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Supratik Sen
University of Oxford

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1797

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The Green Gītā: Connecting Ontology, Soteriology and Environmental Ethics

Supratik Sen
University of Oxford

Abstract

The text of the Bhagavad Gītā is compatible with a favourable ecological reading. I highlight two concurrent worldviews in the text, a world-renouncing worldview and a bhakti worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. I then argue that the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, is consistent with the interconnected normative, soteriological and ontological dimensions of each of these two worldviews.

1. Introduction

THE Bhagavad Gītā has uniquely informed Hindu self-representations since the turn of the nineteenth century, and along with the Upaniṣads and the Brahmaśūtra, forms the triple foundations of Vedānta—the “most influential school of theology in India” (Flood 1996, p. 238). Considering the Bhagavad Gītā’s prominence within the admittedly heterogeneous Hindu cosmos, it is significant that Lance Nelson has claimed that the ontological vision and soteriological goal promoted by the Gītā is incompatible with environmental ethics. In his ecological critique of the Gītā, Nelson concludes that the Gītā’s “hierarchical, fundamentally dualistic outlook” which elevates “pure spirit above matter” implies that nature is “finally irrelevant to the Gītā’s soteriological goals” and thus the Gītā’s “ideals are in many ways antithetical to ecological ethics as we know it” (Nelson 2000, p. 140, 151).

In an important respect, Nelson’s critique of the Gītā parallels Lynn White’s critique of Christian monotheism as the ideological source of the contemporary environmental crisis (White 1967). In a widely discussed essay exploring the historical roots of the environmental crisis, White argued that the core ideas of Christianity led to a deeply damaging form of anthropocentrism, one that encouraged the overexploitation of nature by maintaining the intrinsic superiority of humans over all other forms of life on Earth, and by depicting all of nature as created for the use of humans. While White’s critique is aimed at the “orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature” (White 1967, p. 1207), Nelson’s critique targets the purported Vedāntic indifference toward nature. That is, since the Gītā’s theology...
asserts that the ultimate human concern is to attain a state of salvation transcendent to this world the Gītā provides no impetus to engage with environmental issues or to work for the ecological welfare of this world. If Nelson’s critique carries weight, then it problematizes the claim that the Gītā transmits “an eternal teaching that has universal relevance” (Davis 2015, p. 18).

Against this conclusion, I argue that the Gītā can inspire environmental ethics on many levels. I show there are two concurrent worldviews embedded in the Gītā—a world-renouncing worldview and a bhakti worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. More specifically, I will argue that the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, is consistent with the interconnected normative, soteriological and ontological dimensions of each of these two worldviews.

2. Environmental Ethics from a World-Renouncer’s Perspective

Edwin Bryant has labelled the Bhagavad Gītā “a Vedānto-Sāṃkhyan text” and has highlighted how the text expresses the “theism of the older Sāṃkhyan traditions” (Bryant 2014, p. 33). The Gītā’s theistic Sāṃkhya delineates three irreducible ontological categories: prakṛti—the unconscious, primordial matrix of matter, puruṣas—beginningless, self-aware subjects and puruṣaḥ paraḥ—the Supreme Person, the autonomous independent entity who sustains and is the ultimate cause of both prakṛti and innumerable selves (puruṣas). The Gītā turns on the idea that a human being (embodied beings, in general) is a composite of three parts: a physical body, a subtle mental body and an irreducible, beginningless, self-aware subject or puruṣa. According to the Gītā, then, both the physical body and the functions of the subtle mental body are manifested by the unconscious energy of prakṛti. The puruṣa, however, is ontologically distinct from prakṛti in that the puruṣa being a trans-prakṛtic entity inherently consists of pure subjectivity or self-luminous awareness. Pursuing the Vedāntic project of distilling the real self from the not-self, the Gītā differentiates the physical and subtle mental body from the puruṣa, arguing that only the puruṣa—the diachronically unchanging eternal self-aware subject that observes the constantly changing mind-body complex—is the real self, whereas the subtle and physical body belong to the category of not-self. In this context, the text advances a world-renouncing worldview that is succinctly described at 13.7-11. These verses advocate an ascetic mode of living, wherein the primary purpose driving action is to relinquish the world of prakṛti while simultaneously trying to connect to the innate, unchanging, eternal, transcendent nature of the puruṣa. From this perspective, one views one’s mind-body complex as external to one’s real self and consequently, considers one’s immersion in prakṛti to be circumstantial and an obstacle to realising one’s intrinsically blissful state of being.

