

## Ecosophy in *Bhagavad Gita* : Natural Harmony and Interdependence

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### Abstract

*This paper examines how the notion of ecosophy, a notion developed from the Western philosophy of the deep ecology, is inherent in the Eastern philosophy of Bhagavad Gita. Bhagavad Gita, a book on the philosophy of life, provides different notions of ecosophy such as harmony and interdependence. Harmony is the essence of life and existence. Western natural philosophy has talked much about natural harmony in the last three decades, especially with the deep ecological movement and the publication of Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle (1989), and The Dream of the Earth (1988). Western societies have realized that a change has to be taken in the way we treat nature for better harmony. As a result, the theory of ecosophy has been developed to redefine the human and nature relationship. But in the East, the idea of natural harmony can be traced back to ancient philosophical and religious traditions that emphasize the interconnectedness and balance of the natural world. The concept of harmony with nature has long been a central tenet in the texts like Vedas and Upanishads, however, the real principle of environmental awareness is a quite new issue to both the East and the West. This paper aims to unearth how Bhagavad Gita has focused on the essence of natural harmony. As a philosophical and spiritual dialogue set within the larger epic, the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita establishes a discussion on selflessness, devotion, self-discipline, meditation, and the nature of the soul, but this paper uses lately practiced Western theory of ecosophy as a tool to explore the idea of the state of balance, interconnectedness, coexistence and synchronicity in natural creation as enunciated in the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita.*

**Keywords**: Ahimsa, ecosophy, interdependence, natural harmony, niskama karma.

### Introduction

The term ‘ecosophy’ was first used by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the 1970s. Being involved in the movement of deep ecology, he has conjoined two ideas ‘ecology’ and ‘philosophy’ to examine the ecological issues developed in Western philosophy. Ecosophy is ecological philosophy, but more particularly it has to do with “one's own personal code of values and a view of the world which guides one's own decisions (insofar as one does full heartedly feel and think they are the right decisions)” (Naess, 1989, p. 36), but not just as the subject of study or a discipline.

The area of study could be eco-philosophy, but since this study is more concerned with huankind, it is ecosophy. ‘Eco’ refers to ecology and ‘sophy’ refers to insight, and therefore ecosophy is the insight about ecology. And therefore, ecosophy is ecological philosophy, a philosophical perspective that focuses on the relationship between human and non-human beings or human and natural environment. It focuses on understanding and addressing environmental issues and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Ecosophy, as a discipline of deep ecology, talks about the radical shift in human values and behavior towards the natural world, and emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living things and the interconnectedness of all ecological systems.

The exertion of connecting the late 20th-century theory of deep ecology with *Bhagavad Gita*, the text supposed to have been composed during 400 BCE to 400 CE, is a convoluted research journey. The epic based on the philosophy of *Upanishads* and the principle of the war between justice and injustice as articulated in *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita* is also known as *Bhagavad Gita* or simply *Gita* in a common and familiar term. The *Gita* embodies the profound teachings of Lord Krishna, the manifestation or *Avatara* of the Supreme Being. These teachings are conveyed through a personal and profound dialogue with his disciple Arjuna. *Gita*, “a source of wisdom and salvation” (Nelson, Reading the *Bhagavadgita* from an Ecological Perspective, 2000, p. 130). It is written in the form of a conversation between Prince Arjuna and Lord Krishna, who serves as a spiritual guide in the long war of *Dharmakshetra* and short (18 days) war of *Kurushetra*. Therefore, it is structured in 18 chapters. It provides the message of humanity, the philosophy of life and death, principles of *Prakriti* and *Purusa* or nature and desire. Supposing *Gita* as a significant text in Hindu philosophy or Hindu religion is one mode of generating faith in the power of the supreme being. In the mode of generating spiritual understanding, it addresses profound existential questions and explores various paths to spiritual realization, and touches upon topics such as selflessness, devotion, self-discipline, meditation, and the nature of the soul. Doing this just limits the knowledge of *the Gita* within a certain religious or cultural group or identity or one aspect of life that is spiritual, however, the central aspect of life it is. But the *Gita* is significant for its teachings on ethics, duty, and the nature of reality, which serves the whole arena of human and non-human beings. This paper sets a limit, here, with a departure in that it aims to see the *Bhagavad Gita* not as a religious scripture, but as a text with the message of ecological philosophy, which exactly is the life philosophy for Hindus and non-Hindus, Indians, and non-Indians, and all human beings yonder any geographical, religious and other zones.

### **Objectives of the Study**

*Bhagavad Gita* is an ancient scripture and ecosophy is a later 20th-century

philosophy related to ecology. The objective of the study is to analyze *Bhagavad-Gita* and search the elements of ecosophy in it. To accomplish this general objective, this study follows specific objectives as below:

- observe the major principles of ecosophy;
- uncover the principles of ecosophy in *Bhagavad Gita*;
- connect the Eastern lifestyle proposed by Gita philosophy with the recently touched requirement of ecological harmony.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to address the following research questions:

- What issues of ecosophy does *Bhagavad Gita* incorporate?
- How does *Bhagavad Gita* integrate the message of natural harmony, interdependence, and wholeness?

