



## Research Article

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# Ecological Consciousness: Exploring Some Indic Perspectives, Initiatives and Implications

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## Abstract

This article is based on a study of four contemporary Indic organisations within the purview of Hinduism in terms of their perspectives on ecological consciousness, ecological initiatives and micro and macro implications of perspectives and initiatives. The basic purpose is to see how spiritual and religious consciousness influences ecological consciousness. The pragmatic value of the exploration lies in providing a new insight to ecological consciousness (of the influence of religious and spiritual consciousness within the purview of Hinduism on ecological consciousness) in the wake of the current ecological crisis. The core finding is that sacralisation of nature is viewed as an ecologically viable proposition to combat the present day ecological crisis - sacralisation as instrumental in nature preservation, also bringing in dimensions of embedded morality in human nature relationships, soul-cosmos relations as revealing the individual being as the microcosm of the macrocosmic universe and the universe as a manifestation of the Ultimate Reality.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Ecology, Ecotheology, Indic Perspectives, Initiatives and Implications  
Shree Ganeshaya Namah

## Introduction

That ecological discourses form a quintessential part of discussions on 'development' is a postulate supported by a plethora of theoretical and empirical evidences. As distinct from 'environment' signifying the external physical realms, the term 'ecology' proposes an organic worldview- a harmonious co-existence of the existential multiplicity of life forms and the cosmos. What is proposed thus is a Kuhnian paradigmatic shift from scientism and technocentrism to the more holistic epistemologies proposed by the hermeneutics and the phenomenological schools. The various perspectives on ecology float differential ontologies and epistemologies in an attempt to picture a worldview of a harmonious co-existence of 'beings' and cosmos. Two such perspectives are spiritual ecology and ecotheology

reinstating theological doctrines and metaphysical stances rejected by hegemonic rationalisation and perpetuated by the notions of the Cartesian cogito. According to them sacralisation of nature is viewed as an ecologically viable proposition. Dimensions of empirical literature subscribing to them include descriptions on nature myths (mythology), cosmology, symbology and knowledge systems.

Within the Indic framework these references are also found in the context of Hinduism. In the contemporary context there exist voluntary organisations and initiatives within the purview of Hinduism. The typologies reveal organisations and institutions working on ecology drawing from tenets of Hinduism, religious voluntary organisations within the purview of Hinduism who concretely express their ecological stance or whose initiatives reflect ecological consciousness, organisations with political

adherings drawing from Hinduism and undertaking ecological initiatives and movements drawing from the ecotheological framework expressed in Hinduism. Distinctively reflecting the theoretical perspectives of spiritual ecology and ecotheology in praxis are religious voluntary organisations within the purview of Hinduism undertaking ecological initiatives. The movements combine a radical stance, organisations with political adherings look at ecological initiatives as subsidiary activities and organisations and institutions working on ecology combine other perspectival dimensions also.

The examination has been done in the light of the traditional indological view and the counter arguments. Some of the umbrella questions that have been looked at are: the applicability of the theoretical perspectives of spiritual ecology and ecotheology in praxis, the extent to which they question the hegemony of scientism and enlightenment rationality, the extent to which are they able to make a case in the light of the counter arguments, the strand of theoretical perspectives of spiritual ecology and ecotheology the organisations draw from and the extent of adherence to tenets of Hinduism. The focus is to highlight the paradigmatic shift, the basic difference in the approach to the ecological issues and how spiritual and religious consciousness influences ecological consciousness. The findings would have implications for religious voluntary organisations, organisations working in the area of environment/ ecology – the approach signifying a move beyond scientific management of the environment to a more holistic approach and an embedded ecological consciousness. For the discipline of social sciences and development discourses particularly this exploration signifies an attempt to reinstate theological doctrines and metaphysical stances rejected by hegemonic rationalisation.

## Review of Literature

Literature in the global context consists of few studies that have examined perspectives, positionalities of initiatives and ensuing implications of religious organisations on ecological consciousness. Few empirical evidences are also seen in the Indian context. Some studies have looked at the perspectives of religious voluntary organisations undertaking ecological initiatives. The perspectives of African Independent Churches

undertaking ecological initiatives has been examined<sup>1</sup>. According to the study, their tree planting activities expresses their association with Christ. This involves the assertion that Christ's body is creation and that he is the fulfillment of all creation, underlining the predominant interpretation of the cosmological inference of Colossians that "in Christ all things hold together". Description of the Christological basis of the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation was provided and has commented that in terms of perspectives it is a combination of the apologetic approach (trying to show that there is already a sufficient basis in scripture and tradition for an adequately Christian response to the environmental crisis), the sacramental approach (focusing on the sacral quality of the cosmos itself) and the eschatological approach<sup>2</sup> (focusing on the soul-cosmos relation along the line of McFague's notions of universe as Christ's body). The perspectives of New York based 'Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life' has been examined<sup>3</sup>. According to them, the perspective combines propositions from the Old Testament of the Universe as God's creation and therefore attributing it divine connotations along with the Judaic traditions of stewardship in the relation between humans and non-human nature. The perspectives and ecological initiatives of a few Buddhist organisations was studied<sup>4</sup>. They are the Zen Centre of Rochester, New York, which conducts the 'earth relief ceremony', San Francisco Zen Centre (Green Gulch Farm conducting organic farming), Australian based "Council for All Beings", and Thailand based "Buddhist Perception of Nature" Project and International Network of Engaged Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists. According to him, their perspectives draw primarily from the teachings in the Sutta Nipata, Anguttara Nikaya and the Vinaya Pitaka, all emphasising upon the divine nature of the cosmos and notions of moral interconnectedness in human nature relations.