The soteriological goal of the world-renouncing worldview is liberation from saṁsāra—the cycle of rebirth that the embodied puruṣa is said to undergo in the world of prakṛti. This is, of course, a negative way of framing the soteriological goal of the world-renouncer. Framing the goal positively, the world-renouncer seeks to achieve the state of brahma-nirvāṇa, literally, “extinction in Brahman.” The text has Kṛṣṇa use the phrase brahma-nirvāṇam
three times,\(^9\) in three consecutive verses, at 5.24–26, a section of the Gītā dedicated to delineating the world-renouncer’s soteriological goal. I interpret brahma-nirvāṇa to mean a state where the puruṣa is no longer connected to the prakṛti composite that makes up one’s empirical personhood but rather, is solely absorbed in the awareness of self-luminous awareness itself.

The Sāmkhya framework underpinning the Gītā’s conception of nature or prakṛti implies that the project of liberation from saṁsāra is equivalent to transcending the three guṇas that pervade and comprise all phenomena born of prakṛti stuff. The guṇas can be discerned through their effects on the subjectivity of the puruṣa and the text details how various guṇas induce a variety of affective and cognitive states, with the highest guṇa of sattva representing virtue, lucidity and wisdom, the intermediate guṇa of rajas representing greed, activity and attachment, and the lowest guṇa of tamas representing ignorance, indolence and darkness. The Gītā depicts the puruṣas embedded in saṁsāric existence as being characterized by the desire to ‘taste’ experiences born of the permutations and combinations of the guṇas.\(^9\) At 14.20, the Gītā thus categorically asserts that by transcending the influence of the guṇas one is liberated from saṁsāra:

When the embodied soul transcends these three guṇas that originate in the body, it becomes liberated from birth, death, old age and misery, and attains the nectar of immortality.

Yet, even though the Gītā defines the liberated person as guṇātītah—having gone beyond or transcended the guṇas,\(^10\) the Gītā also claims that acting in sattva guṇa is the ideal one should aim for and “as such, being established in the guṇa of goodness, one finds oneself adhering to dharma” (Theodor 2016, p. 10). Along with Ithamar Theodor, I contend that 16.1–4, offers a list of dharmic ideals, “ideal qualities to be pursued while living in accordance with dharma” (Theodor 2016, p. 13). This list includes two significant ideals: ahiṁsā (nonviolence) and dayā bhūteṣu (compassion or kindness toward all living entities). Notably, one can derive prescriptive moral injunctions about obligatory and forbidden actions that advance the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, from these two dharmic ideals.

Returning to the world-renouncer’s project of liberation from saṁsāra, we can say that since the guṇas pertain to the prakṛti body, to transcend the guṇas is tantamount to dissolving one’s mis-identification with the mind-body complex made of prakṛti stuff. The Gītā portrays the ahamkāra or ego, the most subtle aspect of the prakṛtic psychological mechanism, as the glue that causes self-luminous awareness to mis-identify with the mind-body complex and the prakṛtic world. Jonathan Edelmann notes: “The etymological meaning of ahamkāra is ‘I-maker’, for it provides the self with the sense of being an individual, or an ‘I’. When the ego is applied to the body and mind, the result is a false concept of personal identity, or a sense of ‘I and mine’” (Edelmann 2012, p. 65). Influenced by the ahamkāra, the puruṣa endeavours to ‘possess and own’ prakṛtic objects that can generate pleasing experiences for the prakṛtic mind-body complex one is embodied in and this motive ensures that the puruṣa continues to remain under the influence of the
guṇas, and continues to be reborn in various types of prakṛtic bodies according to the karmic merit and demerit one acquires.