### **Ecosophy: The Ecological Philosophy**

Ecosophy combines two terms, ‘ecology’ and ‘philosophy’. Ecology is “the study of relationships among organisms and between them and their environment” (Gosling, 2001, p. 04). Philosophy is the love of wisdom. As a branch of philosophy, ecology explores the relationship between humans, nature, and the environment. It seeks to develop a holistic understanding of ecological issues, human existence, and ethical considerations related to human interaction with the natural world. This concept was first introduced by Arne Naess during the 1970s when he was particularly proposing the concept of deep ecology, “The term ‘Deep Ecology’ was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who outlined the broad principles of the Deep Ecology movement in a brief paper in 1973” (Mathews, 1991, p. 84). Deep ecology is a broader philosophical framework and ecosophy comes within it which emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and ecosystems. It encourages a shift in human consciousness to recognize the intrinsic value of non-human life forms and the importance of biodiversity.

Philosophy refers to the discipline which focuses on the study or wisdom, an activity instigated to understand fundamental truths about the world in which we live, and our relationships to the world and each other, “philosophy is not a simple art of forming, inventing, or fabricating concepts” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 5), but it “is the discipline that involves concepts” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 5). Philosophy, therefore, is a mode of theorizing the concept through constant inquiry, “what philosophy is not: it is not contemplation, reflection, or communication” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 6). It provides insight into the understanding of the things around us. As the combined form, ecosophy signifies ecological philosophy. Gauttari defines ecosophy

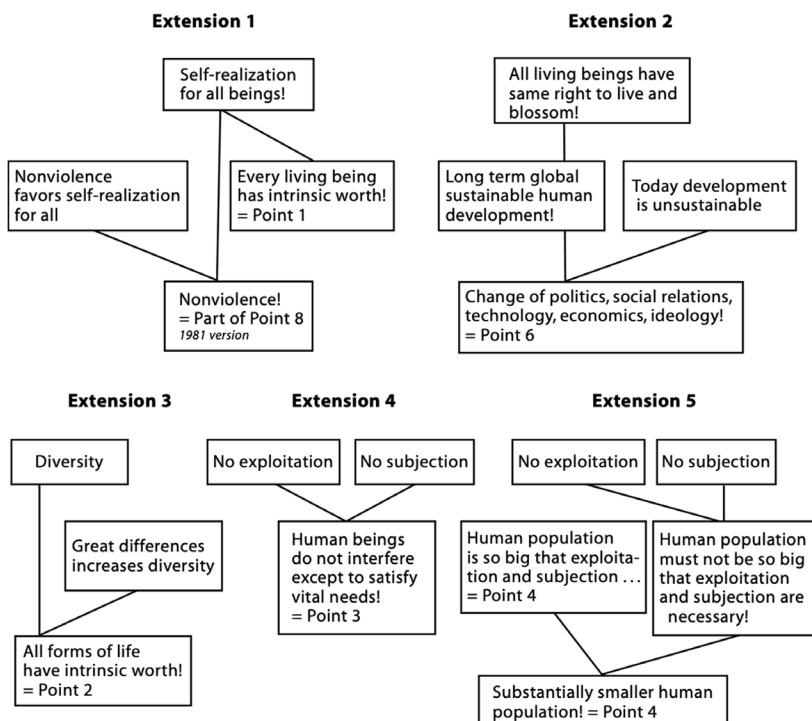
as “an ethico-political articulation - which I call ecosophy between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity)” (Gauttari, 2000, p. 28): social ecology, mental ecology, and environmental ecology.

Social ecology, the first type in Gauttari’s views, negates our traditional image of the natural world and its creation with the view, “Nature is always with us as a conscience of the transgressions we have visited on the planet- and the terrifying revenge that awaits us for our violation of the ecological integrity of the planet” (Bookchin, 2022, p. 65). It places the human mind within a natural context and tries to explore it with its natural history so that the traditional binary of thought and nature or social and natural would disappear. It raises the issue of the present human trend of supposing nature as a marketplace. It looks into the alarming state of social relations as Gauttari has realized, “assets and environments are destined to enter into a phase of decline. The demands of singularity are rising up almost everywhere” (Gauttari, 2000, p. 30). Supposing nature as a marketplace certainly leads human understanding to the rationale that nature is outside us. It negates the idea that we are within nature, and therefore this notion causes the continuous deterioration in the human-nature relation. With this reference, the social ecosophy consists “in developing specific practices that will modify and reinvent the ways in which we live as couples or in the family, in an urban context or at work, etc” (Gauttari, 2000, p. 34). Modern context has created an even more complex narrative that “the powerful individual rejects the perspective of the Natural community for that of personal scope of control: *This plot of land belongs to me. I own it. I may do whatever I want to do it!*” (Boylan, 2022, p. 16). This is the mantra in the material understanding of nature as a marketplace, where humans do not infer nature as a community.

