

LAND&LIBERTY

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message from the honorary president

In the Spring 2025 edition (1265) of this column I quoted from the final chapter of *Progress and Poverty* where Henry George links the problems of individual life with the problems of social life. I suggested how Henry George's description of the natural law of rent is 'in essence' consistent with 'the primary truth' that he says lies at the heart of the *Vedas* and other ancient scriptures'.

Here I wish to explore further how the philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta* (non-duality) and the political economy propounded by Henry George are complementary as both seek to liberate humanity from illusions: one from the illusion of a separate self, the other from the economic illusion of unearned personal wealth. I believe their combined wisdom offers a guide for society that is not only spiritually enlightened but also materially just and efficient.

At the heart of *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy is the relationship between the *Self* and *Prakriti* (Nature or primal matter). At the heart of the science of political economy is the relationship between *People* and *Land* - the economic term for all that nature provides.

Prakriti is considered the dynamic, ever-changing material cause/explanation of the universe, encompassing the physical world, the senses, the ego, and the mind. It is composed of three fundamental qualities, the *Gunas*: *Sattva* (purity, harmony - that conducts consciousness), *Rajas* (activity, passion - that reflects consciousness), and *Tamas* (inertia, ignorance - that absorbs consciousness).

The spiritual task, as illuminated by *Advaita*, is to recognise that the *Self* (*Purusha*), the eternal, non-dual consciousness, is merely a detached witness to the ceaseless activities and proliferations of *Prakriti*. *Illusion* (*Māyā*) arises when the *Purusha* mistakenly identifies with the temporary, dualistic, and often painful products of *Prakriti*, particularly the ego (*Ahamkāra*).

Henry George's analysis provides a powerful parallel to this illusion within the socio-economic realm. It illustrates how society's legitimisation of an individual's claim to the *Economic Rent of Land* is also based on an illusion of mistaken identity: where the exchange value of land is assumed to be created by (and a property of) an individual rather than by the presence and growth of the whole community.

This mistake gives rise to the *Illusion of Ownership*: Where the property or ownership of a non-human and passive common resource (land) is confused with the property or ownership of the human and active factor of production - labour.

George's political economy, viewed through the lens of *Advaita*, is not then merely a tax reform; it is a profound *socio-economic* way to reduce the illusions, deceptions, and fantasies caused by structural injustice. It clears the material plane so that the *Purusha* can enact the "eternal drama" of life justly, efficiently, and for the collective good, establishing an environment where *Ānanda* (Bliss) can manifest everywhere.

For me the teachings of Henry George and *Advaita* philosophy converge on a single, powerful truth: Freedom, spiritual and material, requires the liberation of individuals and society from the burden of mistaken identification. By implementing economic justice through the collection and proper use of land rent, we might create a more propitious stage for Self realisation.

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