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Connecting Amid the Chaos: Gary Snyder's Vision of the 'Great Earth Sangha' in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

Gary Snyder's vision of the 'great earth sangha' articulates a philosophy of ecological awakening in which spiritual, ethical, and affective relationships connect all forms of life into a cohesive and sacred web of interbeing. The concept of the 'great earth sangha' embodies a profound sense of 'oneness,' in which the dichotomy between the self and the other dissolves, leading to a realisation of the Earth as a sentient, experiential, and pulsating entity. Inspired by the holistic perspectives of Buddhism and the resonances of Indigenous cosmologies, Snyder's idea of the 'great earth sangha' represents a heightened consciousness and an "emotional intelligence" that fosters compassion, love, care and empathy for all beings in the world. For Snyder, the great earth sangha is a practice—a way of living in mindful ecological engagement. It is embedded with the principles of *sila* (morality), which foregrounds visions of harmonious coexistence and ecological kinship. This article argues that Snyder's idea of the 'great earth sangha' offers a counter-anthropocentric perspective that subverts entrenched human-centred hierarchies by situating human identity within a communal web of existence. The article discusses how Snyder redefines the notion of 'community' as an inclusive, interdependent network that transcends human boundaries and embraces all planetary beings. Finally, the article explores how Snyder's holistic vision propounds a restorative path that centres on ideas of ethics, affect, justice, responsibility and stewardship.

Keywords: great earth sangha; community; consciousness; Buddhism; eco-dharma

1. Introduction

As a poet, I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the Paleolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals. The power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the damned, the common work of the tribe.

(Snyder 1967, p. 52)

With these lines, American poet Gary Snyder roots his poetics in a Palaeolithic imagination that nurtures the ideas of sacred nature and communal life. Snyder frames the mystical perception of nature not as primitive residues but as enduring principles guiding the path towards ecological harmony. Inspired by the primordial values of nature in indigenous worldviews and the contemplative awareness of oneness in Zen Buddhism, Snyder introduced the concept of the 'great earth sangha', a vision of a singular, all-inclusive community grounded in ecological interconnectedness. Gary Snyder's vision of the 'great earth sangha' articulates a form of ecological awakening in which spiritual,



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ethical, and affective ties connect all forms of life into a cohesive and sacred web of interbeing. The concept of the ‘great earth sangha’ embodies a profound sense of ‘oneness,’ in which the self–other dichotomies dissolve into a broader acknowledgement of the Earth as a sentient and living being. Rooted primarily in Buddhist principles, with resonances of indigenous cosmologies, Snyder’s concept of the ‘great earth sangha’ represents a heightened consciousness and an “emotional intelligence” (Goleman 1995, p. 10) that fosters compassion, love, care and empathy for all beings in the world. This heightened consciousness involves an expanded mode of awareness in which the idea of self resonates with a gestaltic ecologic holism, allowing individuals to understand how the interdependence of all elements is woven into the sacred web of existence. In this web of quantum connections, ‘emotional intelligence’ signals towards a holistic consciousness of emotional registers that advocate positive behaviours that can enhance responsible dwelling and stewardship of the planet. In this context, Snyder’s conceptualisation of the earth sangha is both a vision and a lived, ongoing practice that entails living in mindful ecological engagement. It is embedded with the principles of *sila* (morality), which foregrounds visions of harmonious coexistence and ecological kinship. The great earth sangha operates simultaneously as both a noun and a verb, referring to a community of interconnected beings and also to a continuous process of ecological awakening.

This article consists of three sections. First, it provides a vivid introduction to the concept of the great earth sangha, focusing on the eco-dharmic and indigenous traditions embedded within it. It suggests that Snyder’s vision offers a mystical yet practical framework for understanding the significance of communitarian ethos in nurturing ethical relations between humans and the more-than-human environment. The ‘great earth sangha’ dissolves the socially constructed hierarchies and awakens a heightened sense of communion among organisms, wherein anthropocentric *hubris* and ego give way to the shared pursuit of balance and connection. The second section examines the significance of Snyder’s concept in the Anthropocene, highlighting its role in promoting shifts in ecological consciousness. The communitarian approach is positioned as a countercultural response to the anthropocentric values characterised by species exclusivity, resource extraction and environmental exploitation. The third section of the article proposes the great earth sangha as a pathway for future belonging and kinship.