The pertinent question: what is the ethical means through which the world-renouncer can transcend the influence of the guṇas? One answer to this question is found in the phrase sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ, which appears twice in the Gītā—at 5.25 and 12.4. At 5.25, the phrase is used to qualify the person fit to attain brahma-nirvāṇa, or extinction in Brahman. At 12.4, the same phrase is used to qualify the person fit to attain ākṣaram avyaktam—the imperishable and unmanifest Brahman. The phrase sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ may be translated as “concerned with the welfare of all beings” or “engaged in the welfare of all beings.” I believe sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ is the primary ethical means through which the Gītā conceives of the world-renouncer transcending the influence of the guṇas. The rationale behind this idea is that by focusing on acting for the welfare of all beings, one can relinquish the ahaṃkāra-centred pursuit of guṇa experiences within saṁsāra and develop “constant equanimity toward desired and undesired events,” brought about by the guṇas (mind and senses) interacting with the guṇas (sense objects), which further allows the puruṣa to disconnect from the ahaṃkara itself and ultimately, transcend the influence of the guṇas.¹¹

Can sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ encompass a proactive version of social activism that includes environmental activism? I believe the sixth chapter of the Gītā gives us good reason to believe that it can. The chapter describes classical yoga, a psychosomatic manual of meditative practice aimed at helping one realize the actual nature of the puruṣa. At 6.32, the text has Kṛṣṇa declare:

O Arjuna, one who in relation to himself sees all beings equally, whether in happiness or distress, is considered the supreme yogī.

Lance Nelson, while acknowledging that this verse offers a vision of universal empathy, quotes Rāmānuja’s commentary on this verse as saying that the highest yogī is cognizant of the sameness of all puruṣas, in that, being of the nature of Brahman, puruṣas are disconnected from and indeed, untouched by the pleasure and pain incurred in embodied existence in saṁsāra. Nelson writes that this vision is “ecologically unnerving” because by claiming that “spirit is untouched by mere empirical calamities” Vedāntic thought minimizes the significance of empirical calamities such as the degradation of the environment (Nelson 2000, p. 143, 151). Nelson’s account implies that Rāmānuja should have done nothing to mitigate the suffering of embodied beings, knowing that Brahman is untouched by matter. Yet, Rāmānuja devoted his life to spreading the teachings and practices of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, which, for him, was ostensibly the means to mitigate the suffering brought about by empirical calamities. Pankaj Jain similarly asks: “If the world was an illusion, māyā, for Śaṅkara why would he work to “defeat” Buddhist tradition and other ideologies in the popular discourses as captured in the Śaṅkara-Digvijaya?” (Jain 2011, p.12). To press the point further, if the perfected yogī is supposed to exhibit indifference to “mere empirical calamities” knowing that Brahman is untouched by empirical calamities, then why do Vedāntic theologians endeavour to spread the teachings and practices of their respective Vedāntic schools, which, for them, is ostensibly an
endeavour to help puruṣas be liberated from empirical calamities?

To answer this question I suggest we need to read Brahman absorption as having a rather different effect than what is suggested by Nelson. Brahman absorption frees the puruṣa from the ahaṃkara-centred vision of seeing the world as an instrument to fulfil one’s schemes for prakṛtic enjoyment. Concurrent with the emancipatory effect of Brahman absorption, Brahman absorption may be interpreted as having an ‘activist’ effect as well. The brahma-bhūta yogī knows that Brahman is completely unrelated to matter, but the brahma-bhūta yogī is deeply aware that puruṣas under the influence of māyā (the deluding power that causes the puruṣa to apprehend reality to be something other than what it actually is) acutely experience the duḥkha—suffering, pain, discontent, frustration, displeasure—endemic to saṁsāric existence in general. Therefore, the brahma-bhūta yogī ‘works’ to help all beings (re)discover their true ontological status as beings partaking of the inherent bliss of Brahman. I interpret this to mean that the vision of universal empathy, which includes the attendant ethic of sarva-bhūta-hite ratāḥ, is not just the means to attain immersion in Brahman but is also the ethical modus operandi of one who has attained immersion in Brahman. Working to mitigate ecological issues can thus be an authentic subset of the world-renouncer yogī’s compassionate outreach to mitigate the pain of embodied beings, both in the stage of yoga practice and in the stage of perfection (Brahman absorption).

