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ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES WITHIN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

BY

MICHAEL SCAIFE

B.S., Rivier College, 2003

THESIS

**Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

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in

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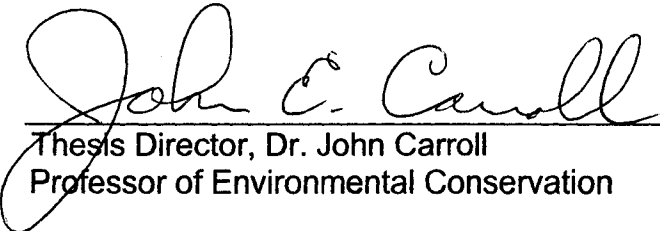
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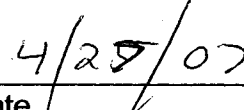
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Date

DEDICATION

To My Mom and Dad

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would especially like to thank my Thesis Director, Dr. John Carroll for sharing his enthusiasm and knowledge. His advice and counsel have been instrumental in the completion of this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Drew Christie and Dr. Paul Brockelman for their help as committee members. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. David Andrew for his guidance throughout my Graduate career.

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ABSTRACT

ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES WITHIN ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

by

Michael Scaife

University of New Hampshire, May, 2007

The world, in which we live, stands at a precipice. Ecological disasters now threaten the very existence of human civilization. The so called "shallow" environmental initiatives that continue to dominate the political and social landscape have proved ineffective in dealing with this problem. It is crucial that all of humanity actively embrace radical change in regards to how we go about our lives. No where is this more apparent than in the Indian subcontinent. Two radical ecologies that have emerged from the West, Deep Ecology and Social Ecology, offer a vision as to the nature of that change.

This document examines Advaita Vedānta, the dominant form of Hinduism, in order to identify those aspects of the religion that facilitate radical ecological change among believers. Activists working in the subcontinent can then utilize these aspects of Advaita to engage the Indian population regarding ecological matters in a "Hindu" way.

INTRODUCTION

Man inhabits two worlds. One is the natural world of plants and animals, of soils and airs and waters which preceded him by billions of years and of which he is a part. The other is the world of social institutions and artifacts he builds for himself, using his tools and engines, his science and his dreams to fashion an environment obedient to human purpose and direction. (Ward & Dubos, 1972, pg. 1)

The above words, written in 1972, begin the report entitled *Only One Earth*; the result of an international collaboration of scientific and intellectual leaders from fifty-eight countries. It is a curious statement and one that reaches to the core of our situation. We are, of course, simply one form of being amongst many others taking part in a greater community of life. Yet, this is not the whole of the matter. As Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos state, humanity has created for itself through labor and ingenuity another more alien environment, namely, culture. Moreover, humanity depends upon each of these environments, culture and the greater community of life, for survival. Yet it seems that the processes and institutions that create and sustain civilization are at odds with the processes that sustain the community of life.

The resultant clash has, among other things, so far decimated whole species and altered the very climate of the Earth. Ultimately, this clash threatens all life in the form of extinction level events such as nuclear war and drastic climate change. What is needed to confront and solve this problem is not simple or easy. At first glance, scientific advancement seems to offer a solution to this

crisis, for it is science that can offer us new and innovative technologies that are less harmful or even beneficial to the eco-system. Furthermore, science offers humanity a greater understanding of the eco-system. Unfortunately, this is not enough, for the current clash between human civilization and the greater community of life is not the result of too little technological advancement or scientific understanding on the part of the former. Indeed, researchers Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha (2000) have demonstrated that, as a society's technological development and understanding of natural systems increase, so does the destruction of the ecosystem by that society. Scientific advancement without a concurrent change in ideology, both in regards to resource usage and our relation to other beings, will not bring about any meaningful change. Therefore, it is important to examine from an ecological perspective those institutions that shape our ideology.

Many of those who have given thought to the relationship between cosmological beliefs and environmental attitudes see certain elements of the dominant Western mindset as especially detrimental to ecological concern. Chief among these cosmological beliefs is hierarchical dualism concerning spirit and matter respectively, which according to Lois Daily (1990) works by:

First, the elements in the dualism are perceived as higher and lower relative to each other. The higher is deemed more worthy or valuable than the lower. Second, the lower element is understood to serve the higher. In fact, the value of the lower is derived in instrumental fashion. Third, the two elements

are described as polar opposites. These three assumptions lead to a logic of domination that repeatedly identifies differences and controls them in such a way as to protect the "higher" element in the dualism. In this way, from the point of view of the "higher," difference automatically implies inferiority. (p. 4)

The mindset this kind of dualism creates is one of disdain for and alienation from the natural world. Recognizing the ill effects of such dualistic modes of thought, which are generally characterized as being Western, scholars such as Thomas Berry and others have looked and, in their eyes, have found more ecologically friendly cosmological modes of thought in Eastern Religion and philosophy.

According to these scholars, the central cosmological tenet of these Eastern systems of thought is monism. In contrast to hierarchical dualism, which posits that there are two kinds of substance that exist in a superior-inferior relationship to one another, monism posits that there is only one kind of substance. As Lance Nelson (1998) states, "there are ways of thinking in Asia based upon interconnection rather than dichotomy" (p. 62). For the most part, however, these systems of thought have not been critically examined in terms of how their followers interact with the natural world and their beliefs regarding it. In the preface to *Hinduism and Ecology*, Lawrence Sullivan (2000) states, "environmental studies has thus far left the role of religion unprobed" (p. xii). What is needed is a systematic review and debate over what role each of the world's major religions has in shaping current and past attitudes towards the natural world. It is the intent of this thesis to focus on one variation - Advaita

Vedānta - of one of those religions – Hinduism – which offers the possibility of avoiding hierarchical dualism and achieving unity as ecology demands. The following is a systematic review in regards to ecology of Advaita Vedānta, a rich philosophical and religious tradition. Such a review is important, for the colonial legacy of India along with that of the more modern industrial revolution the country is undergoing has decimated the subcontinent's ecosystems and is a threat to the very future of the Indian people. This review will show that Advaita Vedānta has many positive implications for ecological concern when seen through the lenses of Deep Ecology and Social Ecology and can serve as a guiding set of principals and beliefs to harmonize the lives of India's people with their environment.

CHAPTER I

ADVAITA VEDANTA: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Advaita Vedānta, according to Eliot Deutsch (1969), “is a non-dualistic system of Vedānta expounded primarily by Sankara. It has been and continues to be the most widely accepted system of thought among philosophers in India” (p. 3). Advaita Vedānta is an ontological system, known as idealism, where the universe is believed to be nothing more than consciousness. This consciousness, known as Brahman, is the underlying reality of all that exists. Human consciousness has simply forgotten its true identity, that of Brahman. Human beings may seek “re-union” with Brahman or supreme consciousness through paths of devotion, taking hallucinogens, moral living, and/or meditation.

Creation in Advaita Vedānta

As a spider spins out threads, then draws them into itself;
As plants sprout out from the earth;
As head and body hair grows from a living man;
So from the imperishable all things here spring. (MuU 1.1.7)

The central problem in classical, systematic Vedānta, according to Deutsch (1969), is the status of the world and its relation to Brahman. In what sense is Brahman the creator of the world? The Upanishads offer several views of creation. Most of these follow the Sāmkhyan type model of emanation, which consists of a progressive unfolding of various principles out of primordial nature,

which then form the basis of the subtle and gross objects that constitute the world. Sāmkhya is a dualistic school of Hinduism and the main opponent of the Vedānta schools. This creates a great challenge for Advaitins. Advaita like other Vedānta schools is grounded in the teachings of the Upanishads. However, the Upanishads also claim repeatably that Brahman is the “one only without a second,” that Brahman is a state of awareness whereby all distinctions dissipate and are transcended. Advaita Vedānta treats the problem in different ways and proffers different answers to it. However, there is a core doctrine that is shared by most, if not all, Advaitins. This doctrine, first offered by Sankara, theorizes that the effect preexists in its cause, with Brahman as the material and efficient cause of the world, and that the effect is only an apparent manifestation of its cause (Deutsch, 1969). To support this doctrine, Advaitins including Sankara give several analogies.

One very ancient analogy that is given likens the world's relationship with its creator to the relation between foam and the water from which it bubbles. The purpose of this analogy is twofold. First, the analogy clearly emphasizes the identity between cause and effect, water and foam. The second is to illustrate how, even in the phenomenal world, production sometimes does not require any distinction between a creator and the materials he or she uses to create.

A second analogy involves a pot. Gaudapāda, Sankara's teacher, gives the pot metaphor to explain how non-duality can apparently produce reality without being affected. He states, space, which is single and continuous, may be

seemingly enclosed within a pot without harming the unity and continuity of space in general. So too, may limitless Brahman be apparently enclosed within many individual selves without being affected in the same fashion.

