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Locating the *Bhagavadgita* on the Deep Ecology Platform: A Study of Convergence and Divergence

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Abstract. Hinduism records a strong ecological underpinning in the dharmic system of life which is reflected in the core religious texts like the *Bhagavadgita*. In the text, the Brahman figure Krishna reveals himself as personified cosmic energy pervading all living and non-living beings and beyond. The eight-pointed deep ecology platform formulated by Arne Naess, demands a radical paradigm shift in human lifestyle for flourishing of nature and biodiversity and the ecosophy conceptualises individual eco-consciousness. As deep ecology was influenced by the *Bhagavadgita* also, the present study investigates the converging and diverging relations between the deep ecology and the *Bhagavadgita* and, thereby, foregrounding the limitations of the former to unravel the ecological discourse of the text.

Keywords and phrases: Naess, deep ecology, *Bhagavadgita*, ecosophy, Hinduism

Should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?

John Muir (Cohen 1986, 20)

Introduction

The contemporary era is designated as the age of Anthropocene[1] where human being is the dominant geological force negatively impacting nature (Clark 2015, 1) projecting the loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and rising global warming as the consequences of it. Only the half of the century has seen what Bill McKibben calls "the end of nature" (Buell 2001, 3) despite ultramodern science and advanced technology. The inadequacy of science and technology to address the environmental

crisis, compels ecology to seek recourse in its intersectional points with religion. Haigh (2022) states, "The world religions have a key role to play in securing a better and more sustainable future because 'ultimately, the environmental crisis is the crisis of mind' or, more properly, the human spirit". Various religions have asserted their ecologically significant values as remedy in the wake of the crisis.

Hinduism, as a distinct religion, harbours significant eco-consciousness and worldviews holding relevance for the quest of the non-anthropocentric ecological egalitarianism. United Nations Environmental Programme and Parliament of World Religions (2020, 44) observes holistic worldview of Hinduism:

> It is permeated by a reverence for life, and an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the sky, the air, the water and fire—as well as various orders of life including plants and trees, forests and animals are all bound to each other within the great rhythms of nature. The Divine is not exterior to creation, but expresses itself through natural phenomena.

But simultaneously, it becomes a cause of concern as to whether the ecological theories and conceptualisations developed in different socio-cultural background of the West, can adequately unravel the intricate ecological fabric of the core *Sanatana* (Rajarajan 2021) texts. The concern compels the present study to investigate how deep ecology developed in the West proves its adequacy while applied to the *Bhagavadgita*, a core text of Indian *Sanatana* tradition. Religion and nature share a close proximity across the historical evolution of the human consciousness. Religion plays a determining role in conceptualising the worldviews as to how humans see the world in connection with themselves:

> We will understand ecology better when we understand the religions that form the rich soil of memory and practice, belief and relationships where life on earth is rooted. Knowledge of these views will help us reappraise our ways and reorient ourselves toward the sources and resources of life. (Sullivan 2000, xiii)

The *Bhagvadagita* is considered as a quintessential repository of the theological, philosophical and environmental ideas elaborated in the other texts of the Hindu religious tradition. However, the proposed text is regarded as a religious epitome but, simultaneously, it stands as an eloquent and exquisite poem in the form of dialogues spanning from 23 to 40 chapters of Part 6 of *Bhishma Parvan* in the epic *Mahabharata*, arguably composed around fifth century BC. Hence, it qualifies for the literary text as well. After Sankaracharya's commentary in ninth century (Zaehner 1969, 3), the text records a huge number of commentaries written till

date. According to Davis (2014, 56–57), 227 commentaries on the *Bhagavadgita* have been discovered in Sanskrit language only. Most of the commentaries have emphasised the theological, philosophical and practical aspects of the text, despite the fact that it encapsulates a vehement deep ecological ethos. Schweig (2022) opines, "The wondrous, sensuous beauty of nature in general, and in particular, flora such as plants, trees, fruits, flowers, and so on, are engaged in Hindu sacred poetic narratives". The ecological discourse in the concerned text is inseparably interblended with the theological structure which this article aims to unravel with recourse to the concepts of deep ecology.

Ecocriticism[2] defined by Glotfelty (1996, 18) as "the study of relationship between the literature and the physical environment", incorporates deep ecology within its ambit. The deep ecology is an ecophilosophical movement propounded and pioneered by the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess with the publication of his article "The Shallow and Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary" in 1955. The proposition of the deep ecology contrasts with that of the shallow ecology. The shallow ecology "fights against pollution and resource depletion" and its central objective is "the health and affluence of people in the developed countries" whereas the deep ecology emphasises the "rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational total-field image" and sees the "[o] rganisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations" (Naess 1995a, 151). The deep ecology rejects anthropocentric worldview in favour of a biocentric worldview which proposes "[a] new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people…for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being" (Naess 1995a, 166–167). Chapple (2001, 59) quotes Thomashow that deep ecology is "an attempt to uncover the most profound level of human-nature relationships, stressing the need for personal realisation as accomplished by integrating the self with nature". Religion and philosophy play a significant role in determining the presuppositions of the deep ecology. Besides, Naess's deep ecology records an important role of the South Asian traditions played in modelling his fundamental ecosophy.[3]

