

Embracing Eco-sophy: A Pathway to Self-realization and Moksha

Rita Goswami

Research Scholar

Krishna Guru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya

Dr. Bhupesh Sharma

Research Guide

Department of Philosophy

Krishna Guru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya

Abstract:

The interconnections of humans, the environment, self-realization and Moksha undergo a close relationship where individuals recognize themselves as part of a larger ecological web. This understanding encourages a sense of responsibility towards nature, as humans well-being tied to the health of the environment. Through self-realization that expands to include nature, individuals may cultivate a deeper respect for Eco-system. This interconnected view encourages balance and harmony. Eco-sophy, emphasizes living in balance with nature, recognizing the interconnections of all beings. Embracing Eco-sophy could be seen as a path toward liberation in the sense of fostering a deeper connection with nature and promoting ecological balance. Eco-sophy highlights the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems. Nature has value beyond its utility to humans.

Anthropocentrism says that all living and nonliving beings have value only because they are of use to the human species. This view favours the superiority of man over the rest of non-human beings. Since 1970 a new approach towards the non-human world has come into existence with a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. As a result numbers of new trends have developed to give a new light of interpretation regarding man-environment interaction as meant for protecting the planet Earth.

Eco-sophy is a term coined by Arne Naess that emphasizes ecological balance and harmony. It challenges the idea that humans are superior to other species and emphasizes that all living beings have intrinsic value. Eco-sophy is closely related to Deep Ecology which is a movement and philosophy developed by Arne Naess emphasizing the intrinsic value of nature and a shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentricism. In principle, deep ecology posits "bio-spherical egalitarianism."

This paper is an attempt to focus on how we live, interact with nature, and make decisions. Moving from anthropocentric (human-centered) to eco-centric views.

Keywords: Eco-sophy, Deep Ecology, Ecological wisdom, ecology, spirituality, Self-realization

Date of Submission: 04-12-2025

Date of Acceptance: 14-12-2025

I. Introduction:

Eco-sophy is a concept that resonates with many spiritual traditions. The idea is that by cultivating a deeper understanding and connection with nature, one can attain a state of liberation or Moksha. Moksha or liberation is a Spiritual concept that aims to free individuals from the cycle of suffering. In many Eastern Philosophies, including Hinduism and Buddhism, there's an emphasis on living in harmony with nature as a path to spiritual growth. By embracing Eco-Sophy, individuals can develop a sense of interconnectedness with all living beings, leading to a greater unity and ultimately, Moksha or Nirvana. This understanding can inspire individuals to adopt more sustainable and compassionate lifestyles, contributing to the well-being of both people and the planet.

Everything that surrounds us may collectively be termed as the environment. It is from the environment that we get food to eat, water to drink, air to breathe and all necessities of day to day life. Environment around us constitutes a life support system. Now a days, environmental study is a multidisciplinary science, which depends on a variety of disciplines such as Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Statistics, Meteorology, Climatology, Geology, Geography, Economics, Sociology, Agricultural Science, Forestry, Horticulture, Genetics, Physiology etc. Environmental Philosophy is branch of Philosophy that is concerned

with the natural environment and human's place within it. Man as an organism interacts with the environment at individual and community levels. He is being the product of the environment, his survival and development depends on the symbolic interactions with the physical, social, cultural, economic and political environment. Environmental philosophy takes deep interest in meaning and analysis of the concept of environment and the other related concepts. A philosopher is not expected to do too much with factual affairs, but to go beyond language analysis to know the ethical dilemmas that we face in terms of changing environmental matter worldwide. Environmental philosophy includes environmental ethics, environmental aesthetics, ecofeminism, environmental theology etc.

Objective of the Study:

The main objective of the study are:

1. To promote a philosophy of ecological harmony and balance.
2. To foster Deep ecological connection.
3. Encouraging practices that minimize harm to Eco system.
4. To encourage self- realization through understanding and connecting with the natural world.
5. To seeks spiritual liberation from worldly attachment and cycles

II. Methodology :

The study is based on secondary data which are collected from books, journals, magazines and subject related research papers, internet etc.

Concept of Eco-sophy:

The Word 'Eco-sophy' is derived from the Greek words "Oikos" and "Sophia". Oikos means house or household and Sophia means wisdom. It is essentially about having wisdom regarding one's household. Ecosophy is a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. The term was coined by the French post-structuralism philosopher Felix Guattari and the Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess. Eco--sophy is configured as a social necessity, creating awareness that everyone must care for and preserve the environment for future generations, forming active individuals. The Ecosophy makes the man participant in discussion and debate of environmental issues and their solutions. Guattari holds that traditional environmentalist perspectives obscure the complexity of the relationship between humans and their natural environment. He argues that environmental problems are inseparable from social evolution and human subjectivity, proposing a framework of "three ecologies", environmental, Social and mental. His philosophy emphasizes the need to re-conceptualize our relationship with the world. By understanding how these three spheres intertwine, fostering new ways of thinking and acting for ecological preservation and social liberation.