The Status of the World and God in Advaita Vedānta

It is large, heavenly, of inconceivable form;
yet it appears more minute than the minute.
It is farther than the farthest,
yet it is here at hand;
It is right here within those who see,
hidden within the cave of their heart. (MuU 3.1.7)

Within Advaita Vedānta there is an ontological system through which three orders of being are characterized: Reality, Appearance, and Unreality. According to Deutsch (1969), Reality is that which cannot be *subrated* by any other experience. According to Deutsch, "Subration [is] the mental process whereby one disvalues some previously appraised object or content of consciousness because of its being contradicted by a new experience" (1969, p. 15).

Appearance is that which can be *subrated* by other experience. Unreality is that which neither can nor cannot be *subrated* by other experience. Advaitins believe that the phenomenal world is one of appearance, not reality, because it can be subrated through the experience of Brahman or Atman. This does not mean that the phenomenal world is false or unreal. Rather, the relationship is one of misperception. According to Advaita Vedānta, reality is nothing more than Brahman, the supreme consciousness that is without form or attributes. Human beings incorrectly perceive the phenomenon that arise from Brahman that are only momentary fragments of consciousness and, therefore, have a vastly different

ontological identity than Brahman, as Brahman because of ignorance. This ignorance can only be removed through liberation. The ontological identity of phenomenon in Advaita metaphysics needs to be understood in the context of the ontological identity of how Advaitins define reality. According to Advaitins, reality is nothing more than that which is immutable and everlasting (Potter, 1981). Since the phenomena that arise from Brahman are mutable and are not everlasting, they are not reality as one's perception might suggest. Such phenomenon does, however, exist on a different level of being than Brahman and is real and has substance in that sense.

A person who is not liberated and is acting under the pretense that the phenomenal world is real will mistakenly view Brahman as God having distinct form. In fact, knowledge or experience of God is the highest state possible for those who are not liberated. As one approaches liberation, one's conceptualization of Brahman changes from God to undifferentiated reality. It is important to note that Brahman does not change, only the perception of the individual changes as this process takes place (Potter, 1981). In this sense God is true in a pragmatic sense as is the phenomenal world.

Liberation in Advaita Vedānta

He knows this highest abode of Brahman,
placed in which shines everything bright.
The wise men, free from desires,
who worship the Person
go beyond what is here bright. (MuU 3.2.1)

Advaita Vedānta, like all Indian philosophical systems, is oriented entirely

around the pursuit of liberation from bondage. According to Potter (1981), bondage is seen by Advaitins as a mechanical process with well defined and describable attributes. Ultimately, liberation, according to Advaitins, is a transcendence of phenomenal being, whereby consciousness of time, space, and karma is annihilated. Karma is the universal principle in Indian thought of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Advaitins believe that the only path to liberation is through correct knowledge of reality. However, moral acts as well as devotion to God are paths to correct knowledge. Advaitins do believe it is possible for a human being who is still alive to obtain liberation.

The “liberated saint” is, as stated, someone who has transcended phenomenal being. At first, such a possibility, as the “liberated saint,” seems paradoxical, for the “liberated saint” no longer recognizes distinctions and yet is still able to function for the rest of their allotted years. This is due to the fact that such a person continues to be subject to and impelled by built up tendencies or impressions resulting from karmic residues still working themselves out (Potter, 1981). As it would seem, knowledge of the one true self or liberation does not destroy any left-over karmic residues. That can only occur at death and only for someone who has obtained true knowledge of the self and, hence, merges with Brahman.

The Status of Ethics in Advaita Vedānta

When the seer sees that Person,
the golden-colored, the creator, the Lord,
as the womb of Brahman;
Then, shaking off the good and the bad,

the wise man becomes spotless,
and attains the highest identity. (MuU 3.1.3)

Ethics occupies a firm place in Advaita Vedānta, although, in a manner different from most other philosophical and religious systems. This difference has been a ground for confusion and criticism. As one might expect, ethics according to Advaita, belongs to the world of appearances, not reality. This does not mean that Advaitins or, for that matter, even those who have achieved liberation, are free to act unethically. Sankara emphasizes many times in his teachings that those desiring liberation must be of very strong moral inclination. Simply put, ethical actions help to bring about right knowledge, whereas the opposite is true regarding unethical actions (Potter, 1981). Another area of confusion regarding ethics in Advaita regards the “liberated saint.” Critics of Advaita often point out that such a person becomes a sort of antinomian outside the boundaries of social morality free to do anything. This argument is bolstered by the teachings of Sankara, which state that a liberated person is not required to perform moral actions. However, these criticisms are unfounded. Potter (1981) explains, the “liberated saint” cannot act in any way other than that which is ideal because of his or her very nature (p. 36).

CHAPTER II

NATURE AND THE QUESTION OF VALUE

The need to properly account for the value of life and the rest of nature is now approaching a level never before seen. By far, the vast majority of moral systems, both religious and secular, that have been developed by Western Civilization have done scant justice to living beings who are not of our species and less still to the greater community of life. The values assessed about other life forms and the greater community of life by Western systems of thought have in general been anthropocentric in nature. The result of such narrow value systems has directly and indirectly led to the widespread undermining of the processes that sustain the greater community of life here on Earth and has led to the extinction of many individual species and genera. However, recent shifts in understanding of the current environmental crisis and its causes have propelled some theorists to propose new philosophies that are not based upon anthropocentric bias.

One such philosophy is Deep Ecology, which is marked, most notably, by a new interpretation of "self" which deemphasizes the radical duality between human beings and their environment. Founded by Arne Næss, Deep Ecology rejects the idea that organisms can be ranked according to their relative value.

Instead, Deep Ecologists, including Arne Næss, hold that the right of all lifeforms to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being, including humans, has more of this right to live than any other species and the value of the whole ecosystem is greater than any of its parts. Arne Næss has proposed the following eight point platform of Deep Ecology:

1. The flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth has inherent value. The value of non-human life-forms is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms are also 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* human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and culture is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. In view of the foregoing points, policies must be changed. The changes in policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present and make possible a more joyful experience of the connectedness of all things.
7. The ideological change is 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 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. (2005, p. 68)

The radical critique of the modern definition of “self” and its relation to the greater environment that Deep Ecology offers is a dynamic framework in which life, human and non-human alike, and the processes which sustain life, can be valued. Moreover, in many respects, concepts central to Advaita Vedānta demand an appreciation and sense of nature and other beings that is compatible

with Deep Ecology. These concepts include (1) the unification of all existence through Brahman, (2) the interconnection of human life and the natural world through “karma theory,” and (3) the “emanationist” theory of creation.

The Concept of Brahman as a Foundation for Reverence

As already stated in this chapter, the central doctrine of Deep Ecology is that all lifeforms have an inherent, equal right to life. In other words, there exists a sort of egalitarianism between species. What has not been stated is that this conceptualization of Brahman as the “supreme self” or “cosmic spirit” demands this same sort of egalitarianism between various species. This view is echoed throughout the three foundational scriptures of Advaita Vedānta as well as the writings of Sankara (see Appendix A: Interpreting Ancient Scripture).

The Upanishads and Deep Ecology. One of the three foundational scriptures of Advaita Vedānta, the *Upanishads* contain numerous such inferences. One of the best known is to be found in the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad, the oldest of all the *Upanishads*. The dialogue's main purpose is to explain what has value in the world and what does not. However, after a careful analysis of the dialogue, one can infer Advaita's position regarding the level of equality between various living beings. The dialogue starts when Yājñavalkya, a sage, is about to depart from the world and one of his wives, Maitreyī, asked him to share some of his wisdom with her regarding immortality. Eventually, after telling her how dear she is to him, Yājñavalkya launches into a long monologue that goes as follows:

One holds a husband dear, you see not out of love for the husband; rather, it is love for oneself (Ātman) that one holds a husband dear. One holds a wife dear not out of love for the wife; rather, it is love for oneself that one holds a wife dear. One holds children dear not out of love for children; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds children dear. One holds livestock dear not out of love for livestock; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds livestock dear. One holds the priestly power dear not out of love for the priestly power; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the priestly power dear. One holds the royal power dear not out of love for the royal power; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the royal power dear. One holds the worlds dear not out of love for the worlds; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the worlds dear. One holds the gods dear not out of love for the gods; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the gods dear. One holds the Vedas dear not out of love for the Vedas rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the Vedas dear. One holds beings dear not out of love for beings; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds beings dear. One holds the Whole dear not out of love for the Whole; rather, it is out of love for oneself that one holds the Whole dear. (BU 4.5.6)

Lance Nelson (1998), a prominent Sanskrit “specialist,” explains that this passage should not be read as saying that the wife, creatures, husband, universe, and so on are expressions of the self and therefore deserve value as such. Rather, the dialogue is directing readers to devalue the phenomena in favor of the supreme value of the Absolute which is the basis for the phenomena. Nelson (1998) goes further in saying, “value is located in the self alone. Far from being worthy of reverence, all that is other than the Ātman (self), ... is without value” (p. 66).