2. The Great Earth Sangha

Etymologically, the term sangha is derived from the Sanskrit *samgha* (and its cognate in Pali *sangha*), referring to a community or association bound together by a shared purpose or practice. The term is more commonly used in Buddhist tradition to designate the community of practitioners, originally restricted to the ordained monastic order, but in broader Mahayana traditions, it extends to include lay followers or the larger community of beings following the dharmic path. D.N. De L. Young, in his article “The Sangha in Buddhist History”, observes that “the core of the Buddhist religion is the sangha, the community of *bhikkhus* around whose corporate life the religion is moulded” (Young 1970, p. 241). He further notes that sangha also exists for the *bahujana*, a Pali term used in the canon denoting the broader populace. While later commentators such as Buddhaghosa construe *bahujana* as ‘the unconverted,’ earlier texts employ the term more inclusively to signify the community in its entirety. One of the central goals of the sangha is to connect the *bahujans* with Buddhist teachings, thereby extending the reach of the *dharma* beyond the monastic community into the broader social sphere.

Sangha is enshrined as one of the ‘Three jewels’ or *Triratna*, alongside the Buddha (the enlightened one) and the *Dharma* (the teachings); collectively the three jewels constitute the doctrinal foundation and spiritual refuge of Buddhist faith and practice. The Tibetan

term for sangha *gedun*, meaning “to yearn for” or “strive after”, signifies a community devoted to undertaking virtuous and positive actions for the benefit of others (Rinpoche 2005). Tibetan teacher Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche depicts that the sangha embodies two enduring dimensions: the recognition of mind’s intrinsic nature and the consequent liberation from delusion, ego and desire, the emotions that generate imbalance and suffering in humans and their surrounding environment. His insight positions the sangha as a dynamic space where the inward journey of self-realisation and the outward pursuit of collective harmony converge, highlighting its capacity to sustain both individual discipline and collective responsibility (Rinpoche 2005). Exploring the psychoanalytic view of the sangha, psychologist Kevin Volkan argues that adherence to sangha is a psychological journey oriented towards nurturing an awareness of the individual’s interrelationship with the larger community. He states the following:

The Buddhist Sangha can be thought of as a group that participates in human relationships in an extraordinary way. This participation includes a dedication to refraining from harm and serving as a role model for others. This in turn leads to the practice of compassion amongst themselves which is then extended to everyone else outside the group. Psychologically, Sangha members use other group members as a safe way to work out negative mental projections on one another, while reinforcing positive and idealized mental projections, and then extend this beyond the group. (Volkan 2013, p. 49)

Over time, the sangha evolved into a stabilising force and moral compass for wider society, shaping sociopolitical order and normative values through its ethical authority and doctrinal influence. The idea of the sangha served as an anchor for one’s spiritual journey, ensuring heightened consciousness of the surrounding environment and “social service directed toward the community at large” (Loftus 2021, p. 265). According to the Buddhist traditions in the sangha, “the overarching energy is mindful and aware, supportive and safe, compassionate and wise” (Conway n.d.). Gary Snyder extends this relational and ethical ethos onto a broader ecological plane, envisioning the great earth sangha as a global community in which values guide not only human interactions but also foster harmonious engagement with the environment. He argues that “a sangha should mean the community,” extending the Mahayana ideal in which all living beings are included within the scope of ethical and spiritual concern (Snyder 1980, p. 45). The holistic inclusion of all beings is not merely an acknowledgement of their biological presence, but a recognition of their value and relational agency within a shared ontological field. Snyder unsettles the conventional assumption that equates sentience exclusively with living organisms, inviting a broader reconsideration of how responsiveness, presence, and intrinsic worth are distributed across the Earth community. In doing so, he seeks to erase rigid distinctions between the living and the non-living, not by anthropomorphising the latter, but by challenging the conceptual boundaries that confine vitality and value to biological life alone. In his essay “The World is Watching,” Snyder remarks that the dimensions of consciousness should not be confined to human beings, and in doing so, he invokes Dōgen’s assertion that “Mind means trees, fence posts, tiles, and grasses,” thereby expanding awareness beyond the limits of human cognition (Snyder 1999, p. 178). Snyder emphasises non-hierarchical communal existence in which “there is no centre, or perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere” (Rangarajan 2008, p. 42). In his poem “Riprap”, Snyder places granite, sediments, humans, ants and planets in the same continuum of existence. By presenting words, thoughts, and stones as subject to the same processes of formation and change, he blurs the presumed divide between human cognition and material elements, depicting how each is embedded within and constituted by the other.

