

Deep Ecology: Indian Perennial Paradigms**Sanjit Sarkar**Ph.D. Research Scholar
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COVID-19 has revealed and reproved that human beings are not special creation on earth. It has proved our position on this planet as important as millions of species like Coronavirus. The pandemic has challenged arrogant anthropocentrism and has signalled us to co-live and co-evolve with countless species in harmony for survival. The environmental abnormalities and calamities remind us to fundamentally change our attitude towards nature for overcoming the evolutionary crisis. Deep ecology offers a new spiritual discipline for the basic solution to ecological degeneration. It means any integrated philosophy of Nature and 'earth wisdom' of ecological harmony and believes in the experience of Self-realization and in the intrinsic or inherent value of nature. Indian cultural paradigms and spiritual literature, which run through *The Vedas*, *The Gita*, *the Upanishads*, and *the Puranas*, etc. present the spiritual metaphysics and ethics which are very rich with deep ecological ethos, which can offer a solution to the environmental crisis through a radical shift in human consciousness, and through a fundamental change in the way people relate with nature. The paper explores the Indian deep ecological ethos which can be a new way of life in the post-Covid era for the next survival.

Key Words: Deep ecology, Intrinsic value, Spirituality, Vedanta.

Deep ecology is a spiritual philosophy that preaches a new world view to save the world from the present ecological degradation and degeneration. In response to the anthropocentric shallow environmentalism, Deep ecological consciousness has now emerged as a new spiritual discipline. By 'ecosophy' or Deep ecology Naess(1973), the founder of the deep ecology movement, means any integrated philosophy of Nature and an 'earth wisdom'-of ecological harmony. It believes in the experience of Self-realization or identification with the whole nature. For this, a deeper metaphysical and mystic relationship between the Self and nature is to be established through self-realization or through unfolding the Self outwards into the environment. Greg Gerrad says:

Deep ecology demands recognition of intrinsic value in nature. It identifies the dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of the environmental crisis and demands a return to a monistic, primal identification of humans and the ecosphere. The shift from a human-centered to a nature-centered system of values is the core of the radicalism attributed to deep ecology. (22-23)

Deep Ecology postulates the oneness of all living beings, non-injury, and Self-realization, or "re-earthing" as normative to address the ecological crisis. Arne Naess' biological egalitarianism among all living beings in an anti-class posture, that is the rejection of the exploitation of some by others, is the very essence of ancient Indian eco-tradition. The deep ecological principle of diversity and symbiosis, that is 'live and let live' in a beneficial mutual co-existence among living beings, is in line with Indian eco-ethics. Deep ecology is the complexity, not a complication of principle, which favours the preservation of complex relations among all in nature. The *Vedanta* has deeper light of deep ecology to heal nature with the celebration of the oneness of all lives. This light can purify human nature through destroying the delusive dilemma and arrogance of man so that the 'dualistic' self can be reconnected with the Divine Self to revere earthly nature as manifestations of God. This divine realization revives our dormant love in hearts, liberates our soul from materialism, and reinstates ourselves in its eternal position with universal nature. This realization uplifts us to understand this ecological universe with unique ethical responsibility and reverence. Indian eco-traditions teach us about 'intrinsic value' in nature to treat nature as a source of all life, a "total-field image" that is man is not simply "in" his environment, but essentially "of" it -as a source of unlimited joy, not as a resource only to be consumed and contaminated. Indian cultural heritage and spiritual paradigms which run through *The Vedas*, *The Gita*, *the Upanishads*, *the Puranas* and so on can illuminate and awaken the 'self' to "Self-realization" then there comes the change of consciousness of human mind and soul to the sense of universal uniformity and equanimity: transcending us from ego consciousness to eco-consciousness.

Deep Ecology (Ecosophy or Ecophilosophy) is a kind of *Vedantic* philosophy, "a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium" as it amplifies the awareness of the oneness and interconnection of all life. Ecosophy, a radical version of environmentalism, seeks ecological harmony or equilibrium in nature amplifying the awareness of the oneness and interconnection of all life in deeper and more harmonious relationships to avert ecological catastrophe through spiritual and moral awakening. Arne Naess thinks that all *Hindu* scriptures have become part of the vocabulary of environmental ethics. He interprets the *Bhagavad Gita* and other texts as supporting Deep Ecology. S. Cromwell Crawford, as quoted in Nelson, in his *The Evolution of Hindu Ethical Ideals*, argues that the "unitive view" of Hindu philosophy "can provide the basis for an environmental ethic."(Nelson.63). The philosophy of *Brahman*, he states, supplies the one essential ingredient of an environmentally sound ethic, namely, "reverence for nature." He points to the belief that *Atman* (the true Self) is one with *Brahman*, the idea that all beings are separate only apparently, actually being emanations of the one Brahman. This gives *Hinduism* a "cosmic" outlook on life: "The nature of the self in *Hinduism* includes all lesser forms of existence." Since everything is divine, an ethic of reverence is required from humans toward all other manifestations of God. Indeed, the universe, though it appears to be merely material,