At first glance, what Yājñavalkya says seems to be in opposition to Deep Ecology as is Nelson's take. According to Yājñavalkya's monologue, even nature and the various beings who comprise it are all without value for they are merely phenomena and not the Absolute. However, the core of Deep Ecology is

centered upon *the moral egalitarianism between species, not the level of value placed upon each*. This is exactly where Yājñavalkya's monologue and Deep Ecology merge. If all creatures, including human beings, have no value, then they have equal value to one another. This is the exact sort of moral egalitarianism that Deep Ecology suggests. Moreover, if all phenomena (human beings, plants, fish, etc...) is rooted in the divine (Brahman), then the relationship between various phenomena should be that of reverence so that the essence of the divine that resides in each is recognized. Another phrase found in the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad advances this attitude more directly. Consider:

Now, this self (Ātman) is a world for all beings. So, when he makes offerings and sacrifices, he becomes thereby a world for the gods. When he recites the Vedas, he becomes thereby a world for the seers. When he offers libations to his ancestors and seeks to further offspring, he becomes thereby a world for his ancestors. When he provides food and shelter to human beings, he becomes thereby a world for human beings. When he procures fodder and water for livestock, he becomes thereby a world for livestock. When creatures, from wild animals and birds down to the very ants, find shelter in his houses, he becomes thereby a world for them. Just as a man desires the well-being of his own world, so all beings desire the well-being of anyone who knows this. All this is known and has been thoroughly examined. (BU 1.4.16)

Unlike Western traditions, which clearly place human beings above wild animals regarding the right to exist, the just-stated passage suggests that human beings have no greater right than wild animals to exist. The world is a home for all beings, with no creature having greater claim than any other to it. Furthermore, all lifeforms are shown to be intertwined through their relation to the supreme self, again suggesting that the proper relationship between various lifeforms should be that of reverence.

Another passage in the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad infers an appreciation for the diversity of life here on Earth and the ecosystem in the same manner as

Deep Ecology. Consider:

This earth is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this earth. The radiant and immortal person in the earth and, in the case of the body, the radiant and immortal person residing in the physical body—they are both one's self (Ātman). It is the immortal; it is Brahman; it is the Whole. (BU 2.5.1)

The preceding passage compares all things and beings to honey, which to Advaitins and all other Hindus, contains the life supporting substance *rasa*. *Rasa*, which is believed to be a source of vital energy, can be found, in addition to honey, in semen, tree sap, rainwater, milk, various alcoholic beverages, certain venoms, and the magical substances *amrita* and *soma*. The point of the analogy is to show the value of all beings in this world, for all beings contribute and give life to one another. Like the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* also infers a great deal as to the ecological orientation of Advaita.

The *Bhagavad Gita* and Deep Ecology. The *Bhagavad Gita*, like the *Upanishads*, is one of three foundational texts of Advaita Vedānta.

Sadhusangananda Dasa has written, the *Bhagavad Gita*'s ideal is that we be “devoid of any tinge of greed, desire to control, manipulate, or exploit” (Quoted in Nelson, 2000, p. 131). This ideal is the very opposite of the ideals of the consumerist, growth-oriented “religion of the market” that dominates Western culture and, thus, it (the ideal of the *Bhagavad Gita*) is central to Deep Ecology. Furthermore, what is important and interesting insofar as ecological concern, the

Gita does not advocate a monastic withdrawal from life, at least for most. The asceticism of the Gita is to be combined with a consecrated activity in the world (Nelson, 2000, p. 132). Consider the following verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

As the ignorant act with attachment
to actions, Arjuna,
so wise men should act with detachment
to preserve the world. (BhG 3.25)

Thus, the ideal according to the Gita is “positive” social engagement through spiritually disciplined action.

This model has served as a central influence in the lives of many of India's greatest environmental activists including Gandhi and Bahuguna, both of whom remain powerful influences throughout the Hindu and Non-Hindu world.

According to Nelson, the Gita depicts, as an ideal, a picture of a devout and frugal lifestyle that has inspired, and may be expected to continue to inspire, ecologically supportive lives of minimal consumption and universal altruism (2000, p. 133).

Furthermore, within the passages of the *Bhagavad Gita* there exists the foundational logic of Deep Ecology. The foundational logic of Deep Ecology, as stated in the beginning of this chapter, is that no one species has any more right to live than any other species and that the right of all species to live is universal. Moreover, the ethics of the Gita demand that all beings and nature be treated with reverence as proscribed by Deep Ecologists. Consider the following passages from the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Learned men see with an equal eye

a scholarly and dignified priest,
a cow, an elephant, a dog,
and even an outcaste scavenger. (BhG 5.18)

Seers who can destroy their sins,
cut through doubt, master the self,
and delight in the good of all creatures
attain the pure calm of infinity. (BhG 5.25)

Arming himself with discipline,
seeing everything with an equal eye,
he sees the self in all creatures
and all creatures in the self. (BhG 6.29)

While there exist many more passages within the *Bhagavad Gita*, which reiterate the same point, these three suffice to depict the overall philosophy of the text regarding the reverence for all beings and for nature.

The *Bhagavad Gita* also very strongly advocates appreciating life quality rather than adhering to an ever increasing standard of living. Consider the following passages:

As the mountainous depths
of the ocean
are unmoved when waters
rush into it,
so the man unmoved
when desires enter him
attains a peace that eludes
the man of many desires.
When he renounces all desires
and acts without craving,
possessiveness,
or individuality, he finds peace. (BhG 70-71)

This appreciation is central to being able to view other beings in the manner proscribed by Deep Ecology. Indeed, one cannot venerate someone or something that one wishes to possess.

The *Brahma Sutras* and Deep Ecology. The *Brahma Sutras*, like the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, make up the three foundational scriptures of Advaita Vedānta. Specifically, the *Brahma Sutras* set forth in logical and precise order the teachings of Vedānta. Moreover, the *Brahma Sutras* reconcile seemingly contradictory teachings within the *Upanishads* by placing them in doctrinal context and, at the same time, stitch the various teachings of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* into a logical whole (Vireswaranda, 1998). Unlike the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Brahma Sutras* do not infer any ecological positions relative to Deep Ecology. However, the writings of Sankara like the foundational scriptures of Advaita, also provide scriptural grounding for the core beliefs of Deep Ecology.

The Writings of Sankara and Deep Ecology. Sankara is said to have written many works in his lifetime. However, only eight works can be definitely attributed to him. The majority of these works do not speak directly or indirectly to matters central to ecological concern. Sankara does, however, give thought to such matters in the *Bhaja Govindam*, a devotional hymn to Krishna, as the herder of cows. Consider his words in the *Bhaja Govindam*:

In you, in me and everywhere, there is but one Vishnu, Mistakenly viewing me with a sense of difference, you are ill-deposed towards me. Try to see in all beings only the Vishnu who is your own self. Give up your false and egoistic sense of separateness from other beings. Cultivate a sense of kinship, unity, and oneness with all. Do not look at anybody in terms of friend or foe, brother or cousin; do not fritter away your mental energies in thoughts of friendship or enmity. Seeking the self everywhere, be amiable and equal-minded towards all, treating all alike. (Trans. Kumthekar, 2005, Verses 24-25)

The expressed unity of all life in the *Bhaja Govindam* comprises an understanding and belief regarding the intrinsic value of the greater community of life and its members that is in line with Deep Ecology. Furthermore, in the *Bhaja Govindam*, Sankara expresses values regarding the accumulation of wealth and the ownership of property, which are in agreement with those of Deep Ecology.

Consider the following:

It is wealth only that causes all harm and brings about one's ruin. Bear this truth in mind always. Know that the pursuit of wealth does not lead one to happiness at all. The rich fear and are even afraid of their own sons. This is the outcome of riches anywhere and ever. (Trans. Kumthekar, 2005, Verse 29)

While extreme, the preceding verse from the *Bhaja Govindam* expresses a core truth about happiness and human flourishing that has been largely ignored in the age of consumerism. Furthermore, it reaches to the core of the third and eighth tiers of Deep Ecology as proposed by Arne Næss.

The foundational scriptures of Advaita Vedānta along with the writings of Sankara infer a belief system that is compatible with Deep Ecology.