The second ecology, as Gauttari analyses, is mental, further extended as mental ecosophy joined with philosophy, which has to do with human subjectivity. It is the time “to re-examine the relation between concepts of the individual and subjectivity” (Gauttari, 2000, p. 36). An individual is not just an individual; rather he/she is accompanied by subjectivity or the psyche. One’s behavior toward others, human or non-human is necessarily determined by the psyche. The philosophy which concerns ecology and human subjectivity then is mental ecosophy. It observes the relationship between the human psyche and nature, “The increasing deterioration of human relations with the socius, the psyche and 'nature' (Gauttari, 2000, p. 41). The declining relationship between psyche and nature could partly be the result of environmental and objective pollution, but more essentially, due to the ethical shift because “members of a community (human and non-human) have responsibility to be active members. Ethically one cannot completely shift this responsibility to others” (Boylan, 2022, p. 17). And, humans have the psyche of easily shifting the responsibility to others and acting individually, or more accurately subjectively.

The third type is environmental ecology focuses on the interaction among organisms and their environment. Interaction is an essential activity to maintain harmony and balance. The philosophy that deals with the social, psychic, and interactive relationship between the organisms, both humans and non-humans, and their environment is ecosophy. Ecosophy calls for a fundamental change in human attitudes, values, and behaviors to promote ecological sustainability and harmonious coexistence with nature. It serves as a philosophical framework that challenges anthropocentrism and encourages a deeper understanding of the natural world. It also fosters a more sustainable and harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. It focuses on the study of human-nature relationships. This world is equal to everyone, and all beings have the same right to live and blossom. One should have the self-realization which comes from nonviolence. This world consists of diversity and every natural element has its intrinsic value. Naess has developed and elaborated the concept of ecosophy emphasizing the importance of recognizing the intrinsic value of non-human life forms and promoting a deep ecological consciousness in a tree diagram which he calls Ecosophy T:

Figure: Ecosophy T



Source: (Naess, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom*, 2005, p. 535)

Hence, rooted in the theory of deep ecology, ecosophy provides a philosophical insight concentrating on the interactive relationship between the human and non-human world. It establishes the principles of interdependence, interconnectedness, harmony, balance, and non-violence. It expects a radical change in the way people think about their relationship with nature. It respects the existence of individual life but with the same right to live and blossom like others. It does not focus on individuality in isolation but on co-existence.

### ***Bhagavad Gita* and Ecosophy**

*Bhagavad Gita*, often referred to as *Gita* in common parlance, is a significant and revered text in Hindu philosophy and spirituality. It is considered sacred scripture by Hindus and has also gained recognition and influence beyond borders, attracting readers from various religious and philosophical backgrounds with many more interpretations. It addresses fundamental questions about life, duty, righteousness, and the nature of the self and the universe in the form of dialogues between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. It encompasses a wide range of philosophical insights to guide human beings, though the context narrates a mythical reference to the Mahabharata battle. Though spirituality is at the heart of Gita philosophy, the lessons it gives to the whole human beings provide insights beyond any spatiotemporal frame, and therefore, Gita invites numerous interpretations and abundant perspectives across time.

*Gita* suggests copious possibilities to define and redefine this world and suggests ways to change the behavior of human beings. There is a long gap between the creation of Gita and the theory of ecosophy. Keya Maitra examines the belief on the creation of the Gita, “The Gita is a part of the sixth book of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* that is believed to have been composed between 400 BCE and 400 CE, though the nucleus of the story of the epic was known much earlier” (Maitra, 2018, p. 30), and ecosophy has come up with an environmental movement known as deep ecology in 1978. The greatness of Gita rests on the fact that every mode of human thinking has some association with Gita philosophy in the area of knowledge and wisdom. *Bhagavad Gita* is a text conceived from a grand narrative, *Mahabharata* and ecosophy is a concept. *Bhagavad Gita*, a text in literature and a holy scripture with spiritual lessons proposes abundant philosophical insights and this paper tries to establish a research-based logic to examine how *Bhagavad Gita* consists of ecosophy, one among the late 20th-century theories of deep ecology.

### **Eco-interconnected and Interdependence**

Deep ecology seeks the value away from the individual to some other unit with the concept that every basic unit creates a greater biosphere life is what the unit. Every

element of this unit is strongly connected at the level of interdependence. Arne Naess argues, “the aspect of the science of ecology that is most important is the fact that it is concerned first of all with relationships between entities as an essential component of what these entities are in themselves. These include both internal and external relations” (Naess, 1989, p. 36). For example, when a tiger eats a deer, the deer is in external relation, but eating is internal relation because both animals are within the internal relation of an environment. This type of relationship exists everywhere, which generates unity in nature. Fritjof Capra observes this principle of interrelation in Eastern philosophy, “The most important characteristic of the Eastern worldview—one could almost say the essence of it—is the awareness of the unity and mutual interrelation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestations of a basic oneness” (Capra, 1983, p. 130). This principle of oneness links everything in nature.

Everything in nature works with the principle that ‘all things hang together’ with overlapping relationship for which Krishna says in *Bhagavad Gita*, “Everything rests upon me as pearls are strung on the thread” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 330).<sup>1</sup> Krishna supposes himself as the central element in which all the other beings are linked to one another. Krishna’s message of centering himself in the symbol of a thread may create separate meanings in spiritual understanding, but it gives an eco-understanding that the things in the world are necessarily linked to each other. In this connectivity, one cannot exactly imagine individual existence in isolation, “the world is made up of a plurality of discrete individual substances: the world has been viewed, since classical times, as an array of individual objects which are logically mutually independent but bound in a web of causal ties” (Mathews, 1991, p. 1). Gita philosophy views this world as a systematic arrangement of every individual like a garland in which the creator is the thread.