Some studies in literature have shown how the ecotheological approach of the organisations drawing from Judaism, Islam Christianity and Buddhism has been translated to the nature of the initiatives. Historically examining the ecological conditions in the Middle East, it was tried to see how the synagogues of Israel have attempted to draw from the Old Testament to support discourses and lectures to create ecological conscientisation<sup>5</sup>. Looking at the initiatives of New York based 'Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life' it is argued how an understanding of the biblical and early rabbinic attitudes towards nature can

conservation is to be based on the principle that all individual components of the environment were created by God and that all living beings were created with different functions; functions carefully and meticulously balanced by the Almighty Creator. Visualising this as the basic principles, It is looked at how they are utilised by Islamic organisations such as “Muqawamat al- Tasauwur al- Islami” to situate their initiatives and provide for a moral interconnectedness dimension to ecological conservation<sup>7</sup>. It was also studied how American Baptist Churches of USA have utilised spiritual and ecotheological principles of ‘reverence for life’ and ‘sacredness of creation’ to formulate its policy statement and situate its initiatives, clarifying its stance and approach<sup>8</sup>. In a study it is seen how the “World Council of Churches” have supported a Biblical justification for challenging the Newtonian, individualistic-substantialist view of reality in support of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all reality – the holistic-organic worldview<sup>9</sup>. Sponsoring a consultation at Annecy, France in September 1988, the World Council of Churches, in a drive for ecological conservation, adapted as the basis of its approach, the theme of ‘liberation of life forms’ due to their being different manifestations of God’s creation as stated in the Bible. This was believed to challenge the hegemony of technocentrism and strengthen the organic worldview. Examining the Zen Centers of Rochester and San Francisco, it is seen how, drawing from Buddhist reminders of beings’ interconnectedness with the earth, these centers have popularised certain individual and group practices of ecological conservation<sup>4</sup>. Among the individual practices are the recitation of “mindful verses” such as, while turning on a water faucet, a mental recitation of, “water flows from high in the mountains, water runs deep in the Earth, miraculously water comes to us and sustains all life.” Among the group practices are treating recycling as a “family ecological ritual” using it “to bring out the meaning of interbeing” and performing of “earth relief ceremonies”. Studying an Australian Buddhist Organisation called the ‘Council of All Beings’, it is seen how the organisation has utilised Buddhist moral interconnectedness notions in the interface of ‘beings’ and ‘cosmos’ and relationship among

beings<sup>10</sup>. The Council helps people “to move from having ecological ideas to having an ecological identity, an ecological self.”

Discussions have been undertaken in the following studies looking at the implications of a religious outlook on ecological consciousness, the substantive contributions of which can be examined here. It is looked at how the Biblical base influences a larger ecological consciousness by re-enforcing innate, psychic aspects and notions of moral embeddedness in human-nature relations<sup>11</sup>. Dedication of Faith-Man–Nature group formed by the National Council of Churches to articulating a Christian Environmental ethic was instrumental in invoking an ecological consciousness among its members by drawing from its Biblical base<sup>12</sup>. How the stance of National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, New York, influences the ecological awareness in its members with roots in Judaic traditions was studied<sup>13</sup>. The findings have revealed that the members’ perceptions have been influenced greatly due to the religious base. It was studied<sup>14,15</sup> how the earth and nature worship practices of the Zen centers of Rochester and New York have been looked upon by members as key affirmations to ecological consciousness. Worshipping of the Self and Nature are perceived to be one. The recitations of meaningful verses in reverence of nature are viewed by the members as quintessential in invoking the consciousness<sup>14</sup>. The findings thus propose that spiritual and religious consciousness positively influences ecological consciousness and correspondingly has multipronged interpretations wherein due to the theologico-spiritual base ecological consciousness is proposed to emerge naturally.

In the Indian context, broadly, the literature on Indic religions and ecology includes – studies subscribing to the traditional indological view (including studies providing a semantic analysis of scriptures for ecological readings; studies combing an analysis of scriptures with relations to praxis; and, ethnographic studies examining the embedded ecological consciousness in folk traditions) and counter perspectives looking at sacralisation as dichotomous bringing in issues of purity-pollution, ecofeminist critique along with the “Ganges Syndrome” and the concept of

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a. To counter the traditional view certain questions have been raised pertaining to mythic ritual sacralisation and divinisation of nature like reference to the “Ganges Syndrome” wherein sacralisation has a tendency to obscure the need for ecological action endorsed by the concept of “intermittent sacrality” on a study based in South India and the assertion that in Hindu India sacralisation moves in a complex, dialectical relationship with the world negating tendency within the religious cosmos; moving alongside sacralisation the Hindu concept of purity/impurity and the ideology of caste as problematising the ecological situation in India; the incorporation in the Hindu thinking of the self/other, spirit/matter distinctions found in other patriarchal traditions and the association of feminine and nature with materiality most typically devaluing both and providing a dichotomous approach to the natural world and debates on the transcendental thought in the Advaitic philosophical tradition as world negating (Advaita proposing non-dualism between ‘being’ and ‘cosmos’ as an ontological stance).

