

# ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN ANCIENT INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, having conversations and debates about sustainable development, often known as development that does not deplete the earth's natural resources, has become an everyday occurrence. It is a fact that the current world is in danger due to the depletion of natural resources and the rapid escalation of global warming, both of which have an effect on the existence of life on earth. The changes in temperature that were caused by the greenhouse effect, natural catastrophes, and disasters that were caused by humans finally led in global warming and other occurrences, which ultimately posed a threat to the existence of humans and their peaceful connection with nature. Quite frequently, in the course of our conversations, we give the impression that we are concerned about the earth and the resources it provides. The federal government is always developing new policies with the intention of preserving our natural resources; yet, the results of these policies are not very desirable because the majority of them are content to remain on paper rather than being put into practise. This article begins with a discussion of the many components that comprise Indian environmental jurisprudence. In addition to that, the international efforts being undertaken to tackle issues relating to the environment are brought to light. In conclusion, the author sheds light on the Indian experience of environmental legislation and the instrument that resulted from it, which is the human right to exist in an environment that is clean and healthy. Over the course of the past twenty years, the judicial system in India has encouraged a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to the protection of environmental rights throughout the nation. The notions of forest ecology and conservation were mirrored in ancient Indian books such as Arthashastra, Sathapatha Bhramanas, Vedas, Manusmrti, Brhat Samhita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Rajtarangini. These works were written thousands of years ago.

**keywords:** *Environmental, Ancient India*

## Introduction

"The finest education is one which not only provides us with information but also brings our lives into harmony with all that exists."

The discourse, debates, seminars, and conferences on the environment, its interaction with other fields of study, and its protection have all become commonplace features of today's society. The abrupt appearance of this phenomena might be attributed, at least in part, to the recognition of the tight connection that exists between humans and their surrounding environment. In the absence of the natural environment and its resources, the continued existence of human beings on this planet is, to say the least, fraught with uncertainty. Although such debates and discoveries are intellectual artefacts generated in this century, the history of the connection between human people and their surroundings begins straight from the beginning of the human species. The process of simultaneously developing a link between humans and their natural

surroundings, as well as the relationship that humans have with their natural surroundings, is the major focus of this study. We are aware that the Earth and the life that exists on it formed at the same time. While geological processes shaped the Earth, the Earth's ever-changing geology provided a supportive environment for the development of life. It was not an easy process, and the many geological breaks and rifts show that many species were unable to tolerate the changes in climate. [Cause and effect] Studies have shown that different species developed through the process of genetic replacement, and that the individuals of a species that survived predation and geological upheavals adapted to the new environmental circumstances that resulted from their survival. Studies that have been done on the similarities between geology and biology have yielded clues that can be used to understand the relationship between the location of pathways and barriers in early animal and hominid history. These studies have revealed that these pathways and barriers were responsible for both the existence of some fossils and the absence of others. First we were hominids, then we became homo, and eventually we became homosapiens. According to a number of studies, the evolution of Homo sapiens occurred concurrently with geological changes, and it appears that humans have also learnt to adapt to changes in their environments (Penna 2015, 41–43). Since the beginning of life on earth, organisms have been forced to rely on nature and the natural resources that are freely available within nature in order to maintain their own existence. These include water (both salt and fresh water), land, soils, rocks, animals (including fish), flora, fossil fuels, and minerals. Water comes in both salt and fresh forms. These "Natural Resources" are what allow for there to be life on this planet. During the formative phases of human evolution, man, like like all living species, had to struggle to adapt to the natural environment. This was an extremely difficult process The problems and dangers posed by the environment have, however, been gradually eliminated as a result of improvements in industrial, scientific, and technical fields. The illnesses that were originally considered to be the primary contributors to death and morbidity and that were transmitted by insects and rodents, as well as by water and food, have been effectively brought under control. All of these things have been accomplished with relatively little disruption to the natural world that surrounds us. Over the course of time, an increase in the population necessitated a greater use of resources, which led to an imbalance in nature, and along with that imbalance came the emergence of new dangers to our environment. Today, evidences can be drawn from many different parts of the earth about the "dangerous levels of pollution in water, air, earth and living beings; major and undesirable disturbances to the ecological balance of the biosphere; destruction and depletion of irreplaceable resources; and gross deficiencies harmful to the physical, mental, and social health of mankind." These levels of pollution are described as "dangerous levels of pollution in water, air, earth and living beings; major and undesirable disturbances to the ecological balance of the biosphere.