However, the practice of environmental ethics as inspired by the Gītā’s world-renouncing perspective faces a seemingly more fundamental objection. Critics claim that since the world-renouncer, as defined by the Gītā, only sees, or is aiming to see, the non-dual Brahman, such an imperative to transcend duality also implies transcending the dual categories of moral and immoral itself. Without this dual category, what is the basis for any kind of ethical imperative, including the imperative to care for animals and plants? Nelson consequently writes that the Gītā drifts toward an “ultimate amoralism (or perhaps transmoralism) in the absolute realm, one that may not bode well for ecological awareness” (Nelson 2000, p. 144).

In addressing this concern, I wish to point out that when the Gītā speaks of transcending duality, it is referring to transcending the mentality of categorizing experiences as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in relation to one’s ahaṃkara-centred enjoyment. But this does not imply that the world-renouncer is not cognizant of the dual categories of virtue and vice. The Gītā clarifies this point at the beginning of chapter eighteen. The chapter begins with Arjuna asking Kṛṣṇa to explicate the meaning of renunciation (tyāga) along with the meaning of the renounced stage of life (sannyasa), and the difference between them. At 18.3, the text has Kṛṣṇa point out that some thinkers argue that all types of actions should be relinquished, since they are inherently faulty, yet other sages maintain that acts of sacrifice (yaṣṭa), giving (dāna) and austerity (tapāḥ) should never be abandoned. Then, at 18.5, the text has Kṛṣṇa deliver his verdict:

Acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity are not to be given up, but rather should be performed, as sacrifice, giving and austerity purify even the wise.
If the Gītā expects the world-renouncer who is aiming to transcend duality to continue acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, then the world-renouncer must have a basis upon which to differentiate between actions that may be regarded as acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, and those that may not be regarded as such. This basis is provided by the soteriological goal of the world-renouncer, the intent to achieve extinction in Brahman. For the world-renouncer, then, virtuous actions, encompassing acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, are ones that help oneself and others attain Brahman immersion and such acts are never to be given up. In summary, the Gītā depicts the world-renouncer as being intent on attaining the state of extinction in Brahman or to realize the true status of self-luminous awareness freed from its entanglement with prakṛti. Engaging in activities that advance the welfare of all beings, including activities that mitigate the pain and suffering experienced by embodied beings, is the ethical means to achieve extinction in Brahman as well as the symptom of one who has achieved extinction in Brahman. Activities to care for and protect animals and plants falls within the category of activities that mitigate the pain and suffering experienced by embodied beings. Therefore, normative environmental ethics can be derived from the world-renouncing worldview in the Gītā.

3. Bhakti-Inspired Environmental Ethics

The bhakti worldview pertains to those puruṣas whose identity is defined through their relationship with the Supreme Person. The ontological foundation for the bhakti worldview rests on the notion of Īśvara, a supreme puruṣa who impels and sustains the various categories of existence and is intrinsically ontologically higher than all other puruṣas. This idea is explicated in some detail in the last five verses of the Gītā’s fifteenth chapter. Through these verses, the Gītā espouses a vision of Īśvara as a special puruṣa belonging to a different ontological category from other puruṣas, while at the same time the Gītā puts a name to this Īśvara—Kṛṣṇa.