“intermittent sacrality”<sup>a</sup>. In the light of the traditional indological view and the counter perspectives, a few recent studies have concentrated upon the ecological initiatives of contemporary institutions within the purview of Hinduism. The attempts are to discern the ‘backward-forward linkages’ between the traditional view and contemporary initiatives in the light of the issues raised by the counter perspectives. These studies adopt the unified view of Hinduism as a conglomeration of sects and sub-sects with ontological and epistemological variations and regional differentiations. Existing studies in this area<sup>16,17</sup> have looked at the initiatives of ISKCON linking the traditional views on ecology to ecological initiatives of ISKCON pertaining to forestation and tree planting along the parikrama path in Vrindavana<sup>b</sup>. By and large, the types of organisations and institutions falling within the purview of Hinduism in the modern times, undertaking ecological initiatives can be classified as follows: organisations or institutions focusing on ecology drawing from ecotheological tenets of Hinduism<sup>c</sup>; religious voluntary organisations (within the purview of Hinduism) undertaking ecological initiatives or whose initiatives reflect ecological consciousness<sup>d</sup>; organisations professing Hindu religious ideology and having a political agenda<sup>e</sup>; and, movements drawing from tenets of Hinduism such as Chipko and Appiko<sup>f</sup>.

The proposed study attempts to look at the perspectives and initiatives of select religious voluntary organisations undertaking ecological initiatives situating the study at the interface of spiritual ecology and ecotheology in the light of traditional indological view and the counter arguments.

## Experimental

### Objectives

#### *Broad objective*

To explore the interface between Hinduism and ecological consciousness through a study of the perspectives pertaining to ecological consciousness and related initiatives of religious voluntary organisations (within the purview of Hinduism) in the contemporary times.

#### *Specific Objectives*

- To discuss the perspectives of such select voluntary organisations in relation to ecological consciousness.
- To study the relevant ecological initiatives of the voluntary organisations.

b. The philosophy of ISKCON influencing ecological consciousness is shaped through the following<sup>16</sup>:

- The idea that the whole world is a forest and the description of everything in terms of divinity and in relation to the ultimate Reality. The different aspects of this ultimate reality are all to be found in various forms of the physical world.
- Every physical object symbolises some aspect of the Reality. Amongst these, the forest symbolizes the divine attribute of “totality” combining all life forms together in a single interdependent whole.
- Vedic cosmology with notions of Cosmic Existential Being and the entire universe as Krishna – the essence of Krishna consciousness.

The Bhagwat Purana, an important text followed by ISKCON, contains descriptions of the life of Krishna and reveals an embedded ecological morality and herein Krishna is considered as a paradigm of reverence for nature<sup>17</sup>. This is evident through his defeating of the river polluting demon Kaliya and whiskipping of Mount Govardhana and the Sun God. The injunctions are also drawn from texts such as the Bhagwad Geeta and the Manusmriti.

c. Such organisations include Trees for Life (started by Balbir Mathur in Delhi drawing from Puranic injunctions reiterating the importance of tree planting), Vishwa Bharati of Rabindranath Tagore, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and Bharat Seva Samaj (Both the latter organisations sponsor lectures on ecology and the role of Indic religions)<sup>20</sup>. Established in 1921, Vishwa Bharati is based on the model of Tapovanam or forest school with the ideal of ‘back to nature’ influenced greatly by the Upanishads and the philosophy of Advaita identifying God with nature. Herein Biblical affiliations of divine creation- centered cosmology and associations to morality based ecological discourses from the Koran are also sought. The Annual Report of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan contains mention of seminars on ecology and relations to Indic Religions wherein there were paper readings on topics related to readings in ancient Sanskrit literature, Pali canons and Jain Suttas, Nikayas and Pitakas pertaining to ecology. The Gandhian school attempts to link Yogic tenets to ecological consciousness through discourses from Upanishads and the Bhagwad Geeta combined with morality-based discourses on ethics of frugality and restricted consumption<sup>21</sup>. The ethical discussions also find parallels to Anekantavada and Syadvada doctrines of Jainism containing egalitarian postulates forwarding the argument that each individual has a “teleological centre of life” which pursues its own good in its own way and possesses equal inherent worth. Human beings are no more intrinsically valuable than any other thing but should see themselves as equal members of the Earth’s community.

d. There exist on the one hand some organisations whose philosophy and initiatives reflect an ecotheological consciousness based in Hinduism in a subtle fashion and on the other some organisations that have concretely expressed their ecological consciousness with base in various tenets of Hinduism.

e. These include organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Although such organisations may support local initiatives (like social forestry and RSS’s focus on traditional systems of medicine reiterating the quintessentiality of nature’s resources and the human body as a miniature representation of the cosmos) independent ecological initiatives are not predominant on the agenda<sup>22</sup>.

f. The perspectival adhering in this case is amalgamated; drawing from ecotheology as well as tenets of radical ecology. Initiated by Sunderlal Bahuguna, the Chipko movement draws its philosophical framework from Puranic concepts of Vanasri involving reverence to nature. To re-instate the worldview this (and similar other localized ecological movements) combines at the pragmatic level a radical ecology stance primarily concerned with deconstructing historiography i.e. moments of change are pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transitions. Ecologically is socially constructed i.e. comprehended according to the diverse meanings in the different lifeworlds and changes are signaled and marked by functional changes in the sign systems<sup>23</sup>.

- To develop an understanding of the micro level implications of the perspectives and initiatives on individuals associated with these organisations and their plausible macro level connotations/inferences

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

In keeping with the focus of the study, the research design adopted to meet the objectives is a multiple unit case study design.

### *Sampling Design*

The universe comprises of religious voluntary organisations within the purview of Hinduism. Hinduism being a multifaceted concept (as illustrated through the unified approach) the adherence is to its specific strands. An initial exploration of the universe comprising of religious voluntary organisations within the purview of Hinduism was undertaken to find out which of them reflect ecological consciousness either in perspectives or initiatives with the base in Hinduism. In keeping with the objectives of the study under consideration (of exploring how spiritual and religious consciousness within the Hindu framework influences ecological consciousness), the organisations have been selected through selective and purposive sampling. The selection criteria involve the following:

- Adherence to tenets of Hinduism.