Guattari developed the theory of Ecosophy from the Deep ecology of Arne Naess. According to Naess, Deep Ecology is a broad ecocentric grass-roots effort as contrasted with an anthropocentric approach to achieve an ecologically balanced future. In this sense, it is a world-wide grass-roots social and political movement. In another sense, deep ecology is used to refer to Naess' own self-realization thesis. It is known as ecosophy or ecosophy T for referring to his own specific ecological philosophy of ultimate premises centred on self-realization achieved through wider identification of one's ecological context. This thesis of self-realization is primarily a philosophical understanding of Naess.

What is Deep ecology :

Deep ecology is a contemporary ecological and environmental philosophy characterized by its advocacy of the inherent worth living being regardless of their instrumental utility of human needs. Deep ecology argues that the natural world is a subtle balance of complex inter-relationships in which the existence of organism is dependent on the existence of others within ecosystems. Deep ecology's core principle is the belief that the living environment as a whole should be respected and regarded as having certain legal rights to live and flourish. It describes itself as 'deep' because it regards itself as looking more deeply in to the actual reality of humanity's relationship with natural world arriving at philosophically more profound biology. The philosophy provides a foundation for environmental ecology and green movements and has fostered a new system of environmental ethics advocating wilderness preservation, human population control and simple living.

According to Aldo Leopold, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."¹

Deep ecologists say that an eco-centric attitude is more consistent with the truth about the nature of life on earth. Instead of regarding humans as something completely unique or chosen by God, they see us as integral threads in the fabric of life.

In their book 'Deep ecology' Bill Devall and George Sessions describe a series of source of deep ecology. This includes the science of ecology itself and cites its major contribution as the rediscovery in a

modern context that “*Everything is connected to everything else.*” They point out that some ecologists and natural historians, in addition to their scientific view point have developed a deep ecological consciousness, for some a political consciousness and at times spiritual consciousness. This is a perspective beyond the strictly human point, beyond anthropocentrism. Among the scientists they mention specifically are Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, John Livingston, Paul R. Ehrlich and Barry Commoner, together with Frank Fraser Darling, Charles Sutherland Elton, Eugene Odum and Paul Sears.

Contemporary teaching of the Catholic Church appears to support some deep ecology themes like use of the mineral, vegetable and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperative. Man’s domination over inanimate and other living beings granted by the creator is not absolute, it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come, it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.

Deep Ecology of Arne Naess :

In 1973 the name “Deep ecology movement” was introduced into environmental literature by Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer professor Arne Naess. Naess’s article was based on a talk he gave in Bucharest in 1972 at the Third World Future Research conference. In his talk Naess discussed the longer range background of the ecology movement and its connection with respect for nature and the inherent worth of other beings. Naess enjoyed the opportunity to observe political and social action in diverse cultures. Both historically and in contemporary movement Naess saw two different forms of environmentalism. One he called the “long range deep ecology movement” and the other the “shallow ecology movement”. The word ‘deep’ in part he referred to the level of questioning of our purposes and values, when arguing in environmental conflicts. The ‘deep’ movement involves deep questioning right down to fundamentals. The shallow stops before the ultimate level. The long range deep ecology movement includes some of Arne’s thoughts on the relationships of three great movements – peace, social justice and ecological sustainability which is emphasized the importance of diversity, co-operation and beautiful action, with the high quality of a joyful life based on non-violence and low consumption. The supporters of the long range deep ecology movement look for long term solutions, engage in deep questioning and pursue alternative patterns of action. They strive to build sustainability. The shallow ecology movement relies on quick, technical fixes and pursues business as usual without and deep value questioning.

The deep questioning approach of the long range deep ecology movement examines our basic values and life styles and reflects on our fundamental relationship with nature and who we are. We must learn from the integrity and diversity that are there. When we use violent methods such as toxic sprays to control other plants and organisms, we not only harm other beings but also set off long range problems that are worse than the ones we are trying to solve. Trying to control the whole nature is wrong and futile. Our challenge is to manage ourselves as responsible members of an ecosystem that includes diverse species, communities and unique individuals who deserve our respect.

Naess and others have proposed a set of eight principles to characterize the deep ecology movement as part of the general ecology movement. These principles are endorsed by people from a diversity of backgrounds who share common concerns for the planet, its many beings and ecological communities. In many western nations according to him, “*Life is fundamentally one ... the deep ecology movement is ecology movement which questions ‘deep’ ... stress that we ask why and how, where others do not.*” Supporters of the platform principles stated below come from different religious and philosophical backgrounds. Their political affiliations differ considerably. What unites them in a long range vision of what is necessary to protect the Earth’s ecological communities and values?

