

DEBATE

Open Access

Śraddhā in the Bhagavad Gītā: an investigation on the primeval expressions of the contemporary paradigm on heart-philosophy

Rubens Turci

Correspondence:
Programa de Estudos Indianos
(PEIND), Universidade do Estado do
Rio de Janeiro, Rua São Francisco
Xavier 524 sala 9016, Rio de Janeiro
- R.J. 20550-900, Brazil

Abstract

Background: The *Gītā*, as it is well known, is an episode in the *Mahābhārata* when the climactic battle is about to begin. Kṛṣṇa argues in the *Gītā* that Arjuna should cultivate the necessary *śraddhā* (faith-in-oneself; mind's serene asceticism toward the heart) in order to overcome his state of doubts and distress.

Discussion: This essay discusses in what manner the contemporary forms of Environmentalism, such as those found in Eco-Dharma and Deep Ecology, have grown straightforward from the heart-philosophy rooted on the concept of *śraddhā* as dealt with in the *Gītā*.

Summary: *Śraddhā* is a ground to spirituality and environmentalism. No matter one's dogma of faith, it is always possible to display the universal soul force called *śraddhā*. For, when a sincere Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or even atheist, places his or her trust in that which transcends, what they all display is nothing but a form of the universal *śraddhā*. Being the element that is common to people of different faiths, *śraddhā* represents the main category for the understanding of heart-philosophy, which encompasses Theology, Spirituality, Eco-Dharma, and Environmentalism.

Introduction

This essay explores a couple of consequences of my thesis “*Śraddhā* in the *Bhagavad Gītā*” (2007), where I have shown both that term *śraddhā* keeps in the *Gītā* its essential meaning of the mind's serene asceticism toward *ātman* (the universal life-principle; the pervading principle in which everything exists, and also that within each living being's heart), and further that, that *śraddhā* represents the main category for the understanding of the theology of the *Gītā*.^a Now I intend to discuss in what manner the contemporary forms of Environmentalism, such as those found in Eco-Dharma and Deep Ecology, have grown straightforward from the heart-philosophy, rooted on the concept of *śraddhā* as dealt with in the *Gītā* – a text which paces the carrying out of day-to-day life activities with an existence entirely oriented to the development of a deep awareness of the holistic inner nature of the outer world.

The *Bhagavad Gītā*, as it is well known, is an episode in the *Mahābhārata* when the climactic battle is about to begin. There, Arjuna refuses to fight, and it is Kṛṣṇa's counsel that will finally convince him. Ultimately, due to his dialogue in the form of a series of kind-hearted theological arguments with Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna is able to overcome his

paralyzing state of distress. The discipline taught by Kṛṣṇa leads Arjuna to solve the dichotomy between the duties of the warrior in the *pravṛtti*^b process and those of the disciple seeking spiritual instruction in the *nivṛtti* path. In the *Gītā* these two modes represent the two inherent aspects of every single action. Although these processes seem to be separate and opposite, representing the paths of (1) living in the world (*pravṛtti*) and (2) retreating from it (*nivṛtti*), in the *Gītā* they are said to constitute that one single path defined as surrender unto *ātman* (BhG 18.66^c).^d The *Gītā* discusses this issue from the viewpoint of Arjuna's gradual shifting of mindset,^e from his initial ego-centric state of distress (*guṇa-para* state, as described in BhG 2.67), toward a selfless surrender into the sacred realm of the heart (*ātma-para* state, as described in BhG 2.58). In the *Gītā*, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna to leave behind all personal desires^f (*kāma*), withdrawing the senses from the sense-objects as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into its shell (BhG 2.58). Even when engaged with the objects of the senses, Arjuna should not lose sight of *ātman* (BhG 2.64). For, when enslaved by the senses, the mind blinds one's judgment (BhG 2.67). Kṛṣṇa argues that Arjuna should acquire the necessary *śraddhā* in order to shift from the egocentric sphere (*guṇa-para* state) to that of surrender unto *ātman* (*ātma-para* state).

The following Hindu poetical standpoint evinces the premises of those living in accordance with the *śraddhā*-based heart-philosophy:

I experience life as if all things and beings were born from a universal being that interpenetrates and sustains the entire cosmos. I experience life as if we all, from the lowest to the highest being, embodied nothing but a single existence. (Anonymous)

The Bhagavad Gītā inside the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata* presents a war-like situation in which the message of the *Gītā* provides a contrast between Arjuna's process of *pravṛtti* – the 12 years in the forest, dedicating himself to the practice of tapas (austerity) to get the necessary weapons for the fighting – with Arjuna's process of *nivṛtti*, when he appears in the *Gītā* eager to step into the spiritual path. The discipline taught by Kṛṣṇa leads Arjuna to solve the dichotomy between the duties of the warrior in the *pravṛtti* process and those of the disciple seeking spiritual instruction in the *nivṛtti* path. *Śraddhā* becomes in the *Gītā* the key element for redefining previous concepts and, as a consequence, for solving moral dilemmas.