As Eliot Deutsch writes, "... what does it mean to affirm continuity between man and the rest of life? [Advaita] Vedanta would maintain that this means the recognition that fundamentally all life is one, that in essence everything is reality, and that this oneness finds its natural expression in a reverence for all things." (Quoted in Callicott, 1994, p. 49)

As the above quote infers, the Advaita proposition of Brahman demands reverence for all life and for nature as a whole, a reverence which is the cornerstone of any eco-centric philosophy such as Deep Ecology.

Karma Theory as a Foundation for Interconnection and Moral

Responsibility

The interconnection and interdependence of human life and the natural world is also key to ecological ethics as seen by proponents of Deep Ecology. Karma theory, which is a central concept of Advaita Vedānta as well as all other Indian belief systems, provides the basis for such interconnection and interdependence. Eliot Deutsch (1989) states, “Karma ties together everything that one does in patterns of action informed by habits acquired in past experience, and shows the subtle ramifications of one's [actions] throughout one's environment” (quoted in Coward, 1989, p. 45). The following verse from the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad explains the concept further:

A man who's attached goes with his action,
to that very place to which
his mind and character cling.
Reaching the end of his action,
of whatever he has done in this world—
From that world he returns
back to this world,
back to action. (4.4.6)

Literally speaking, we are the product of our previous actions and thoughts. It is in this way that karma determines the nature of our world and individual lives. With each action and / or thought an individual makes, a “memory trace” or karmic residue is created that instills ingrained behavioral patterns that, while changeable, influences that individual throughout the rest of his / her life.

Harold Coward (1989) in an article entitled “The Ecological Implications of Karma Theory” explains what this means in terms of the relationship between

human beings and the rest of the eco-system regarding moral responsibility. He states:

From the point of view of environmental ethics, [karma theory] means that the impulses I am now feeling in the way I behave toward animals, plants, earth, air, and water are a direct result of the way I have chosen to behave in past lives. If my karmic impulses are suggesting irresponsible behavior toward the environment, it is because I have acted in immoral ways towards the environment in this and previous lives. And since I chose to behave in those ways, I created for myself the impulses now arising from my own unconscious. If I find myself wanting to cut down the forest, foul the water, pollute the air, and selfishly over consume the earth's resources, I cannot blame these impulses on God, the devil, my parents, or society. They are coming into my mind at this time because I laid them down as seeds or memory traces in my unconscious in the past. So, I alone, am responsible for the environmental impulses that I am now experiencing. (p. 44)

It should be remembered, however, that karma is not just an individual phenomena, but a cosmic one, for all beings exist in a continuum with all other beings and therefore one's karma also shapes the world for all others and vice versa. It is in this way that karma binds individuals to the rest of nature. While the emphasis in karma theory is on individual freedom, it is a freedom that is circumscribed with moral responsibility to the environment.

As Coward (1989) states:

Whereas Western ideas of separation of humans from nature lead to actions of exploitation and irresponsible consumption, the karma conception of humans and nature belonging together in a moral freedom results in a natural reverencing of the environment. (p.46)

The concept of moral freedom, which binds human beings and the rest of the eco-system together, that Coward identifies is central to the theoretical foundation of Deep Ecology. Furthermore, the cosmic dynamic of karma gives credence to Warwick Fox's claim that we and all other beings are "aspects of a

single unfolding reality” (1990, p.232). According to karma theory, it is our combined past and present actions and thoughts that is that reality.

Emanationism as a Foundation for Moral Egalitarianism

The theory of creation in Advaita Vedānta, as stated in the first chapter, is known as Emanationism. The emanationist theory of creation in Advaita holds that an insentient Absolute emanated lower and lower spiritual modalities and lastly matter, as the resultant efflux of the Absolute, resulting in the world. The following passages taken from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣhad* illustrate the manner in which this process occurs:

In the beginning there was nothing here at all. Death alone covered this completely, as did hunger; for what is hunger but death? Then death made up his mind: 'Let me equip myself with a body (ātman).' So he undertook a liturgical recitation (arc), and as he was engaged in liturgical recitation (arc), water (ka) sprang up for me.' This is what gave the name to and discloses the true nature of recitation (arka) Water undoubtedly springs for him who knows the name and nature of recitation in this way. So, recitation is water. Then the foam that had gathered on the water solidified and became the earth. Death toiled upon her. When he had become worn out by toil and hot with exertion, his heat—his essence—turned into fire. He divided this body (ātman) of his into three—one third became the sun and another the wind. He is also breath divided into three. His head is the eastern quarter, and his two forequarters are the south-east and the north-east. His tail is the west, and his two hindquarters are the south-west and the north-west. His flanks are the south and the north. His back is the sky; his abdomen is the intermediate region; and his chest is the earth. He stands firm in the waters. A man who knows this will stand firm wherever he may go. (BU 1.2.1-3)

It should be noted the central character in these passages, “Death,” seems to be a sentient figure that creates the world through a liturgy, “he” is in fact not one. The symbolism of death in these passages is meant to confer to the reader that the origins of the world is not a God or Gods, hence creationism, but rather an

indescribable absolute. The fact that “Death” uses a liturgy to bring forth the world from his own self is not implying any activity on the part of the Absolute to bring about the efflux that is responsible for the world. Rather, the passages are again using symbolism to denote the importance of certain forms of spoken mediation known as mantras.

This explanation of the origins of the world carries many ecological implications. Of most importance, is the fact that in this cosmogony, all things and beings are derived from and are of the divine, not just created by God as is believed in most other traditions. This awesome statement implies that all things and beings have intrinsic spiritual worth derived from and sustained by their shared and sacred “lineage.” The logical corollary to this cosmogony and what it implies is a key component of Deep Ecology. Namely, the Advaita account for the origins of the world demand a sort of moral egalitarianism. This does not imply that human beings or any other creature stop utilizing or consuming those things (or in some cases those beings) that they need in order to survive. Rather, the crux of this moral egalitarianism is that human beings and other beings should act in ways that, while beneficial to themselves, do not endanger the delicate balance and diversity that sustain processes of the greater ecosystem.

Deep Ecology in India Today and Its Origins

The environmental movement in India is the largest in the world and differs significantly from its counterparts in North America and Europe (Chapple, 2000).

According to Patrick Peritore (1993), a political scientist who has typologized environmental activists throughout the world, ecological advocates in India fall into three categories. "Greens" comprise the first category and emphasize bioregionalism and respect for traditional ways of knowing. They are followers of Deep Ecology. "Ecodevelopers" comprise the second category and advocate responsible programs for economic development. "Managers" comprise the third category and "give priority to human needs and rational management of environmental processes" (p. 804). According to Peritore (1993), all three see a need to develop a "Dharmic administrative model" that combines traditional ways of doing things with secularism and seeks to create a modern, ecologically responsible world. Peritore goes further to describe the vibrancy and strength of India's environmental movement and its challenges. He notes:

India's environmental movement has the advantage of Gandhian religion, strong links to native cultural ecomanagement practices, an excellent intellectual and political infrastructure, and multiple points of access to national and local government. But its sophistication and strength is dissipated by a corrupt and bureaucratically tangled government, by a declining economy, and by an ecological and population crisis that surpasses known techniques of environmental repair and management. The movement, far from being a vanguard, is fighting a rear guard action for cultural and ecological survival. (1993, p. 818).

Christopher Chapple (2000) has identified several key forms environmentalism takes in India today. This includes general information conveyed through the media, direct action, as found in the Chipko and Narmada movements, and an emphasis on personal decision-making inspired by religious precepts. According to Chapple (2000):

Three primary varieties of religious expression influence this last component. These include tribal insights into ecosystems, Brahminical models that emphasize an intimacy between the human and the cosmos, and the renouncer orthopraxy of the Buddhists, Jainas, and Yogis that advocates nonviolence and minimization of possessions. (p. xl)

Advaitins should also be included alongside the Buddhists, Jainas, and Yogis, for nonviolence as well as strict asceticism are key components of their religion as well. Moreover, the Brahminical model Chapple mentions belongs to the Advaita School of Vedānta. It is in these ways that Advaita Vedānta, along with other Indian traditions and systems of thought, give a preexisting spiritual and religious foundation for the Green or radical ecological movement in India today.

Furthermore, India's Green movement is dominated by a uniquely Indian form of Deep Ecology, which can be found amongst the Chipko and the Narmada movements and various environmental institutions throughout the subcontinent.