- Perspectives on ecological consciousness drawing from the same and expressed concretely.
- Undertaking ecological initiatives to thereby reveal the ecological consciousness in praxis.

Replication logic has been utilised in the selection in keeping with the requirements of the multiple unit case study design<sup>18</sup>. The four organisations selected for detailed empirical inquiry have been named as Organisation P, Organisation Q, Organisation R and Organisation S. In the narratives of the responses however, Organisation Q is referred to as 'the Mission', Organisation R as 'the Kendra' and Organisation S as 'the Ashram' respectively<sup>9</sup>.

### *Methods Design – The data collection strategies*

Data collection was done from the headquarters and the centers of the organisations in Mumbai, India. As the objectives of the present study combine an analysis of the perspectives pertaining to ecological consciousness and the corresponding ecological initiatives of the organisations and the micro and macro implications of the same, to cover the various aforementioned angles in the case studies, multiple sources of evidence<sup>18</sup> and a triangulation of data collection techniques have been used<sup>19</sup>.

Keeping in view the general guidelines of the case studies, the tools for data collection included the following:

- Guidelines for aspects to be noted from existing literature/documentations of the organisations
- Interview guide for key informants
- Interview guide for members

g. Organisation P – Started by Swami Prabhupada as a movement of Krishna consciousness, the philosophy of Organisation P draws mainly from the Bhagwad Geeta and the Bhagwatam. The teachings are presented in the form of Bhaktivedanta, which also serves to make a case for ecological consciousness. Initially headquartered at Mayapur, West Bengal, it has centers around the world. However in the Indian context the centre at Mumbai is the functional headquarter. The management includes basically the Swamis/Prabhus who are inculcated into the religious order. The members comprise of spiritual aspirants influenced by Krishna consciousness. The general activities are in the nature of religious (conducting discourses, publications etc.) and educational. Under the aegis of Organisation P, the BhaktiVedanta Institutes undertake research on various aspects of Vedas and Vedanta to evolve a practical spirituality relevant to contemporary times, Ecology is considered as a part of the movement of Krishna consciousness, influenced greatly by the lifestyle of Krishna. In terms of the ecological initiatives, there are lecture series and workshops organised by the Bhaktivedanta Institutes and there are some projects in the Indian context. They are the tree planting efforts along the parikrama path in Vrindavana and eco-development at Mayapur, West Bengal. Being an international organisation some of the initiatives have also been undertaken by centers abroad. A predominant concept in Organisation P is that of Vedic eco-villages along the lines of Gokula of Krishna. Another important aspect of the initiatives of Organisation P is the propagation of vegetarianism, which also contributes to ecological consciousness.

Organisation Q- Organisation Q was formed by devotees of Swami Chinmayananda to give organisational structure and cohesiveness to the work and activities of Swami Chinmayananda. The philosophy of the organisation essentially draws from a conglomeration of scriptural teachings such as the Vedas, Upanisads and Bhagwad Geeta. In effect the teachings are combined and presented in the form of Vedanta to thereby develop a purposeful teleology. It is headquartered at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Mumbai and has around 243 centres around the world. The current spiritual head is Swami Tejomayananda and Swamis constitute the apex of the administrative hierarchy. The members are volunteers and devotees influenced by the discourses and are active either at the headquarters or study groups throughout the world. The general activities are of the nature of educational (running schools and colleges), developmental (rural development programmes in Sidhbari, Lathikata in Orissa, Kurmathoor in Kerala and Ellayapale in Andhra Pradesh), management courses and services conducted by its Institute of Management, Bangalore, conducting research on Vedanta, the chief research organ being Organisation Q International Foundation, Kerala, Homes for senior citizens and medical services.

In each of the organisations, key informants were identified as those who have been inculcated into the religious order and are a part of the organisational hierarchy. In Organisation Q and Organisation P they were the Swamis/Prabhuis and Brahmacharis, the Jeevan Vratis in Organisation R and in Organisation S they were the Sadhaks. Members encompassed those who were associated and involved with the organisations as devotees, volunteers and Seva Vratis but did not form a part of the religious order. The duration and extent of involvement formed the criteria for selection. Although the interview guide was maintained and followed for the purposes of data collection, the researcher gained a considerable amount of insightful information also through informal interactions and general discussions with some of the key informants and members. To study the perspectives of the organisations, secondary sources such as published literature of the organisations were explored for a critical reading along with key informant interviewing. 4-5 key informants were selected per organisation for the purpose of the interviews.

The ecological initiatives were explored through documentary evidence and key informant interviewing. In the case of Organisation P, the projects were looked at, through the evidences in Bhakti Vedanta Institute of Organisation P, Mumbai. The initiatives of Organisation S were observed first hand at Pondicherry and Auroville. In the case of Organisation R, the Natural Resources Development Project was explored at its head quarters at Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari. To see how spiritual and religious consciousness influences ecological consciousness, the implications (micro and plausible macro) of the perspectives and the initiatives were examined

through the perceptions of the key informants and members associated with the organisations. The members were selected through the combination of purposive and snowball sampling from the information of the memberships got through the respective organisations. 15-20 members were selected per organisation for the purposes of interviews and the information obtained was subjected to qualitative analysis. Basically intensive interviews were conducted with the key informants. Members were interrogated primarily on certain specific aspects.