The platform principles of the deep ecology movement:

Here are the proposed platform principles of the deep ecology movement as originally formulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions in 1984 while on a hiking trip in Death Valley California.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms : intrinsic value, inherent value)
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Except to satisfy vital needs, humans do not have the right to reduce this diversity and richness.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.

7. An ideological change would essentially entail seeking a better quality of life rather than a raised standard of living.
8. Those who accept the above mentioned points are responsible for trying to contribute directly or indirectly to the necessary changes.

Anyone who endorses these eight principles is called by Naess and others a supporter of the deep ecology movement, not a deep ecologist. The word 'supporter' is more Gandhian and rich for interpretation. Naess stresses that those who support these principles can do so from a wide range of different ultimate views. Just as birds build different kinds of nests in different habitats, so human cultures which grow out of ecological places with respect for their inherent values develop diverse forms of practice, technology and social order.

The above principles can be refined down into three simple propositions:

1. Wilderness Preservation
2. Human population control
3. Simple living

Eco-sophy :

Naess calls his own ultimate philosophy ecosophy. It is deeply influenced by Gandhian non-violence, Mahayana Buddhism and Spinozan pantheism. The basic norm in Naess's Ecosophy is *self-realization for all beings*. The self to be realized for humans is not ego self but the larger ecological self. Self-realization for humans he says, can be achieved in a variety of ways. His own approach is to extend his sense of identification to a larger sense of self. We have the capacity to connect with a much larger sense of self, transcending ego. It is not difficult for us to identify with other living beings. We can actually practice or cultivate this capacity.

Naess sees biodiversity and cultural diversity as inextricably interconnected. He has strong feeling for the uniqueness of each individual whether a rock, an insect or a person and at the same time he is able to appreciate their unity and common biological and ecological grounds. He says that most of us eventually realize that some of our basic ways of knowing rest on an intuition such as "*Everything hangs together*" and "*Live and let live*". All philosophies of life consist of basic value norms and basic hypothesis about the nature of the world. When these philosophies take careful account of ecological responsibilities, they become ecosophies, a word he found for ecological wisdom.

According to Naess, Ecosophy means a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of Sofia or wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority, announcements and hypothesis concerning the state of affairs in our universe. Wisdom is policy wisdom, prescription, not only scientific description and prediction. The details of an eco-sophy will show many variations due to significant difference concerning not only the 'facts' of pollution, resources, population etc. but also value priorities." Just as the aim of traditional philosophy is Sophia or wisdom, so the aim of Eco-philosophy is Eco-sophy or ecological wisdom.

Ecological problem is not local but global in nature. Everyone will unanimously agree to the point that global concerns get priority. The slogan, Think globally, act locally, is being replaced by the new one, Think globally, act globally. Eco-sophists are not silent in terms of the problem faced by the poor people. They are very much concerned of it. They spoke about the controlling of human population, they have prepared a lesson for the third world because of over population, poverty, low quality of life etc. Naess in his essays, "The three Great Movements" has said that, the three great movements for global responsibility during the 20th century were the Peace, Social justice, and environmental movements.

Eco-sophy is related to Eco-feminism:

There are many eco-feminist people like Joanna Macy for example who would call themselves deep ecologists, but there are some eco feminists who have made an important claim against it. They say the real problem is not anthropocentrism but androcentric man-centeredness. They say that 10,000 years of patriarchy is ultimately responsible for the destruction of biosphere "and the development of authoritarian practices, both socially and environmentally. Deep ecologists concede that patriarchy had been responsible for a lot of violence against women and nature.

Arne Naess says that he is a supporter of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism points out that women's labour and knowledge are required for the health of planet. Thus feminism and environmentalism need to move forward hand to hand. This hand to hand journey can provide liberation from the life destroying systems that currently threaten women.

Eco-sophy and Self-realization:

Ecosophy is closely related to self-realization where individuals recognize themselves as a part of a larger ecological web. The understanding of the interconnectedness of humans, the environment, fosters a sense of

responsibility towards nature. Because humans see their well-being tied to the health of the environment. Individuals may cultivate a deeper respect for eco system, leading to more sustainable interactions through self-realization. Feeling of ecosophy encourages balance and harmony, suggesting that as humans nurture the environment, the environment also nurture their own wellbeing. The feeling of ecosophy understands the impact of human actions on the environment and taking steps to mitigate harm. This feeling aware of the environmental impact of consumer choices and opting for sustainable options. Feeling of ecosophy also encourages to participating in local environmental initiatives and promoting ecological awareness and examines the ethical and philosophical implications oh human environment interactions.