CHAPTER III

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MATRIXES AS THE DETERMINANT FOR HUMAN-NATURE INTERACTION

In 1902, Peter Kropotkin, a Russian Prince and revolutionary, published *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, which proffers an alternative view of animal and human survival beyond the claims of the Social Darwinist's. Kropotkin's theory can be summarized in the following excerpt taken from the conclusion of his work:

In the animal world we have seen that the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life: understood, of course, in its wide Darwinian sense -- not as a struggle for the sheer means of existence, but as a struggle against all natural conditions unfavorable to the species. The animal species, in which individual struggle has been reduced to its narrowest limits, and the practice of mutual aid has attained the greatest development, are invariably the most numerous, the most prosperous, and the most open to further progress. The mutual protection which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay. (¶ 2)

Kropotkin saw the law of mutual aid and support as a dominant component in the struggle for life and the chief factor for progressive evolution. There is, however, a second component in the struggle for life, which is the law of

mutual contest or struggle, whereby members of the same species are pitted against each other in the ruthless pursuit of necessary and scarce resources. Kropotkin saw this sort of competition within species as an obstacle in the way of progressive evolution, setting him apart from his peers (1902, Introduction, ¶ 6).

In *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution*, Kropotkin also traced the importance and the workings of his theory in human society from prehistory to his day and time. He saw as evidence for his theory on mutual aid, the formation of labor unions, charities, the social bonds of impoverished women and mothers, and many other social institutions and phenomena. Kropotkin realized that individual self-assertion also played a key role in the development of human society that was both complementary and antagonistic towards the products and the processes of mutual aid. He states:

[T]he Mutual Aid institutions--the tribe, the village community, the guilds, the medieval city--began, in the course of history, to lose their primitive character, to be invaded by parasitic growths, and thus to become hindrances to progress, the revolt of individuals against these institutions took always two different aspects. Part of those who rose up strove to purify the old institutions, or to work out a higher form of commonwealth, based upon the same Mutual Aid principles; they tried, for instance, to introduce the principle of "compensation," instead of the *lex talionis*, and later on, the pardon of offenses, or a still higher ideal of equality before the human conscience, in lieu of "compensation," according to class-value. But at the very same time, another portion of the same individual rebels endeavored to break down the protective institutions of mutual support, with no other intention but to increase their own wealth and their own powers. (1902, Introduction, ¶ 15)

The results of this three cornered contest between the two groups of revolted individuals and the supporters of what had existed are the great inequalities that now plague human civilization and, as Kropotkin states, "the real tragedy of

history” (1902, Introduction, ¶ 15). According to Social Ecologists, however, the results of this human contest are not limited to human society; they extend throughout the natural world.

Social Ecology holds that the roots of the ecological crisis faced today are located firmly in relations of domination between people. In essence, the roots of the crisis can be traced to the breakdown and collapse of the institutions of “mutual aid” and the development and ultimate ascension of the institutions of “mutual struggle” in human society. To understand clearly the effects of this breakdown of the institutions of Mutual Aid and the development of hierarchy, one needs to explore the branch of myth that Bookchin refers to as “myths of disintegration” (2005, p. 81). The first chapter of *The Ecology of Freedom* begins with the retelling of such a myth, the Norse Legend of Ragnarök. The Ragnarök Legend, which tells of the destruction of the present world in which the Gods, humanity, and almost all of the rest of creation are destroyed in a terrible battle, speaks of a historical theme in human civilization. The legend, which is very complex, is the story of the disintegration of existing social institutions and order. Despite being veiled through the use of myth, the theme of disintegration of order and the social institutions of the world of Norse mythology, which the legend is concerned with, is very clearly seen, as is the cause. Bookchin sees, at the core of the Legend of Ragnarök, the effects of hierarchy (Bookchin, 2005). What is unique about the Legend of Ragnarök is that the conflict in the story is not a simple battle between good and evil like the Christian myth of Armageddon. The

battle between the Gods and their enemies is more nuanced than that. The Gods, while generally regarded as good, commit a horrible act due to greed that actually starts the great battle. On the other side of the conflict are the Giants who despite being generally regarded as evil, are merely defending one of their own, the witch Gullveig. At the heart of the myth is an *understanding* of the *destructive power of hierarchy*, which results from greed on the part of the Norse Gods.

What is so haunting in regards to the Ragnarök Legend, however, is not the historical theme of disintegration that is embedded within the story, but rather the prophecy that emerges from it. The mythological world in which the Legend of Ragnarök takes place is supported and linked together by an enormous ash, the World Tree. The World Tree despite being constantly gnawed at by animals, remains unharmed, renewed by a magic foundation that infused it continually with life (Bookchin, 2005). Bookchin (2005) sees the World Tree, the animals that constantly gnaw at its base, and the magic fountain, which infused the World Tree with life, as a great metaphor. The World Tree stands for the institutions of Mutual Aid discussed earlier in this chapter. The animals that gnaw at the great ash's base are those in society who seek to undermine those institutions for personal benefit and the magic fountain stands for those who seek to renew and reform the very same institutions. The act of greed that starts the war and ultimately causes the total destruction of the World Tree along with the entire world stands for commerce, which forms the basis for hierarchy. The war is the

result of the pre-existing divisions in society being expanded and worsened by hierarchy and reaching a critical mass. What is notable is that the war in the Ragnarök Legend destroys everything in the Norse world, not just those involved in the conflict, just as hierarchy in human society holds grave consequences for non-humans as well as humans. In the words of Murray Bookchin (1970):

The notion that man must dominate nature emerges directly from the domination of man by man... But it was not until organic community relations... dissolved into market relationships that the planet itself was reduced to a resource for exploitation. This centuries-long tendency finds its most exacerbating development in modern capitalism. Owing to its inherently competitive nature, bourgeois society not only pits humans against each other, it also pits the mass of humanity against the natural world. Just as men are converted into commodities, so every aspect of nature is converted into a commodity, a resource to be manufactured and merchandised wantonly. (§ 11)

According to Social Ecologists, the result of this multifaceted contest will be the ultimate destruction of all, as it was in the war between the Gods and their enemies in the Ragnarök Legend.

Social Ecologists believe that if human beings related to one another in complimentary fashions instead of competitive ones, the way in which human beings would relate to the rest of the environment would be complimentary also. To use the words of Murray Bookchin (1993), "human beings would complement nonhuman beings with their own capacities to produce a richer, creative, and developmental whole — not as a "dominant" species but as supportive one" (§ 6).

With regard to spirituality, Social Ecologists are often criticized for not giving the matter adequate or serious attention. However, Social Ecology was

among the earliest of contemporary ecologies to call for a sweeping change in existing spiritual values. According to Bookchin (1993):

Such a change would be a far-reaching transformation of our prevailing mentality of domination into one of complementarity, one that sees our role in the natural world as creative, supportive, and deeply appreciative of the needs of nonhuman life. In social ecology a truly "natural" spirituality would center on the ability of an awakened humanity to function as moral agents for diminishing needless suffering, engaging in ecological restoration, and fostering an aesthetic appreciation of natural evolution in all its fecundity and diversity. (§ 1)

In contrast to many contemporary ecologies, including Deep Ecology and Ecofeminism, the "natural" spirituality advocated by Social Ecologists rejects the deification of nature on the grounds that such mystification is anti-naturalistic. Social Ecologists assert that nature must be valued in its own right and viewed from a purely scientific perspective (Janet Biehl, 1989, § 1). Most Social Ecologists believe that attempts to "instill" value in nature through theism are both meaningless and deceptive. Such efforts are meaningless because nature already possesses value as established by science. Such efforts are deceptive because there is nothing supernatural about nature in the eyes of Social Ecologists. For Social Ecologists, the ends of a "natural" spirituality would be to advance the destruction of social hierarchy in all its forms and promote the development of social equality.

"Natural" spirituality seeks to deal with diversity and other aspects of the natural world in an ecological manner – that is, "according to an ethics of complementarity" in the words of Murray Bookchin (1993, § 6). According to Janet Biehl (2003) in a policy statement for the Burlington Greens, entitled "On

Theistic Spirituality,” describes a natural spirituality as being secular in nature as opposed to theistic spirituality, which tend to be otherworldly. She goes on to state that such a secular spirituality involves a sensibility or combination of feelings and reason as opposed to faith alone (§ 3). “Natural” spirituality does not give value to nature nor enhances the value that nature has. Moreover, “natural” spirituality is not an exercise in myth or mysticism and makes no claim to the understanding of unknowable realms. Rather, “natural” spirituality is an endeavor into the core of what it means to be an individual among the almost endlessly complex and awesome community of life that can be found on Earth. The word community here carries special weight, for the term community implies an interdependence and togetherness that are central to “natural” spirituality. Moreover, interdependence and togetherness for the backbone of the concept of Mutual Aid introduced in the beginning of this chapter.