is actually the universal consciousness itself. This doctrine, Crawford believes, “provides the philosophic basis for the Hindu’s veneration of the natural world.”(Nelson 63). In short, the Hindu tradition has an “ecological conscience” and deep ecological essence.

Vedanta (*Veda* means knowledge and *ante* means-end) is the scientific and philosophical treatise of the spiritual legacy of India. *Vedanta* says that Nature is the divine manifestation of God Himself and there is divine interconnection and interrelation among all in the universe and ecology. We can feel it if we can purify and enlighten our mental and spiritual ecology with holistic light and we can well appreciate everything of nature in ourselves and ourselves in everything and thus we take nothing in ecology separate but everything as a divine one. Divine oneness binds us with fellow-feeling and empathy with all in ecology. So, the *Vedantic* ecosophy is cosmic consciousness and this consciousness illuminates the way to the discovery of one’s soul and self-identifying one with cosmic divinity, where the human self is attuned with the Universe. The *Isha Upanishad*, identifies that the integral Divine Union which is thought as triple Divine apprehension that of (i) Self is in all things, INDWELLING; this indwelling Self expands to give the realization that (ii) all things are within the Self, OVERDWELLING; and this indwelling Self concentrates to give the realization that (iii) all things are made up of stuff of the Self, INDENTITY. These triple realizations are identified as a starting point for integral Divine action extending over the whole earth through a universalized and impersonal consciousness. *Vedanta* says the self is the pure consciousness that inspires and illuminates nature. Our pure consciousness with harmonized heavenly universe helps in the pure contact between the subject or self and the universe or Nature. So to reach this understanding with nature, the soul and self are to be illuminated with the divine light of the *Vedanta*, and thus the clouds covering self and soul with—materialistic attachment and arrogance- are ‘to be purged of to discover the divinity in the heart of nature where the soul will find solace’ in eco-universe. In the Indian spiritual tradition of Man, God, and Nature, God is the infinite, eternal, and universal Consciousness, the creative origin of the Individual and Universe, Man and Nature. He is the deepest and innermost Self of our own being and the universe and in which we can feel our unity with all creation. Nature is the creative energy of God and the origin of all energies in the Individual and the universe — physical, psychological, and spiritual. Thus God in this concept is the spiritual Unity and Wholeness — Unity of Being, Unity of Consciousness, and Unity of Energy — sustaining and binding all creation. *Vedanta* says that all creation in this universe is an integral totality, a “total-field image” and a universal spirit binds all the creatures of this universe in “biological egalitarianism.” Here lies the importance of deep to deeper and the deepest ecological essence in Indian tradition.

The *Bhagavatha Purana* shows the evolution of life through different divine manifestations starting from *Matsya avatar*, God as fish moving in water, to *Kurma Avatar*, amphibious one like a tortoise, *Varaha*, boar, animal form, *Narashimha Avatar*, mammals like a man and animal then finally to *Parasu Rama*. So, all animals are spiritually interlinked through evolution. *The Upanishads* again show the evolution of human life in this way: “The earth is the essence of nature; water is the essence of the earth; Vegetation is the essence of water, human life is the essence of vegetation, meditation is the essence of human life, recitation, essence of balance or harmony is the existence of human beings in totally.”(Dr. Chaturvedi) The ancient Rishis believed that “God sleeps in minerals, wakes in animals and thinks in man.” (Justice Iyer) Thus, Indian ontology shows the interdependence of different