Krishna, in *Bhagavadgita*, gives the lesson of interdependence to Arjuna, which is interpreted as the ecosystem in modern science. He says that the elements and events in nature ‘hang together, “All living bodies subsist on food grains, which are produced from rains. Rains are produced by performance of Yajna, and yajna is born of prescribed duties” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 161).<sup>2</sup>

Living beings depend on natural events and natural events are determined by human activities like yajna and karma (duties). *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the interdependence of the natural world in the way ecosophy focuses on the intrinsic relationship,

Organisms as knots in the field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the

same things. (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 28)

It highlights the idea that every living entity is part of a larger web of life and that harming one aspect of creation affects the balance of the entire system. This idea further leads to Gita-image of multiplicity and diversity in nature. Gita philosophy respects diversity and proposes the idea of an essential link among the elements in diversity, and “all are intimately interconnected” (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 38). Krishna accepts the variety of worldly existence and expects unity out of the variety when he says, “I am the taste of water, the light of the sun and the moon, the syllable OM in Vedic mantras; I am the sound in ether and ability in man” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 332).<sup>3</sup>

Krishna’s cognizance is that the earth, sun, moon, water, sky, and plants all are varieties of nature, but all of them do have unity. With this argument, *Bhagavad Gita* focuses on the point that the central cause of this interlock between organisms is the creator or the supreme soul. One who is aware of this fact can see equality in every being.<sup>4</sup> There is equality, and equality exists in God. The division between the beings can be felt in the relativity of intrinsic value, “living beings can be ranked according to their *relative intrinsic value*” (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 167). And more often, the difference is just caused by the extrinsic value for which we give something more focus as part of human need or intrinsic value can also be relative. If something is characterized as intrinsically valuable, then it is simply analytic that, other things being equal, it should not be destroyed or prevented from existing (Mathews, 1991, p. 83). *Bhagavad Gita* does not make a difference in the natural existence but accepts the fact that “vast complexes of interrelations is a characteristic of our existence which we joyfully acknowledge, contemplate, and study” (Naess, *Ecosophy and Gestalt Ontology*, 1989, p. 134). Gita philosophy accepts that variety exists in nature, but variety is not the point of division or difference and is something that is extrinsically more valuable than others.

Moreover, intrinsic value does not negate the relation of one form of nature with others. In *Ecological Self*, Freya Mathews defines intrinsic value as the value of an individual to others, “Just as every part of my body matters to me, since I matter to myself, so every part of the universal self or system matters to it—every part possesses a value which it inherits from the value of the whole” (Mathews, 1991, p. 82) Krishna sees two kinds of the values of nature - one perishable and another imperishable- in which perishable quality reflects the extrinsic value that goes on changing and imperishable matches to the intrinsic value of individual nature. Sri Krishna states, “There are two classes of beings, the fallible and the infallible. In the material world every living entity is fallible, and in the spiritual world, every living entity is called infallible” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 648).<sup>5</sup>

The sloka reveals that those who are perishable are always changeable and they undergo the same process of change through six stages: birth, growth, duration, reproduction, declining, and dying. All living beings are conditioned, conditioned with the world, with internal relations, and with the mode of coexistence. Nature consists of all these perishable things and Gita philosophy relates these things as Prakriti, and it always consists of energy. Every element in nature has an energy. The living entity of *the Bhagavad Gita* is the energy of nature in modern scientific terms. This energy is the source of life with interconnectedness. Living beings are perishable; living entities are imperishable, and this imperishable quality of nature is energy in modern science that never gets lost. Talking about the two interrelated domains of the natural world, the *Bhagavad Gita*, although primarily focused on spiritual and philosophical aspects, does touch upon certain ecological principles and concepts. While it does not explicitly discuss modern ecological issues, it provides valuable insights into humanity's relationship with the natural world. Lord Krishna conveys a message of interconnectedness to Arjuna, “Earth, water, fire, air, ether (space), mind, intellect, and ego—these are eight components of My material energy” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 326).<sup>6</sup>

The material energy, as Krishna says, is the material nature that constitutes all these matters, nature with both concrete and abstract qualities. Similar to this message of *Bhagavad Gita*, “ecophilosophy is also a philosophy of *total involvement*. And there is a relation between interdisciplinarity and total involvement” (Hoyer, 2012, p. 63). Krishna, through the dialogue in *Bhagavad Gita*, has delivered the unconditional idea of the relationship of interconnected, interdependence and total involvement in material nature.