In contrast to the world-renouncing worldview where the puruṣa seeks Brahman immersion, a state where awareness is absorbed in its own essential nature, the soteriological goal of the bhakti worldview is to be perpetually absorbed in loving devotion to Īśvara and upon attaining final liberation (through the grace of Īśvara), to enter Īśvara’s eternal personal abode to perpetually engage in loving relationships with Īśvara. This bhakti worldview is articulated in the concluding verse of the ninth chapter and the importance of this bhakti ideal for the Gītā can be inferred from the fact that the verse appears again almost verbatim at the end of the Gītā’s epilogue at 18.65. Numerous times, the text has Kṛṣṇa reiterate the ideal of total absorption in him, the bliss of exchanging loving relations with the Supreme Person and the ultimate goal of returning to the deity’s dhāma or abode. The means to attain the bhakti soteriological goal is to worship, serve, and glorify Īśvara as expressed in 9.13-14 and again at 10.9-10. The Gītā claims that this unwavering absorption in Īśvara is what helps the bhakta transcend the influence of the guṇas, reconnect to one’s Brahman nature, and return to Īśvara’s personal realm. The theistic Vedāntins who elaborated on the bhakti soteriological goal have characterized Īśvara’s personal realms as saṅgaṇa-brahman, realms within Brahman that
are made of self-luminous awareness—Brahman—but that are nevertheless populated by forms, individuals, and personalities.17

Having outlined the ontological structure and soteriological goal of the bhakti view present in the Gītā, we are now tasked with addressing the question pertinent to environmental ethics: How can working for the benefit of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, be construed as authentic elements constituting the worship and glorification of Īśvara? A crucial part of the answer to this question lies in the Gītā’s panentheistic conception of the divine. Panentheism is the idea that God is simultaneously immanent in the world and transcendent to the world. In the terms of the Gītā this means that Īśvara is simultaneously immanent in prakṛti and transcendent to prakṛti. A panentheistic vision appears at a number of places in the Gītā text, most notably at 7.4-9, 7.12 and 9.4. This vision divinizes the constituents of nature and offers an explicitly sacred view of the world around us. Rāmānuja, the founding theologian and hierarch of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community elaborated upon this panentheistic vision in his theology of viśiṣṭādvaita—‘differentiated nonduality’—an interpretation of Vedānta which is as an exemplar of Indic panentheism.18

Rāmānuja posited an eternal tripartite differentiation within Brahman or ultimate reality: Brahman as supreme personal Being, or Īśvara, whom he correlated with Viṣṇu/Nārāyana; prakṛti or matter; and puruṣas or selves. Rāmānuja claimed these are eternal and real ontological categories but these categories do not compromise the essential nonduality of Brahman since everything emanates from, and remains wholly dependent on Īśvara for their existence.

Śrī Vaiṣṇava soteriology, which I consider to be an archetype of the bhakti soteriological goal delineated in the Gītā, says that to eternally glorify, worship and serve Īśvara is the ultimate destiny of the puruṣa on account of one’s inherent subservience to and dependence on Īśvara. The Śrī Vaiṣṇava Vedāntic school teaches that the life of a prapanna, one who has surrendered to Īśvara, consists of service to and worship of Īśvara. Building upon this emphasis of serving the deity, Patricia Mumme (Mumme 1998) has argued that Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are called upon to engage in ecological activism since service that advances the welfare of this world—loka-saṅgraha—is included within service to Īśvara, which is the puruṣa’s ultimate goal and destiny, even for puruṣas that have attained the ultimate soteriological goal of completely surrendering (prapatti) to Īśvara.