The common Hindu statement, quoted by Shastri, "*Śraddhā* is the basis of *Śrāddha* – *śraddhā śrāddhe yato mūlam*" (1963, 390),^g provides the underlying theological frame for structuring the story that links the *Gītā* with the *Mahābhārata*. The *śrāddha* rite (death rite) involves a ritual which bonds people to the deceased by *śraddhā*, in a kind-hearted relation of spirituality and religious fervor. Arjuna's regaining of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā*, which is a subsection of the Book of *Bhīṣma* (*Bhīṣmaparvan*), and the heroic ancestor *Bhīṣma*'s death ritual (*śrāddha* rite) that follow in the Book of Instructions (*Aṅuśāsanaparvan*), therefore, are central to the understanding of how the pair *śraddhā* and *śrāddhā* link the different *parvans* together as a number of different reflections on *dharma*. After all peace attempts of the *Udyogaparvan* had failed, *dharma* is thought of in the following *parvans* in the context of the battle (*dharma-yuddha*). The importance of death in ritual terms is clear in each of these different *parvans*, with the relation of *śraddhā* and *śrāddha* particularly explored in the *parvans* celebrating commanders' deaths.

At the very moment one chooses not to follow what *ātman* indicates, one loses one's *śraddhā* and the ability to recognize *dharma*. The blind king loses sight of how to rule; *Bhīṣma* loses sight of what he needs to protect, and, according to *Kṛṣṇa*, *Kaṁa* loses sight of who it is to whom he really owes loyalty. These are the stories of the confusion about *dharma* in the *Mahābhārata*. Those who are ruled by the selfish motives rooted in the individual (*ahaṁkāra*) are not aware of their social and sacred inner nature, or *ātman*. They are not aware that *ātman* encompasses the individual, or *ahaṁkāra*. What the message of *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Gītā* adds to the story of the *Mahābhārata*, therefore, is the theological sense that when the *sattvic* (pure) form of *śraddhā* is not manifest in a person's heart, the consequence is the deterioration of all forms of life. For, the ability to recognize truth and the laws of nature comes from *ātman* by means of *sattvic śraddhā*.

The *Gītā* and the *Mahābhārata* show how the people who suffer from egocentrism, being oblivious to the principles of the heart-philosophy (*ātmic* understanding), begin to indulge in lawlessness; with the result there is soon confusion about the nature of the holistic realm in which life itself takes place. Both texts exemplify that, although we are naturally aware of our own existence in the world, we are not always aware of the *ātmic* realm. One needs to develop the proper *śraddhā* and live a spiritual life to get *ātmic* understanding. In the *Gītā*, throughout its 18 chapters, *Kṛṣṇa* contrasts *śraddhā* with Arjuna's whining behavior by introducing him to the discipline of orthopraxis^h known as *niṣkāmakarmayoga* – one should put one's heart on the performance of one's mission, without any ulterior motive or interest.ⁱ Arjuna's initial state in the *Gītā* is to be understood as the true dramatic moment of the whole *Mahābhārata* – a point where all questioning necessarily leads to some sort of conclusion and practical engagement. Arjuna conveys a metaphysical, social, and political attempt to reach orthopraxis, and the *Gītā* represents that point of the *Mahābhārata* where all questions ask for some sort of resolution. The struggle between war and peace represents the moment and opportunity to think again about the meaning of life, law, family ties, righteousness, and above all, the meaning and role of one's own conscience in the larger social process.

The *Gītā*, then, represents a wholehearted mode of reasoning where the transcendent *ātman*^j is understood as a way to overcome the manifold world-processes ruled by individualism and selfishness. The *Gītā* describes a unique and concrete situation, a never-to-be-repeated in reality. The dialogue gives rise to a phenomenology of conscience where different modes of thinking are laid out. The text makes use of myths and customary values to reveal the different aspects of the human psyche that play themselves out in the field of moral philosophy. The *Gītā*'s abstract discussions take place in the field of values, *Dharmakṣetra*. There *śraddhā* emerges as the truly central category of a heart-philosophy, and reconciles the two distinct types of human activities, defined by the conceptual pair *pravṛtti* (engagement in the affairs of the world) and *nivṛtti* (disengagement from the affairs of the world).

The *Gītā* in the Light of *Śraddhā*

Although the two paths of *pravṛtti* (engagement) and *nivṛtti* (disengagement) used to be seen in Vedic tradition as separate and opposite, *Kṛṣṇa* redefines them as the two complementary aspects of the one discipline of orthopraxis rooted in *śraddhā* that he is presenting to Arjuna.^k Orthopraxis is presented as a matter of an ethical choice, rather than a

matter of a simple moral decision based on faith and tradition. The *Gītā* reminds us that the idea of ‘*doxa*’ is something of provisional and of relative value; something that should be constantly re-evaluated under the light and higher authority of *ātman*. This is shown in the *Gītā* through Arjuna’s legitimate and honest process of doubting. As a real psychological subject (Nara), Arjuna is going through many epistemic transitions, and struggles to realize the ideal epistemic subject (*ātman*), characterized by Kṛṣṇa (Nārāyaṇa). The *Mahābhārata* often refers to Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as Nara–Nārāyaṇa, the nourishers of truth. While the *Mahābhārata* showcases the concrete field called *Kurukṣetra*, with Arjuna demonstrating his ability in fulfilling his deeds (*pravṛtti*), the *Gītā* exhibits his inner struggle to overcome himself and make his mind abide solely in the sacredness of the heart (*nivṛtti*). The *Gītā* unifies these two different paths of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti*.¹ Arjuna, the warrior in the external process, and Arjuna, the psychological subject seeking real knowledge, are unified by means of the discipline of the realization of *ātman*, rooted on *śraddhā*.