### **Gita-Insight of Nonviolence and Ecosophy**

Arne Naess has proposed nonviolence as the basic notion of ecosophy, which inspires living beings to respect others and provide the right to live and blossom. Nonviolence is a practice that can be applied to lifestyle and culture too. Further, it comes as a governing principle in world religions to maintain order in nature “inquiry into the question of the relation between religion and the order of nature, one that wishes to address the crucial issues emanating from the present-day environmental crisis” (Nasr, 1996, p. 10). As *Bhagavad Gita* provides spiritual and philosophical knowledge, one for religious purposes and another for present-day life, it talks about nonviolence for both spiritual and practical modes of life that is the guiding principle for all ages. *Bhagavad Gita's* insight into nonviolence focuses on the belief of nonviolence as a habit or way of life, “practices must be emphasized, for realizing ecosophy requires means for uniting all of our spiritual, intellectual, psychological and aesthetic powers” (Drengson, 1989, p. 121). This practice of nonviolence, as proposed by *Bhagavad Gita*,

is essential to promote mutual trust and respect for each other in the present-day world. The concept of nonviolence, or *ahimsa*, is an important ethical principle imparted in various scriptures, including the *Bhagavad Gita*. *Ahimsa* is the state of respecting every living being at equal state and not to kill the living beings. Lord Krishna divulges spiritual wisdom and guidance to the warrior prince Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. While the context of the *Bhagavad Gita* is a war, the main teaching does not explicitly promote non-violence but emphasizes the principles of righteousness, duty, and the pursuit of spiritual liberation. These principles foster the idea of non-violence implicitly. Krishna has conveyed the message of *ahimsa* four times in *Bhagavad Gita*. He says that it is strongly necessary to practice *ahimsa*, *tapa* and *dana*. It means “humans should learn the qualities of nonviolence, equanimity, contentment, austerity, clarity, and fame” (Prabhupada, 1972).<sup>7</sup> The practice of *ahimsa* can “nurture new, appropriate, social activities, which will give rise to sustainable patterns of community life-styles” (Drengson, 1989, p. 121) This idea emphasizes the value of compassion, empathy, and respect for all beings. It encourages individuals to cultivate a mindset of nonviolence in their thoughts, words, and actions. These qualities are envisioned to bring a change in human lifestyle to respect both humans and nonhumans.

Nonviolence, as Lord Krishna further relates, is the source of human knowledge: “Non-violence, forgiveness and simplicity are the sources of knowledge” (Prabhupada, 1972).<sup>8</sup> Likewise, he further suggests to adopt *ahimsa*, “Learn nonviolence, truthfulness and leave the anger” (Prabhupada, 1972).<sup>9</sup> Do not follow the principles of violence; speak the truth; get rid of the anger and live peacefully without anger is the principle of non-violence Krishna presents in *Bhagavad Gita*. *Ahimsa* “is the concept of welfare, not of any particular person or group or class, but of all creation” (Singh, 1995, p. 141). If this philosophy of *ahimsa* is practiced everywhere transcultural, it generates the worldviews of ecosophy across the religious and geographical boundary, “Ecosophy, while transcultural, is capable of being realized through diverse yet specific cultural forms” (Drengson, 1989, p. 122). Lord Krishna extends the concept of *ahimsa* as *tapa*, an essential mode of human life, “Non-violence is one of the qualities of *Tapa*” (Prabhupada, 1972).<sup>10</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* promotes a holistic approach to ethical action that includes nonviolence, selflessness, and the pursuit of spiritual growth. It encourages individuals to act with righteousness, compassion, and detachment, ultimately leading to a more peaceful and harmonious existence.

Hence, the *Bhagavad Gita* upholds the principle of non-violence, which extends beyond human-to-human interactions. It encourages individuals to practice compassion and avoid causing harm to any living being, including animals and the environment. By practicing self-control, self-discipline, and mindfulness, individuals can overcome the impulses that lead to violence and harm. Lord Krishna’s view of *ahimsa*, in *Bhagavad*

*Gita*, explores global harmony of love, respect, and disciplined life with the same space as the life of others.

### **Dharma for Harmony and Balance**

*Dharma*, in Sanskrit, is to ‘uphold or sustain’. The *Mahabharata* (Karnaparva, chapter 49, Sloka 50) defines dharma as something that can be adopted.<sup>11</sup> It means nurturing the subjects is dharma. One should nurture dharma; and it nurtures the whole universe in return. In this sense, dharma refers to the duty or responsibility which has a direct attachment to the duty to cosmic order and law. The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes the importance of fulfilling one's duty or dharma. This notion of dharma has a wider influence. People with religious beliefs may understand it as religion alone, but dharma has a wider meaning. Its meaning can be extended to the essence of ecological order and harmony. This can be interpreted as recognizing our responsibility towards nature and embracing sustainable practices that protect and preserve the environment.

The *Gita* vision of *dharma* involves “as supportive of its vision of a harmoniously ordered cosmos, the idea that human beings must accept certain curbs on their desires so that this order can be preserved” (Nelson, Reading the *Bhagavadgita* from an Ecological Perspective, 2000, p. 133). Dharma is the activity of treating everyone equally for the welfare of all for which *Bhagavad Gita* denotes, “those who are always busy working for the welfare of all the beings are liberated and supreme” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 267).<sup>12</sup> The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes the significance of maintaining balance and harmony through dharma in all aspects of life with the vision that real delight resides in the welfare of all beings.

Lord Krishna says to Arjuna that dharma maintains the balance and order in the world. if *dharma* is destroyed and *adharma* flourishes, he would initiate to establish dharma, “Whenever there is a decline in dharma (righteousness), and an increase in *adharma* (unrighteousness), at that time I manifest myself on earth” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 201).<sup>13</sup>

He worries about the possible imbalance in the world order and he intends to take action to maintain it through *avatara*, “the *Gita* provides a powerful model of activism in the image of the Deity's voluntary descent (*avatara*) to Earth for the very purpose of protecting *dharma* and uprooting *adharma*, the forces of disorder” (Nelson, Reading the *Bhagavadgita* from an Ecological Perspective, 2000, p. 133). This desire enhances the activism for the natural order and harmony. This principle of dharma can be extended to ecological systems, promoting the understanding that sustainable coexistence and responsible stewardship of the environment are essential for the well-being of both humans and nature. Only then, the balance and harmony can be maintained.