The question still remains: if the ultimate soteriological goal of the bhakta (prapanna) is to attain a state of salvation outside of this world, then why should bhaktas attend to issues concerned with the welfare of this world? To answer this question, let’s begin by noting that the term loka-saṅgraha appears twice, at 3.20 and 3.25, in a part of the Gītā where Kṛṣṇa is trying to persuade Arjuna to fight the battle as a form of dharmic duty performed without attachment (asaktah) to enjoying the perceived beneficial results of that action. Here the agent is faced with a dilemma: if one is detached from acquiring any type of prakṛtic gain, then why should one continue to dutifully act in the world of prakṛti? In the context of the bhakti worldview, this dilemma is resolved by imputing the bhakta’s (or prapanna’s) motivation to work for the welfare of the world by supporting the eternal dharmic order as an expression of the bhakta’s devotion to Īśvara. In
In this regard, note that the Gītā famously depictsĪśvara repeatedly descending to this ārkītic world to maintain dharmic order.19 One can reliably infer that maintaining ecological harmony is a subset of the project of maintaining dharmic order. Therefore, the bhakta’s motivation to work to help sustain ecological order is impelled by the bhakta’s devotion toĪśvara which manifests in the endeavour to align oneself with the will ofĪśvara who is personally invested in maintaining the dharmic order that sustains the world.20 It is in this sense that the bhakti worldview is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. The Gītā depicts the ideal bhakta as someone who is free from the desire to pursueguna-born experiences involving any kind of ārkītic object and in this sense, because they do not see the world as an instrument to fulfill ahaṃkāra-centred enjoyment, ideal bhaktas can be said to have renounced the world.21 But at the same time, the text calls upon the devoted to acknowledge that this world exhibits the power and excellence ofĪśvara and is a divine manifestation expressingĪśvara’s glory (vibhūti).22 Moreover, sinceĪśvara is invested in maintaining the dharmic order that sustains the world it is incumbent upon the bhakta to work for the welfare of the world according to dharmic codes because by doing so one worshipsĪśvara.

In conclusion, we do not need to read the other-worldly soteriological goal of the Gītā’sbhakti worldview as necessarily translating into an ethical outlook that is impervious to issues concerning the welfare of this world. Rather, the Gītā advances a panentheistic conception of the divine that sees this world of ārkīti as both real and valuable toĪśvara, to the extent thatĪśvara repeatedly descends to this world to maintain the dharmic order that sustains it. Therefore, puruṣas who identify as servants ofĪśvara can pleaseĪśvara by acting for the benefit of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, because such activities are a legitimate subset of the category of activities that support the dharmic order that sustains the world.

4. Conclusion
What are the Gītā’s arguments to get us to act in a way consistent with environmental ethics and are such arguments internally consistent? In answering this question, I have shown that there are two concurrent worldviews in the Gītā—a world-renouncing worldview and a bhakti worldview, which is simultaneously world-affirming and world-renouncing. The distinct ontological commitments and soteriological goals of these two worldviews lead to two different theories of motivation. These two different theories of motivation provide two distinct reasons for acting in the world and more specifically, they provide two different reasons that warrant actions that advance the welfare of animals and plants. Environmental ethics, for the world-renouncer, is an aspect of acting for the welfare of all beings, which is the primary means to achieve extinction in Brahman as well as the symptom of one who is immersed in Brahman. Environmental ethics, for the bhakta, is an aspect of the bhakta’s endeavour to pleaseĪśvara by supporting the dharmic order that sustains the world. Thus, the theological matrix of the Gītā lends itself to a favourable ecological reading such that the motivation to act for the welfare of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants, is compatible within the
inter-connected, ontological, soteriological and normative dimensions of the text.

Notes

1 Some of the arguments presented in this article first appeared in my article on the eco-theology and the corresponding multi-layered ethical theory of the Bhagavad Gītā (Sen 2021).

2 Throughout this article, I have, for the most part, shortened the title Bhagavad Gītā to “the Gītā.” When specific verses are referenced, the chapter number appears first, followed by the verse number. When quoting Gītā verses, I have used Ithamar Theodor’s (Theodor 2016) translations.