Śraddhā is represented in the *Gītā* as a ground to spirituality. For, it does not define any ‘religion’, but that which lies beyond every creed. The etymology of *śrad-dhā* suggests the general meaning of ‘to place one’s heart on’. In accordance to the *Gītā* different kinds of devotees (*bhakta*) are rewarded in accordance with their *śraddhā*.^m Certainty arises from *śraddhā*. And that is why *śraddhā* has sometimes been defined as trusting judgement, or affirmative conviction – *āstikya-buddhi*, a Vedic ritualistic state of mind, which is totally different from later theistic forms of ‘faith’.ⁿ The understanding of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā* as *āstikya-buddhi* implies entering the sphere of *ātman*. W.C. Smith, for instance, offers a thorough discussion on the view of *śraddhā* as *āstikya-buddhi* and makes it an orientation of yes-ness, an ‘awakeness to transcendence’ that belongs to the higher visionary self in the ‘heart’, and not to the rational mind or *manas*. In his monumental study called *Faith and Belief* (1979), W. C. Smith comments on this scholarly discussion of the term *śraddhā*. He starts his analysis noting that the major Vedic commentator Sāyaṇa, and the major commentator on the *Gītā*, Śaṅkara, take *śraddhā* to mean *āstikya-buddhi* – a kind of orientation of yes-ness (59). He uses both Minoru Hara (1964) and Paul Hacker to support his understanding that Śaṅkara exegetes the term as *śraddhayā āstikyabuddhayā* (n. 22, 217), which he translates as ‘awakeness to transcendence’ (59). Noting that the term is linked with ‘*buddhi*’ rather than ‘*manas*’ or the ‘mind’ he concludes that it means more than ‘believing’ or giving mental assent to something. Furthermore, Smith explains in another note:

śraddhā . . . āstikyabuddhir bhakti sahitā. This formula occurs in his [Śaṅ kara] exegesis of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, in the section (3:9:20–25) where it is being set forth that the visible forms, life-generative matter, the truth (*satyam*), and also faith (3:9:21) are dependent upon, are firmly supported by, dwell steadfast in (*pratiṣṭhitāni bhavanti*) the heart – and indeed, the heart alone (*hṛdaye hy eva*). Ed. cit. (above, our ref. 52), p. 484. It may be noted that “heart” here is explicitly interpreted by Śaṅkara as what Westerners would call the mind: namely, the two discriminated organs *buddhi* and *manas* together – ibid, p.483, commentary on 3:9:20.” (Smith 1979, n. 66, 239)

Manas is the category responsible for the state of doctrinal assent or ‘believing’ and therefore it relates to faith, not *śraddhā*.^o Even when Smith accepts the statement that

śraddhā may be seen as faith, he does not accept the reverse, that ‘faith is *śraddhā*’. The consequence of such a view is the establishment of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā* at the very center of spirituality and all philosophical phenomena – heart-philosophy included, as shown next.

Śraddhā* and the Heart-Philosophy of the *Gītā

Throughout the whole *Gītā*, Arjuna is led to focus his mind, not in the changeable aspects of the external and material world, but exclusively on that which lies hidden in what we perceive as reality – the *ātman*, or the unchangeable.^P What the *Gītā* shows is that anyone is able to ‘experience with certitude’ the truths of the sacred realm when they discover the highest forms of *śraddhā* – the ‘soul force’ responsible for putting love in action. It is *śraddhā* which gives us enough certainty about our intuitions. When one is able to develop *śraddhā* and experience this state oneness dealt with in the *Gītā* by means of the concept of *ātman*, the mind realizes what has been called the sacredness of nature and of the whole universe.

A similar metaphysical position, where one experiences the world as if through a holy person’s eyes is also present in contemporary expressions of heart-philosophy, such as Eco-dharma and Environmentalism, inasmuch as they all assume that the subject is to be thought of as interconnected with the objects, like in the relation of the parts and whole. Arne Naess’ main work, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), for instance, is deeply ingrained in the heart-philosophy of the *Gītā*. His focus on deep ecology has given rise to what many have also addressed as Eco-dharma. And that is why one can trace his thought back to the *Gītā*, where *śraddhā* can be said to work as a key factor in bringing life to a perfect balance of ‘spirituality’ and ‘materiality’.

As Naess acknowledges in many places, his philosophy, known as Ecosophy T, is rooted in the verse 29 of chapter 6 of the *Gītā*, where the concept of *ātman* is outlined.^Q When absorbed in the *ātman*, one cannot deviate from the truth. For, the ignorant is he whose *ātman* is sleeping^r – a fact that manifests itself as one being dispossessed of *śraddhā*. The ‘eco-dharmic’ life, in whatever its form, presupposes *śraddhā*, and *śraddhā* lights the path, developing itself within that life, where someone gives one’s heart and transforms all human affairs in a sacred experience.