beings and even between human and non-human essence in respect of evolution of the universe. So, Indian mind delights in conferring godhead on any object that he comes across, thereby subjecting the objective world to the subjectivity of human imagination.(Paniker 9) Indian ethics never teach people to feel superior to other beings and to dominate others. According to Indian spiritual ethics, “Nature does not need to be controlled or transformed or decorated; she needs to be accepted in her entirety as a whole... She can be loved and celebrated as she is... But she is alive and must not be diminished or reduced”(Ravindra 38). The *Upanishadic* light delineates a supramental ecology to revolutionize human thought, where the human self realizes its true spiritual truth, and thus ego-centric human nature disappears to have eco-centric nature when an integral relationship grows between human and ecological worlds with the help of inner realization. The human mind finds divine pleasure being merged in the contemplation of integral wholeness of the eco-universe as he feels perfection in himself overcoming dualistic delusions, ‘dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture as the origin of environmental crisis, and demands a return to a monistic’(Greg). The Divine light of *Vedanta* can purify, transform, universalize, divinise and integrate our feeling with superior Consciousness to look at nature with compassion and can bind us with nature with reverence and ethical ethos. Chanting the *Upanishadic Slokes* uplifts us to liberate our soul from lower nature to enjoy blissful spiritual enjoyment in the heart of ecology and thus we with ‘Self- realization’ feel unity and interdependence. Self-realization is the means for an individual to intuitively gain an ecocentric life, the earth is to be thought of as a part of human life not separate from it. Deep ecological consciousness in the *Vedanta* transcends us from egoic ignorance to a deep song of nature with pure Self. Then we are to be disciplined with the thought that- “Everything within this world is possessed by God. He pervades both the animate and the inanimate. Therefore one should only take one’s fair share, and leave the rest to the Supreme”. (*Isa Upanishad* 1, quoted in Ranchor pp 70)) We feel,- “This earth is (like) honey for all creatures, and all creatures are (like) honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reverence to oneself, this shining, immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this self. This is immortal, this is Brahman, this is all. (BU2.5.1, Radhakrishnan pp 201). Radhakrishnan comments on this passage as follows: “The earth and all living beings are mutually dependent, even as bees and honey are. The bees make the honey and the honey supports the bees” (Radhakrishnan, pp202) “This mankind is (like) honey for all beings, and all beings are like honey for this mankind. This shining, immortal person who is in this and with reference to oneself,”(BU 2.5.13 pp 204).

According to Indian traditions Earth, Air, Space, Water and Fire are five *Pancha Mahabhutas* (the Five Great Elements) who form the web of life and environment and so all lives and environment are internally interconnected and interrelated. The Upanishads analyse this interrelation on the basis of Brahman, the ultimate reality, and Atman, the individual reality. “From Brahman arises space, from space arises air, from air arises fire, from fire arises water, and from water arises earth” (Jain, 2011) Vedanta says that the Atman pervades everything of this universe in the form of vital energy that is called *Pranasakti*. All materials, senses, mind, everything draw energy from the *Pranasakti* and evolution of this energy is actually the evolution or *Sristi*. The *Purusa Sukta*, a hymn of *Rig Veda* also says that the gods, the earth and the heavens are born in the primal person (*purusa*) and thus shows innate interconnectedness of all. Indian *Rishis* have shown a relationship between the five elements and our five sensory organs. The nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to

air and ears to space. This inter-relationship establishes the fact that people need to give them the same importance as they give to their sensory organs. These Five *Mahabhutas* are cosmic elements which create, nurture and sustain all forms of life, and after death or decay they absorb what was created earlier; thus they play an important role in preserving and sustaining the environment. (Dwivedi, 2001). Lord Sri Krishna says, “Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism—thus is My Nature divided eightfold” (Bhagwad Gita 7.4 Swarupananda. pp165). “Know that these two (My higher and lower Natures) are the womb of all beings; I am the origin and dissolution of the whole universe.” (Bhagwad Gita 7.6 pp 166). Naess may have here immense light of his integrated philosophy of Nature –an ‘earth wisdom’. In such realization there is one essential ingredient of an environmentally sound ethic, namely, “reverence for nature.” (Crawford)

Environmental crisis is an evolutionary crisis. To address this critical evolutionary crisis lost understanding of the relation among God, nature and human beings is to be restored and revived. *Vedanta* makes us understand the all-encompassing and eternal unity in nature by helping us to reduce our material desires- purifying our will and transforming our mind into a pure crystal consciousness and then we can experience a common ecological consciousness or ‘eco-conscience’. This pure ‘eco-conscience’ makes us appreciate and admire pure beauty of Nature. Nature, God’s energy, thus harmonizes us with the ultimate and supreme Truth. This divine realization revives our dormant love in heart, liberates our soul from materialism and reinstates our self in its eternal position with universal nature and thus lifts us to understand this ecological universe in unique way. After this understanding there remains no possibility of discrimination as “he who sees everyone in himself, and himself in everyone, thus seeing the same God living in all, he, the sage, no more kills the Self by the self.”(*the Bhagavad Gita*) and thus if we hurt nature, it will be suicidal.