3 The word ‘nature’ is nebulous and can mean nature as a whole, wholes in nature such as ecosystems or species and individuals in nature—humans, animals and plants. Christopher Framarin (Framarin 2014, p. 5) rightly notes that among those who clarify the term ‘nature’ none deny the claim that “a plausible environmental ethic must attribute direct moral standing to individuals in nature, such as animals and plants.” The alternative, in which only wholes have direct moral standing, unavoidably leads to a kind of “environmental fascism” (Regan 2004, p. 362) wherein we could unapologetically prescribe the culling of large numbers of human beings to reduce carbon emissions, for example. I therefore take it that to act for the benefit of ‘nature’ is to act for the benefit of individuals in nature, such as animals and plants.

4 Śāṁkhya is often labelled as a monolithic non-theistic tradition, but in fact, there were strains of Śāṁkhya that were theistic, as evidenced in the Mahābhārata and highlighted by Edwin Bryant (Bryant 2009).

5 This ontology is expressed at 7.4-7. There have been a variety of Vedāntic approaches to the Gītā’s ontology, but here I am informed by the twelfth century Vaiṣṇava theologian Rāmānuja’s reading of the Gītā.

6 See, for example, 2.13, 2.20 and 13.6-7.

7 See, for example, 13.3, 13.32, 13.33 and 13.34.

8 Kṛṣṇa also uses the phrase in 2.72.

9 See 13.22.

10 See 14.25.

11 The ideal of equanimity as characterizing the state of liberation from the guṇas is made explicit at 14.21-25. The idea of “constant equanimity toward desired and undesired events” is conveyed in the phrase “nityam ca sama-cittatvam iṣṭāniṣṭopapattīsu”, one of the qualities of the world-renouncer described at 13.10.

12 The Gītā describes māyā, consisting of the three guṇas, as a deluding veil preventing the puruṣa from apprehending its own essential nature and the nature of Kṛṣṇa. See 7.12-14.

13 At 7.27, Kṛṣṇa claims that all living entities, from their very birth, are covered by illusion consisting of “surges of desire and hate, due to the deluding power of the dualities.” Then, at 7.28, the text claims that “those of pious deeds, whose evils have ended,” are freed from the illusion of duality (dvandva-mohena) and such persons worship Kṛṣṇa, “firm in their vows.”

14 A world-renouncer who has already attained Brahma immersion continues acts of sacrifice, giving and austerity, to help other puruṣas attain Brahma immersion.
For example, at 8.14-15: O Partha, I am easily reached by the yogī who always remembers me, is constantly and fully absorbed in me, and is thus ever yoked. Having come to me, these great souls do not again undergo rebirth into that transient abode of misery, as they have attained the highest perfection. See also 9.14 and 10.8-11.

At 14.26 the text claims that one who serves Kṛṣṇa constantly through bhakti-yoga, “unswervingly and without going astray,” transcends the guṇas. 18.54 presents the idea that one attains supreme devotion to Kṛṣṇa after attaining Brahmaṇ status.

This is the view of the theistic Vedāntins (e.g., Rāmānuja’s commentary to Vedānta Sūtras I.1.21).

Eric Lott (Lott 1976) has shown that Rāmānuja is not the originator of this panentheistic vision, it has deep roots in Hindu texts.

See 4.7-8.

Patricia Mumme notes that in the Śrī Viṣṇuva tradition, the injunctions of Dharma Śāstras are “not seen as mere social convention for those who ignorantly identify with their body and social role but as the word and command” of Viṣṇu, the supreme deity (Mumme 1998, p. 146).

12.13 delineates the qualities of the ideal bhakta and specifically claims that the ideal bhakta is nirahanikāraḥ (without false ego) and nirmamāḥ (with no sense of proprietorship).

At 10.16, Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to describe his vibhūtiḥ (glories) through which he pervades the worlds. The rest of the chapter is devoted to describing how different powerful beings and objects of adoration in this world all originate from a fraction of Kṛṣṇa’s splendour (10.41).

References


Mumme, Patricia. Y. 1998. Models and Images for a Vaisnava Environmental Theology: The Potential Contribution of