### *Analysis Design*

In keeping with the analysis traditions of case study design, single and cross case analysis has been attempted. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, case descriptions, coding and pattern matching have been utilised as analysis techniques. The perspectives have been discussed by looking at the worldviews, cosmological conceptions and moral interconnectedness, notions pertaining to ecology of the organisations. Specific discussions have been made in the light of the notions of mythic ritual sacralisation and divinisation of nature, notions of transcendence as quintessential to indological thought, their ecotheological implications and the corresponding counter arguments. Single case descriptions and cross case tabular representations have been undertaken. In the case of initiatives a description of the types and the extent and degree of backward-forward linkages (i.e. how the traditional outlook is translated into an ecological rhetoric) have been looked at both in the case of single and cross case to bring out there by the differential and multifaceted linkages. Micro

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Pertaining to ecology, Organisation Q, in some of its workshops and shibirs, deals with ecological consciousness making thereby a strong case through Vedanta. The initiatives include discourses, publications and developing of Missions' campuses along eco-friendly lines.

Organisation R- Started by the devotees of Swami Vivekananda, Organisation R with its headquarters at Kanyakumari draws from the yogic expressions of the Upanisads and the Bhagwad Geeta. The philosophy basically combines tenets from Bhakti, Jnana, Karma and Raja Yoga. The yogic stance proposes a transcendental worldview (visualising the divine in all beings). Through this, combined with Vedanta, the case is made for ecological consciousness. Management comprises of Swamis and Lifetime workers (Jeevenvratis). The members are the Seva Vratis and volunteers (Karyakartas). The general activities are educational (running schools) and developmental (rural development programmes), vocational training centers, rural development programmes, Organisation R Vedic Research Foundation and the Organisation R medical research foundation and medical centers. The ecological initiatives include discussions in the publications such as 'Akshaya Vikas, and 'Ahead to nature' compiled by lifetime volunteers of the Kendra and worship of nature deities like Surya Archana. A Natural Resources Development Project is conducted from Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari. Apart from these, centers across the country also conduct workshops on related issues.

Organisation S- Started by the devotees of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and further shaped by Mother Meera-the spiritual companion of Sri Aurobindo, Organisation S draws from Vedas, Upanisads and the philosophical schools of Yoga, Vedanta and Tantra to develop then its own framework of Integral Yoga attributing primacy to the consciousness. Herein also lies the basis for ecological consciousness. It is headquartered at Pondicherry and managed by Sadhaks. The members are devotees of the Ashram and administrative heads of centers around the world. The organisation believes that the basis of Integral Yoga is a holistic cosmic/ecological consciousness. In the Ashram at Pondicherry, the eco friendly initiatives undertaken include the handmade paper factory, handloom, ayurveda section and publications on ecological consciousness. One important aspect of discussion here includes discourses on the spiritual significance of flowers and nature. Auroville, a project of the Ashram is based on the strong foundations of ecological consciousness. Alongside the lifestyles revealing a back to nature drive, the efforts include tree-planting, nurseries to grow flowers and explore their spiritual significance and organic farming.

level implications of the perspectives and initiatives in terms of the perceptions of the key informants and members on how the perspectives and initiatives effect upon the ecological consciousness and lifestyles of the key informants and the members and eventually how does the spiritual and religious consciousness influence ecological consciousness has been examined.

The endeavour in this study is to explore, through the aforementioned analysis standpoints and arguments generated through them, how the tenets of spiritual ecology and ecotheology are applicable in praxis, to what extent are they able to make a case in the light of the traditional indological view and the counter viewpoints and how does the spiritual and religious consciousness (within the purview of Hinduism) influence ecological consciousness.

## Major Findings

### Perspectives of the Organisations Pertaining to Ecological Consciousness

#### *Views on Ecological Consciousness*

Thus, the organisations reveal some of the facets of views on ecological consciousness within the purview of Hinduism. They are:

- Reverence to nature, cosmic consciousness and embedded ecological morality as revealed through the Bhaktivedanta.
- Unity of God (connoted as 'Being' and Ultimate Reality) and Becoming (manifested as nature). According to Organisation Q this unity can be represented through the syllable 'Aum' encompassing an ecological consciousness.
- The principle of existential oneness as proposed by Organisation R.
- Propositions of 'Nature as Godhead' by Organisation S along Spinozian lines. These are combined with symbological representation of cosmic consciousness as in the syllables 'Aum' and 'Hare Krishna Mantra'.

#### *Linkages with the Traditional Tenets of Hinduism*

The linkages discuss an adherence to Vedic and Upanisadic cosmologies. The cases for ecological consciousness are made generally through tenets of Yoga (discussing the epistemology of 'being' i.e. the relationship of the 'being' to the cosmos and the Ultimate Reality and modes of attaining the unity. The different modes such as

the Bhakti, Jnana, Karma and Raja Yoga are discussed elaborately by Organisation R) and Vedanta (dealing with the integration of 'beings' and the 'Being').

#### *Sacralisation and Divinisation of Nature*

This is viewed as instrumental in maintaining and harnessing an ecological consciousness. Nature as divine and a purposeful teleology implying the entire cosmos as the Ultimate Reality are the various facets.

#### *Transcendental Notions*

Transcendental notions of the organisations are not in the nature of world negation.

#### *Issues of Dichotomy*

There exists however an inimitable linkage between notions of transcendence and issues of dichotomy such as those of self-other and spirit-matter which may lead to negative symbolism and hierarchical categorisations at the perspectival level. In the case of Organisation P, although Nature is perceived as an integral notion of the ultimate Reality, there exist distinctions between the 'spiritual world' and the 'material world' – the Ultimate Reality within the purview of the spiritual world and Nature as the material world. Although in the case of Organisation Q all existential aspects are discussed as possessing elements of Godhead the dichotomy of Ultimate Reality (Godhead) as spirit and the world (cosmos) and nature as matter exists. Transcendence in the case of Organisation R involves attempts to elevate nature and cosmos and all existential beings to the higher consciousness of the Godhead. But eventually Godhead is recognised in existential aspects akin to tenets of Vedanta to thereby resolve the earlier dichotomy. In the case of Organisation S, Being (Ultimate Reality) and Becoming (manifested existential aspects) are perceived as one. Thus spirit and matter are perceived to be one, thereby negating dichotomous notions.