The *Bhagavadgita* as a representative text of the *Sanatana* Hindu religion, incorporates a rich ecological wisdom of almost two and half millennia ago. The fundamental environmental discourse permeates indirectly throughout the text. The present article seeks to investigate as to what extent the deep ecology is able to unravel the ecological discourse of the proposed text and where it faces limitations. The article follows where deep ecology and the philosophy of the *Bhagavadgita* meet and where the latter transcends the contours of the former followed by the conclusion. The study majorly focuses on the 10th chapter of *The Bhagavadgita*

translated by S. Radhakrishnan (2010) (referred as *Bhagavadgita* throughout this article). The methodological framework applied for study includes close textual analysis of the text in the light of the deep ecology platform of Naess and beyond.

The Converging Point of the Deep Ecology and Eco-consciousness of the *Bhagavadgita*

The Western environmental traditions have imported numerous concepts from the Hindu religious texts. The interconnected concepts like "non-injury (*ahimsa*), oneness of all living beings (*advaita*), and self- (*atman*) realisation (*moksa*) have become the part of the vocabulary of environmental thinking in Europe and North America" (Jacobsen 1996, 219). Deep ecology captures the Indic eco-consciousness to some extent. Relating deep ecology to the Hindu tradition, Chapple (2001, 74) states:

> In a Hindu context, deep ecology can be affirmed through reflection on traditional texts that proclaim a continuity between the human order and nature, through ritual activities, and through applying meditative techniques that foster a felt experience of one's relationship with the elements.

In addition, "Naess several times quotes the most popular religious text of Hinduism, the non-sectarian *Bhagavadagita*, in support of deep ecology" (Jacobsen 1996). Naess was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi for "whom the *Bhagavadgita* was the central religious text and 'the infallible guide of conduct'" (Jacobsen 1996). Naess considers the Verse 6.29, often quoted by Gandhi, as the most notable of several central statements of *Bhagavadgita* "which can be considered as the common denominator for the large sections of the Indian philosophy" (Jacobsen 1996, 220). The verse reads, "He whose self is harmonised by yoga seeth the Self abiding in all beings and all beings in Self; everywhere he sees the same" (Radhakrishnan 2010, 239). For Naess, Self-realisation is the only means to connect with the cosmic Self that abides all living entities. He prefers capital "S" instead of small "s" for his concept of "Self-realisation". The aforementioned verse exponentially conforms to his concept of "self". In his view, "Self-realisation in its maximum is, as I see it, the mature experience of oneness in diversity as depicted in the above verse" (Naess 2012, 105). Kinsley (1995, 187) writes that "the principle of self-realisation for Naess is not something new. For him, the view is expressed quite clearly in *Bhagavadagita*". Self-realisation ensures the individual connection with the world and through that with the ultimate cosmic energy, God. The maximum self-realisation can be possible only through a conduct of non-violence and acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of the living entities. The trajectory

aspired by deep ecologists to carry out a paradigm shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism requires strict change of moral, ethical and behavioural value system. For that purpose, Naess and Sessions formulated an eight-point platform as a fundamental belief system for the deep ecology movement (Naess 1995b, 68). Further, this article applies five out of eight points of the deep ecology—the remaining three, points 4, 5 and 6, have been left because of their strict adherence to the contemporary context—to the philosophy of the 10th chapter of the *Bhagavadagita.*

The first point by Naess reads, "[T]he well-being and the flourishing of the human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: the intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" (Naess 1995b, 68). In the 10th chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*, Krishna identifies himself with the biotic and abiotic entities. He projects himself as the anthropomorphic form of the cosmic energy that enables life by its omnipresence. The very title of the 10th chapter corroborates the argument, translated as "God is the Source of All; To Know Him is To Know All" (Radhakrishnan 2010, 303). Radhakrishnan (2010, 310) comments, "The Gita does not set up an opposition between Brahman and the world… [It] gives a comprehensive spiritual view". The projection of Krishna as cosmic energy pervading all corresponds to the deep ecological concept of the "intrinsic or inherent value". He identifies himself with both the components of nature enabling the life on earth and the living entities. The following textual evidences prove the point:

> (The) different forms of life proceed from Me. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.5)[4]
>
> I am the origin of all; from Me all (the whole creation) proceeds. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.8)
>
> [P]ervading these worlds, thou dost abide (in them and beyond). (*Bhagavadgita* 10.16)
>
> I am, O Gudakesha, the self-seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, middle and the very end of beings. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.20)
>
> I (am) the creator whose face is turned on all sides. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.33)
>
> (I am) the origin of things that are yet to be. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.34)
>
> And further, whatsoever is the seed of all existences that am I, O Arjuna; nor is there anything, moving or unmoving that can exist without Me. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.29)

