

# A Comprehensive Study On Environmental Ethics In Classical Sanskrit Literature

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sanskrit literature is abundant not only in its grammatical structure and romantic expression, but also in its insights into the environment, its degradation, and the imperative to save it. These themes arise frequently in many circumstances anytime the study of this literature is undertaken. This study investigates the importance of the environment in Sanskrit Literature. Throughout the course of human evolution on Earth, there has been a simultaneous existence of human life and the environment. The environment has provided mankind with unpolluted air, uncontaminated water, and surroundings free from toxins. Throughout history, every religion worldwide has consistently prioritized the environment. It is necessary for individuals living in society to comprehend the significance of maintaining the purity of these components. He should be aware of the advantages of consuming fresh water, air, and food. In order to maintain excellent health, it is crucial for individuals to consume nutritious food, consume clean water, and reside in an environment free from pollution.

**Keywords:** Environment, Pollution, Human, Earth, Plant.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Due to the perversion of humans and devices produced by humans, nature is currently crashing. In tandem with the deterioration of the natural environment, megafauna have lost their inherent capacity for development. The result of this is that one side has developed the quality of life style of men through technological excellence, and we have also learned about the devastating impact that technology has on the environment. On the one hand, rapid industrialization, and on the other hand, the unyielding and arrogant desire to dominate nature, have led us to the point where the existence of the

world is in crisis conditions. At what point does pollution of the environment reach its peak, and what measures may be taken to safeguard the growth of industrial pollution against pollutant pollution of the environment? The answers to these questions are of utmost significance to emerging nations, such as those found on the continent of Asia, because a significant number of the people living in these nations belong to the lower socioeconomic classes and thus are completely oblivious to environmental issues.

The creation that God has made in this day and age is gradually deteriorating as a result of human people. It is important to note that this is a significant contribution to the human body. The phrase "na mānuṣāt śreṣṭhataram kiñcit" is specifically stated in the Mahābhārata. In the distant ago, these individuals genuinely played for the benefit of all the immovable and movable of the world- "dyauh śāntih, antarīkṣam śāntih, pṛthivī śāntih, āpah śāntih, oṣadhayab, śāntih, banaspatayah śāntih, sarvam śāntih, śāntireva śāntih, sā mā śantiredhi."

If we do an in-depth analysis, we will be able to determine that the relationship between religion and the environment is extremely tightly tied. As a result of the fact that the majority of people adhere to the tenets of religion, religion plays a significant part in the protection of the environment. A great number of environmentalists suggested that western Christianity was to fault for the lack of environmental protection it provided. In the section of the Bible that discusses the creation of the world, it is said that God created humans with the intention of having them rule over the globe. As a result of this way of thinking, individuals have learned to view the environment as a consumer commodity and a consumer product. It was typical for primitive human communities to engage in religious ceremonies that were seen as being holy to the natural world. As a result of the rejection of these ceremonies as superstitions, the glory of Christianity eventually became entrenched. A discussion is taking place on the extent to which Christianity may be held responsible for environmental issues. Environmental issues have emerged as one of the most significant challenges that humans face in the modern era. There was never any concern among Greek philosophers regarding the environment or the connection between humans and the natural world. We are utilizing the environment as a source of satisfaction for ourselves, despite the fact that we are far superior creations of God. When it

comes to us, the environment is treating us. There are tremendous temperatures in the summer, very low temperatures in the winter, no rain in the rain, and so on. We can see that the climate is acting like a piece of junk. Pollution in the form of extremes has been observed in water pollution, air pollution, and land contamination. The lives of other people have been challenged, but we are unaware of this fact.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Kumaravelu, Shanmugapriya & Christopher, G.. (2023) This research employs ecocriticism as its theoretical framework and utilizes text analysis to ascertain the importance of trees in both ancient religious literature, such as Pali's Jataka Tale, and nonreligious works, such as Sanskrit's Panchatantra Tales. The ecocritical theory offers fresh perspectives on how individuals perceive non-human entities such as plants. It aims to acknowledge and validate their significance within the framework of eco-critical concerns, with the goal of enhancing the environment and promoting the transition from "eco-awareness" to "eco-consciousness." Trees provide nourishment and protection to humans, while also contributing to the preservation of a green environment, which holds significant aesthetic value. Hence, it is imperative that we take all necessary measures to save trees and prevent their ultimate extinction. Furthermore, esteemed academics Tisnawijaya and Kurniati assert that trees are synonymous with Mother Earth. Nevertheless, the truth is that the planet Earth is presently confronted with a multitude of ecological issues. Historical literature imparts wisdom about achieving a content existence in symbiosis with the natural environment. These exceptional works of eco-literature effectively convey the intricate relationship and mutual reliance between humans and the environment, a key theme in the genre. As ecocritical literature is more studied and debated, humanity will get a deeper understanding of how to coexist harmoniously with nature and effectively tackle the ongoing global environmental problem.