#### *Inclusion of Tantric Injunctions*

Although Organisation R recognises Nature (Prakriti) and the cosmic force as the Divine feminine, Tantric injunctions are formally discussed only in the case of Organisation S wherein Sakta

Tantras are discussed as the base, on which the divine feminine principle is developed. Relating the aforementioned perspectives of the organisations to the theoretical perspectives of spiritual ecology and ecotheology it can be discussed that the following linkages are generally applicable.

- The Gaia hypothesis proposing a spiritual worldview.
- Propositions of the Ultimate Reality and Brahman provide a clear connection to the conceptual contribution of Bonifazi's attempt at a discourse analysis of the 'soul of the world' by a discussion of the realm of the unknown pertaining to the phenomena of nature.
- McDaniel's "reverence for life Principle" proposing that God is not distinct from the world itself but rather identical with the underlying structures of the world or nature.
- Pertaining to theoretical perspectives of ecotheology, Sallie McFague's notion of the 'universe as God's body' and Burghart and Cantlie's sacralisation of nature hypothesis along with John Hicks' conceptualisation of ecotheology dealing with (from the phenomenological standpoint) dimensions of the sacred pertaining to the phenomena of nature in religious traditions and other cosmological arguments are applicable.
- In the case of Organisation S, Sjoon and Barbara's discussions on the 'spiritual dimensions in ecological discourses in accordance with the divine feminine principle' are also applicable.

Table 1 looks at the dimensions of perspectives pertaining to ecological consciousness from a cross case perspective.

### **Ecological Initiatives and the Backward-Forward Linkages**

Generally falling under the categories of discourses, lecture series and workshops; publications; individual and group practices and eco friendly projects, certain general trends and pattern can be discerned in the initiatives. Also, the backward forward linkages with the traditional tenets of Hinduism display replication logic.

#### *Discourses and lecture series*

The discourses, lecture series and workshops attempt to highlight the hegemony of

science and attempt to seek solutions in spirituality and theology. These naturally build into an emphasis on ethics of frugality, restricted consumption and dimensions of moral interconnectedness in human-nature relationships. Aspects of ecological consciousness on praxis such as organic farming, use of herbal medicines and practice of vegetarianism are also highlighted through these.

### ***Publications for ecological awareness and conscientisation***

The publications translate the organisational philosophies into ecological rhetorics. The multifaceted translations are:

- Enmeshing of Krishna consciousness with ecological consciousness
- Vedanta (the philosophy of interconnectedness of 'being' and the 'cosmos') as the base practically revealed through the chanting of 'Aum'
- Vedanta and Yoga as the base – different variations of Yoga revealing different paths of attaining harmony of 'beings'
- Advaita Vedanta, Integral Yoga and Tantric injunctions as collectively providing the base.

The organisational literature also imparts practical information as eco-friendly methods.

### ***Eco-friendly individual and group practices***

Individual practices to evoke ecological consciousness involve the following:

- Psychic transformation through mantra meditation such as 'Hare Krishna' and 'Aum'.
- Spiritual transformation through reverence of and meditation on the cosmos in general to inculcate a cosmic consciousness akin to ecological consciousness.
- Physical transformation by adopting an ecofriendly lifestyle through a practice of vegetarianism, using of herbal medicines, employing ecofriendly methods etc.
- Collectively, the group practices are also aimed at - collective psychic transformation through chanting; collective spiritual transformation through group veneration of nature (such as the Samuhik Surya Namaskar) and group meditations; and,

collective physical transformation through participation in ecofriendly projects, adopting a lifestyle in harmony with nature by indulging in recycling, vegetarianism etc. and restricted material consumption.

The cross case picture of the projects reveals the following typology:  
 • Campus development/Development of centers, and temple iconographies along ecofriendly lines.

### *Community Ecological Projects*

**Table 1.** Dimensions of Perspectives Pertaining to Ecological Consciousness within the Purview of Hinduism: A Cross Case Representation

Analysis Standpoints	Organisation P	Organisation Q	Organisation R	Organisation S
<b>Views on ecological consciousness</b>	Bhaktivedanta as the basis Bhakti implying reverence to nature and Vedanta discussing the integration of 'beings' and 'Being'. Hare Krishna Mantra meditation representing ecological consciousness	Unity of God i.e. 'Being' (Ultimate Reality) and 'Becoming' (its manifested aspects such as nature). Syllable 'Aum' representing ecological consciousness	Oneness of existence and nature and sacredness of creation.	Absolute Being (Godhead) in nature. Nature as Godhead. Yoga enmeshed with Vedanta as the base of ecological consciousness.
<b>Linkages with traditional tenets of Hinduism</b>	Amalgamation of scriptures. Reverence to nature, cosmic consciousness and vegetarianism.	Primarily linked with the discourses of the Upanisads	Adaptation of the Cosmology of Vedas and Upanisads. Amalgamation of Yoga and Vedanta.	Traditional scriptures and the Tantras utilised to make the case for ecological consciousness.  Integral Yoga as the basis.
<b>Attitude towards sacralisation and divinisation of nature</b>	Instrumental in preserving ecological consciousness.	Nature as divine. Single divine self (Ultimate Reality) in all the phenomena of nature.	Divinisation of nature as an ecologically viable proposition.	Teleology implying that the entire cosmos is the ultimate Reality
<b>Attitude towards the transcendental stance</b>	Nature perceived as integral notion of the Ultimate Reality. Transcendental notions not world negating.	All existential aspects as possessing elements of Godhead. The transcendental stance does not lead to world denying propositions.	Attempts to elevate nature and cosmos to higher consciousness.	Being (Ultimate Reality) and Becoming (the manifested aspects) are perceived to be one
<b>Issues of dichotomy</b>	Distinctions between the spiritual world and the material world.	Dichotomy between spirit-matter. Ultimate Reality as the Spirit and the world (cosmos) and nature as matter.	Dichotomy between 'being' and 'nature' and Ultimate Reality (as in Yogic tenets). Resolved when enmeshed with Vedanta. Recognising Godhead in existential aspects.	Dichotomous notions negated as Spirit and matter are perceived to be one.
<b>Inclusion of Tantric injunctions</b>	Tantric injunctions not highlighted	Tantric injunctions not included. Predominance to Vedic propositions.	Nature (Prakriti) and the cosmic force as the Divine feminine. No formal inclusion of Tantric injunctions.	Adherence to Sakta Tantras.