Criticism:

Many critiques say that deep ecology platform are problematic and there appear to be inconsistencies within the philosophy as a whole. Because deep ecology requires everyone to formulate their own interpretation, people who claim to be part of the movement hold incompatible view points from each other. Some says that the main problem with deep ecology is its vagueness. In attempting to allow for openness to interpretation and personal intuition, deep ecology risks becoming vacuous.

Murray Bookchin, critiques that deep ecology falls to see that the problem of the environmental crisis is directly linked to authoritarianism and hierarchy. Bookchin says these are the real problems and they are expressed both socially and environmentally. Deep ecologists invite themselves to be accused of nature mysticism. Social ecologists say we need to change our social structure, and that the elimination to authoritarianism and hierarchy in human society will end the environmental crisis.

Critics have latched onto the fact that no one or two occasions, certain deep ecologists have called for very draconian measures to save the planet from destruction at the hands of human beings. The danger that social ecologists and others see is that what these deep ecologists envision will become a new kind of totalitarianism as "Eco fascism". In other words, some kind of the world government which would compel people to change their social practices and totally control their behaviour to make it consistent with the demands of the ecosphere.

If the people of 2 of the deep ecology platform are true, how do we account for the fact that natural processes like volcanic eruptions have severely reduced the diversity of life on earth? Given that the sun will eventually destroy the earth and all life on it, natural processes do not appear to value life species diversity. It is more plausible to claim that these are purely human values which deep ecologists are imposing on a romanticized concept of nature. All humans have duties towards other beings, which require us to engage with the natural world in practical ways. But how much should we interfere? Naess leaves this question to be decided by 'local', regional and national circumstances and cultural differences. Peter Marshall not unreasonably believes that if that is the case the very notion of biocentric equality has little context except as slogan.

III. Conclusion:

Eco- sophy or Deep Ecology movement have articulated ultimate philosophies based on religious world views as Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Hinduism, Islam, Neo-Paganism and Shamanism. Many have said their interpretation of this spiritual traditions emphasize humility, love of others and respectful treatment of all beings. Bio-regionalism is and activists form of support for the deep ecology movement. The wild land project, the Arne Naess selected work project, the Eco-agriculture movement, the Eco-forestry institute and Institute for Deep Ecology education programmes and the eco forestry foundations are a few examples applications of deep ecology movement principles to work in support of bio-diversity, preservation of wildness and ecological restoration.

20th century left as legacy for the new century complex, bundles of problems. Primarily man made, including climate change, ozone hole, environmental poisoning, drying trees, expansion of desert regions, extinction of species, disregard for human dignity, over population, world famine, drought, migration of the poor, ethnic cleansing, mass unemployment, wars, state terror, violent fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, unconventional weapons and arms trade, to mention just a few. Therefore the question as to whether this array of problems of Gordian complexity can be solved is certainly justified. From the point of view of deep ecology life and death in the 21st century will very much depend upon the type of interaction between the various people's nations, states and cultures. The eco-centric values implied by the platform lead us to recognize that all human cultures have a mutual interest in seeing earth and its diversity continue for our sake, for its own sake and because we love it.

By embracing Eco-sophy, individuals can cultivate deeper connection with nature, leading to a greater sense of unity and offers a pathway to Moksha by promoting a holistic understanding of the world and our place within it. By recognizing our interconnectedness with nature, we can transcend the limitations of our individual perspectives and achieve a state of unity and liberation.

References:

- [1]. Devall, Bill. Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology, Salt Lake City, Gibb Smith, 1988.
- [2]. Devall, Bill & George Sessions, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered. Salt Lake City, Peregrine Smith, 1985
- [3]. Drengson, Alan and Yuichi Inoue, Editors, The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology, Berkeley, North Atlantic Publishers, 1995
- [4]. Drengson and Devall, Bill The Ecology of Wisdom Arne Naess.
- [5]. Fox, Warwick, Toward a Transpersonal Ecology, Boston, Shambhala, 1990.
- [6]. Mc Laughlin, Andrew, Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology, Albany Sunny Press, 1993
- [7]. Naess, Arne. Interpretation and Preciseness, Oslo, Dybwad
- [8]. Naess, Arne. 1974, Gandhi and Group Conflict, Oslo, Universitets Forlaget, 1953
- [9]. Naess, Arne, Ecology, Community and Lifestyle, London Cambridge, 1991
- [10]. Naess, Arne, Selected works of Arne Naess, In English, Edited by Harold Glasser, Amsterdam, Kluwer, 2000.
- [11]. Sessions, George. Editor, Deep Ecology for the 21st century, Boston Shambhala, 1995.
- [12]. Piet, J. H. & Prasad. A, An Introduction to Applied Ethics, Page no. 110
- [13]. The Institute for Deep Ecology is at: <http://www.deep-ecology.org>