### **Gita-vision of Wholeness and Intrinsic Value**

Deep ecology raises many issues. Naess has suggested eight points and one among them is the independence and inherent value of nature, “The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes” (Naess, *The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects*, 2012, p. 86). Every human and non-human being are complete in themselves. They do have wholeness in themselves, however, their internal and external relation is unavoidable and sometimes predictable, “If a being has an eternal soul, this being is of greater intrinsic value than one which has a time-limited or no soul (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 167). Hoyer sees ontological reason in the natural interrelations:

Both bio- and human ecology focus on wholeness, on complexities, and on the complex inter-relations between the diversity of units, that make the whole both something more and something else than the individual parts. It is a view that not only gives an epistemological reason but also an *ontological reason* for interdisciplinarity. (Hoyer, 2012, pp. 44-45)

Everything is ontologically linked with others, and wholeness is maintained. Lord Krishna has told to Arjuna that everything in the universe is moving and nonmoving and all are in one place, in his body:

Whatever you wish to see, behold at once in this body of mine. This universal form can show you whatever you now desire to see and whatever you may want to see in the future. Everything-moving and unmoving- is here completely in one place. (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 494)<sup>14</sup>

Arjuna sees the whole universe in Krishna’s body, even the sun and the moon. All the material nature exists as moving nature and the spiritual world exists as unmoving in which the physical world depends on the cosmic will to exist, “Our world, the world of physical reality, is an expression of selfhood, of a cosmic will-to- exist” (Mathews, 1991, p. 82). In *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna presents himself as a cosmic will. He has the will to maintain the physical world as a whole which includes both properties, wholeness, and ontology with intrinsic value, and “this can be termed the *inherent value of nature*” (Hoyer, 2012, p. 57). Both- movable and unmovable- exist in unity and both have their intrinsic value, the value of an individual for individual sake, but as Krishna says people only see the material world which is moving by nature, “One who can see that all activities are performed by the body, which is created of material nature, and sees that the self does nothing, actually sees” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 597).<sup>15</sup>

It means the world has material and spiritual existence in which the material world is the nature we live in. The role of ‘the soul’ demands a different mode of discussion, that is spiritual, but *Bhagavad Gita* accepts the truth that every living entity

has its own identity.<sup>16</sup> When there are different material bodies, they do have different identities. And, these identities, in harmony create intrinsic value of the material world. Being in different identities for the value and importance of their own, all these material beings are interlinked in the form of wholeness. This wholeness, as *Bhagavad Gita* supposes, is unified with the supreme soul or the creator, and unity is maintained from the same, “unity which is the origin of all sacred forms and at the same time be able to grasp the significance of the meaning of sacred forms within the religious universe” (Nasr, 1996, p. 18). Material nature does have variety, but in essence, there is always unity and wholeness. Thakar observes the concept of wholeness in his book *Insight into Bhagavad Gita*, “The wholeness of life smiles at us through the blade of grass, through the flow of water, through the raindrops, through the frightening lightning, the depth of the ocean, the expanse of space; we are embraced by the wholeness of life” (Thakar, 2005, p. 25). Thakar also locates the Gita-insight of unity, “While we relate to nature, to fellow non-human beings and fellow human beings, let us be watchful that no fragmentation takes place within us” (Thakar, 2005, p. 25). Gita philosophy expects that there will be a relationship on the biological level and psychological level between humans and non-humans; material and immaterial, and physical and metaphysical nature.

Hence, the universe is the totality of every individual nature, however, it is not certain that the totality must show the quality of individual natural things, still it reflects, “By identifying with greater wholes, we partake in the creation and maintenance of this whole. *We thereby share in its greatness*” (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 173). Existence is the being of whole, the wholeness in individual nature which we call intrinsic value. Intrinsic value is the value of wholeness within an individual and this individual wholeness incorporates with the universal wholeness in a system, however, the problem rests on the human trend of separating nature in the name of individuality, for which Capra says, “In ordinary life, we are not aware of this unity of all things, but divide the world into separate objects and events. This division is, of course, useful and necessary to cope with our everyday environment, but it is not a fundamental feature of reality” (Capra, 1983, p. 131). The differences do exist, but the concern is the search for wholeness out of disintegration.