**Table 2.** Dimensions of ecological initiatives and the backward forward linkages: A cross case representation

<b>Facets of Initiatives/ backward forward linkages</b>	<b>Organisation P</b>	<b>Organisation Q</b>	<b>Organisation R</b>	<b>Organisation S</b>
<b>Lecture series, workshops and discourses</b>	On topics such as Vedic cosmology, critique of scientism and insights on ecological consciousness from the Bhagwad Geeta.	Deal with impending ecological problems and their solutions lying in religion Re-iteration of cosmological ideas from the Upanishads	Seminars on renewable energy sources and herbal medicines. Workshops on organic farming and developing ecofriendly centers.	Interface of Integral Yoga and ecological consciousness. Various practical aspects of ecology.
<b>Publications</b>	'Divine Nature' 'Life comes from Life'	'Kindle life', 'The Art of man making' 'The manual of self unfoldment' 'The art of living' 'Harmony and Beauty'	'Ahead to nature' 'Akshaya Vikas' 'Environment in day to day life'. Booklets on practical aspects of ecology. Regular features in magazines.	'Whispers of Nature' and 'Environmental consciousness' 'Spiritual significance of flowers' Journal articles
<b>Individual and group practices</b>	Practice of vegetarianism, Hare Krishna mantra meditation and padayatras to create awareness	Recitation of mantra 'Aum' and meditation to invoke cosmic consciousness	Meditation and practicing Yoga, Samuhik Surya Namaskar (veneration of solar energy) Tree planting initiatives at centers.	Mantra meditation of Aum, practicing Yoga and emphasis on vegetarianism
<b>Ecological Projects</b>	Nova Gokula in East Brasil Nandagram Project, Australia Adopt a cow programme, North Carolina Hare Krishna community of Mayapur, West Bengal Vrindavan Forest Revival project	Campus development as eco-spiritual retreats Developing of Temple iconographies wherein through symbologies and forms ecological consciousness is expressed.	Natural Resources Development Project-NARDEP	Gloria farm Lake Estate project, research on ambient energies, marine ecology, handmade paper, handloom and ayurveda section, work on sacred groves of wild plants and herbs Township of Auroville.
<b>The backward forward linkages</b>	Vedic cosmology, readings in the Bhagwad Geeta and Bhagwatam	Rare texts on Vedanta explored along with readings in Upanishads and Puranic injunctions of practical aspects of ecological consciousness	Vedanta propositions and Yogic tenets	Drawn to Vedic literature, Tantra, Vedanta and Yoga

- Developing of ecofriendly units such as handloom, handmade paper, Ayurveda section etc.
- Developing sites along ecofriendly outsidess centres and headquarters as in the case of Auroville.
- Natural Resources and Renewable energy Development and awareness drives relating to the same.

Participation of the key informants at the managerial level and of the members at the level of workers and volunteers is a common element in all the projects. In most of the cases, funding is mixed (internal and external).

### ***The backward-forward linkages***

In establishing the backward forward linkages, all the organisations draw their roots from the traditional scriptures of Hinduism. In the case of Organisation Q some of the rare texts are also explored and Organisation S also incorporates the Tantric injunctions. Table 2. presents the cross case picture of the ecological initiatives and the backward - forward linkages.

### **Implications of the Perspectives and Initiatives**

The various dimensions of implications of spiritual and religious consciousness on ecological consciousness broadly bring out thus the following:

#### ***The general perceptions of the key informants on the micro level implications of the perspectives and initiatives of the organisations***

- i The implications of the specific perspectives of the organisations on ecological consciousness bring out various dimensions of indigenous perspectives on ecology rooted in the scriptures of Hinduism and in terms of ontology and epistemology, expressed through the philosophical schools.
- ii In terms of the implications of the perspectives and initiatives for the members, the key informants claim that the various aspects such as mantra meditation, ethics of frugality, philosophical outlook combining Yoga and Vedanta dealing with a progression of consciousness are perceived by the key informants to influence their ecological consciousness.

- iii Pertaining to the image of the organisations vis-à-vis other organisations it can be said that through concrete expressions of ecological consciousness the organisations lend themselves a more evolved philosophical framework. Combined with the practical initiatives a definitive edge is gained over similar other organisations.
- iv In terms of implications on ecology, the projects undertaken display a positive trend.
- v In terms of implications on their own lifestyles, the key informants perceive the ascetic and yogic lifestyles as in the wider context expressions of eco-consciousness.