Whereas other contemporary ecologies, such as Deep Ecology, derive a considerable degree of their world-view from spirituality and certain religions, Social Ecologists have followed a different course. Their world-view has evolved from the dual strains of political philosophy and science with no direct religious or spiritual influence. For Social Ecologists, “natural” spirituality is a “rational” mechanism or sensibility by which human beings recognize the endless interdependencies found in the natural world and act accordingly. Traditional religions on the other hand are viewed with suspicion at times. This is because such institutions often have both instigated inequality and dominance or have

benefited from such inequality and dominance in the past. However, this does not mean Social Ecologists find no value in traditional religion.

One very prominent Social Ecologist and rival to Murray Bookchin, John Clark (1997), holds that:

Part of the task of a social ecology is to investigate the physical, psychological and ontological aspects of humanity that link it to other living beings, to the earth, and to a primordial ground of being. He contends that some concepts of "spirit" have been a means of expressing humanity's relationship to the constantly changing, non-objectifiable reality of nature and to its deeper ontological matrix. He argues that social ecology is compatible with a spirituality that expresses wonder and awe at the unfolding of the universe's potentiality for realized being, goodness, truth and beauty. (Quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ¶ 9).

Another theorist, Joe Kovel (1990), who is sympathetic to Social Ecology as a general perspective, has argued that Social Ecologists should pay more attention to what can be learned from mysticism. He believes mysticism to be more in touch with a primary, pre-linguistic relationship to nature, which is unavailable to ordinary consciousness. In order to understand what Kovel is saying it is crucial to appreciate both the nature of and the transformational qualities of a mystical experience. According to William James a mystical experience can be characterized by four marks: transiency, passivity, noetic quality, and ineffability. It should be added that mystical experiences often, perhaps characteristically, involves an altered state of consciousness where the sense of self is altered or lost. Both Kovel's views and Clark's are central to understanding the compatibility of Advaita with Social Ecology.

To fully appreciate the similarities between the ethical imperatives of Murray Bookchin's "natural" spirituality and that of Advaita, one only has to look at the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna's proclamation of "jatra jiv tatra Shiv," which means, "Wherever there is a living being, there is God," is at the heart of the Advaita worldview. From this comes Ramakrishna's famous teaching "Jive daya noy, Shiv gyane jiv seba," which means "not kindness to living beings, but serving the living being as God himself," shows a deep appreciation of humanity's place in the ecosystem. Swami Vivekananda goes even farther than Ramakrishna. In one of his most famous teachings Swami Vivekananda states, "Jiva is Shiva", which translates "to each individual is divinity itself." One can see the implications of this radical statement for Deep Ecology when considering the notion that the roots of the current ecological crisis are located firmly in relations of domination between people. The understanding of the inherent value of human beings and, indeed, all lifeforms that Vivekananda speaks of, and the resultant social structures that would emerge from such an ethics, are indistinguishable from the ideals of Social Ecology. As demonstrated, the worldview and ethos that evolves from an understanding of ecology and its emergent properties as perceived through the lens of social ecology are by no means dissimilar to the values of Advaita Vedānta. Rather, as the teachings of the Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda show, they have much in common.

Dispassionate Awareness as a Basis for Mutual Aid and Complementary Relationships

A famous teaching in the Bhagavad Gita, referred to as karmayoga, instructs readers that only when one acts without attachment to the fruits of his or her making, that we act properly and in a state of freedom (Deutsch, 1989). The practice of karmayoga, which means “discipline of action”, according to the Bhagavad Gita and also Advaita Vedānta, is one path to the state of enlightenment known as Moksha. One should not make the assumption that the instruction to act with dispassion means that that one should act without concern or care for the world. Instead, one should interpret karmayoga as meaning that one should act in a manner that is, in essence, selfless and with great concern for the welfare of others and the world in general. According to Advaitins, such as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and the Bhagavad Gita, it is impossible to act in a selfless and rational manner if one is concerned with oneself. Consider the following verse from the third teaching of the Bhagavad Gita:

As the ignorant act with attachment
to actions, Arjuna,
so wise men should act with detachment
to preserve the world. (BhG 3:25)

The practice of karmayoga involves an advanced sensibility whereby one detaches oneself from any desires through purifying the mind. Consider five more verses from the third teaching in the Bhagavad Gita whereby Arjuna questions Krishna regarding the origins of evil:

Arjuna

Krishna, what makes a person
commit evil
against his own will,
as if propelled by force? (BhG 3:36)

Lord Krishna
It is desire and anger, arising
from nature's quality of passion:
know it here as the enemy,
voracious and very evil! (BhG 3:37)

As fire is obscured by smoke
and a mirror by dirt,
as an embryo is veiled by its caul,
so is knowledge obscured by this. (BhG 3:38)

Knowledge is obscured
by the wise man's eternal enemy,
which takes form as desire,
an insatiable fire, Arjuna. (BhG 3:39)

The senses, mind, and understanding
are said to harbor desire:
with these desire obscures knowledge
and confounds the embodied self. (BhG 3:40)

As Lord Krishna explains, the "default state" of being for human beings, when free of desire, is a state of goodness and not one of evil or greed. It is a state of being whereby mutual aid is commonplace and domination and hierarchy cease to function. This "default state" is reached through karmayoga.

The practice of karmayoga or acting dispassionately is key to the call of Murray Bookchin (1993) for humanity to function as "moral agents for diminishing needless suffering, engaging in ecological restoration, and fostering an aesthetic appreciation of natural evolution in all its fecundity and diversity" (§ 1). Consider the following passages from *The Ecology of Freedom* regarding hierarchy, its

development, and its legacy:

Hierarchy is not merely a social condition; it is also a state of consciousness, a sensibility toward phenomena at every level of personal and social experience. Early preliterate societies existed in a fairly integrated and unified form based on kinship ties, age groups, and a sexual division of labor. Their high sense of internal unity and their egalitarian outlook extended not only to each other but to their relationship with nature. People in preliterate cultures viewed themselves not as the “lords of creation” but as part of the natural world. They were neither above nature nor below it but within it. (Bookchin, 2005, p. 69)

A hierarchal mentality fosters the renunciation of the pleasures of life. It justifies toil, guilt, and sacrifice by the “inferiors,” and pleasure and the indulgent gratification of virtually every caprice by their “superiors.” The objective history of the social structure becomes internalized as a subjective history of the psychic structure. Heinous as my view may be to modern Freudians, it is not the discipline of *work* but the discipline of *rule* that demands the repression of eternal nature. This repression then extends outward to external nature as a mere object of rule and later of exploitation. This mentality permeates our individual psyches in a cumulative form up to the present day... (Bookchin, 2005, p. 72)

To understand how the role of karmayoga is key to achieving the “unity of diversity” that existed in preliterate societies and ultimately substantive equality it is crucial to understand the implications of what Bookchin is saying.

Bookchin does not see hierarchy as a phenomenon that occurs merely within human society nor as a phenomenon that is purely external to the worldview of those who experience it. Rather, hierarchy is far reaching in its consequences. Those who experience it are fundamentally changed in their way of looking at the world. As Bookchin (2005) states the phenomenon becomes “internalized” and becomes ingrained within the psychic structure (p. 69).

Also, through the mental internalization of hierarchy and the resultant changes in psychic structure one undergoes as a result of experiencing hierarchy, what

originally begins as a limited phenomenon morphs into a greater one. Instead of being limited to human-to-human interactions, hierarchy becomes a mindset that shapes all relationships and ultimately destabilizes a society.

As it exists as a mindset, hierarchy cannot simply be destroyed by instituting “leveling mechanisms” in society to address wealth and other social disparities. Rather, the very mindset of hierarchy must be destroyed through the internalization of a different kind of experience than which created it.

Karmayoga, because it involves the internalization of a selfless mindset through selfless action, is a method one can use to rid his or her mind of the destructive mindset of hierarchy. In fact, karmayoga is the highest possible development of mutual aid, which, as previously stated, forms the basis for what Social Ecologists desire in human-to-human relationships and human-to-nature ones.

The Universe as Consciousness as a Basis for Unity of Differences

Bookchin (2005) in the first chapter of *The Ecology of Freedom* explains how social ecology interprets the nature of communities and ecosystems in the following remarks:

The science [of social ecology] deals with social and natural relationships in communities or ecosystems. In conceiving them holistically, that is to say, in terms of their mutual interdependence, social ecology seeks to unravel the forms and patterns of interrelationships that give intelligibility to a community, be it natural or social. Holism, here is the result of a conscious effort to discern how the particulars of a community are arranged, how its “geometry “ makes the “whole more than sum of its parts.” Hence the “wholeness” to which Gutkind refers [when he states, “the goal of Social Ecology is wholeness”] is not a spectral “oneness” that yields cosmic dissolution in a structureless nirvana; it is a richly articulated structure with a history and internal logic of its own. (p. 87)

In other words, the “wholeness” that social ecology seeks is a unity of differences or a unity of diversity. The concept of a unity of differences, however, is not one easily seen in the classical Advaita Vedānta of Sankara and others. According to Sankara and other Advaitins, the experience of multiplicity is the result of ignorance, which blinds one to the true nature of reality and creates illusion. In the words of Nelson (1998), “The [classical] Advaitin yearns for the unchanging, the radical unitary” (p. 68). Despite the fact that the Advaita worldview does not allow for multiplicity, Advaita metaphysics is not antithetical to the concept of unity of diversity.