Śraddhā, therefore, is what expresses the sovereignty of *ātman*. *Śraddhā* is a symbol of illumination and revealer of truth. Arising from the vital stimuli received from the soul (*ātman*) through its representative (i.e., *buddhi*, the power of forming and retaining conceptions; intellect, reason, discernment, and so on), *śraddhā* is a ‘material’ phenomenon manifested as energy in our body. This energy, even when acknowledged by some scholars as the essential part of the religious phenomenon, is uncomfortably identified with a term coming out of a foreign scripture. Our preference, then, falls on a term such as ‘spirituality’, which is used as a way to cut away the barriers among different ‘faiths’, and which now seems to be taking the place of what once we used to call ‘religion.’ It is with the help of this category ‘spirituality’ that we can draw together people with different expressions of faith, such as, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Emerson, Luther King, Gandhi, Joan of Arc, Socrates, Lao Tzu, The Buddha, and so on . . . In other words, the term ‘spirituality’, which somehow translates ‘*śraddhā*’ helps us to understand how it is possible to draw a sort of universal Ecosophy, or Eco-dharma, from the *Gītā*. For, what the *Gītā* shows is that

anyone is able, subjectively, to approach and ‘experience with certitude’ something of the transcendent *ātman*, when they discover their own spirituality. No matter one’s dogma of faith, it is always possible to display through our deeds the universal soul force called *śraddhā*. For, when a sincere Christian, Hindu, Muslim, or even atheist, places his or her trust in that which transcends, what they all display is nothing but the highest form of the universal *śraddhā*.⁵ The next section will make this point clearer.

Eco-Dharma: a work in progress toward a New scientific paradigm for reuniting the rational and the spiritual

It is worthwhile to point out next how the Roman Catholic definition of faith as *fides quaerens intellectum*,^t where the Latin term ‘fides’ (faith) implies this urge to accept some ‘truths’ prior to understanding them, has generated strong debates among philosophers.^u Krishna Sharma,^v for instance, denounces the theological exercise undertaken from 17th to the 19th century to safeguard the Christian concept of a personal God:

... the growing trend towards the impersonalization of God in modern European philosophy had posed a serious threat to Christianity which could be counteracted only through a reiteration of faith in the Biblical God, who was personal in nature, and was different from the God of the philosophers” (Sharma 1987, 9).

The consequence, she argues, was the radical separation of religion and philosophy in the Western world. Such a separation was followed by the Christian explanations that religion was “a matter of faith and emotion and not of knowledge and reason” (9). That is to say, the Western differentiation between religion and philosophy was an outcome of the Christian understanding of religion as a dogma of faith in one personal god. The more sophisticated “philosophical explanations of the oneness of God in impersonal terms” were, then, labeled “as either pantheism or monism” (9). Krishna Sharma blames Christian scholars for being interested in keeping the Western division between religion and philosophy, between personal and impersonal concepts of God, and between monism and monotheism” (1987, x).

Paul Hacker comes to the subject with a very different approach. Hacker believes (as all Catholics do in consequence of their definition of faith) that faith must precede understanding, and this is the theological view he assumes when discussing the nature of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā*. *Śraddhā* is to him, so to speak, the preparatory step leading first to knowledge and then to salvation. Hacker explains the meaning of *śraddhā* through the postulation of a twofold definition: *śraddhā* would have developed an intellectual constituent, which nowadays may be understood as ‘faith’, but it would also have kept its foundational ritual constituent. When defining ‘intellectual *śraddhā*’ in the *Gītā*, he states that *śraddhā* must precede the knowledge that leads to salvation (1963, 153). Yet, although arguing that *śraddhā* is mainly the acceptance of a doctrine (intellectual *śraddhā*), he is also constrained to acknowledge, when discussing BhG 18.71, that redemption comes primarily from experience, with *śraddhā* constituting its driving force (154).

The findings of Hacker have not impressed Smith. Smith criticizes those who argue that *śraddhā* presents many different meanings, “speaking of ritual *śraddhā*, intellectual *śraddhā*, moral *śraddhā*, and so on,” in a way that betrays the understanding of its inherent simplicity, as well as of its objects (1979, 61–2). For, *śraddhā* “does not designate

a relationship to anything,” but “indicates rather the attitude or initial act whereby they enter into one or another relation” (62). And further, “It has to do with man’s capacity to become involved: the tendency or quality inherent within each person to move outside him or herself and to become engaged” (62). Clearly, one of the scholars Smith is referring is P. Hacker, who also “has made the most thoroughgoing studies of the concept to date,” and who indicates by ‘faith’ (*der Glaube*) both *āstikya-buddhi* and *śraddhā* (n. 28, 222). Smith argues that Hacker has complicated the matter by “including the object of *śraddhā* in the consideration of the various usages and then exploring the resultant modalities of faith in their intricate variety, in such a way as to obscure what is common to all and is relatively simple.” That is to say, because of “the Western tendency to define faith in terms of its objects,” Hacker “has clearly been influenced by his prior mental association of faith with intellectual content (an association from his modern Christian heritage),” and the consequence is that he produces a complicated “typology of ritual *śraddhā*, intellectual *śraddhā*, etc. (n.40, 227). Smith remarks, then, that *śraddhā* is not a primarily intellectualistic concept, and therefore, if we manage to “understand *śraddhā* at all we can understand it in all its Hindu forms” (n. 40, 228). When it comes to Hindu writers, he says, he prefers Rao (1989), who, more cautiously than others, has generally taken *śraddhā* to mean ‘faith’, but has also stressed that it is “misleading to translate the word uniformly and without qualification” (n. 28, 222).