In the aforementioned verses, "I" (Krishna) denotes the all-pervasive life force or the cosmic energy which constitutes the inherent value of all living entities irrespective of their usefulness to human being. In rhetorical manner the cosmic energy itself narrates the wisdom of equality of all as the same fraction of it enables each life both human and non-human. It envisages what Naess calls "biospherical egalitarianism" (Naess 1995a, 151). Visualisation of the world as a complex, interconnected web where everything is interconnected to everything else is a key concept of the deep ecology and, assigning a sacrosanct status to the intrinsic value of things is vital for sustaining the interconnections. In the text, Krishna is the fundamental source from which all living and non-living beings acquire the intrinsic value. He functions as a unifying principle integrating individual life to its environment and to non-human entities.

The second point by Naess follows as the "[R]ichness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves" (Naess 1995b, 68). As previously indicated, Krishna himself is the cosmic energy in the *Bhagavadgita*. Consequently, the realisation of the intrinsic value of things is corollary to the realisation of the omnipresent cosmic energy. Krishna prescribes three methods of self-realisation; *karma* yoga, *bhakti* yoga and *jnan* yoga, roughly translated as the "yoga of action", the "yoga of devotion" and the "yoga of knowledge", respectively. Self-realisation is the medium to realise the interlinking of the entire cosmos. Naess (1989, 86) states that "the concept of Self-realisation is a condensed expression of social, psychological and ontological hypotheses" about the world. "The world is a living whole, a vast interconnectedness, a cosmic harmony inspired and sustained by the one Supreme" and therefore "[m]an has to discover his spiritual unity with God and so with all his creatures" (Radhakrishnan 2010, 310–311). Even Gandhi holds the opinion that god and his creation are not separate rather one: "God…must be taken to mean the whole creation of God. The service of all created beings is the service of the God and the same is sacrifice" (Desai 1946, 150). In the 10th chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*, Krishna associates himself with biotic and abiotic entities, with the components of the nature vitally important for life and various forms of life (as shown in Figure 1). He identifies with the components of nature in the following way:

> Of lights I am the sun, I am Marichi of *maruts* (wind and storm); Of stars I am the moon. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.21)
>
> Of *vasus* (deities) I am Agni and of mountain peaks I am Meru. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.23)
>
> Of lakes I am the ocean. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.24)

Of immovable things (I am) Himalaya. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.25)

Of all trees I am *ashvattha* (pipal/*ficus religiosa*). (*Bhagavadgita* 10.26)

Of purifiers I am the wind… Of the rivers I am Ganges. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.31)

Of seasons I am flower-bearer (spring). (*Bhagavadgita* 10.35)

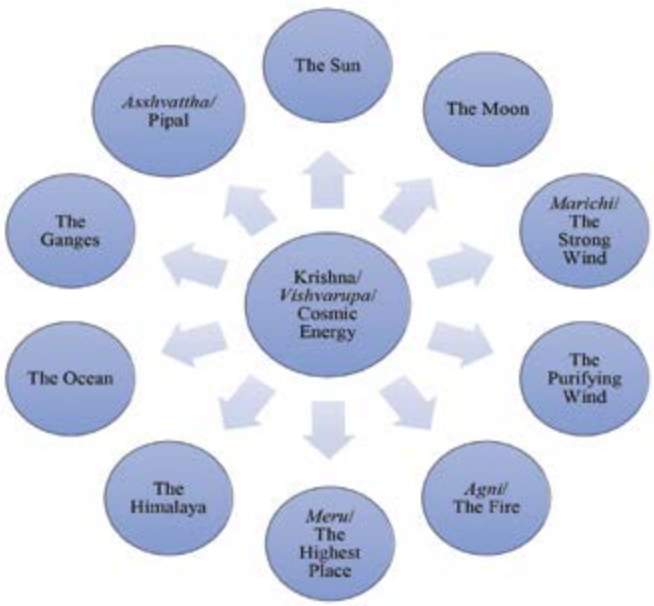

Figure 1. Krishna's association with the components of nature

Surya (the sun) is one of the Vedic ethereal gods and the ultimate source of energy that enables life upon earth. Absorbing sunlight trees process the act of photosynthesis, grow and become the producer in the food chain. The moon is important for the gravitational balance of the Earth, and it is also considered that the herbs grow mature under the moonlight. *Marichi* is the strong wind blowing in space. This is one of the 49 types of wind or the *maruts*. The purifying wind provides vital air for the biotic life. *Agni* which is the second most revered god of the Vedic pantheon with dedication of 200 mantras, is vitally important for life survival. This is one of the five basic elements forming human body. Krishna identifies himself with Meru among the mountain peaks. Maybe, it was considered to be the highest place upon the Earth in those times. Himalayan range is rich in its flora and fauna having the topmost peak, the Mount Everest. The ocean represents the largest saltwater body upon this planet while the Ganges is the longest river

flowing with sweet, drinkable water in India. *Asshvattha* or the pipal tree (*ficus religiosa*) is the representative of the trees. It is the most oxygen producing tree. Thus, these various factors combining together constitute favourable conditions for enriching and flourishing of biodiversity upon the planet. Krishna's identification with them, poses him as an ultimate source of energy enabling these factors to function the cosmic energy embodied as Krishna identifies with the biodiversity (as shown in Figure 2) as well in the following verses:

> The seven great sages of old, and four *manus* (humans) are of my nature. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.6)
>
> Of horses know me to be *ucchaisshrava* (horse)… Of lordly animals (I am) *airavata* (elephant). (*Bhagavadgita* 10.27)
>
> Of cows I am the Cow of Plenty (*kamadhenu*), Of the serpents I am *vasuki*. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.28)
>
> Of *nagas* (asps) I am Anant. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.29)
>
> Of the beasts I am king of the beasts (lion) and of the birds I am the son of *vinata* (*garuda* [eagle]). (*Bhagavadgita* 10.30)
>
> Of the fishes I am the alligator. (*Bhagavadgita* 10.31)

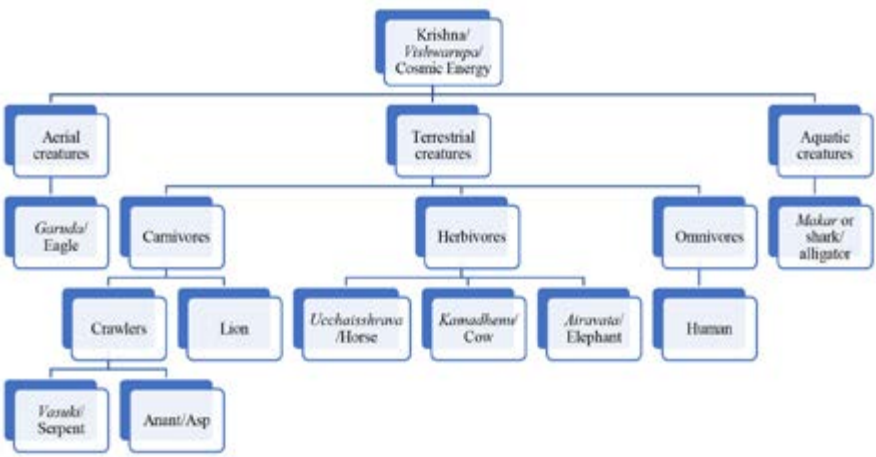

Figure 2. Krishna's identification with biodiversity

These creatures of different species represent various species of three different habitats: aquatic, terrestrial and aerial. The *makar* or alligator/shark represents the aquatic creatures while *garuda* (eagle) is the representative of the aerial creatures.

The terrestrial creatures can be divided into three types: carnivores, omnivores and herbivores. *Vasuki* (serpent), *anant* (asp) and the lion represent the carnivorous creatures, whereas humans represent the omnivores and herbivores are represented by three species: *kamadhenu* (cow), *ucchaisshrava* (horse) and *airavata* (elephant). Further, the carnivores are the wild animals while the herbivores are domesticated ones. The seven sages and the four *manus* are regarded as the precursors of the human population. Padhy (2016) states, "[I]nterestingly, the various animal representatives presented by Srikrishna perfectly match the Vedic age animal classification forwarded in *Manusmrti*". The *kamadhenu* has been considered "the wish-fulfilling Cow of Plenty, who symbolises the abundance and proliferation of Nature" (Lodrick 2005) and "[h]er four legs are the *Vedas*, her horns are the gods, her face the sun and moon, her shoulders *Agni*, and her legs the Himalayas" that poses her *viratrupa* (the cosmic form) (Smith 2006, 434). The biodiversity is weaved into an integral unity by all-pervading cosmic energy embodied as Krishna. In his article on the *Bhagavadgita*, Padhy (2014) states, "The divine life force and the biological world are intimately associated with each other". Throughout his dialogue of cosmic unity, Krishna imperatively suggests realising the ultimate god synonymous with the cosmic energy through acknowledging His oneness with the biodiversity. Krishna utters, "He who knows in truth this glory (manifestation) and power (steady action) of Mine is united (with Me) by unfaltering yoga; of this there is no doubt" (*Bhagavadgita* 10.7). The "glory (manifestation)" is synonymous with nature its components and biodiversity. Commenting on the same verse Radhakrishnan (2010, 306) points out:

> The knower will be aware of his unity with the Divine and participate in the work of the world which is a manifestation of the Divine. The knowledge of the determinate Brahman (present in everything) is the way to acknowledge the indeterminate Brahman.