The teaching of Advaita that all of existence is merely consciousness, known as Brahman or the cosmic spirit, demands a radical unity of diversity. To illustrate why this is so, it is necessary to revisit the topic of superimposition and illusion. Illusion occurs, according to Advaitins, when the mind superimposes a false interpretation upon the immediate experience, thus seeing something that is not really there. The prime example is when the mind experiences objects and perceives these objects to be outside of consciousness. The shapes and colors are indeed present in consciousness, but the interpretation of these shapes, colors, and other qualities of what is perceived as external to consciousness is the mind-imposed delusion. It is important to realize that all qualities, both subtle and gross, exist within consciousness. It is not that red, yellow, rectangle, circle, tiger, cigar, and human beings do not exist. In fact, these phenomena do exist, but only as aspects of an ever-unfolding, infinite consciousness according to

Advaitins. They, like everything else, are all “momentary thoughts” or manifestations of the supreme consciousness. The unity of these diverse “momentary thoughts” or manifestations is the divine ground from which they arise and ultimately descend back into, namely Brahman.

The History of Social Ecology in India

As previously stated in the concluding section to the second chapter of this thesis, environmentalism in India spans a complex and varied group of both isolated and interrelated movements. Unlike Deep Ecology, however, the influence of Social Ecology is not found in India to a great extent. While there are certain traces of Social Ecology within the ecological model Peritore identifies as “Greens,” those activists comprising the Green model of the Indian environmental movement are mostly influenced by Deep Ecology. There can be no doubt that a significant reason for the lack of influence which Social Ecology has had in India is due to the attitudes of its two main proponents, Murray Bookchin and Janet Biehl, towards Eastern religions. Whereas Deep Ecology has openly embraced the religious traditions of Asia as a source of understanding humanity's role in the Universe, Bookchin and Biehl have openly criticized the religions of Asia as being anti-rational and anti-ecological. However, the underlying philosophy of Social Ecology, which is humanity's very unhealthy relationship with nature, is the logical corollary of the unhealthy relationship humanity has with itself. This has profound implications for India. Modern Indian society has been greatly influenced by and is, to a significant

degree, the product of both the caste system and Colonialism. Both of these legacies are, at their core, legacies of domination and oppression. One key to unlocking the great potential of Indian civilization for both ecological restoration and ecological living is through recognizing the consequences of these and other legacies of domination, which still hold sway over the Indian mind.

CHAPTER IV

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA IN REGARDS TO ECOLOGICAL ACTIVISM AND AWARENESS

As with any religious and philosophical system, which is several thousand years old, Advaita Vedānta does not directly address contemporary problems such as the looming ecological disaster that humankind now faces. Instead, Advaita Vedānta and other such systems proffer a world view by which both individuals and entire societies may base their day-to-day lives and existence. In turn, this world view may have both positive and negative implications in terms of how it influences the behavior of both individuals and various collectives. In the cases of ecological activism and awareness as seen through the lenses of Deep Ecology and Social Ecology, Advaita Vedānta is largely favorable. There are, however, some aspects of Advaita, which are negative in regards to matters of ecological concern. As the favorable qualities of Advaita Vedānta have already been discussed in the second and third chapters, the focus here will be on those qualities that are unfavorable to matters of ecological concern. Chief among these qualities are certain religious tenets, which have served to promote an advanced atomism or extreme individualism in Indian society.

Intense Individualism Can Encourage Selfish Behavior and Hierarchy

According to Anil Agarwal (2000), the various schools which comprise Hinduism are highly individualistic. He goes further in asserting that social responsibility, for Hindus, is primarily focused upon the consequences of one's own behavior in regards to oneself as opposed to the consequences of one's behavior towards others. It is his view that the "culture of self-centeredness" that the modern Indian state arose from is to a significant degree the result of Hinduism's unique perspective on social responsibility (p. 172). However, it is important to note that Advaita Vedānta is unique among Indian traditions in regards to both its ontological positions and the nature in which adherents of the religion practice their beliefs (Advaita is purely a monastic tradition). Still, the view of social responsibility that Agarwal refers to is shared by Advaitins to a significant degree and despite being a purely monastic tradition, the ontology and values of Advaita dominate India.

While it is true that in no way is an Advaitin permitted to act in a manner harmful to another individual or being, the motive for this very amicable proscription is not altogether out of concern for the sake of other individuals or beings. Rather, the motive is primarily based upon the idea that when an individual acts in a way that is evil, that person is cast into even greater ignorance regarding the true nature of his / her being and purpose in the world. Therefore, a person should not injure another because the act of doing so would cause injury to the self in the form of spiritual blindness. This mindset, when in

the confines of the monastic tradition from which it originates, is not altogether harmful, for the only danger lies, in regards to matters of ecological concern, when this individualism is combined with the mindset of domination. Such a mindset does not exist within the Advaitin who has renounced material greed in favor of spiritual enlightenment. However, the values of Advaita dominate India, as stated above, even among non-Advaitins who are still bound by legacies of domination in regards to the very oppressive caste system and the brutal memories of colonialism. This has in turn created a society according to Agarwal (2000) where Hindus value tremendously the cleanliness and sanctity of their individual homes but think nothing of throwing their trash right into the street soiling what they consider outside their domain. Agarwal (2000) goes further illustrating the example of the many high caste Hindus who ritually bathe themselves in the Ganges as part of their spiritual practice and then knowingly utilize sewer systems that dump their own waste right into the sacred river.

Interpreted Literally Sacred Texts Sometimes Demean Nature And Its Creatures

The great religious texts of the world are filled with parables and similar literary devices, which are utilized by authors for the purposes of presenting readers with lessons that have layered meanings. Moreover, the various meanings that a parable or similar device may have are not always explicit or literal. Many times the “deeper” layers of the lesson can only be grasped through intense study and devotion and the literal meanings of the parables or similar

devices are irrelevant. This is the case with the religious texts of Advaita Vedānta. However, just because an individual only grasps the “shallowest” or literal of the various meanings from a given lesson does not in any way lessen the extent to which they may be influenced by that lesson. Regarding the various sacred texts of Advaita, this is a cause of concern in matters of ecology, especially since many of the sacred texts of Advaita have significance within other Hindu traditions and among non-Hindus.

The Bhagavad Gita is especially important to Advaitins as already discussed. It is also sacred to other Hindus and is studied by many non-Hindus as well who wish spiritual insight or a greater understanding of Indian culture and religion. There are several passages within the Bhagavad Gita, which interpreted only literally might give the impression to readers that certain animals are of lesser value than others or that the wondrous complexity of nature is without value. Certainly, if these passages were meant to be interpreted literally then the Gita would indeed be a very undesirable text from the standpoint of those who are concerned with ecology. However, these passages were not meant to be interpreted literally as can be gleaned from the nature of the text. The Gita, which is concerned solely with ontological issues, utilizes highly symbolic language at all times and all references to natural things, such as trees or honey, are meant to convey an ontological meaning that has nothing to do with what is being referenced. Consider, for instance, the metaphor of the tree of life at the beginning of the Fifteenth Chapter:

Roots in the air, branches below,
the tree of life is unchanging, they say; its leaves are hymns,
and he who knows it knows sacred lore.

Its branches
stretch below and above nourished by nature's qualities,
budding with sense objects;
aerial roots
tangled in actions
reach downward
into the world of men.

Its form is unknown
here in the world;
unknown are its end
its beginning,
its extent;
cut down this tree
that has such deep roots
with the sharp ax
of detachment. (BhG 15.1-3)

A literal interpretation of these passages suggest that, in the words of Lance Nelson (2000), "nature is finally irrelevant to the Gita's soteriological goals" (p.151). He bases this view primarily on the fact that Lord Krishna is instructing Arjuna to cut down the tree and the fact that in the metaphor the tree is upside down. According to Nelson (2000) the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are concerned with only other worldly matters and thus are negative in regards to matters of ecological concern. Nelson's assertion that the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are other worldly, however, is problematic. The ontological position of Advaita is that there is only one world, which can be viewed differently by different individuals in relation to their level of spiritual advancement. Hence, there cannot be another world other than this one that

the Bhagavad Gita is concerned with. His other assertion that the Bhagavad Gita is negative from an ecological standpoint is also problematic at best. The Gita's entire focus and goal is to teach practitioners a method for achieving enlightenment through action known as karmayoga. Once enlightenment is reached, however, the enlightened individual, according to Sankara, despite being outside the domain of conventional morality, cannot act unethically due to his / her enlightened state (Potter, 1981, p. 36). Therefore, an enlightened individual could not act in any way other than that which is beneficial for the environment for acting in a way that is not beneficial for the environment is unethical. Still, it is important to realize that both misinterpretation and "shallow" interpretations, such as Nelsons, of certain passages of the sacred literature of Advaita can give one a sense that Advaitins do not value the environment.