*In the thin loam, each rock
a word a creek-washed stone
Granite: ingrained with torment of fire and weight
Crystal and sediment linked hot all change, in thoughts,
As well as things. (Snyder 1999, p. 404)*

Snyder's vision of a great earth sangha is the establishment of a community that negates human exclusivity and extends the sense of belonging to all earthly elements. He believes that reframing the Buddhist community as an earth-based community grounded in Buddhist holistic ideas and ideologies would encourage ethical responsibility, mutual care, and effective management of ecological commons. He put forward that his idea of the earth sangha referred to "an expanded community of spiritual practice, one which would retain the universality and intellectual sophistication of Buddhism but be a broader, nonmonastic community like those found in tribal societies" (Barnhill 2000, p. 205). Acknowledging the intrinsic value of nature and ethically participating in the process of interdependence and co-creation, for Snyder, is the ultimate path of dharma. David Landis Barnhill contends that for Snyder, the idea of sangha is both sacramental and radically ecological, yet immanent. He states the following:

Snyder has clearly departed from that notion here: the sangha is the ecosphere of the planet. In this one image is suggested two fundamental characteristics of his thought: a creative extension of both Buddhism and ecology by seeing each in terms of the other, and an overriding concern with community. (Barnhill 2000, p. 205)

The phrase the great earth sangha is introduced by Snyder in his poem "O Waters" from the Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *The Turtle Island* (1974). In the poem, Snyder presents his vision of the great earth sangha not through doctrinal exposition but through embodied poetic experience. The invocation "O water wash us, me" (Snyder 1974, p. 134) in the poem is an expression of a desire to situate the self within an ecological continuum where the humming mountains, crumbling snowfields, melting soil and the blue Polimonium flowers form part of a shared field of consciousness. This moment of ecological intimacy embodies the spiritual principle of sangha, extending it to the natural world, and transforming purification into a relational practice that unites humans, animals, plants, and elemental forces within the interdependent vision of the great earth sangha. For Snyder, the earth sangha is a consciousness of the intangible aspects of all beings on the planet, a state of awareness that transcends dualistic ontologies that separate humans from the natural world. This heightened consciousness resonates with what Snyder describes as the "power vision of the solitude" (Snyder 1980, p. 36), an experiential mode in which the individual, divested of ego, enters a space of radical receptivity to the waves of the earth. The power vision is not a pursuit of dominance, rather an exploration of the "power of no-power" (Snyder 1980, p. 36) in which the bounded self is dismantled, giving way to an embodied self that acknowledges human relationships with ecological networks of animals, plants and landscapes. The power vision emerges with the realisation that human social and spiritual identity is co-created with the more-than-human world and through participation in the great earth sangha. This heightened awareness of individual distinctness, as well as situating oneself within the larger, holistic community, is what Snyder perceives as the "Buddhist concept of oneness and uniqueness" (Snyder 1980, p. 21). Snyder's conception of no-self echoes Dōgen's teaching that "to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to become one with the ten thousand things," emphasising that the self is realised precisely through its dissolution into the wider continuum of being (Snyder 2006, p. 42). Like Snyder, philosopher Arne Naess advocates a reorientation of our whole civilisation, foregrounding the intrinsic value of the "flourishing of human non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value"

(Rangarajan 2008, p. 42). Naess argues that “gestalts bind the I and the non-I together in a whole. Joy becomes, not my joy, but something joyful of which the I and something else are interdependent, non-isolated fragments,” thereby unsettling the notion of the self as a discrete centre of experience (qtd. in Rangarajan 2008, p. 42). Emotion, in this view, is not individually possessed but arises within a relational field in which everything co-constitutes one another. In his essay, “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution”, Snyder argues that in the Buddhist worldview all sentient beings are intrinsically in a state of complete transcendental wisdom (*Prajñā*), compassion and mutual interdependence. This experiential realisation of reality, an inherent affective communion within all beings, is achieved by relinquishing the egoic notion of a separate self. The totalistic realm, he believes, not only constitutes compassion and love but also includes “governments, wars, or all that we consider ‘evil’” (Snyder 1969, p. 92) in the vast interrelated network. Understanding this reality of interdependence requires a sense of enlightenment or a mode of awakened perceptions that is fundamentally communal and shared among all beings. To highlight ecological interdependence, Snyder, in his essay “Writers and the War against Nature”, uses the concept of “gift economy” (Snyder 2006, p. 38) as a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationships that sustain both human communities and the natural world. The notion of gift economy depicts that we all live “in the midst of a great potluck feast” (Snyder 2006, p. 38) and in this feast we consume others, and we are also consumed by others. This refers to the continual energy flows through food webs, nutrients circulate through soil and water, and organisms depend on one another for survival.