### ***According to the members***

Discussing the implications of the perspectives and initiatives on their own lifestyles, the members claim that at the psychic level it influences worldviews and at a pragmatic level lifestyles in tune with nature are imbibed correspondingly.

### ***General perceptions of the macro level implications- according to key informants***

Individual philosophical frameworks developed as perspectives on ecology and the initiatives leads to a psychic (consciousness oriented) and physical (practical lifestyle) transformation of members associated. The organisations perceive their individual perspectival frameworks as dimensions creating indigenous outlooks on ecological consciousness, stating thereby the macro level implications of the perspectives and initiatives.

### **General perceptions of the macro level implications- according to members**

The members perceive a positive connection between spiritual and religious consciousness and ecological consciousness.

Thus the propositions of spiritual ecology and ecotheology of viewing 'sacralisation of nature as an ecologically viable proposition to combat the present day ecological crisis; sacralisation as instrumental in nature preservation, also bringing in dimensions of embedded morality in human nature relationships; soul-cosmos relations revealing the individual being as the microcosm of the macrocosmic universe and the universe as a

**Table 3.** Dimensions of implications of the perspectives and ecological initiatives: a cross case representation

Point of Analysis	Organisation P	Organisation Q	Organisation R	Organisation S
<b>According to key informants</b>	Basis on Krishna consciousness and Vedic cosmology	Vedanta provides a strong base for ecology	Proposition of the Upanishads and various strands of Yoga linked to ecology.	Integral Yoga (combing Yoga Vedanta and Tantra) as the base.
<b>(i) Implications of the specific perspectives of the organisations on ecological consciousness</b>				
<b>(ii) Implications of the perspectives for members (as perceived by the key informants)</b>	Emphasis on Hare Krishna Mantra meditation, vegetarianism and ethics of frugality shape the thinking of members.	Inculcating the thinking that 'Ecology around you is what you are' and the chanting of Aum.	Philosophical outlook to nature combining Vedanta and Yoga along with practical knowledge on organic farming etc. obtained.	Teachings of the progression of consciousness prescribes the path for the Sadhana-relevant for eco-consciousness
<b>(iii) Implications of the concrete expressions of ecological consciousness on the image of the organisation vis-a-vis other similar organisations.</b>	By looking at ecology, covers all aspects of Krishna consciousness.	Application of Vedanta to contemporary issues provides a definite edge.	Holistic worldview and enmeshing philosophy and practice provides a distinctive stand.	Strengthens cosmological conceptions. Situating and seeking relevance of the philosophy in the context of contemporary issues provides a definitive edge.
<b>(iv) Implications of the initiatives for ecology per se</b>	Projects contribute positively to ecological awareness.	Ecofriendly drives, development of Ashram premises in ecofriendly ways, ecological morality and related value systems	Annual appraisals of the projects reveal a positive trend.	Annual appraisals of the projects and various reports reveal a positive trend.
<b>(v) Implications on the life styles of the key informants.</b>	Ecologically conscious lifestyle in keeping with the ultimate goal of unison with the Absolute.	Ascetic lifestyle with ethics of frugality looked at in the wider context as an expression of ecological consciousness	Yogic lifestyle influences the consciousness and deepens the understanding of the soul cosmos relation.	Yogic lifestyle influencing eco-consciousness.
<b>According to members, Implications of the perspectives and initiatives on their lifestyles</b>	Influences worldview, ethics of frugality, disciplined lifestyle in tune with nature	Lectures on 'eco-friendliness as innate' motto of 'giving more than what you take from nature' – influence lifestyles.	Internalising of Yogic lifestyle and the back to nature approach	Lessons of 'divinity in all beings', practical spirituality and Integral Yoga as a way of life influence lifestyles.
<b>Macro level implications on ecological consciousness</b>	Bhaktivedanta encompasses all that a spiritual outlook to ecology proposes.	Linking Vedanta and Ecology an indigenous outlook created	The link between Vedanta and Yoga perceived as relevant for a large ecological consciousness.	The path of Sadhana prescribed for Integral Yoga seen as enabling an ecological consciousness.
<b>Perception of the members of the relation between spiritual and religious consciousness and eco- consciousness.</b>	Through Krishna consciousness ecological consciousness comes from within.	Religiosity, spirituality and eco-consciousness perceived to be in one flow.	Theologico-spirituality and Yoga perceived as the very base for being ecologically aware.	Spiritual consciousness seen as enabling the more from ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness.

manifestation of the Ultimate Reality have multiple implications as seen through the findings and corresponding influences on the lifestyles of key informants and members imbibing the perspectives.

At the micro level there are implications as perceived by the key informants of the specific philosophies of the organisations on ecological consciousness, on their own and members' lifestyles, on the organisations' stand vis-à-vis other similar organisations and on ecology per se. Parallely there are implications as perceived by members on their own lifestyles. At the macro level there are implications as perceived by the key informants of the perspective of the organisations on a larger ecological consciousness and implications as perceived by the members of the spiritual and religious consciousness on ecological consciousness. On the whole, the picture attempts to project the pragmatic implications of the various propositions forwarded by spiritual ecology and ecotheology manifested through the perspectival stances and initiatives of the organisations under study. Table 3 represents the cross-case picture of the implications of the perspectives and initiatives.

### Concluding Remarks

Thus through the aforementioned course of arguments the focus of the study of exploring the interface between spiritual and religious consciousness within the purview of Hinduism and ecological consciousness is brought to light. The study on perspectives unveils the philosophical framework. The investigation into initiatives and the backward-forward linkages views how the perspectives translate onto the initiatives. The exploration into micro and macro implications of the perspectives and initiatives reviews the perceptions of the key informants and the members on the interface.

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