Vedantic ecological wisdom awakens our reverence for nature and the ‘intrinsic value’ of other things erasing any ambiguous relationship and egocentric prejudices. It is always involved in continuous, comprehensive, deep inquiry into ‘values’ of the nature and the Self. In Deep Ecologists’ realization that ‘All is One’ and interconnected is aptly *Vedantic*. *Vedantic* philosophy helps us to achieve ecological equilibrium in this universe with ‘Self-realization’. The Vedantic expression “*Sarvabhuta-stham atmanam Sarva-bhutam catmani iksate yoga yuktatma sarvatra Samadarsanah*” means, “He sees himself is yoked in discipline, and who sees the same everywhere.” Having this knowledge we understand that all life comes from the self expression of God, and thus all life is on the journey to achieve the oneness with God and ultimately we understand God in everything in nature and everyone. Thus we may have the understanding that all life forms are equal in the sense of value: “the person of knowledge sees no difference between a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or an outcast” (*Bhagavad Gita* 5:18 pp 130) and then whatever he experiences is charged with the presence of the divine or the manifestation of Brahman and feels environment as the dwelling place of the divine. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, “My energy enters the earth, sustaining all the lives: I become the moon, giver of water and sub, to feed the plants and trees.” A mantra in the *Chandogya Upanishad* also says: “whether it be the tiger or the lion, the wolf or the bug everything originates from it”. In *Sloka* 20, Chapter 10 of the *Gita*, Lord Krishna says, “I am the self seated in the heart of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of all beings.”(pp 229-30) So all beings are alike and we are all ethically and spiritually interlinked. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna compares the

world to a single banyan tree with unlimited branches in which all the species of animals, humans and demigods wander. Such “unitive view” of Indian deeper ecological tradition “provides the philosophic basis for the Hindu’s veneration of the natural world.”(Crawford). In *Brhadaranyaka Upanisad* there we find perfect co-existence and co-operation of human and ecological balance. “In so far as he gives shelter and food to men, he becomes the world of men, In so far as he gives grass and water to the animals, he becomes the world of animals. In so far as beasts and birds, even to the ants find a living in his houses he becomes their world. Verily, as one wishes non-injury for his own world, so all beings wish non-injury for him who has this knowledge. This, indeed, is known and well investigated.” (BrhadaranyakaUpanisad 1.4.17. Radhakrishnan pp 172).

India, a spiritual field since times immemorial, has been perceived as a holy land (*punya-bhumi*). In the ethical landscape of India rivers, mountains, forest have been associated with sacred bond with human evolution as integral part, as a spiritual source. The *Srimad Bhagavatam* says as quoted in Ranchor (pp 28) that “... the rivers are the veins of the Cosmic Person and the trees are the hairs of His body. The air is His breath, the ocean is His waist, the hills and mountains are the stacks of His bones and the passing ages are His movements”. (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 2.1. 32-33.). According to Indian tradition in this universe all creation is an integral totality. The presence of a universal spirit binds the creature of this universe. The *Vedic* literature regards mother Earth as goddess (*Bhu Devi, Bhumi, or Prithvi*). She is always gracious to us. *Atharvaveda* provided that “she is at times mother and father and product of *Antariksha*. Everything has been and is being and will be created due to Earth. Water is the source of all living being and strength of Earth or cause of the earth.” The *Vishnu Purana* says, “As the wide-spreading *Nargodha (Banyan)* tree is compressed in a small seed, so at the time of dissolution, the whole universe is comprehended in Thee as its germ; as the *Nargodha* germinates from the seed, and becomes just a shoot and then rises into loftiness, so the created world proceeds from Thee and expands into magnitude.” “Verily, this whole (world) is the body of God”. (*tat sarvam vai harea tanuh*)-says *Visnu Purana* (1.12.38.). Since everything is divine, an ethical bond has grown among people with the other manifestations of God. So, eco-spiritual and eco-ethical taboo has been in human minds to sustain nature with all efforts. Thus in Indian Eco-traditions there is Naesseean concept-“knots” between man and nature, that finds an organic unity in a “total-field image” that is a man is not simply in his environment, but essentially of it -as a source of unlimited joy, not as a resource only to be consumed and contaminated.

