

In Search of Deep Ecology in Indic Perennial Texts and Traditions

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Abstract

In the present environmental crisis that threatens the very existence of every life-form on the plundered planet, humanity is in search of a sustaining understanding and relationships to the earth because profound connections with natural processes and deep engagement with environmental surroundings are necessary to save this planet from environmental catastrophe. Deep ecology proposes a new spiritual understanding to find a fundamental solution to evolutionary eco-crisis through reviving the lost link and relationship with the earth. It believes in the experience of Self-realization and in the intrinsic or inherent value of nature. Indic perennial scriptures like *The Vedas*, *The Gita*, *the Upanishads*, and *the Puranas*, which have been inspiring East-West deep ecologists with the eco-spiritual ethics and metaphysics, can offer a solution to eco-crisis through a radical shift in human consciousness in the way people relate with nature. They awaken humanity to be reconnected with the earth to realize deeper relations with Nature for the heal-all of all earth-maladies, and that heal-all lies in healing ourselves and in healing our deepening reconnection with Earth. The paper attempts to explore the ecological philosophy of Indic texts and traditions for inspiring humanity to form new life-*ecosophies* in the post-COVID era for the next survival.

Key Words: Ecosophy, Intrinsic value, Spirituality, Indic, Vedanta.

Responding to the anthropocentric narrow environmentalism, Deep ecology has emerged as a new spiritual world view. By ‘ecosophy’ or Deep ecology Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess(1973), the founder of the deep ecology movement, means any integrated philosophy of Nature and an ‘earth wisdom’-of ecological harmony. It is “a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium” as it amplifies the awareness of the oneness and interconnection of all life. Greg Gerrad says:

Deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of the environmental

crisis and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. The shift from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology. (22-23)

Deep Ecology supports the concept of the oneness of all living beings, non-injury, and "re-earthing" and promotes biological egalitarianism among all living beings in an anti-class posture. It rejects anthropocentrism and advocates biospheric egalitarianism where no distinction of superior or inferior is made. It emphasises the symbiosis and diversities of life-forms and stresses the principle- 'Live and let live'.

The "platform principles" prepared by Arne Naess and George Sessions elaborate deep ecology movement.

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has intrinsic value. The value of non-human life forms is independent of the usefulness may have for narrow human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to the flourishing of human and non-human life on earth.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
6. Significant change of life conditions for the better requires change in policies. These affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of intrinsic value) rather than adhering to a high standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes.(439)

So, deep ecology recognizes the 'intrinsic value' of the non-human world and emphasises the conservation resources for the use of species. It celebrates the wildness of nature.

Different Indic texts and traditions can be explored in accordance with the Deep Ecology and there is a lot of evidence of biospheric egalitarianism in the treatment of plants and animals, and even of non-living elements. In this tradition, nature is treated as sacred, conscious, living, and a source of wisdom. And if we live in harmony with the laws and rhythm of nature, then nature in different forms of plants, fruits, flowers, animals, insects can bring healing to humanity. In the order of evolution as mentioned in the Vedas and Upanishads, there is the source of deep ecological realization of egalitarianism. The deep ecological principle of diversity and symbiosis in a beneficial mutual co-existence among living beings is in line with perennial Sanskrit texts and traditions. The Upanishadic view of evolution or creation finds the entire universe as evolving from the same reality, the Brahmin, and therefore, there is no discrimination of superiority or inferiority.

Naess writes that 'Ecology has only one ultimate: 'Self-realization!' I do not use this expression in any narrow, individualistic sense, I want to give it an expanded meaning based on the distinction between 'a narrow egoistic self' and 'a large comprehensive self'.(437) Thus, Naess has distinguished between 'a narrow egoistic self' and 'a large comprehensive self' and advocates the latter as it embraces all life forms on this planet and suggests an extension of 'sense of identification

for extending our affection and care to everything and everybody around environment. With such 'Self-realization'! We must realize the natural universe as an extension of ourselves and realize everything around us as self-same having the same inherent worth. The wisdom of the Upanishads is the perennial source of expanding self to the ever-widening universe for love and care.

Different Indic texts and traditions have been inspiring in forming eco-centric life and in promoting deep ecological realization. Arne Naess thinks that all *Hindu* Sanskrit scriptures have become the part of the vocabulary of environmental ethics. He interprets the *Bhagavad Gita* and other texts as supporting Deep Ecology. In his *Ecosophy T*, Naess has mentioned the Sanskrit words like *atman*, *jiva*, *advaita*, *svamarga*, *ahimsa* referring to self, self-realization, and non-violence and so on. J. Baird Callicott in his article "International Environmental Ethics" has asserted that Naess "was inspired by the Vedantic doctrine of non-duality to make cultivation of the experience of oneness with nature the core practice of Deep Ecology." (Singh 30). David Kinsley has more clearly mentioned that the principle of self-realization of deep ecology "for Naess is not something new. For him, the view is expressed quite clearly in the *Bhagavada-gita*." (187). S. Cromwell Crawford, as quoted in Nelson, in his *The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals*, argues that the "unitive view" of Sanskrit Hindu philosophy "can provide the basis for an environmental ethic." (Nelson.63). The philosophy of *Brahman*, he states, supplies the one essential ingredient of an environmentally sound ethic, namely, "reverence for nature." He points to the belief that *Atman* (the true Self) is one with *Brahman*, the idea that all beings are separate only apparently, actually being emanations of the one Brahman. The idea of Gandhiji's self-realization based on the perennial texts of Hinduism has great influence or inspiration on Naess and we find Naess to mention Gandhiji in his different writings. But the words of these influences are not sometime evaluated enough. Knut A. Jacobsen has pointed-