Snyder’s conceptualisation of the great earth sangha is also indebted to the communal lifeways and spiritual cosmologies of Indigenous (specifically Native American) communities, whose relational ontologies contributed to his vision of a more-than-human community. He was mostly inspired by the Native American reverence for and knowledge of the landscape: “There is something to be learned from the Native American people about where we all are. It can’t be learned from anybody else” (Snyder 1990, p. 156). The works *Turtle Island* (1974) and *The Old Ways* (1977) reflect Snyder’s affinity for Native American communal culture, with its emphasis on kinship networks, mystical view of nature, and eco-centric rituals. In the poem “For All” from the collection *Turtle Island*, he pledges allegiance not to the country but to the land, articulating a vision of community that resonates with Native American ecological epistemologies, which celebrate the interdependence of all beings.

*I pledge allegiance to the soil
of Turtle Island,
and to the beings who thereon dwell
one ecosystem
in diversity
under the sun
With joyful interpenetration for all. (Snyder 1974, p. 86)*

Snyder believed that the Native American conceptualisation of identity as assemblages countered the anthropocentric paradigms of disembodied human identities. This holistic approach of situating humans within a larger community motivated Snyder to envision sangha as a multispecies community that embeds an understanding of extended kinship networks. For Snyder, the shared emphasis on the “transcendence of self” and the mysticism of nature establishes a “fundamental unity between Buddhism and Native American spirituality” (Barnhill 2002, p. 113). This syncretic merging of the perceptions of nature embedded in two different cultures into a “single ecological vision” situates

Snyder, in David Barnhill's term, as an "intercultural environmental writer" (Barnhill 2002, p. 115). Barnhill argues as follows:

In drawing on Buddhism and Native American culture, Snyder is proposing two general ideals. The first is to combine Asian religious wisdom and shamanistic/mythic traditions, with his focus being on Buddhism and Native American cultures. The second is to combine these 'foreign' cultures with modern American culture in order to create a new society, a new spirituality, and a new view of nature. (Barnhill 2002, p. 115)

This envisioned new society, oriented to foster mystical views of nature, is what Snyder identifies as the great earth sangha.

3. The Great Earth Sangha and Ecological Worlding in the Anthropocene

In *Buddhism and the Coming Revolution*, Snyder argues that the failure to recognise a holistic, interdependent community constitutes a manifestation of "Ignorance", which, as he notes, "projects into fear and needless craving" (Snyder 1969, p. 91). This ignorance is not just a spiritual impediment but also the foundation of ecological degradation. The ignorance has created populations of "preta—hungry ghosts, with giant appetites and throats no bigger than needles" who have relentlessly consumed the "soil, the forests and all animal life" and have fouled the "air and water of the planet" (Snyder 1969, p. 91). These extractivist trajectories are rooted in Cartesian Dualism, which posits humans and nature as segregated identities. This hierarchical separation was established to celebrate a presumed superiority of human beings over all other beings. Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his *Politics*, asserts "we may infer that, after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man" (Motzer 2022), thus advancing an instrumental view of nature in which non-human beings are perceived primarily in their usefulness to human beings. This dualistic worldview was popularised in Enlightenment philosophy, especially by René Descartes, whose articulation of humans as thinking beings fundamentally distinct from non-human beings, whom he characterised as mechanistic, fostered an exploitative approach to nature. Subhabrata Banerjee and Diane Arjaliès note that human–nature dualism, which is "a product of Enlightenment thought", is primarily responsible for the ecological crisis that we face today (Banerjee and Arjaliès 2021, p. 5). The progressive forces of Enlightenment, they argue, have created "new forms of domination" that foster colonialism, ecological destruction and cultural erasure (Banerjee and Arjaliès 2021, p. 6).