In Rig-Veda, the trees are regarded to have divine powers due to their medicinal properties and advises us- “Do not harm the environment; do not harm the water and the flora; earth is my mother, I am her son; may the rivers remain fresh, do not harm waters”. “Do not cut trees, because they remove pollution.” (*Rig Veda*, 6:48:17) A verse from Rig-Veda says, “Thousands and hundreds of years if you want to enjoy the fruits and happiness of life then take up systematic planting of trees.” “A single tree nurtured by a man performs what a son would do, in that it gratifies gods with its flowers, travellers with its shade, men with its fruits; there is no fall in hell for the planter of a tree.” (*Kane*). The *Atharvaved* says that the earth is not only for us, but for other creatures as well-“Born of Thee, on Thee move mortal creatures; Thou bearest them-the biped and the quadruped;” On this Dwivedi wrote “Whether we are in a rural area, in woods, on a battleground or in public meetings(whatever we are) we should always speak graciously about the Mother Nature and be respectful to her.” (Dwivedi,

1997, p. 31). According to M. Vannucci, the *Atharva Veda* says that; “Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of Nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms.” (Vannucci70). A deep ecological kinship among all forms the strong eco-ethical and eco-spiritual foundations of Indian deep ecological traditions.

God’s grace may be achieved through love and fellow-feeling not by killing or harming His other creations. “God Kesava is pleased with a person who does not harm or destroy other non-speaking creatures or animals.” (*Visnupurana*, 3.8.15). In Yajur Veda it is said that “No person should kill animals helpful to all. By serving them one should obtain heaven.” (*Yajur Veda*, 13.47; quoted in Dwivedi and Tiwari, 1997, pp 177). Varaha and Matsya Purans regard planting trees as pious activity and treat a tree is equal to ten sons and say that those who plant trees will not go to hell. Such environmentally sound ethic binds us with “reverence for nature” with deep ecological understanding.

In India sacred plants have her ecological heritage and associated with divine communication and divine manifestation. Several plants have been worshipped with reverence and they are regarded as the abodes of various gods and have been seen as an integral part of human consciousness. For the tree worshipping people of India have been cherishing a natural reverence for nature and enjoying a sacred bond with nature. In Indian traditions trees, fruits and plants have sacred significance. Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*(9.26), “I accept a leaf, flower, fruit, or water or whatever is offered with devotion.” Flowers, leaves, fruits are offered to God during worship. The different forms of nature are worshipped and revered here as plants like *Tulsi*, trees like *Peepul*, birds like Garuda and animals like lion and so on. Millions of people of India chant *Sanskrit* mantras daily to revere rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and the earth. The forests were revered as *Vana Devata* and different plants and trees are attributed as symbols of God - as Lotus symbolizing *Laxmi*, *Banyan* as *Brahman*, Fig as *Rudra*, *Peepal* as *Vishnu* and so on. It is inauspicious to urinate or spit on a tree; even plucking flower or leaf or a branch of a tree after sunset is forbidden. In every *yuge* of Indian heritage there were sacred trees as in *SatyaYuge* the sandalwood was the sacred tree, in the *Treta Champak* tree, in the *Dwapar* the copper bush and finally in *Kali Yuge* the Jackfruit. There were sacred forests as *Naimisha-aranya*, *Chitrakuta* and *Dandakaranya*, *Panchavati*, *Kishkinda*, and *Ashoka vana*. The *udumbara*(cluster fig) was used for making the *yupa* (sacrificial pole), *udumbara* and *khadira* for making the *sruva* (ladle), *nyagrodha* for making the *chamasa* (sacrificial bowl), and *bilva* for its fruit and for making the *yupa* for the sacrifice.(Krishna & Amirthalingam 14).The branches of the *papal* and *shami* were used to kindle the sacred fire and plum to make sacrificial bowls. So every part of tree is sacred, symbolical and revered to Indians. A deep ecological association with tree has been there in Indian mind and great sages went to the forest again and again for enlightenment, wisdom and lesson.

The Vedic sages found sacred web of the environment in which they lived, where they felt the all-encompassing and all-inclusive spiritual ecological harmony and equilibrium. To them, Nature and all creatures had a loving and reciprocal relationship based on unity, where Nature was mother of all love and care. *Vedantic* eco-spirituality can change our attitude to Nature binding us with cosmic consciousness giving us a “cosmic” outlook on life. This

sacred inner light of Indian perennial traditions can heal the nature with the worship of the sacredness and oneness of all life. We can learn to live in empathetic harmony with nature hearing her cry with sacred sympathy, treating her as a source of all life, not as a resource to be consumed. Selfish human self finds true identity in pure *Vedantic* light, and feels elated with the understanding of the true Self, when Nature becomes ours. *Vedantic* spiritual paradigms can stir inner light to elevate our soul, expand our vision, and nourish our heart so that we can listen to the cry of distressed Nature with hearty compassion, with our deep, deeper and the deepest ecological love, reverence and conscience.

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