Biswas, Sukanta & Rao, Laxmi. (2022) This research aims to elucidate the significance of a guru in shaping the community that fosters the development of environmental ethics. India has a rich heritage of spiritual masters who served as gurus in their respective domains. The aforementioned leaders, including Nanak, Kabir, Namdev, Tukaram, Shankar Dev, Shri Chaitanya Dev, and others, emerged on various times. The

suggested presentation includes information on Sri Jambheshwarji, who was born in the year 1451 A.D in the hamlet of Pipasar, located in the Nagour district of Rajasthan. The presentation will include his name and activities. In addition to religion, Jambheshwarji, like other religious leaders, actively participated in other issues of different facets of human existence. Jambheshwarji formulated twenty-nine principles that remain relevant and significant in the present day. He delivered twenty-nine principles through his preaching and distributed an additional one hundred twenty sermons that merged his philosophy and religious beliefs among his followers. This concept is commonly referred to as 'Shabdabani'. In 1730 A.D., a total of three hundred sixty-three Bishnoi individuals, under the leadership of Amrita Devi, willingly gave up their life in and around Jodhpur to protect against deforestation. Their actions were motivated by their admiration for Jambheshwarji's values and ideas. The Bishnoi community is renowned for their deep reverence for the environment and their role as custodians of nature. They are always prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to save the environment and safeguard endangered animals. Currently, significant transformations have occurred in the social, political, religious, and economic framework of the Bishnoi community. This research aims to examine the challenges encountered by the Bishnoi community in adhering to the teachings of their Guru. The disruptions in the Bishnoi community's daily existence were caused by societal developments.

Jha, Bipin & Tripathi, Abhishek. (2020) *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, a Sanskrit drama by the esteemed poet Kālidāsa, places much emphasis on the significance of nature and the environment. Every individual, regardless of their social status, including kings, sages, their children, and their students, bears equal obligation and accountability for environmental stewardship. The monarch is admonished against killing the animals that wander within the protected boundaries of the sages' Āśrama (cottage). Śākuntalā received counsel from her father Kaṇva to attend to the cultivation and care of flora and fauna. The *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* graphically explores the reciprocal relationship of mutual dependency between humans and the environment. The primary duty of the King is to preserve the environment. One example of this is when King Duṣyanta tames a mad elephant, inadvertently destroying plants, while introducing himself to Śākuntalā for the first time. Another

example is the opening statement in *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam*, which reflects the importance of environmental protection and the people who care for and nurture the environment. This is described as: "Yāsṛṣṭiḥsraṣṭurādya vāhatividhihutaṃ yāhaviryā ca hotrī, Ye Dvekālaṃ vidhattaḥ śrūtiṣaya guṇā yā sthitā vyāpyaviśvam, Yām āhuḥ sarvabīja-prakṛtiriti yayā prāṇinaḥ prāṇavantaḥ, Pratyakṣābhiḥ

prapannastanubhiravatuvastābhiraṣṭābhiriśaḥ [A.S 1.1]." Shiva, the supreme deity, possesses eight distinct forms, symbolizing his role as the ruler and lord of everything. Water is the first thing that was created. And fire, which accelerates the initiation of the ritual; individuals who have a concern for the natural world; and the celestial bodies that mark the passage of time, namely the moon and the sun; The all-encompassing ether, the medium through which sound travels; The earth, where all the fundamental elements of life are present; May he, the embodiment of life-giving air, approach and bestow his blessings upon everyone assembled here, as expressed by Ryder (1999). The *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* describes eight components, including the five gross elements, time, space, and the humans who care for nature. These elements are thought to be the constituents of deity or Shiva. The environment and nature are considered as a unified entity, symbolized by Lord Shiva, one of the three deities in Hinduism. This representation reflects the belief in the importance of caring for the environment.