As Smith admits, *śraddhā* “almost constitutes the differentiating characteristic that qualifies any human activity as religious,” for it means ‘to set one’s heart on’ since the times of the Ṛg Veda (61). Further on he adds,

That on which one puts or might put one’s heart, in the gamut of India’s complex religious life, has been varied. Yet the religious man has been characterized (might we not say, “of course”?) by the fact that he has put his heart on something within it. The term *śraddhā* is open, in the sense that it does not itself specify or even suggest what it is on which one puts one’s heart. The concept as a concept has no particular object, or type of object. (61)

Smith touches here on the issue of the universality of *śraddhā*, which is not completely dependent on one’s faith, for it represents that inner-faith or conviction that allows everyone to see things under the light of the heart, in the *ātmic* sense presented by Kṛṣṇa a to Arjuna. As Smith points out, the regular classical Sanskrit word for ‘heart’ is *hṛdaya*. The term *śrad* has been motive of some dispute by the linguists. However, “the question is only as to whether *śrad*/**kred* is ‘heart’, the visceral organ,” and has nothing to do with the figurative sense in which it is being used here. (n. 35, 223–4)

As Smith puts it, *śraddhā* “contrasts with a mind that is wandering” (63); it implies “involvement” with our own reality. It “denotes a way of doing things” in “the way an intellectualist relates his mind and himself to the truth” (64). There is no instance of *śraddhā* where the notion of “putting the heart” “is not relevant and appropriate” (n. 44, 229). That is to say, “once it has been affirmed that *śraddhā* means ‘placing one’s heart on,’ there is in a sense nothing more to be said” (62). Spirituality, whatever its form, presupposes *śraddhā*, and *śraddhā* lights the path, developing itself within that life, where someone gives one’s heart. As a consequence, this truth transcends what is ‘religious’ and transforms all human affairs, leading to Deep Ecology, Environmentalism, and Eco-dharma, as A. Naess and others have described it.

In order to help to end this quarrel about the phrase *'fides quaerens intellectum'*, which imposes a passive acceptance of the dogmas of 'faith', I want to point out, therefore, that *śraddhā* seems to mean more than faith. It means, at least, faith plus prudence. As a matter of fact, I am inclined to believe that the meaning of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā* encompasses the Seven Virtues adopted by the Catholic Church Fathers: Prudence, Justice, Temperance, Courage, Faith, Hope, and Compassion. This means, perhaps, that to bring up to date the true meaning of the phrase *'fides quaerens intellectum'*, as foreseen by the medieval Catholic Church Fathers, it would be enough to replace the term 'fides' by the more accurate term '*śraddhā*'. For, the half-breed expression '*śraddhā quaerens intellectum*' passes both the scientific and spiritual requirements. Representing a kind of experimental certainty and trust, the expression '*śraddhā quaerens intellectum*' seems to relate to both, the Cartesian Cogito,^w and the Baconian Method.^x One may even consider that this expression represents, indeed, a fair candidate as the new paradigm of contemporary Heart-Philosophy and Eco-dharma. For, the meaning it conveys implies the so-called reconciliation of reason and spirituality (Fritjof Capra states that "ecology and spirituality are fundamentally connected, because deep ecological awareness, ultimately, is spiritual awareness." (qtd. in Dudley 2005: 21)) intended at least since Blaise Pascal's saying, "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart."

Conclusion

Besides the complex philosophical and mythological elements and the ritual theory which frames the *Gītā* in the context of the *Mahābhārata*, one cannot disregard the fact that what explains how the different characters respond differently to the same ethical dilemmas is *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* also provides the underlying unity of the two texts. Furthermore, *śraddhā* expresses the gradual shift from the sphere of the individual to that of the collective, representing an altruistic 'placing of the heart' on righteous expressions of activism, which are supposed to be free from any selfish interest. *Ātmic* detachment and altruism are triggered by means of *śraddhā*, which enables one to take the righteous deeds to the heart (*ātman*).

When Naess coined the expression "Deep Ecology," he had in mind a new paradigm shift that could bridge the huge gap in the Western world between the realms of spirituality and science. One may but hint at the formula Naess was trying to grasp – perhaps the one we have captured under the half-breed expression "*śraddhā quaerens intellectum*."

The conclusion, then, is that *śraddhā*, being the element that is common to people of different faiths, represents the main category for the understanding of heart-philosophy, which encompasses Theology, Spirituality, Eco-Dharma, and Environmentalism. Eventually, by means of *śraddhā*, we come to trust our own ability to identify what constitutes the truth, and this is just a contemporary way of restating what St. Anselm had tried to convey through the expression "*fides quaerens intellectum*."