### ***Niskama Karma and Respect to Others***

In terms of genre, *Bhagavad Gita* can be classified as a philosophical and didactic text. It presents complex philosophical concepts through dialogues and guides Arjuna leading a righteous and purposeful life. One of them is the philosophy of *Niskama Karma*. *Niskama Karma*, refers to performing actions without attachment to the results or outcomes of those actions. The term ‘*nishkama*’ means ‘without desire’ or ‘selfless,’

while '*karma*' refers to actions. *Bhagavad Gita* teaches the principle that one should not expect anything as the result of our *Karma*. At its surface level, it simply relates to the principle that we should not expect anything so directly from our actions. This principle has its context to convince Arjuna to fight in the war of Mahabharata. This principle favorably applies to the selfless human actions of humans and non-humans in a wider perspective. Nelson and Jakobsen opine that The *Bhagavad Gita* supplements this world- sacralizing vision with an ascetic ethic of selfless activity in the world (Nelson & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 64). This ideal of desireless action, (*niskama-karma*), is also a principle of ecosophy. Arne Naess talks about self-realization which is not merely the realization of happiness for the self and the concept of self-realization naturally follows the principle of "living beings, using "living" in a rather broad sense" (Naess, Deep Ecology of Wisdom, 2005, p. 530). This broader sense of living in *Bhagavad Gita* is living with the sense of *niskama*, "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty" (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 121).<sup>17</sup>

This *niskama karma* has a connection to ecosophy in the sense that it encourages individuals to perform their duties and actions without seeking personal gain or being driven by material desires. This detachment from excessive consumerism and materialistic pursuits reduces the strain on natural resources and minimizes environmental degradation. By cultivating contentment and reducing the demand for unnecessary goods and resources, *niskama karma* promotes a more sustainable and ecologically responsible way of life. It involves acting for the benefit of others without expecting anything in return. This selfless attitude extends beyond human beings to include all living beings and the environment. By considering the well-being of other creatures and the planet itself, individuals practicing *niskama karma* make choices that promote ecological harmony and conservation. It encourages actions that support the overall balance and welfare of the natural world. Lord Krishna further says, "Perform your duty equipoised abandoning all the attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is yoga" (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 122).<sup>18</sup>

Lord Krishna says that Ahimsa is the greatest yoga of all. Practicing *niskama karma* involves acting responsibly and sustainably, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting eco-friendly practices. By embracing the principle of responsible stewardship, individuals can help protect the ecology and ensure the well-being of the planet for future generations. It also ensures the interaction among the organism in a positive environment, "organisms in interaction with each other and with the surroundings, organic as well as inorganic" (Naess, 1989, p. 36). The interaction leads to the understanding of *niskama* and then to purification, for which Krishna says, "The

yogis, by abandoning attachment, act with body, mind, intelligence, and even with the senses only for the purpose of purification” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 253).<sup>19</sup>

One who practices the yoga of *niskama karma* achieves purification and enhances purification in others with “a revived intimate relationship to Nature, to recognize and accept wholeheartedly our ecological self (Naess, *Deep Ecology of Wisdom*, 2005, p. 523). It helps to nurture awareness and consciously consider the ecological consequences of our actions too, which leads to sustainable choices. It could be the best activity for environmentally friendly practices.

### **Reverence to Nature: God in Nature and Nature in God**

*Bhagavad Gita* recommends a great reverence to nature, though it does not appear as the adoring of nature as eloquently as in the Vedas. Gita philosophy shows respect for nature with the idea that nature and the divine are spontaneously connected, or they are the same, “One experiences oneself to be a genuine part of all life. Each living being is understood as a goal in itself, *in principle* on an equal footing with one's own ego” (Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989, p. 174). Lord Krishna frequently says that he is at the core of all things in nature, “I am the Self, O Gudakesha, seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 470).<sup>20</sup>

Krishna mentions the presence of the divine in all beings, including nature. As *Bhagavad Gita* “reaffirms, from a theistic perspective, the Upanishadic vision of the inseparability of the world and the divine” (Nelson & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 664), the Supreme Being, (Krishna in *Bhagavad Gita*), resides within the hearts of all creatures, implying a connection between the divine and the natural world. Krishna, the divine incarnation, *avatara*, declares, “Of all manifestations, I am the beginning, the end, and the middle” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 479).<sup>21</sup> Krishna identifies himself with elements of the natural universe. This idea is further mentioned in the verse, “I am the generating seed of all existences. There is no being—moving or nonmoving—that can exist without Me” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 485).<sup>22</sup>

Gita philosophy asserts that all beings and forms of existence in nature depend on the divine energy for their existence, “God and nature were one and the same” (Dwivedi, 2000, p. 6). The presence of the divine as the essence foregrounds the relationship and interdependence between humans, animals, plants, and the environment as a whole. By recognizing this interconnection, individuals are encouraged to treat nature with reverence and care, understanding that the well-being of all living beings is interconnected. Krishna says, “I am the father of this universe, the mother, the support, and the grandsire. I am the object of knowledge, the purifier. I am also the Rik, the Sama, and the Yajur Vedas” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 422).<sup>23</sup>

Lord Krishna, in this verse, focuses that the Supreme Being is the only creator of the universe, and also its sustainer. Nature is seen as a manifestation of the divine, and all aspects of it are considered sacred. He further says, “For those who see Me everywhere and see all things in Me” (Prabhupada, 1972, p. 300).<sup>24</sup> It means God and nature are the ones. One can see God in nature and nature in God.