The association of the biodiversity with immeasurable Brahman renders it a sacrosanct status for human beings to earn their respect for the animals. Many tribes had mystical values of animals, therefore, when they joined Hinduism, their animals were made the vehicles and companions of god (Radhakrishnan 2018/1926, 23). Various Indian paintings and texts like *Bhagavadpurana* as well describe the Krishna as *viratpurasha* who incorporate each and everything existing upon the planet in himself (Rajarajan 2020). The *viratpurasha* (cosmic soul) conceptualisation occurs in 11th chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*. It has a symbolic value as it proposes macro-cosmic worldview for humans and enhances the acceptability of the world as one unit for humans. Therefore, in Hindu iconography, the *viratpurasha* concept is not associated with Krishna only, but it has also been liked to Vishnu, Shiva and Devi (Rajarajan 2020). Krishna identifies

with Vishnu who has been conceptualised as *visvarupa* (macro-Vishnu) as well as *vatapatrasayi* (micro-Vishnu) and it, Rajarajan (2020) states, "The micro in all these mythologies may stand for the molecular organisms such as bacteria, and the macro the multi-cellular creatures such as fishes, whales or the defunct dinosaurs". Thus, the *Bhagavadgita* formulates the spiritual-ecological method to realise the intrinsic value of things synonymous with god through richness and diversity of life forms.

The third point of the deep ecology by Naess (1995b, 68) reads, "Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity (of life forms) except to satisfy vital needs". This principle appears as corollary of Gandhi's famous dictum that earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not everyman's greed. The principle itself is a counter-statement to the prevailing contemporary ideology that humans are reducing the richness and biodiversity of life forms for their luxury instead of vital needs. In the age of Anthropocene when myopically exploitative intervention of human in the biosphere has brought the entire planet to state of precariousness, the ecological crisis has emerged phenomenally, such ethical imperatives are the demand of the time. It is interesting to introspect how a text culturally, chronologically anomalous to the context of deep ecology, negotiates with the third principle of the latter. The *Bhagavadgita* establishes ethical imperatives for reducing contagious human intervention in biospherical balance. The eco-friendly ethical values are integrated in the lifestyle itself. In the *Bhagavadgita*, several times Krishna repeats *ahimsa* or "non-violence" as a cardinal virtue. Even in 10th chapter, he narrates that *ahimsa* proceeds from him (*Bhagavadgita* 10.5), whereupon Radhakrishnan (2010, 305) annotates "*ahimsa*: non-violence; in old texts it means non-hurting, especially non-killing". Moreover, Krishna's clarification of non-dualism is in the sense that the same all-pervasive soul or *atman* allots a consecrate status to all the various members of the biosphere. His identification with the biodiversity and the richness of nature exemplifies it in the 10th chapter. Therefore, doing *himsa* or "violence" to other creatures equals to violating god's will, the life, and it is the primary hurdle to the Self-realisation. Naess states, "*[H]imsa* against a living being is *himsa* against oneself" and "*[H] imsa* against a living being makes complete Self-realisation impossible" (Weber 1999). The concept of *ahimsa* ensures what Naess calls "biocentric egalitarianism". Padhy (2014, 41), affirming the biospherical egalitarianism in the *Bhagavadgita* and quotes an ethical imperative from *Yajurveda:*

> The whole universe with its creatures belongs to the Lord (Nature). No creature is superior to any other, and the human beings should not have the absolute power over the nature. Let no species encroach upon the rights and privileges of other species. However, one can enjoy the bounties of nature by giving up greed.

The quotation denies absolute power of human over nature and affirms the rights and privileges of other species but also allows human being to enjoy the bounties of nature by giving up greed synonymous with taking from nature only for vital needs.

The seventh principle of deep ecology by Naess follows, "[T]he ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of difference between bigness and greatness" (Naess 1995b, 68). The principle demands a paradigm shift in contemporary ideology from "bigness" to "greatness". The greatness involves appreciation of life quality which is constituted by an ideology immersed in the inherent value of biodiversity or nature in general. As the *Bhagavadgita* provides a non-dualistic paradigm of thinking, the worship of Krishna is synonymous with the worship of the omnipresent cosmic energy and the other way round. Krishna utters, "I am the origin of all; from Me all (the whole creation) proceeds. Knowing this, the wise worship Me, endowed with conviction" (*Bhagavadgita* 10.8). This non-dualistic ideology preserves devotion for the inherent value of things. Krishna suggests that the eco-friendly virtues like "non-violence, equal-mindedness, contentment, austerity, charity (and) fame…proceed from Me alone" (*Bhagavadgita* 10.5). Non-violence equals to non-hurting or non-injury practiced in lifestyle. The equal mindedness endows with an insight to see the world non-dualistically and abstain from violence. Contentment leads to interfere in biosphere only for the sake of vital necessities of life. The virtue of austerity prevents one from exploiting nature or biodiversity for one's greed or luxuries. The virtue of charity adds on to the welfare of other creatures. The practice of all these altruistic virtues brings about the fame mentioned in the verse (as shown in Figure 3). Thus, the paradigm of thinking in the *Bhagavadgita* gives impetus to a paradigm shift from the ideology of egocentrism to ecocentrism.