Endnotes

^aIn "*Śraddhā* in the *Bhagavad Gītā*" (Hamilton: McMaster University, Ph. D. diss., 2007) I discuss how *śraddhā* (heart force or love-in-action; self-reliance, faith-in-oneself, and also enthusiasm) appears in order with the Vedic usage, and opens the person to contact with the soul-force, which drives the whole universe. I have shown in what ways

śraddhā links the *Gītā* to the *Mahābhārata* and reveals in both texts the centrality of the sacred and sacredness (*dharma*, the sense of spirituality and holiness) hidden in nature itself. I have also discussed some theological implications of this view and considered how *śraddhā* can manifest through a person's heart. The Latin term '*credere*', which is usually rendered by the English term 'creed', can be etymologically traced back to the same Sanskrit root as the term '*śraddhā*'. The metaphorical sense of 'putting one's heart on' points to the common origin of these terms both rooted in the primitive Indo-European term *kred-dhe*. W.C. Smith exemplifies this matter in a note with the help of the Christian saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mathew 6:21 and Luke 12:34). See W.C. Smith's *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979: n.35, 223).

^bThe tendency one shows to express oneself through external action is known as *pravṛtti*, and the tendency one shows to refrain from external activity is known as *nivṛtti*. In other words, *pravṛtti* denotes active functioning in the external world, whereas *nivṛtti* denotes a kind of disengagement from the world, associated with a spiritual discipline and leading from *saṃsāra* (this world) toward *nirvāṇa* (salvation).

^cBhG 18.66 stands for 'verse 66 of chapter 18 of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.'

^dThis solution is unexpected. Śāṅkara, for instance, who reads *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* as karma *mārga* (path of action) and *saṃnyāsa mārga* (path of non-action) respectively, does not consider the meaning intended by Kṛṣṇa, where '*pravṛtti*' might express actions worth pursuing, and '*nivṛtti*' the actions to be avoided. Yet, these meanings are implied in the context of the whole text, and more specifically in the discussion starting in BhG 18.40. For, according to Kṛṣṇa's previous arguments, one can infer that *saṃsāra* (the existence, manifested in the form of movement and actions) presents some sort of reality and cannot be completely fashioned by *avidyā*. According to Śāṅkara, however, calling Arjuna a *saṃnyāsī* is only a special deference meant to praise his action (BhG 18.17), considering that he was not fit for the higher *Sāṅkhya*. Śāṅkara disregards the fact that BhG 18.30 reintroduces the question about the meaning of the terms *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* precisely in order to redefine what a real *saṃnyāsī* is. Śāṅkara simply reads BhG 18.30 as if '*pravṛtti*' meant 'bondage' and '*nivṛtti*', liberation. He says, "That which knows action, "*pravṛtti*", which leads to bondage, the path of Works, and inaction, "*nivṛtti*", which leads to mokṣa (Liberation), the path of *saṃnyāsa*". See *Śāṅkara's Gīta Bhasya*, translation by C. V. Ramachandra Aiyar (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya. Bhavan, 1988: 573). As I have shown in my thesis, however, the *Gītā* makes use of the concept of *śraddhā* to integrate the Vedic *karma-mārga* thesis and the *Upaniṣadic jñāna-mārga* antithesis. The newness of the argument of the *Gītā* lies precisely in this synthesis called *jñānakarmasamuccaya-vada*, which allows Arjuna to learn different views on the science of being, and to shift from his momentary state of an *aśraddadhāna* (one dispossessed of *śraddhā*) to that of a *śraddhāvanta* (one possessed of *śraddhā*).

^eThe issue of Arjuna's transformation has recently attracted some scholarly comment, but most scholars do not discuss the role of *śraddhā* in this transformation. When the *Gītā* starts, Arjuna is a devotee (*bhakta*) without *śraddhā*, and, when the *Gītā* ends, Arjuna is a devotee with *śraddhā*. That is to say, one can be dejected and still be a devotee. However, one cannot be depressed and full of *śraddhā* at the same time. This distinction between *śraddhā* and *bhakti* helps one to follow Arjuna's gradual shifting of mindset throughout the text.

^fWe should be careful in order not to be fooled by the phrase ‘personal desire’. ‘Personal desire’ is not to be taken in the general sense of ‘desire’ as used, for instance, by Herbert Marcuse in his *One Dimensional Man* (Ark Paperbacks, 1964). For, of course, desire can never be fully eradicated from oneself.

^gSee Dakshina Ranjan Shastri, *Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Worship in India* (Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited, 1963).