It is intriguing for anyone with some knowledge of the religious traditions constituting Hinduism to find that the interconnected concepts of non-injury (*ahimsa*), the oneness of all living beings (*advaita*), the self (*atman*, *purusa*), and self-realization (*moksa*) have become part of the vocabulary of environmental thought in Europe and North America. These concepts were originally related to the attempt of the Hindu ascetics to free the self from bondage to the material world, an effort that to some degree is the very opposite of the effort to integrate humans into the natural world and to preserve the biotic communities which is being made by contemporary environmental thinkers. The fact that there is a significant influence from the Hindu traditions of religion and philosophy on the ecosophy of Arne Naess often goes unnoticed. (Eric Katz 230)

However, George Sessions has viewed Ecosophy as "Naess's version of deep ecology; it is inspired by the science of ecology, Gandhi, and the philosophy of Spinoza and is derived from the norm of universal self-realization." (1987, 112-113). In general Deep ecology supporters derive their views of self-realization from their views on the intrinsic value and biocentric egalitarianism. There is a great inspiration of Indic philosophy behind Deep Ecology and there is a close connection between the ecosophy of Naess and the concept of self-realization as conceived in the *Vedantic* tradition in general and by Gandhiji in particular.

Vedanta (*Veda* means knowledge and *ante* means-end) is the scientific and philosophical treatise of the spiritual legacy of India. *Vedanta* says that Nature is the divine manifestation of God Himself and

there is divine interconnection and interrelation among all in the universe and ecology. We can feel it if we can purify and enlighten our mental and spiritual ecology with holistic light and we can well appreciate everything of nature in ourselves and ourselves in everything and thus we take nothing in ecology separate but everything as a divine one. Divine oneness binds us with fellow-feeling and empathy with all in ecology. So, the *Vedantic* ecosophy is cosmic consciousness and this consciousness illuminates the way to the discovery of one's soul and self-identifying one with cosmic divinity, where the human self is attuned with the Universe. The *Isha Upanishad*, identifies that the integral Divine Union which is thought as triple Divine apprehension that of (i) Self is in all things, INDWELLING; this indwelling Self expands to give the realization that (ii) all things are within the Self, OVERDWELLING; and this indwelling Self concentrates to give the realization that (iii) all things are made up of stuff of the Self, INDENTITY. These triple realizations are identified as a starting point for integral Divine action extending over the whole earth through a universalized and impersonal consciousness. *Vedanta* says the self is the pure consciousness that inspires and illuminates nature. Our pure consciousness with harmonized heavenly universe helps in the pure contact between the subject or self and the universe or Nature. So to reach this understanding with nature, the soul and self are to be illuminated with the divine light of the *Vedanta*, and thus the clouds covering self and soul with—materialistic attachment and arrogance- are 'to be purged of to discover the divinity in the heart of nature where soul will find solace' in eco-universe. In the Indian spiritual tradition of Man, God, and Nature, God is the infinite, eternal, and universal Consciousness, the creative origin of the Individual and Universe, Man and Nature. He is the deepest and innermost Self of our own being and the universe and in which we can feel our unity with all creation. Nature is the creative Energy of God and the origin of all energies in the Individual and the universe — physical, psychological, and spiritual. Thus God in this concept is the spiritual Unity and Wholeness — Unity of Being, Unity of Consciousness and Unity of Energy — sustaining and binding all creation. *Vedanta* says that all creation in this universe is an integral totality, a "total-field image" and a universal spirit binds all the creatures of this universe in "biological egalitarianism." *Vedantic* ecological wisdom awakens our reverence for nature and the 'intrinsic value' of other things erasing any ambiguous relationship and egocentric prejudices. It is always involved in continuous, comprehensive, deep inquiry into 'values' of the nature and the Self. In Deep Ecologists' realization that 'All is One' and interconnected is aptly *Vedantic*.