The patterns of extraction, contamination, and consumption, accompanied by dualistic ideas, crystallise in the Anthropocene, an epoch characterised by human destructive imprint on planetary processes. Humans, in the Anthropocene, have emerged as a "new telluric power" (Luciano and Zanoni 2023, p. 106) whose unsustainable ways of living and overexploitation of resources, have affected the "energy balance at the Earth's surface" and have adversely impacted the "broad range of ecosystem services that support human (and other) life", consequently leading to a "crisis in the biosphere" (Steffen et al. 2011, pp. 842–43). The burgeoning alterations of biogeochemical cycles, degradation of terrestrial, aquatic and aerial spaces, and increase in the extinction rate caused by human activities reveal that human potency "now rivals some of the great forces of Nature in its impact on the functioning of the Earth system" (p. 843). This unprecedented planetary agency has gained momentum as ecological consciousness and the sense of kinship with the natural world have waned, allowing human actions to proliferate without reciprocal responsibility. This collapse of ecological awareness in contemporary culture, Snyder argues, is driven by a lack of kinship and ecological belonging, as well as a desire for material growth. He states the following:

But we live in a nation of fossil fuel junkies, very sweet people and the best hearts in the world. But nonetheless fossil fuel junkies of tremendous mobility zapping back and forth, who are still caught on the myth of the frontier, the myth of boundless resources and a vision of perpetual materialistic growth. Now that is all very bad metaphysics, a metaphysics that is leading us to ruin. (Snyder 1980, p. 183)

Snyder's poem "Covers the Ground" highlights how humans have been active participants in transforming landscapes, foregrounding the cumulative and often forceful patterns of human influence that shape ecological forms and processes over time. The poem articulates how human histories are inseparable from complex patterns of influence and causation, participating in the ongoing and relational making of the world (Berry 1998, p. 150). Snyder focuses on how houses, cement culverts, and heavy-duty trucks have created manufactured landscapes and covered the natural ones.

*And the ground is covered with
cement culverts standing on end,
house-high & six feet wide
culvert after culvert far as you can see
covered with mobile homes, pint size portable housing,
johnny-on-the-spots, concrete freeway, overpass, underpass,
exit floreal, entrance curtsies, railroad bridge,
long straight miles of divider oleanders. (Snyder 1996, p. 65)*

This predicament of the Anthropocene calls for a relational framework to counter the "fragmented and alienated kind of social fabric we have now, which lacks community and lacks communication" (Snyder 1980, p. 181). Tu Weiming proposes that there is a "need to go 'Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality' in exploring the spiritual resources of the global community to meet the challenge of the ecological crisis" (Tucker and Grim 2000, p. xxix). In Snyder's view, embracing the ideas of the great earth sangha can restore this fractured sense of community and unsettle the dualistic worldview by highlighting ecological interdependence as a metaphysical truth and ethical imperative. By articulating the great earth sangha as an ecological and multispecies formation, Snyder challenges the conventional nature–culture divide and advances a vision of entangled realities that characterise life in the Anthropocene. In the earth sangha, there is no dualism, but rather fluid assemblages that expand one's identity by dissolving the boundary between self and world, revealing personhood as emergent from the interwoven lives of humans, animals, plants, place, and the living and the dead. This perception of non-self is reflected in Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh's conceptualisation of "inter-being" (Hanh n.d.). According to Hanh, all elements in this universe "inter-contain" each other, and in this "implicit order", becoming is perceived as a sacred circulation, arising between lives and within them and each form is constituted through the presence of others (Hanh 2000, p. 90). Within the earth sangha, there is a spiritual intimacy among the beings, an intimacy that unfolds as all elements continually participate in the formation and transformation of each life.