^hIn a sense, what the *Gītā* shows is that orthodoxy leads to orthopraxis; orthopraxis to renewed orthodoxy, and so on, in a chain of events without end or beginning. ‘Orthopraxis’ is the theological term for ‘correct practice’, and is not to be taken as ‘inflexible practice of rituals and *dharma*’. On the contrary, orthopraxis is to be considered the result of one being confident and full of spiritual enthusiasm (*śraddhā*). Resulting from *śraddhā*, orthopraxis represents something deeper than the Western understanding of it as ‘lifestyle’. One could say that the *Gītā*’s orthopraxis somehow resembles the Buddhist eightfold path, with the differences between the Buddha and Kṛṣṇa’s teachings representing mostly the different audiences they have addressed and their respective ‘*doxas*’ – the first addressing the orthodoxy of the *āstikas* (those who accept the authority of the Vedas), and the second, that of the *nāstikas* (those who does not accept the authority of the Vedas). The Buddhist eightfold path is usually classified under three main headings: *pañña* or wisdom (1. right view; 2. right understanding), *sīla* or moral activity (3. right speech; 4. right action, and 5. right livelihood), and *samādhi* or contemplation (6. right effort; 7. mindfulness, and 8. right concentration).

ⁱ*Niṣkāma*, or ‘non-personal desire’, is what is required from our actions, from the viewpoint of our interest or desire to profit from their outcome. One should act for the sake of the goodness of the action in itself, and not for any other personal reason. For, being disciplined and learning to detach oneself from the consequences or rewards of one’s actions separate those who are ready for the discipline of orthopraxis from those who are not ready yet.

^jSee F. O. Schrader, “Über Bhavavadgītā” (*ZDMG* 64, 1910: 336–340). Schrader is of the opinion that the *Gītā* is placing an emphasis on the experiential knowledge about the *ātman*. Moreover, he also reminds us that the *ātmavidyā* (science of *ātman*) nullifies one’s dependency to the Vedas.

^kSee P. Hacker “*Śraddha*” (*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens* 3, 1963: 151–189), and idem, *Paul Hacker Kleine Schriften* – Herausgegeben von Lambert Schmithausen (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1978). Hacker’s argument that there seems to exist two kinds of *śraddhā*, one intellectual, belonging to the *jñānamārga*, and another ritualistic, belonging to the *karmamārga* also suggests that the two paths of forth-going (*pravṛtti*) and return (*nivṛtti*) represent in the *Gītā* the one discipline based on *śraddhā*.

^lIn the *Gītā*, both processes are made one through the discipline of *niṣkāmakarma*. For selfishness (*svārtha*) is what enslaves one’s actions, either in the form of *pravṛtti*, or *nivṛtti*. Therefore, non-personal *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* together, as defined in the *Gītā*, is what constitutes orthopraxis.

^mFor further details see the whole discussion on my thesis. Here it is enough to point out what Paul Hacker, Das Gupta, and Minoru Hara have already said. Paul Hacker argues that the practice of *bhakti* demands a prior faith (*śraddhā*) in the mythological tradition. He acknowledges that *śraddhā* comes close to *bhakti* in some passages, and

that the commentator Madhusūdana, in his discussion of BG 7.21, equates *śraddhā* to *bhakti*. Hacker reminds us, however, that in *Śāṅḍilya* Bhaktisūtras 22–4 such equivalence is expressly denied. These *Śāṅḍilya sūtras* demonstrate the difference between *śraddhā* and *bhakti* with a logical argument: *sūtra* 22 states that *śraddhā* is the common element of all paths, *bhakti* included; *sūtra* 23 states that the identity of *śraddhā* and *bhakti*, therefore, would lead to infinite regression, and *sūtra* 24, then, states that it is impossible to equate both terms. Das Gupta (1930, 315-333 and 487-513) has shown that the meaning of *śraddhā* in the *Vedic Saṃhitās* cannot be said to be very close to that of *bhakti*. Minoru Hara has shown that in the *Gītā bhakti* can be seen as related to dependence on a theistic god, whereas this is not the case with *śraddhā*. In his view it preserves a more traditional concept of religion, quite independent of theism. As Das Gupta sees it, *bhakti* has a personal connotation and implies a human relation, whereas *śraddhā* is a non-personal and neutral principle, resulting from a ritual context.

ⁿThose who propose *śraddhā* as a synonym of *bhakti* could only do so if they held the complete identity of *ātman* and Kṛṣṇa. As a consequence, they will also argue that Arjuna's ultimate aim is to realise the supreme Godhead in a 'theistic' way. We find a similar view in St. Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney's *Catechism on The Holy Spirit*: "When we have the Holy Spirit, the heart expands; it bathes itself in divine love. The contrast between the experiential concepts of *śraddhā* and *bhakti* actually corresponds to the contrast between what one believes the terms *ātman* and Kṛṣṇa designate as objects. Love towards the personal deity Kṛṣṇa; however, seems to represent nothing but an instance of Arjuna's universal love, grounded on *ātman*."

^oTo be precise, *śraddhā* combines in itself the unflinching devotion and a deep-rooted and clear understanding; it is both intellectual and mental. As it is seen, *śraddhā* is difficult to be translated into any single word in any modern language. In the *Saivagama-s* we find in the context of initiation (*dīkṣā*), that only he who possesses *bhakti* and *śraddhā* will get the saving *dīkṣā*. One may note the redundant usage here: *bhakti* and *śraddhā*. Even when it is possible to be a devotee (*bhakta*) without *śraddhā*, the reverse, to be endowed with *śraddhā* without *bhakti*, is not possible. That is to say, *bhakti* is a prerequisite to the more essential category *śraddhā*.