Nelson has observed that “there is the suggestion in the Gita that God may be perceived within the natural world, and vice versa” (Nelson, Reading the *Bhagavadgita* from an Ecological Perspective, 2000, p. 134). Krishna further identifies himself within individual elements, “I am *ashwattha*, (*peepal*) tree among the trees” (Prabhupada, 1972, p.475),<sup>25</sup> “I am the eternal seed of all beings” (Prabhupada, 1972, p.334).<sup>26</sup> Krishna identifies himself with the tree, with the seed, with the flower, earth, sky, and everything else. Likewise, he identifies with the earth, sky, birds, animals, and all-natural things which provide his attachment to nature to maintain equality and harmony. Hence, *Bhagavad Gita* highlights the significance of reverence for nature and the recognition of divinity within the natural world. It inspires the worldview that individuals, realizing the divine, appreciate, protect, and live in harmony with the environment. It further leads to the understanding of the interconnectedness and sacredness of all life forms.

## Conclusion

*Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient scripture based on the theme of the *Mahabharata* grand-narrative and the philosophy of Upanishads, does not directly address the ecological issue in the way it has come in the present-day environmental activities. Although the ecological principles in the *Bhagavad Gita* may not be as explicitly discussed or extensively elaborated upon as in contemporary environmental literature, they establish a fundamental understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings and the significance of living in harmony with the natural world as a whole integrated with intrinsic value.

Lord Krishna gives the lesson to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* that every element of nature is an essential component of God's creation. Each part naturally derives from and contributes to the entirety of this system. For instance, the sun provides stability to the Earth and supplies the heat and light necessary for life to thrive. The earth, in turn, produces food from its soil, sustaining our nourishment, and contains vital minerals for a civilized way of life. The air facilitates the movement of life force within our bodies and enables the transmission of sound energy. Living beings depend on grains; grains are produced by the raindrops; rain is created by yajna; and yajna is performed by human beings. This is the chain of life. So, as humans, we are also an integral part of God's creation. The air we breathe, the earth we treat, the water we drink, and the light

that illuminates our days are all bestowed upon the wholeness of nature.

While we depend on the favors to sustain our lives, we also bear responsibilities towards the integral system, this responsibility is *dharma* in *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna emphasizes that we are obligated to actively participate with the creative force of nature by fulfilling our prescribed duties in the service of God to maintain the *dharma*, otherwise, he will have to manifest in the form of *an avatar*. The performance we are assigned to is the *yajna* expected from us – engaging in actions that contribute to the well-being of the natural world and its preservation. Krishna recognizes the essence of interconnectedness and realizes that ‘everything hangs together’ like a garland of pearls. If one fulfills the duties and responsibilities with *ahimsa* and *niskama karma*, harmony will certainly be established and the material universe will be empowered with the living entity that is the natural energy in the mode of the ecosystem as intended by the divine.

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## Endnotes

- 1 मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव (BhG 7. 7)
- 2 अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः |  
यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः ॥ (BhG 3. 14)
- 3 रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः |  
प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु ॥ (BhG 7.8)
- 4 “समं पश्यन्हि सर्वत्र समवस्थितमीश्वरम्” (BhG 13. 29)
- 5 द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च |  
क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥ (BhG, 15.16)
- 6 भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च |  
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥ (BhG, 7. 4)
- 7 “अहिंसा समता तुष्टिस्तपो दानं यशोऽयशः” (BhG 10.5).
- 8 “अहिंसा क्षान्तिरार्जवम्, एतज्ज्ञानमिति प्रोक्तम्” (BhG 13.8/12),
- 9 “अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम्” (BhG 16.2).
- 10 “ब्रह्मचर्यमहिंसा च शारीरं तप उच्यते” (BhG 17. 14).
- 11 ‘धारणाद्धर्ममित्याहुः धर्मो धारयति प्रजाः’
- 12 “सर्वभूतहिते रताः” (BhG 5. 25),
- 13 यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत |  
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ (BhG 4.7)

- 14 “इहैकस्थं जगत्कृत्स्नं पश्याद्य सचराचरम् |  
मम देहे गुडाकेश यच्चान्यद्द्रष्टुमिच्छसि || BhG 11. 7||
- 15 प्रकृत्यैव च कर्माणि क्रियमाणानि सर्वशः |  
यः पश्यति तथात्मानमकर्तारं स पश्यति || (BhG 13.30)
- 16 “यदा भूतपृथग्भाव” (BhG 13.31).
- 17 कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन |  
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि|| (BhG 2,47)
- 18 योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा धनञ्जय |  
सिद्ध्यसिद्ध्योः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते || (BhG 2.48)
- 19 कायेन मनसा बुद्ध्या केवलैरिन्द्रियैरपि |  
योगिनः कर्म कुर्वन्ति सङ्गं त्यक्त्वात्मशुद्धये || (BhG 5.11)
- 20 अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः |  
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च || (BhG, 10. 20)
- 21 “सर्गाणामादिरन्तश्च मध्यं चैवाहमर्जुन | (Gita 10.32)
- 22 यच्चापि सर्वभूतानां बीजं तदहमर्जुन |  
न तदस्ति विना यत्स्यान्मया भूतं चराचरम् || (BhG, 10. 39)
- 23 पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः |  
वेद्यं पवित्रमोङ्कार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च || (BhG, 9.17)
- 24 “यो मां पश्यति सर्वत्र सर्वं च मयि पश्यति |(Gita.6.30),
- 25 “अश्वत्थः सर्ववृक्षाणां” (Gita 10.26),
- 26 “बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां” (Gita, 7.10),