Shaw, Julia. (2017) This study evaluates the role of archaeology in discussions about the ecological emphasis of early Buddhism and Hinduism, and its significance for worldwide environmentalism. The presence of long-term human:non-human interdependence and the socio-economically constructed concept of 'nature' in Indic culture challenges post-colonial narratives of India's idealized, environmentally friendly past. It also emphasizes the significance of individual human:non-human ways of knowing in developing historically informed frameworks of Indian environmentalism. In the context of early Buddhism, I serve as a mediator between two opposing perspectives. The first perspective advocates for the concept of 'eco-dharma' as a manifestation of Buddhism's adherence to non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and the reduction of suffering (*dukkha*). The second perspective contends that western environmentalism has wrongly interpreted and used early Buddhist traditions. In my argument, I contend that the

latter perspective adheres to conventional images of passive monks who are detached from worldly matters, despite the presence of archeological proof indicating the involvement of socially-engaged monastic landlords throughout the latter decades before Christ. Some people use this evidence to argue against Buddhism's environmental credentials, but they fail to consider the theme of the interconnectedness between humans and non-humans in modern environmental discussions. Additionally, the emphasis on non-human suffering overlooks the similarities between modern and ancient ecological ethics and environmental well-being. The case studies examine instances of Buddhist land and water management in central India. These examples are analyzed in the context of contrasting perspectives on well-being and suffering, purity and pollution, and broader Indic medico-ecological epistemologies. The aim is to explore these case studies as potential models for collective approaches to addressing environmental stress.

Sivaramakrishnan, K. (2015) This article examines the development of moral and ethical frameworks in India, mostly based on contemporary situations that explore how individuals engage with or envision the environments they inhabit. The incorporation of ethical considerations, particularly those related to emotional connections and affective bonds with nature, both nearby and distant, has not consistently influenced the composition of environmental history in India. Conversely, researchers from other fields have frequently focused on ethical and theological concepts pertaining to landscape and environment, excluding the field of history. This article asserts that the ethics surrounding environment are shaped via the historical processes of community building and the expression of identity. These processes occur through the imagination and firsthand experience of the natural world in religious and political activities. Examining historical viewpoints on these themes is both valuable and essential. By carefully analyzing how emotions and religious practices influence people's attitudes towards certain landscapes, we may enhance our understanding of the significant connections between humans, nature, and the environment in the field of environmental history. The argument is constructed through a meticulous analysis of a small number of recent research that have offered an empirical foundation for this synthesis, evaluation, and conceptual expansion of the ethics of nature in India. This article examines the evolution of ethical concepts

and practical principles about nature in several domains such as worship, management of natural resources, rural development, conservation research, natural resources policy, and legal conflicts related to nature conservation in India.

Desai, Falguni. (2009) The flourishing of our presence on planet Earth is attributed to the benevolence of Mother Earth, who is revered as the deity of nature in Hindu mythology. She is the ultimate essence of our being on earth. She consistently fulfills her job in maintaining our life cycle on this planet, from our existence to our eventual demise, in line with her own nature. However, our actions do not contribute to her nourishment, hence by mistreating the planet we are putting our own survival at risk. The escalating occurrence of natural calamities can be attributed to our egregious exploitation of the Earth. Ancient Indian literature demonstrate a preoccupation with environmental concerns via the use of mythology and tradition. This study explores the ideas and practices that form the foundation of traditional Hindu faiths' approach to nature, as well as their application as a strategic instrument for environmental conservation. It is imperative that we reconnect with our ancestral origins in order to save the environment, so ensuring the well-being of all humanity. We should strive to pass on the valuable Vedic legacy and its teachings to future generations, thereby creating a more favorable living environment for them.

### **III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND NATURE**

In Hinduism, it is believed that even people are composed of five natural essential components: Prithvi, also known as mother earth; Varunadeva, often known as the lord of water; Vayudeva, sometimes known as the lord of winds; Agnideva, also known as the lord of fire; and Aakash, also known as the lord of light (sky). As a consequence of this, the act of cutting down trees and polluting the air, water, and land were regarded as crimes since people believed that these elements of nature should be respected as gods and goddesses. The protection and preservation of these five components is a duty that falls on everyone. When it comes to the Rigveda, there is an entire hymn that is devoted to extolling the healing qualities of trees. This list includes some of the trees that have been associated with various gods and goddesses.

The "Mata Bhumi putruhanprithivya" prayer is a significant Sanskrit vedic prayer. In this prayer, the Earth is portrayed as a

mother, and all of the people who live on the world are portrayed as her sons. It is imperative that all of the earth's natural resources, including water, air, land, soil, mountains, flora, fauna, and anything else that is naturally present on the world, be cared for in the same manner as a son cares for his mother. It is possible to find various passages in the Vedas that are concerned with the preservation and protection of the environment.

"Don't take down trees because they clean the air."

"Do not damage the atmosphere or disturb the skies."