The Indic perennial scriptures celebrate the oneness of human mind with the whole universe and such such life-philosophy can avert anthropocentric-outlook, the root cause of environmental degeneration. *Vedantic* philosophy helps us to achieve ecological equilibrium in this universe with 'Self-realization'. The expression "*Sarvabhuta-stham atmanam Sarva-bhutam catmani iksate yoga yuktatma sarvatra Samadarsanah*" means, "He sees himself is yoked in discipline, and who sees the same everywhere." (*Bhagavad Gita* 6.29). In his different texts about deep ecology, Arne Naess quotes this verse from the BhG many times. Having this knowledge we understand that all life comes from the self expression of God, and thus all life is on the journey to achieve the oneness with God and ultimately we understand God in everything in nature and everyone. Thus we may have the understanding that all life forms are equal in the sense of value: "the person of knowledge sees no difference between a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or an outcast" (*Bhagavad Gita* 5.18 p. 130) and then whatever he experiences is charged with the presence of the divine or the manifestation of Brahman and feels environment as the dwelling place of the divine. Sri Krishna says

in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “My energy enters the earth, sustaining all the lives: I become the moon, giver of water and sub, to feed the plants and trees.” In *Sloka 20*, Chapter 10 of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna says, “I am the self seated in the heart of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of all beings.”(p. 229-30) So all beings are alike and we are all ethically and spiritually interlinked. In *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* there we find perfect co-existence and co-operation of human and ecological balance. “In so far as he gives shelter and food to men, he becomes the world of men, In so far as he gives grass and water to the animals, he becomes the world of animals. In so far as beasts and birds, even to the ants find a living in his houses he becomes their world. Verily, as one wishes non-injury for his own world, so all beings wish non-injury for him who has this knowledge. This, indeed, is known and well investigated.” (*Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* 1.4.17. Radhakrishnan p. 172).

The belief of reincarnation of god in the form of a boar, a fish, a tortoise and of a dwarf advocates in favour of biospheric egalitarianism, the root principle of Deep Ecology. The *Bhagavatha Purana* expounds the evolution of life through different divine manifestations beginning from *Matsya avatar*, God as fish swimming in water, to *Kurma Avatar*, amphibious one as a tortoise, *Varaha*, boar, animal form, *Narashimha Avatar*, mammals like a man and animal then finally to *Parasu Rama*. So, all animals are spiritually and internally interlinked through evolution. The Upanishads again present the evolution of human life in this way: “The earth is the essence of nature; water is the essence of the earth; vegetation is the essence of water, human life is the essence of vegetation, meditation is the essence of human life, recitation, essence of balance or harmony is the existence of human beings in totality.”(Dr. Chaturvedi). The ancient Rishis believed that “God sleeps in minerals, wakes in animals and thinks in man.” (Justice Iyer) Thus, Indian ontology shows the interdependence of different beings and even between human and non-human essence in respect of evolution of the universe.

According to Indian traditions Earth, Air, Space, Water and Fire are five *Pancha Mahabhutas* (the Five Great Elements) who form the web of life and environment and so all lives and environment are internally interconnected and interrelated. The Upanishads analyse this interrelation on the basis of Brahman, the ultimate reality, and Atman, the individual reality. “From Brahman arises space, from space arises air, from air arises fire, from fire arises water, and from water arises earth” (Jain, 2011). Vedanta says that the *Atman* pervades everything of this universe in the form of vital energy that is called *Pranasakti*. All materials, senses, mind, everything draw energy from the *Pranasakti* and evolution of this energy is actually the evolution or *Sristi*. The *Purusa Sukta*, a hymn of *Rig Veda* also says that the gods, the earth and the heavens are born in the primal person (*purusa*) and thus shows innate interconnectedness of all. These Five *Mahabhutas* are cosmic elements which create, nurture and sustain all forms of life, and after death or decay they absorb what was created earlier; thus they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment. (Dwivedi, 2001). Lord Sri Krishna says, “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism—thus is My Nature divided eightfold” (*Bhagwad Gita* 7.4 p. 165). “Know that these two (My higher and lower Natures) are the womb of all beings; I am the origin and dissolution of the whole universe.” (*Bhagwad Gita* 7.6 p. 166). Naess may have here immense light of his integrated philosophy of Nature –‘earth wisdom’.

The Vedic sages found sacred web of the environment in which they lived, where they felt the all-encompassing and all-inclusive spiritual ecological harmony and equilibrium. Their lives and living were exemplars of ideal *ecosophies* and they themselves were deepest ecological treatise. To them,

Nature and all creatures had a loving and reciprocal relationship based on unity, where Nature was mother of all love and care. Perennial Sanskrit traditions can heal the nature with the worship of the sacredness and oneness of all life for the realization that ‘everything is connected to everything else’. We can learn to live in empathetic harmony with nature hearing her cry with sacred sympathy, treating her as a source of all life, not as a resource to be consumed. The spiritual paradigms can stir inner light to elevate our soul, expand our vision, and nourish our heart so that we can listen to the cry of distressed Nature with hearty compassion, with our deep, deeper, and deepest ecological love, reverence and conscience. Deep ecological realizations in accordance with their perennial Sanskrit traditions and text-philosophy may be the right path in the post-COVID-19 period for the post-COVID recovery through healing environmental and human health.

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