CHAPTER V

ADVAITA VEDĀNTA AND ECOLOGY: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Those individuals and groups who work and live in India and are committed to halting and reversing the ecological genocide in the subcontinent should look to Advaita Vedānta for insight and guidance as to the nature of the problem and its solution. By doing so, they will find a rich and vast ontological tradition, which dominates India just like the Judeo-Christian ontological tradition dominates the West. Indeed, Sankara's system of non-dualism has been dominant for over a thousand years in India and is at the forefront of the modern Hindu Renaissance (1998). It is crucial to realize that a society's actions will always be governed, at least in part, by the dominant metaphysical belief system of that society.

James K. Stableman (1946), an American Philosopher, in *The Theory of Human Culture*, argues that philosophies are usually efficacious in the formation of human cultures. According to his theories, speculative systems, such as Advaita Vedānta, shape, along with other influences, the development of human society. Within any society, Feibleman asserts, is an "implicit dominant ontology," which controls action on both an individual and collective level (quoted in Reck, 1972, p. 249). He bases his claims, as do others, on the idea that the

manner in which people *view themselves and their place within the world impacts greatly the manner by which people behave and how they view their behavior*. Feibleman (1946) concludes that in times of social upheaval and trouble, it is the task of the philosopher to make explicit these implicit dominant ontologies for the purposes of criticism and reconstruction. To survive the ecological threats that Indian society faces, it is paramount to heed Feibleman's argument to make explicit the implicit dominant ontology in Indian society for the purposes of reconstruction and criticism. In this way, both individuals and groups active in the fight to reverse the rampant destruction of the subcontinent's unique ecosystems can draw upon the beliefs and customs of India's people in order to educate and promote change.

In effect, Advaita Vedānta adds a religious dimension, which is indigenous to India, to the ethical imperatives of both Deep Ecology and Social Ecology. The ethical positions of the unity of all life and egalitarianism between species in Deep Ecology has a firm underpinning in Advaitin metaphysics. Social Ecologists can also point to the fact that there is no place for the mindsets that lead to hierarchy within the Advaitin way of life and belief system. By acknowledging and appealing to the people's own sense of place and purpose in the World the ecological movement in India can find success. The dynamics of the relationships that shape the interaction between the organic and synthetic world in India must be changed if the subcontinent is to remain a hospitable environment. It is crucial to this end that activists, educators, and policy makers

understand the resource that Advaita Vedānta is in the fight to save India from ecological destruction.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERPRETING ANCIENT SCRIPTURE

The interpretation of an ancient text presents a unique and challenging problem for modern scholars who wish to uncover the meaning(s) the author(s) meant to convey. This problem becomes especially acute when the text is scripture or religious in nature. Often, such texts have layered meanings and are highly nuanced and ripe with metaphorical content allowing for numerous logical interpretations, which can create much confusion and disagreement among both academics and nonacademics alike. Moreover, such texts are very old and were written for people who are long dead and who faced challenges very different than the ones we face today. Therefore, the biases and worldviews of the authors of ancient texts are often very different than our own. Thus, when searching for meaning in such texts it is important not to apply our own biases to such texts.

For the purposes of this Thesis, I have tried to minimize the problems associated with the interpretation of ancient scripture by relying on both a combination of primary and secondary sources as well as multiple translations of primary sources. Furthermore, I acknowledge the fact that not all Advaitins or academics who have studied Advaita Vedānta will agree that the various aspects

or themes within the texts that I have emphasized are the ones most central to the religion or that my interpretations are orthodox.

APPENDIX B

INDIA'S ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The people of India can be said to be living on “borrowed time” (p. 3) Indeed, these are the words of Guha and Gadgil (2000), two very well respected researchers in the fields of ecology and sociology. To begin, it should be noted that there are many positive developments and current happenings regarding matters of ecological concern in India. However, these positives are vastly outweighed by a multitude of interconnected and ever increasing strains upon the environment.

The capital stock of soil, water, plant and animal life that is the core of India's potentially renewable resources is being depleted at alarming rates in ways that are threatening the very ability of these resources to renew themselves. Indeed, in *Deforesting the Earth*, Michael Williams (2003) points out that just in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa over 5.4 million ha of forest has been cleared from 1880 to 1980. This represents almost half of of the 12.5 million ha of forested land that existed in the three states in 1880 (p. 361). Similar rates of deforestation have occurred throughout the rest of India with a notable few exceptions. The results upon the subcontinent's biodiversity, indigenous peoples, water table, and very climate has been devastating (Guha

and Gadgil, 2000).

The Ganges, which flows through the the eponymous plains of northern India into Bangladesh, is 2510 kilometers in length and is the most important waterway in India. The Ganges Basin with its fertile soil is instrumental to the agricultural economy of India. The Ganges and its tributaries provide a perennial source of irrigation to a large area. Chief crops cultivated in the area include rice, sugarcane, lentils, oil seeds, potatoes, and wheat. Along the banks of the river, the presence of swamps and lakes provide a rich growing area for crops such as legumes, chillies, mustard, sesame, sugarcane, and jute. Fishing also provides opportunities to many along the river. In addition to agriculture thousands rely on the Ganges for drinking water and other daily needs. Unfortunately, the ecology of the Ganges is in grave condition. It is estimated that over 1 billion liters of raw sewage is dumped into the river per day. Moreover, inadequate cremation procedures and religious rituals regarding death mean that the river is also subject to being polluted by partially burnt or unburnt human corpses as well as animal corpses (Guha and Gadgil, 2000). The Ganges is also subject to vast amounts of industrial pollution, mostly from the leather industry, especially near Kanpur. Large amounts of chromium and other chemicals are dumped directly in the river from these sources. The ultimate results of this pollution will be dire upon India.

India's growing and enormous population should also be mentioned here, for many of the environmental threats India faces have been exacerbated by the

population explosion the country is going through. There are currently 1.1 billion people estimated to live in India. Furthermore, that figure is rising quickly.

Unlike, its populous neighbor, China, India has done little to reverse or even slow its rising population. This along with widespread poverty and a lack of infrastructure is causing an unprecedented rush to harvest all of India's resources without regard for the quality of life for future generations and even the present one in many ways.

APPENDIX C

THE NEED FOR A DEEPER SOLUTION

Most policymakers and even people around the world who are concerned with the damage human-beings are inflicting upon the ecosystems are of the opinion that only limited change is necessary. Moreover, these individuals feel that with advances in technology, humanity can largely mitigate or negate entirely the environmental threats we face. Individuals such as Al Gore and Jeffrey Sachs, who are both very concerned with environmental and social issues, have committed their lives to promoting this idea and to instigating the limited changes they see necessary to avoid environmental catastrophe.

While Gore and Sachs and others may be correct in saying that only limited change in our use of technology and in our pursuit of resources is necessary to negate or mitigate to “acceptable” levels the environmental risks humanity faces, I do not. It is a mistake to think that the current risks humanity faces is just the result of inappropriate uses of technology or an imprudent pursuit of resources. Rather, human beings utilize technology in dangerous ways and pursue resources with imprudence because of deep seated mindsets regarding our place in the world and how we view ourselves. To some extent, I do not believe it is appropriate to ask whether “technological optimists” such as

Gore and Sachs are correct. In his book, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore gives a very eloquent synopsis the problem confronting humanity in climate change and even proposes a model for addressing it. He proposes through various technological solutions for both electrical power production, transportation, and other matters (some not yet developed) that he believes will mitigate the risks of severe climate change. While such technological fixes may work, the underlying problem will not be solved and another threat will crop up to replace climate change. Moreover, the actions people would need to take in order for that solution to work are not ones many people will be willing to make. Indeed, many polls in the United States show not even a majority of Americans believe that global warming is a grave threat.

To seriously address the ecological issues of our day it is not enough to propose "shallow" solutions that fail to take into account the reasons why things are the way they are in terms of human-to-nature interactions. Humanity must accept the need for radical change in order to harmonize our existence with the rest of nature.