There is a crucial place that flora holds among the people. Historically, the Vedic people were highly skilled at utilizing the resources that nature provided. There was a comparison made between the Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), the Vatvriksh (*Ficus benghalensis*), and the Banana (*Musa acuminata*) and God. A passage from the Vriksayurveda states that the benefits of planting a tree are equivalent to the benefits of having ten sons. This is a statement that may be found in the text.

Because it was believed that god dwelt in this tree, it was illegal to take down the Vataviksha (*Ficus benghalensis*) tree. It was also believed that no illness could strike an area where the Vataviksha (*Ficus benghalensis*) tree was present. It is said in the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita that Shri Krishna endorses this concept: "asswathusarvavikhanam." Recent studies have shown that the peepal tree and the Vataviksha tree are able to remove carbon dioxide from the environment while simultaneously releasing oxygen. This causes the levels of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the atmosphere to be in a state of equilibrium.

Tulsi, also known as *Ocimum sanctum*, is still considered a sacred plant in the Hindu religion. Tulsi, also known as *Ocimum sanctum*, was a plant that was required to be grown in every Hindu home throughout the Vedic period. In the past, every single home had a Tulsi plant, also known as *Ocimum sanctum*, growing on their doorstep. Plant worship of the tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) kind was considered sacred. In the past, people believed that if they watered a tulsi plant (*Ocimum sanctum*), it would ensure that the plant would have a long and healthy life. If the Tulsi plant, also known as *Ocimum sanctum*, was treated with respect and took good care of, then the family was



considered to be wealthy. One more phrase from the Vriksayurveda that expresses gratitude for the tulsi plant.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN SANSKRIT

There are a great number of quotations in Sanskrit writings that communicate a message to a social person to form a combination with the environment. These quotations originate from the Vedic literature. A healthy environment is something that he ought to be aware of. Regardless of the circumstances, the advancement of a man is contingent upon the state of the environment. It is for this reason that the Vedas explain the close tie that exists between man and the environment. It is said in the Bhūmi Sūkta of Atharvaveda that

माता भूमि पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः। पर्जन्यः पिता सा उ न पिपर्तु।

My mother is the land, and I am the father of the land. I pray that the cloud, who is my father, would look after me.

This place treats the earth and the clouds as if they were the mother and father. In the same way as the father helps the mother to care for their children. Throughout the day and night, they look after them. They get prepared to satisfy their wants whenever they are faced with any form of need. In a same manner, land is regarded as "patiīroṣadhīadhinām," which literally translates to "mother of various medicines." Every one of them is necessary for human existence. Might be able to supply those drugs with water so that they might flourish when it rains. Humans have to take into consideration both the ground and the clouds.

According to Veda, when a farmer is out digging the soil for harvest,

यत् ते भूमि विखनामि क्षिप्रं तदपि रोहतु।

He makes an oath to the highest authority, asking that the ground he plans to till be seeded immediately.

A naturally occurring property feature of agricultural land is that the excavated area may nourish itself. That 'Ādiśakti' has the creative capacity to revitalize the parched land with vegetation.

The statement made by this mantra is

मा ते मर्म विमृग्वारी मा ते हृदयमर्पिपम्।

We can harness the land's potential to produce food and medicine. An agricultural plot of land may support the growth of any plant species over the course of several months. So, you shouldn't tread on that land. Care must be exercised in all workings involving the land, including cultivation, excavating, watering, and the application of manure. Another person who shouldn't be in danger is the farmer, who contributes his time and works extremely hard in the field.

Another mantra found in Veda is

नाना वीर्य ओषधिर्य बिभारती पृथिवी न प्रथमं रथ्यतम नः

A person's physical and mental well-being can be supported by the land's abundance of strength and medicinal plants. Some of the foods we consume every day can have medicinal uses. A number of diseases include ginger, black pepper, clove, cardamom, turmeric, etc. as their medicinal components.

“Veda says”

यस्यां पुर्वे पुर्वाजना विक्रिरे यस्यां देव असुरनाभ्यवर्तन

What this indicates is that our ancestors were also able to survive and live their precious lives on this same land. On this land, they used to consume the many plants that were grown for agricultural purposes. As time went on, they became aware of the significance of the environment in which they contained themselves. Through the study of Śāstras, they were able to obtain the wisdom contained inside those classic scriptures of knowledge. Due to the fact that they have studied Sanskrit scriptures, they have been successful in overcoming negative behaviors. The term "Asurān" is employed in this context to refer to the negative behaviors that reside within the individual's own body. They became "devāḥ" after gaining knowledge of the śāstras, and they triumphed over the "Ausrās," which refers to behaviors and practices that are considered to be undesirable.

