Overview

• Critique of Lance Nelson’s reading of Vedanta and Gita
• Shankara – Two versions academic and traditional
• Description of Indian Dharmic leaders’ ecological efforts
• Hindu Dharma and Ecology
• Jain Dharma and Ecology
Vedanta – anti Nature?

• *Brahma Satyam, Jagat Mithyaa*

• Nature-devaluation in Shankara’s Advaita Vedânta = India’s current ecological problems?

• Vedantic world-denial → Abuse of rivers, forests, mountains and other natural resources?

• Vedantic world-denial → Indifferent society towards protection of environment?

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Academic Shankara

- “World-denying” philosopher, renounced his family duties
- Founder of Advaita Vedânta and Ascetic Order
- Wrote great commentaries on ancient texts such as Brahmasutra, Gitâ
- *Prachchhâna Bauddha* (crypto Buddhist)
- Studied by scholars but treated as an Exception by Orthodox Brahmins
- Little relevance for masses
Traditional Shankara

- Popular legend captured in *Digvijaya*
- Great Hindu Revivalist, "defeated" Buddhism
- Estd. four Hindu Matthis in the Northern, Eastern, Southern, and Western India
- Wrote Bhakti hymns (Jnana+Karma+Bhakti)
- Inspires Devotion, Social Activism, and World-Affirmation in Hindus, not Nature Devaluation

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Vedanta, Nature

- **Brahma Satyam, Jagat Mithyaa**
  - Nature-devaluation in Shankara’s Advaita Vedânta?
  - India’s current ecological problems?
  - Society indifferent towards environment?

 ✓ Advaita denounces attachment with the worldly matters, not the world.

 ✓ Advaita is against the duality of spirit and matter, thus “Ishaavaasyam Idam Sarvam”
Gita & Ecology

• Gitâ’s message – “Sthita Prajna” : To become a disinterested spectator about social problems?
  – Arjuna - Inspired to rebel against his elders and teachers, “Sthita Prajna” <> Indifferent
  – Actor “deconstructed,” not Action – Arvind Sharma’s note

• Gitâ 5.19 : Nature is conquered to establish in Brahman Nature conquering is not ecological domination but controlling one’s own nature (svabhava)

• Gita discourages nature worshipping and replaces it with devotion to one God Krishna
  – Krishna in cosmic form includes universe (ecology)
  – Hindus are .....
Brahman <> Monotheistic God

• Ann Gold in Rajasthan – “While Ghatiyalians conceive of God or the Lord (bhagvan) as meting out punishment in exchange for sin, this conception is very close to Hindu theories of karma and its inevitable fruits. It ought not to suggest Judea-Christian theories of a vengeful God who does not want his rules crossed. Notably, no one with whom we spoke named the author of divine punishment by any of the scores of names available in village religion……Rather, what we hear is a conviction that wrong actions reap evil rewards”

• “Human behaviors are irrevocably interwoven with the natural environment’s condition….the deterioration of one implies and involves the other.”

• God → Cosmic system, unlike Abrahmic God as suggested by Lance Nelson

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Ecological Movements

• “Whatever useful elements [in the ancient traditions] may exist must be reinterpreted to make them usable in the face of both new scientific knowledge and the destructive power of the technology it has made possible.”
  - Rosemary Ruether

• Bishnois in Rajasthan
• Athavale – Swadhyaya’s Prayogs
• Bahuguna – Chipko Movement

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1490s and 1940s

- **Bishnoi** (Vishnoi or “Twenty-Niners”)
  - Guru Jambheshwara (*Guruji*)
  - (1451 – 1536 CE)

- **Swadhyaya** (“The Self-Study Movement”)
  - “New Religious Movement” (20\(^{th}\) c. – )
  - Pandurang Shastri Athavale (*Dadaji*)
  - (1920–2003)
The Origin...

- Around 1485 CE...
  - The Drought
  - The Mystical Experience
29 Rules and 120 Statements

• Overlapping of Dharma
  – Protecting the environment
  – Personal hygiene
  – Spirituality
  – Personal and social morality
• “If you remember that the divinity residing in your heart also resides in animals, you will surely attain svarga...[you] will not be able to justify the violence when questioned by your own deities”.

*(my translation)*

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Environmentalism of the Bishnoi Guru

- Water Harvesting Sites
- Tree Plantation
- Animal and Bird Sanctuaries

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The Bishnoi Legend(s)...

- In 1730 CE and more...

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THE PEOPLE WHO HUGGED THE TREES

adapted by DEBORAH LEE ROSE

with pictures by BIRGITTA SÄFLUND
Bishnois Today...

- The Amrita Devi Award
The Swadhyaya Movement

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The Origin of Swadhyaya

• 1942 – Discourses on Hindu texts

• “The Indwelling God”
• “Devotion as Social Force”

• Devotional Activism

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“Reverence for all”

“The acceptance of the principle of the immanence of God not only generates reverence for self, reverence for other selves but also reverence for the whole creation. This attitude towards nature is nobler than the purely utilitarian attitude which leads to wanton destruction of nature and exploitation of biological resources. Most of the ecological problems can be solved if one develops reverential attitude towards nature.”

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“Silent Singing Revolution”

• Devotional Visits
• Socio-spiritual Shrines
• Ocean Worship
• Dairy Industry
• Tree Temples
• Farms of God
• Water Harvesting

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Prayogs

• Nature – For *Upasana* (Reverence), not just for *Upayoga* (Consumption) or *Upabhoga* (exploitation)

• *Vriksha Mandir* - “Arboreal Dharma”
  – “Vriksha main Vaasudeva”, “Paudhe main Prabhu”, “Chhod main Ranachchod”
  – More than 25 Tree-temples
  – Around 10 million plants

• *Go-Rasa* – “Bovine Dharma”

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“We are not environmentalists”

- Devotion and its “by-products”
- *Prayog* (Experiments) for farmers to express their reverence for divinity

*Current Swadhyaya Leader*

*Dhanashree Talwalkar (Didiji)*

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Water Harvesting

• Recharging the wells (about 125,000)

• Harvesting water in ponds (about 1000)

• “If you quench the thirst of Mother Earth, she will quench yours.” - Athavale

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Arboreal Dharma of Swadhyaya

• “Reason based Religion”
  – Krishna Attraction and Capillary Action
  – God in trees
Puja (worship), Pujari (priests)

- Vānaprastha
- Pujārī
- Produce as Prasad
A Lay Swadhyayi...

“One who goes to farms just for work is a farmer, but one who goes to enjoy and respect greenery, goes with reverence and gratitude for God. This reverential perspective inspires to make the entire world green.”

(Personal communication with Jitubhai Patel, January 2007)
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Krishna Plantations

- Annual Tree plantation activities (1993 - )
- Families recite Vedic hymns with trees

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A Timeline…

• 1979 – First tree temple
• 1987 – Wasteland Award
• 1996 – Magsaysay Award
• 1997 – Templeton Prize
• 1999 – 2\textsuperscript{nd} Highest Indian Award
• 2000 – 24\textsuperscript{th} tree temple
• 2003 – “Didi” continues the work…

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Dharma...

- "Dharma" used for "religion", "property", and "duty" (Weightman and Pandey 1978)
- Dharma for supernatural, natural, & human worlds... (Parajuli 2001)
Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities
Sustenance and Sustainability

PANKAJ JAIN

SCIENCE AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN INDIA
Moving the Mountains

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Thank you