes divine language and of how if at all, it differs from human language—makes every word within the revelation a potential complication...

So, our potential 'inner rishi' is forced into action—thinking as the doing—through the complications inherent to language and consciousness itself. The multiple lines of flight captured in this text pay tribute to this call to action as *thinkers in the world*. As bridge builders. In this call, we have an absolute sense of Truth working alongside the ever so

human relativity found in our day to-day encounters with the world. In this context, Shri Aurobindo (2004, p. 103) notes that:

A Rishi is one who sees or discovers an inner truth and puts it into self-effective language—the mantra.

Our mantras are for living in this world, cultivating thinking and doing that fosters Planetary Well-Being, as formed through encounter. The action orientation of mantra here must be acknowledged. The agonal struggles and the rapturous moments of elation collide. This text abounds in both the rapturous and the pragmatic. I think Professor Nadkani would approve of the balance.

In fact, Nadkani himself takes the mantric nature of communicating and bridge building seriously, by choosing to write in the powerful Sanskrit language his own *shruti* for planetary wellbeing, pointing to *viveka*—discrimination as foundational. Our lives, when lived with open hearts and open minds, are an ongoing process of *viveka* formation. Our ability to discriminate and discern is fostered by encounter and ethical engagement.

I am grateful to the editors for their work on this text. It is rich and moving. Read these essays slowly, carefully and allow the intersections, the overlays and resonances to work on you in fostering deeper insights and that sense of ‘inner truth’. In doing so, our ‘inner rishi’ may arise invigorated and, perhaps, humming a sweet melody. As Nadkani (2017, p. Shloka 6) states:

Pathyaapathya-vimarshena
Palaniyakshitirdrutam,
Lokakshemayakartavya
*Vivekenaiva yojana.*¹

Marcus Bussey
 University of Sunshine Coast
 Sippy Downs, QLD, Australia

¹ Deliberating on what is truly good and what is bad, the earth has to be protected promptly, for the welfare of all by planning very wisely.

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PREFACE

We must fill the immense lacunae we have made,
Re-wed the closed infinity's lonely consonant
With the open vowels of Infinity,
A hyphen must connect Matter and Mind [..]

Sri Aurobindo (2021), *Savitri: A Legend and A Symbol*, p. 136.

The mundane world is not meaningless, but an opportunity for humans to uplift own self along with the world too.

MV Nadkarni (2022), *Samajika Niti-Kavya Gucchah: A Boquet of Verses on Social Ethics*, p. 258.

[..] the idea of rights and interests prompts us to consider an ethical conception of life more pluralist in reach than the ones on offer in much of the literature on welfare economics. It is such a pluralist conception of person's good that I shall call her well-being.

Partha Dasgupta (1998), *An Inquiry into Well-Being and Destitution*, p. 8.

Life is a journey of meetings, inspirations, and cultivating a conjoint purpose of life together. For us, meeting and being with Professor MV Nadkarni has been a significant moment in our lives. One of us, R. S. Deshpande, studied with Nadkarni and worked with him at Institute of Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Bangalore as a fellow seeker and co-traveller. Ananta met with Professor Nadkarni at a later stage and was deeply touched by his radiant being, his care, generosity and his depth and breadth of thinking and explorations with and beyond economics.

Around October 2019, we felt an inspiration to cultivate this book as a garland to present to Professor Nadkarni, and we are grateful to Divine, Nature, and our fellow beings that our garland is now woven to present this around the radiant neck of our dear and revered Professor Nadkarni.

We are grateful to you all friends who have joined us in our journey. We are grateful to all our fellow contributors for their contribution and for their generosity and patience. Aparajita Singh is a creative editor and social scientist, and it is an editor's good luck to have the opportunity to work with an encouraging editor like Aparajita. Aparajita kindly nurtured our project and helped us see the light of the day. We thank Aparajita with our heart. We also thank Anand Kumar Mariappan and other friends at Palgrave Macmillan for their help. We thank Professor M. Suresh Babu, Director of MIDS, who supported this dialogue by co-nurturing our hybrid workshop on this book in May 2024.

Finally, we hope that this book invites us to walk and meditate with the creative oeuvre and life of MV Nadkarni, and cultivate new visions and pathways of well-being in self, society, culture, world, and the cosmos.

Chennai, India
Bengaluru, India
Mahashivaratri
February 2025

Ananta Kumar Giri
R. S. Deshpande

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This book enriches this discourse and scholarship and brings the unique contributions of MV Nadkarni, a noted economist and transdisciplinary thinker of India, to the emerging field of well-being studies. It explores the multi-dimensional visions, practices, and movements for well-being at personal, interpersonal, community, state, and world levels. It goes beyond our conventional frames of knowledge and discourse and focuses on new intimations and initiatives in health, learning, knowledge, and well-being. Chapters of this volume strive to cultivate visions and practices of planetary well being, dialoguing with the works of Nadkarni as well as some bringing their related works on the theme.

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ISBN 978-981-95-2076-3



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