^pThe man of restraint is wakeful in that which is the night of all beings, and the time in which all beings are wakeful is the night of the sage who sees [or perceives the light of *ātman*] (BhG 2.69).

^qBhG 6.29: He whose *ātman* is disciplined by yoga, seeing the same in all around, sees *ātman* in everything, and everything in *ātman*.

^rKṛṣṇa is using in BhG 4.40 the same metaphor he had used in BhG 2.69: the sage is awake to *ātman*, which is the night of the other beings.

^sRembert Lutjeharms who insists in translating 'śraddhā' as 'faith' presents a slightest different view in his recent "FIRST FAITH: ON THE MEANING AND ROLE OF ŚRADDHĀ IN CAITANYA VAIṢṆAVA THOUGHT" (*ISKCON Studies Journal*, Vol. 2, 2014: 71–110). He argues that "the notion of faith (śraddhā)" is "closely linked to 'conversion'" (105), and concludes that the devotee starts "with a faith in devotion (śraddhā)," and "progresses as his faith in devotional practices is strengthened by his systematic study of devotional scriptures" (106).

^tAlthough faith is contrary to reasoning, Christian thinkers still base mostly of their philosophical thought on St. Anselm's assertion that faith represents the real pre-requirement to knowledge and self-understanding – '*fides quaerens intellectum*'.

^uSee, for instance, Kai Nielsen's "Wittgensteinian Fideism" (Philosophy v. 42 1967: 191–209 [reprinted in *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein* v. 14. Aesthetics, Ethics, and Religion), edited by J. Canfield]). Wittgensteinian fideism reveals the fallacy involved in the acceptance of the dogmas, which supposedly constitute the final truths of humankind.

^vSee Krishna Sharma, *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement – A New Perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1987).

^wThe Latin phrase '*cogito ergo sum*' (I think, therefore I am) is acknowledged in Western philosophy as a foundation for all rational knowledge. It was stated in French on Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637), and in Latin in his *Principles of Philosophy* (1644).

^xThe Baconian method was proposed in Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620). While Descartes have put forward the deductive process of reasoning used in science, Bacon puts forward the inductive reasoning. Together, they have given raise to the scientific method. Scientific investigation involves the observation of phenomena, the formulation of a hypothesis, experimentation, and a conclusion that validates or modifies the hypothesis. Both, Descartes and Bacon, have based their theories on the results of men such as Copernicus and Galileo, who have doubted the dogmas of faith.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

Received: 6 July 2014 Accepted: 14 January 2015

Published online: 28 February 2015

References

- Das Gupta, Mrinal, "Śraddhā and Bhakti in Vedic Literature." *Indian Quarterly* 6 (1930), 315-333 and 487-513.
- Dudley, Nigel, Liza Higgins-Zogib, & Stephanie Mansourian. 2005. Beyond Belief: Linking Faiths and Protected Areas to Support Biodiversity Conservation, Switzerland & United Kingdom: WWF.ARC. Available at http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/?58880/Beyond-Belief-Linking-faiths-and-protected-areas-for-biodiversity-conservation. Accessed January 31, 2015.
- Hacker, Paul. 1963. "Śraddha". 1963. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Sudasiens* 3: 151–189.
- Hacker, Paul. 1978. *Paul Hacker Kleine Schriften* – Herausgegeben von Lambert Schmithausen. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.
- Hara, Minoru. 1964. NOTE ON TWO SANSKRIT TERMS - *bhakti* and *śraddhā*. *Indo-Iranian Journal* VII: 124–145.
- Lutjeharms, Rembert. 2014. FIRST FAITH: ON THE MEANING AND ROLE OF ŚRADDHĀ IN CAITANYA VAIṢṆAVA THOUGHT. *ISKCON Studies Journal* 2: 71–110.
- Marcuse, Herbert. 1964. *One-dimensional Man: studies in ideology of advanced industrial society*. Ark Paperbacks; reprint. London: Routledge (1991).
- Naess, Arne. 1989. *Ecology. Community and Lifestyle*: Cambridge University Press.
- Nielsen, Kai. 1967. Wittgensteinian Fideism". *Philosophy* 42: 191–209.
- Rao, Seshagiri K L. 1971. *The Concept of Śraddha*. Patiala: Roy Publishers
- Rao, Seshagiri K L 1989. "Śrī Aurobindo on the Types of Śraddha (Faith) in the *Gīta*" *Journal of South Asian Literature* 24.1: 168–178
- Schrader, Friedrich Otto. 1910. *Über Bhavavadgītā*. *ZDMG* 64: 336–340.
- Sharma, Krishna. 1987. *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement – A New Perspective*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Shastri, Dakshina Ranjan. 1963. *Origin and Development of the Rituals of Ancestor Worship in India*. Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited.
- Smith, WC. 1979. *Faith and belief*. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press.
- Sri Sankarā's Gīta Bhasya* (trans. Aiyar, C. V. R). 1988. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
- Turci, Rubens. 2007. *Śraddhā in the Bhagavad Gītā*. Hamilton: McMaster University, Ph. D. diss.