Snyder was interested in exploring the mystical exchange of energies that forms beings and sustains their becoming. John Whalen-Bridge, in his analysis of Snyder's works, notes that the influence of Buddhist concepts of mutual participation is prevalent in his literary works. He states that "his [Snyder's] works, in poetry and prose, insist that the 'self' is not contained within the membranes of our bodily skin, but rather that we permeate the world we see and hear" (Whalen-Bridge 1998, p. 118). This form of ecological worlding constitutes a central and recurring theme in Snyder's poetry anthology *Mountains and Rivers Without*

End (1996). The poems highlight that the reality of a self is not contained within corporeal boundaries but is explored through its connections with the natural world. The anthology is inspired by Japanese Zen monk Dōgen Kigen's essay "Sansuikyō", "Mountains and Waters Sutra" in which he articulates that the knowledge of the self is acquired by the knowledge of the mountains and waters that represent the 'wholeness' or totality of the universe. By asserting that movement and agency are not exclusive to human beings, Dōgen foregrounds the sentience of all elements in nature and their active participation in the process of becoming. For Dōgen, the movement of the mountains and waters is to be experienced with mindful awareness in order to realise it as continuous with the movement of the human self. He writes that "If you doubt mountains walking, you do not know your own walking" (Dōgen 1985, p. 101), signifying that the lack of knowledge of nature and its movement is a failure in recognising the inner self and its conduct. Snyder notes that Dōgen is "not concerned with 'sacred mountains'—or pilgrimages" in a romantic or exceptional sense; rather, he sees them as processes of Earth in all its totality. In the holistic worldview, there is "no hierarchy, no equality. No occult and exoteric, no gifted kids and slow achievers. No wild and tame. . . Each totally its own frail self" (Snyder 2000, p. 128). This is the "thusness" of nature in which all elements are understood as it is in its direct, unmediated unfolding, free from hierarchy and abstraction. Snyder highlights that this "thusness, is the nature of the nature of nature" (Snyder 130). Like Dōgen, he embraces the Buddhist understanding of non-duality and believes in the sentience of all elements. In an interview, Snyder states the following:

A Buddhist landscape would be a living landscape. It would not just be rocks and minerals and plants, etc. It wouldn't be an assemblage of things. It would be a spiritual ecosystem, an energy-flow model. . . That would be a Buddhist/Taoist landscape: the land as the Way in motion. (Tuckabold 1997)

By depicting the landscape, rocks, and minerals as sentient beings, Snyder highlights their active participation in ecological processes and the dynamic exchange of energies between the elements that sustain the community. Jason M. Wirth observes that the realisation of walking in the mountains is attained through the stages of Zen practice. In the first stage, mountains and waters are perceived as "just things among things"; in the second stage, they are "emptied of their self-being (svabhāva), that is, they are seen against the horizon of their lack of intrinsic, self-standing, independent, discrete being"; and in the final stage, they are understood in their "dynamically evolving interdependence" (Wirth 2017, pp. 8–9). In this context, Aldo Leopold, in his conceptualisation of land ethics, notes that land is not merely soil but a "fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals" (Leopold 1949, p. 242). For Leopold, land is a living community to which humans belong, and extension of ethics and reverence to this earth community is both an "evolutionary possibility and ecological necessity" (Leopold 1949, p. 243). Similarly, for Snyder, the idea of sangha is a "commitment to stay together. . . a commitment to the place, which means right relation to nature" (Snyder 1980, p. 45). Such an understanding of community gestures toward a broader eco-dharma, one that integrates Buddhist interdependence with ecological responsibility and envisions spiritual practice as inseparable from the care and continuity of the earth.

4. Nurturing Future Imaginaries

To move away from the Anthropocene, Glenn Albrecht argues for the necessity of a "generational change" (Albrecht 2019, p. 145): a fundamental shift in the way humans perceive society, community, and their relationship to the more-than-human world. In response to the Anthropocene logics of domination and extraction, Albrecht introduces the notion of Generation S, or the Symbiocene, as a counter-imaginary grounded