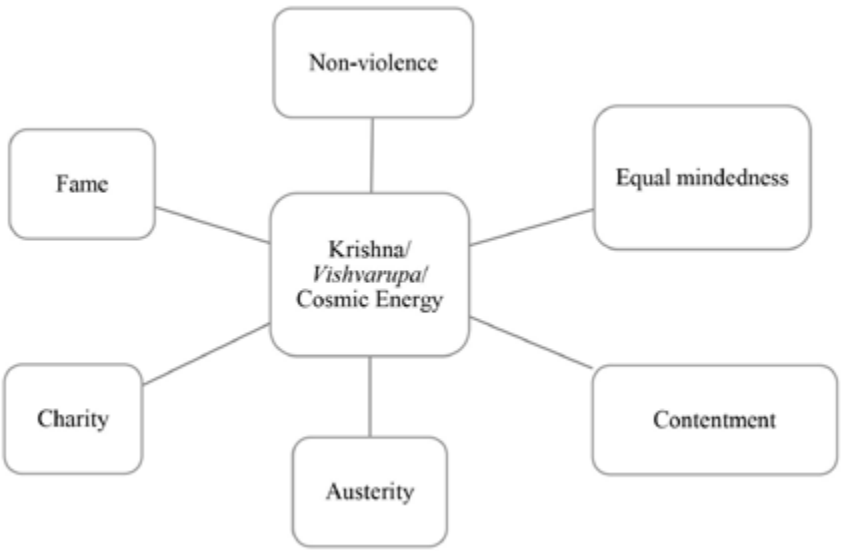

Figure 3. Life quality in *Bhagavadgita*

The eighth or the last point made by Naess goes, "[T]hose who subscribe to the following points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes" (Naess 1995b, 68). The necessary changes indicate change in ideological outlook and the patterns of action that would respect the intrinsic value of biodiversity and prevent destructive human intervention in biosphere. Dwivedi (2000) quotes *Bhagavad Mahapuran* (Verse 2.2.41), "Ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers, and seas, they all are organs of god's body; remembering this, a devotee respects all species". The *Pancha Bhuta* or the five elements have been embodied in Hindu religious places as well. Ekambaresvara Temple in Kanchipuram represents earth, Jambukeshwara Temple in Thirunaikaval represents water, Arulmigu Arunachaleshwar Temple in Tiruvannamalai stands for fire element, Srikalahasti Temple in Kalahasti represents air and Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram represents the element, ether. The concept of Shiva-Natarajan symbolises the cosmic principles connected with creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. Srinivasan (2004) quotes Nagaswamy:

> In this form, the four-armed Nataraja exhibits five primordial acts or *panchakritya*: creation symbolised by the drum in the rear right-hand, protection by the front right arm, dispelling of ignorance and ego by trampling the demon Muyalagan (Tamil) or Apasmara (Sanskrit) with his right foot, granting of solace by the crossed left arm, destruction by the fire in the rear left arm, while the ring of fire symbolises perpetual cosmic cycles.

There are *Pancha Nrityasthalas* representing the cosmic dance of Shiva Nataraja as temples in Tiruvalangadu, Chidambaram, Madurai, Tirunelveli and Kutralam all located in Tamil Nadu. The *Bhagavadgita* projects Brahman in the light of the natural world and also suggests that in order to realise that Brahman, one has to be grateful and respectful to the cosmic energy that holds the world together by permeating all life and non-life. Aurobindo (1922, 377–378) states:

> It is invited by Arjuna in his desire to see the living image, the visible greatness of the unseen Divine, the very embodiment of the Spirit and Power that governs the universe… Nature is full of secret Godhead and in labour to reveal him in her… For this greatest all comprehending vision (universe-image of Krishna) he is made to ask because it is so, from the Spirit (Krishna) revealed in the universe, that he must receive the command to his part in the world-action.

The same universal spirit present in everything of the world is also revealed in Arjun himself by Krishna and thereby, Arjun is bound to act according to the commandment of the cosmic spirit (Krishna) for *loksamgrah* (sustaining the world) and the question of needless destruction of the environment is ruled out. If everything is Brahman and harming others is to harm oneself, the knower of Brahman is obliged to not interfere in nature for more than required for vital needs. Hence, obligation emphasises the need-based-approach to nature instead of greed-based-approach.

The Diverging Point of the Eco-consciousness of *Bhagavadgita* from the Deep Ecology