गवामश्वानं वायसश्च विष्ठा भगं वर्चः पृथिवी नो दधातुः

This agricultural land is a better location for cows, horses, and birds to dwell than any other land. A human being lives in a

house that was constructed on the land using concrete, but these animals and birds live in the natural region, which is advantageous for them. May that land bestow onto each and every one of us the knowledge, power, and popularity that we want.

Veda says

त्वज्जातः त्वयि कारन्ति मार्त्यस्त्वां बिभर्षि द्विपदस्त्वां चतुष्पादः

A man acknowledges the land as the place of his birth and the surface on which we depend for survival. Ultimately, you will be assimilated into the collective after death. All bipedal males and quadrupedal animals, please provide your assistance. You are the foundation of all the living beings that inhabit the Earth.

This mantra has resemblance to another line found in the tattirīyopaniṣad.

यतो वा इमानि भूतानि जयन्ते येन जातानि जीवन्ति

यत्प्रयन्ती अभिसंविशन्ति तद् ब्रह्म तद् विजिंसश्वः।

On another place, Atharvaveda says

स नो भूमिरादिशातु यद्धानं कामयामहे

We desire the wealth that the land should bestow upon us. The land possesses remarkable potential to enhance an individual's physical and financial well-being. If the land becomes fertile, the farmer will experience contentment and be relieved of different challenges in his life.

In the play *Abhiñānaśākuntalam*, authored by Kālidāsa, there are several ślokas that vividly depict the profound connection between Śakuntalā and her surroundings. The drama highlights the close correlation between humans and their surroundings within the Āśrama system. They relied on one another. The citizens of Āśrama incorporated the responsibility of environmental protection into their everyday practice. Conversely, the environment also provided for the well-being of the inhabitants of Āśhrama.

In the fourth chapter, when Śakuntalā, the daughter of Ṛṣi Kaśyapa, was getting ready to travel to the kingdom of king Duṣyanta, the elements of the environment were sorrowful

and sent her jewelry and clothing. Śakuntalā graciously took the presents and adorned herself with them before her departure.

Kālidāsa wrote.

क्षौमं केचित इन्दुपाण्डु तृणा मङ्गल्यमाविष्कृतम्

निष्ठुयतश्चरणोपभोगसुलाभो लक्षरसः केनसित् ।

The trees bestowed upon her garments that gleamed with the radiance of the moon. She was given mahāvar, a substance, to apply on her legs.

अन्येभ्यो वनदेवता करतलैरापर्वभागोत्थितैः

दत्तन्यभरणानि तत्किसलय उद्भेदप्रतिद्वन्द्वविभिः ।

A separate tree presented her with distinct decorations that vied with the fresh foliage of other new trees. In the following verse, Kālidāsa presents a remarkable connection between humans and their environment.

पातुं न प्रथममं व्यावसयति जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या ।

नादत्ते प्रियमण्डनापि भवतान् स्नेहेना या पल्लवम् ।

She is the type of person that consumes water without also watering you. Despite the fact that she is interested in wearing botanical jewelry that were produced from your leaves, she did not want to let go of your leaves. Here is an illustration of the deep relationship that exists between man and nature. After that, it states

आद्ये वः कुसुमप्रसूतिसमाये यस्याः भवति उत्सवः

सेयं याति शकुन्तला पटिग्रहं सर्वैरुणायतम् ।

According to the writings of Kālidāsa, the gathering of Śakuntalā is a festival-like celebration that occurs when fresh leaves appear on the trees. In addition, She Śakuntalā is about to see her husband at his residence today. As a result, each and every one of you ought to bestow your warm blessings onto her. You are all considered to be her elders, just as you are considered to be elders in a joint family.

## V. CONCLUSION

The inherent worth and reverence for nature are beautifully portrayed in classical Sanskrit literature, which in turn exemplifies environmental ethics. Natural elements are revered and portrayed as divine in texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, which emphasize their holiness. Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana are examples of literature that supports an interdependent worldview, in which human happiness is directly related to environmental sustainability. Advocating for measures that safeguard and sustain natural resources, these books have themes of environmental stewardship and sustainability. Mythical stories and cultural rites further emphasize the sanctity of nature and call for conscientious environmental stewardship. A healthy and sustainable relationship with environment may be fostered by embracing these ancient concepts, which give knowledge that transcends time and promotes a change from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric perspective.

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