in the values of symbiosis and coexistence. What Albrecht gestures towards is a deep conceptual reorientation that would nurture ecological consciousness in young minds and foster conditions for sustainable futures. This conceptual shift, which not only redefines the present climate chaos but also cultivates future ecological imaginaries, formed the core of Snyder's vision of the sangha. Although both Glenn Albrecht and Gary Snyder articulate visions of an earth-based community, their foundations differ in important ways. Albrecht's concept of the Symbiocene is grounded in a largely secular spiritual framework, drawing on environmental philosophy and affective ethics, whereas Snyder's vision of community emerges from existing Buddhist ecological worldviews, particularly notions of interdependence, non-duality, and sangha as a more-than-human field of practice. Snyder's earth sangha is directed toward building a new generation that understands the "sacramental energy-exchange" (Snyder 1980, p. 201) that takes place during the communion between elements of the natural world. This mindful communion is an imperative of the Buddha drama that "holds that the universe and all creatures in it are intrinsically in a state of complete wisdom, love and compassion; acting in natural response and mutual interdependence" (Snyder 1969, p. 92). Snyder's vision of the newer generation of the earth sangha is contained in the traditional three aspects of the dharmic path: wisdom (prajna), meditation (dhyana), and morality (sila). Wisdom is the "intuitive knowledge" (Snyder 1969, p. 92) of love, compassion, and selflessness. Meditation is a means to attain a higher form of consciousness, allowing one to locate the self within others. Morality is an act of working responsibly towards the larger community or the sangha. The understanding of the three aspects of the dharmic path, Snyder believes, will call for a revolution in the younger generations, a revolution that will not disrupt but rather "close the circle and link us in many ways with the most creative aspects of our archaic past" (Snyder 1969, p. 93). In Snyder's vision, the artists and writers are significant propagators of the great earth sangha and of the movement to restore ecological harmony. Snyder positions them as contemporary shamans mediating between human and more-than-human worlds, nurturing compassion, and providing a voice to those forms of life that have been subdued within dominant cultural discourse.

The vision of the great earth sangha, though rooted in Buddhist values, resonates with a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions that centre on interdependence, reverence and ethical responsibility. For instance, theologian Thomas Berry highlights the biblical traditions that direct us towards maintaining ethical communion with the environment. As a response to the current environmental crisis, Berry advocates a sacred community and an Earth-centred theology oriented towards healing the planet and the fractured relationship within the ecological community. His idea of the Earth-centred theology indicates a shift in theological understanding, highlighting that understanding Christian beliefs must incorporate awareness of ecological interdependence. He remarks as follows:

If God is speaking to us through the universe, and if we are now seeing that the universe functions differently from what earlier Christians thought, then we must have a different way of articulating our Christian belief. We have, in our new understanding of the universe, new ways of understanding the divine manifestation in the natural world. We have a new type of revelation. (Berry et al. 1991, p. 54)

In this way, religious beliefs become significant in propagating ecological ethics and nurturing future imaginaries. These narratives are significant as they depict a singular vision of an Earth-based community that is rooted not in hierarchical structure but in mutual flourishing.

5. Conclusions

The exploration of the mystical dimensions of nature in Snyder's literary corpus reflects his passionate engagement with Buddhist values and practices. Often described as the 'nature poet', Snyder advances the notion of coexistence by highlighting the affective force that binds humans, nonhumans, animals, landscapes, plants, and all the elements of the ecological community. His literary works serve as cultural catalysts for the current times, emphasising communal practice, ecological consciousness, and the building of a more-than-human community. According to Snyder, the current crisis stems from humanity's failure to recognise its communion and interdependence with the Earth's processes. This alienation has precipitated not only environmental degradation but also a broader socio-cultural dislocation, thereby raising urgent ethical questions about responsibility, perception, and the future of the planet. In response, his literary works depict visions of reconciliation drawing from diverse religious traditions and indigenous worldviews to reimagine human belonging within a relational Earth community. William Scott McLean notes that even though Snyder follows the tradition of the Romantics and the Transcendentalists, "the bases for his poetry lie elsewhere: in oral traditions of transmission, in Chinese and Japanese poetics, and in the ancient and worldwide sense of the Earth Goddess as inspirer of song" (McLean 1980, p. ix).

Snyder's poetic works "on one level, call the society's attention to its ecological relationship in nature, and to its relationships in the individual consciousness" (Snyder 1980, p. 36). As an earth poet, Gary Snyder can be understood as a literary shaman or spiritual mediator, using poetry to repair and rearticulate the fractured relationships between humans and the natural world. His poems present his vision of the great earth sangha in which humans and the more-than-human world are in communion with each other. His work invites readers into a collective awareness in which mountains, rivers, animals, and human histories are recognised as co-participants in a living community. Such a perspective can contribute to cultivating a more ethically attuned form of global citizenship, resonating with other spiritually informed commitments to ecological responsibility. At the same time, Snyder's poetic voice and visionary prose provide a compelling imaginative framework through which both individual consciousness and collective social practices may be reoriented toward transformative ecological engagement.

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