The deep ecology records a considerable influence of the Hindu dharmic tradition, but it involves limitations to unravel the holistic eco-consciousness of the *Bhagavadgita*, for it has emerged in a different sociocultural and sociopolitical context of America. The *Bhagavadgita* constitutes a structure that interweaves present, past, ecology, theology and mythology in a single organic continuum. In the 10th chapter, Krishna identifies himself with several gods, myths, the great men, great sages. He identifies with gods like, Kamadev who is the god of procreation, Vishnu who happens to be the sustainer of the universe, Vasudev which means the "divine light" living in everyone as well as Krishna, Shiva that means "one who does well for others", Yama who maintains law and order, Varun, Agni, Surya, etc., who have strong ecological significance (Padhy 2016). He also identifies with sages like Shukracharya (Usana) who as a greatest poet is said to have composed *mritasanjivani* mantra that could enliven the dead, Narada who is the divine seer and knows the essence of Brahman, Kapila who brought about Samkhya philosophy, the four *manus* each coming as the first human upon earth at

the beginning of each era, Bhrigu who practiced austerity and renunciation, Rama who used his weapons only to protect Dharma, Vyasa as a source of knowledge and Arjuna as an earner of wealth for community (Padhy 2016). These sages and gods characterise human ecology connected to natural ecology. Krishna's identification with Aryama who is a departed ancestor and with four *manus* brings past to the contemporaneity of the *Bhagavadgita*. Though, Krishna's projections as cosmic energy pervading all is connected to what Naess calls "intrinsic value" of things, but it is not limited to that. He is the objective source of intrinsic value existing in subjective realms of living and non-living things. The cosmic energy exists both outside as well as inside and, according to the theory of thermodynamics energy never dies, it just gets transformed. In this sense, even cosmic energy is eternal. But deep ecology does not account for such comprehensive and holistic worldview narrated by Krishna as unifying principle. It borrows words from the Hindu dharmic traditions and rips them off their cultural significance in order to suit its theory.

The *Bhagavadgita* conceptualises the theory of desireless karma that can be an efficient tool for eschewing anthropocentrism. Krishna states, "To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be any attachment to inaction" (*Bhagavadgita* 2.47). The karma theory seeks to remove the subjectivity or I-ness of the doer from his/her action and, instead considers the god or the cosmic energy as a doer through him/her. Hence, it is that cosmic energy that becomes the centre of action instead of man. While performing action "nothing matters except the goodwill, the willing fulfilment of the purpose of God" (Radhakrishnan 2010, 136). This tackling of egocentrism through desireless karma removes anthropocentrism and brings the cosmic energy in the centre of this universe. "The fruits of action" are the results of natural law, not of human desires. Krishna utters, "[W]hile all kinds of work are done by the modes of nature, he whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense thinks 'I am the doer'" (*Bhagavadgita* 3.27). The verse corroborates the supremacy of nature over human ego. Consequently, nature is the real doer instead of human being. Krishna narrates the whole process of the emergence of *kama* or desire and how it leads to the human downfall. He utters:

> When a man dwells in his mind on the objects of sense, attachment to them is produced. From attachment, springs desire and from desire comes anger. From anger arises bewilderment, from bewilderment the loss of memory; and from loss of memory, the destruction of intelligence and from the destruction of intelligence he perishes. (*Bhagavadgita* 2.62–2.63).

From the very dwelling of mind on things that provide sensual pleasure, emanates the eventual cause of human destruction. The pursuit of *kama* produces materialism as Prabhupada (1986, 135) translates the last line of the Verse 2.63, "[W]hen intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool". The karma theory ensures the appreciation of the holistic ontology of life. Coward (2000, 45) states:

> Remember that for karma theory, my existence as a being is not independent but in a continuum with all other beings, with all of nature (*prakriti*). Therefore, what I chose to think and do affects not only my present and future life but also the rest of the environment of which I am an interconnected part.

In this manner *Bhagavadgita* conceptualises an efficient inner engineering as a tool to keep what has been called anthropocentrism at bay. Even, Naess (1995b, 82) conceptualises his ideal actions:

> I have a somewhat extreme appreciation of what Kant calls "beautiful actions" (good actions based on inclination), in contrast with actions which are performed out of sense of duty or obligation. The choice of formulation "Self-realisation!" is in part motivated by the belief that maturity in humans can be measured along a scale from selfishness to an increased realisation of Self, that is, by broadening and deepening the self, that being measured by degrees of dutiful altruism.

Here, Naess inter-mixes the Eastern concept of "Self-realisation" with Kant's concept of "beautiful actions" and poses his contradictory view on the actions performed out of sense of duty or obligation. On the contrary, *Bhagavadgita* poses action as duty-bound and obligatory in the verse, "[N]o one can remain for a movement without doing work; everyone is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature" (*Bhagavadgita* 3.5) and therefore, Krishna suggests, "[D] o thy work as a sacrifice, becoming free from all attachments" (*Bhagavadgita* 3.9). According to the *Bhagavadgita*, as one is bound to act, one should act sacrificing one's sensual pleasures and derive pleasure from the cosmic union. In addition to that, the concept of action in the *Bhagavadgita* is more internally oriented than that of deep ecology.

Although, the deep ecology borrows significantly, from the Hindu dharmic tradition, but it also maintains a selective approach in the process of borrowing. Naess (1995b, 79) states, "Ecosophies (the bases of deep ecology) are not religions in classical sense. They are better characterised as general philosophies, the sense of total views, inspired in part by the science of ecology". Deep ecology prioritises scientific ecology over theological ecology despite the fact that it has borrowed the concepts from the latter. Guha (2013) states, "Deep ecology favours the biologists

of the first world". It appropriates the Asian concepts into the Western contexts and divorces them from their theology-cum-ecological ethos. For example, Naess states that in the context of deep ecology:

> [T]he term *atman* is not taken in its absolutistic senses (not as a permanent indestructible the atman is to be taken in absolutist senses). Within Christian tradition some theologians distinguish "ego" and "true self" in ways to these distinctions similar to Eastern religions. (Naess 1995b, 83–84)

The transplanting of the Hindu concepts into deep ecology is to "suggest that religious traditions in other culture are dominantly, if not exclusively 'biocentric' in their orientation. This coupling of (ancient) Eastern and (modern) Western ecological wisdom seemingly helps consolidate the claim that deep ecology is a philosophy of universal significance" (Guha 2013). This intermingling assigns the West an upper-hand as scientific and rationale opposed to the South Asia. In Guha's (2013) view, deep ecology envisages that the "[E]astern man exhibits a spiritual dependence with respect to nature – on the one hand, this is symptomatic of his prescientific and backward self on the other, his ecological wisdom and deep ecological consciousness…(for) making the privileged orbit of the Western thinkers". This adoption ensues a problem of displacing and reconstituting the cultural ethos of the concepts of Asia. Therefore, despite, rich environmental discourse embedded in the *Bhagavadgita*, deep ecology seems inadequate to unravel it comprehensively.

Conclusion

This article has endeavoured to draw the similarities and dissimilarities between the deep ecology and the *Bhagavadgita*, but, simultaneously, it is necessary to consider the chronological and cultural differences of both. The *Bhagavadgita* represents the intelligentsia of 2,500 years ago while the deep ecology emerges in the 70s. The latter emanates in the culture which fundamentally follows embodied knowing and integral unity whereas the former emerges from the culture that fundamentally follows history-centrism and synthetic unity (Malhotra 2011, 5–7). However, deep ecology borrows from the Hindu tradition, but still, it sees Hindu tradition as the "other". Inden (2000, 85) quotes Spear, "An approach to Hinduism provides a first lesson in the 'otherness' of Hindu ideas from those of Europe. The Western love of definition and neat pigeon-holing receives its first shock, and also its first experience of definitions by means of negatives". Inden, here, refers to the *neti neti* (not this, not this) method popular in Upanishads to define Brahman. Hinduism is a way of life that encompasses a particular care for all the conditions indispensable for human survival (Radhakrishnan 2018/1926, 53). The

Bhagavadgita emerged in the contexts of dharmic culture of India which had its own distinct dynamics of eco-consciousness, therefore, in order to unravel this eco-consciousness, a distinct approach is required that could address the ecological-religious complex.[5] Regarding this, an eminent ecologist of India, Khoshoo (1999) indicated, "Ecology is becoming a moral issue and has deep interconnection with Dharma". The present study foregrounds that despite addressing the environmental ethos of the *Bhagavadgita*, deep ecology misses out a significant amount of it due to its different cultural roots and philosophical orientation. Although, deep ecology claims to be spiritual while addressing the concepts like "intrinsic value", "Brahman", etc., yet it lacks the eco-spiritual depth incorporated in the *Bhagavadgita*. The deep ecological discourse inherent in *Bhagavadgita*, poses a question on the limitations of deep ecology as to how deep it is. Therefore, the present study has attempted to bring the ecological ethos of the *Bhagavadgita* into the field of deep ecology. It has endeavoured to foreground that however, the philosophy of the text records a strong undertone of the eco-consciousness but deep ecology, despite being analogous to it to certain extent, is inadequate to unravel it. The main argument has been that Krishna as a Brahman figure stands as personified cosmic energy pervading all things and beyond. The same cosmic energy functions as a thread to connect everything to everything else leading to holistic worldview. But deep ecology proves inadequate to unfold this ecological-cum-theological complex.[6]

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Notes

1. Anthropocene denotes human being having become the dominant force against the nature in the present era. Defining it, Clark (2015) writes "It is characterised by the unprecedented fact that humanity has come to play a decisive, if still largely incalculable, role in the planet's ecology and geology, that 'Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth as a whole intoplanetary *terra incognita*'".
2. The term "ecocriticism" was first coined by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978 and later defined and pioneered by Cheryll Glotfelty with her co-edited book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* published in 1996.
3. Ecosophy stands for the ecological philosophy or individual belief system towards ecology. For Naess, Self-realisation is the key hypothesis in his *Ecosophy T* (2012).

4. The referred text is *The Bhagavadgita* by S. Radhakrishnan published by HarperCollins Publishers India, Edition 2010 (Original 1948). All the following verses in references belong to that. In brackets, the numbers preceding the dot indicates the chapter and the numbers following the dot denotes verse number. *Bhagavadgita* denotes the one by Radhakrishnan throughout the article.
5. This compound term denotes the ecological ethos inseparably interblended with theological fabric.
6. The term has been coined by the author to denote ecology inseparably interblended with theology in the *Bhagavadgita.*

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