Nevertheless, man should have taken three significant steps in order to comprehend nature and the significance of it, which would have led to our decision to not avoid nature. First, a holistic view on human history, including an awareness of the environmental forces at work over the course of millennia. Second, a more in-depth analysis of a relatively short period of time scale, perhaps for as long as three to four centuries, which has witnessed both the worldwide recovery from the Little Ice Age as well as the beginning of rapid changes in the atmosphere that have been generated by humans. Third, a knowledge of the revolution that took place in climate science was achieved. This revolution was driven by a growing comprehension, which began in the 1960s, of the role that non-renewable energy source innovation plays in altering the global atmosphere.

## **Objective**

## 1. Study On Environmental Protection In Ancient India

### **The Ancient Indian Context**

Ancient Indian literature discusses environmental management, preservation, and protection. Early on, India protected its ecology. In India's early history, people worshipped trees, forests, animals, mountains, rivers, etc. These were revered in Hinduism (Budholai 2010). Megasthenes, Pliny, Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, Itsing, etc., who visited India at different times, reported various elements of environmental protection (Patra 2016, 40). From ancient times to the present, Indians have worked to conserve the environment. Early environmental protection was influenced by religion and culture. Every component of nature was revered. Indian traditions tell us that all forms of life - plants, animals, and humans - are interrelated and interdependent, and that perturbations in any one of them would threaten the ecological equilibrium of the cosmos. Pathak et al. (2012) Protecting nature was everyone's dharma. The five Panchabhutas were heavenly manifestations to them ("Environmental Protection During Ancient and Medieval Periods Law General Essay," n.d.). Hinduism acknowledges that the human body is constituted of five components and links each to one of the five senses. Nose represents earth, tongue water, eyes fire, skin air, and ears space. Our senses and the elements link us to the natural world. Hinduism doesn't separate us from nature. They're essential to our existence.

The growth of Indian religions and belief systems shows their deep ties to nature. Human curiosity in natural elements like rain, flood, storms, and lightning and terror because they couldn't control them likely led to associating nature with religion. Fear of wild animals may have prompted them to revere them as supernatural beings. Harappan seals suggest their religion was zoomorphism (Singh 2015). Wheeler's 1920s seal is a peepul tree, which is regarded the Tree of Creation in India. Harappans knew how to regulate and save water for irrigation in addition to worshipping a tree (Jha 2003, 34). Recent breakthroughs in ethnobiology and paleoclimatology assist recreate the second and third millennia's environment. Climate and rainfall haven't changed much since 9,000 years ago, according to most data. Some researchers propose a more humid climate between 3000 B.C. and 1800 B.C., while others predict higher winter rainfall in Rajasthan between 5800 B.C. and 1800 B.C. Rajasthan's lakes and rivers dried up. This suggests that the Harappan era of the Indus Valley Civilization became drier (Ahmed 2014, 34). Thus, the severe repercussions of "misuse" are shown. Fairservis explains the decline of the Harappan Civilization in terms of ecological difficulties (Singh 2015). Vedas and Upanishads (2500-1500 BC) are the key sources for India's ancient past. Vedic literature, including the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas (forest books), Upanishads, Samhitas, and Upavedas, is not just a religious scripture of India, but also a literature that discusses social religious practises. The Vedas mention environmentalism, ecological equilibrium, and the weather cycle. This shows people's high awareness at the time (Tanwar 2016, 2). In the Vedic scripture, superhuman deities with animal traits govern natural forces and fiery wild creatures. Indra, the rain and lightning god, Varuna, Agni, and Pusan are others. The notion of worshipping nature did not restrict with devotion to the deities, but they provided proper significance and cared for the environment to fulfil their needs. Rain, rivers, etc. were beneficial for agriculture, and fire cleared forests and had household uses ("Hinduism - Gods and Goddess in the Vedas" n.d.). Even throughout Brahmanical/Vedic times, nature was revered. Trees are important in Indian religion and mythology because they sustain life and preserve nature. Trees are a sign of life, growth, knowledge, and immortality. The four Vedas include many allusions to plants, trees, and flowers, indicating the importance of trees to ancient Indians. In Indian literature and beliefs, they were alive entities and harming them constituted sacrilege.

Other trees were venerated besides the peepul. Gods and goddesses worshipped plants and trees. Trees and plants that benefited humans were venerated and given extraordinary powers. The peepul tree releases oxygen day and night, purifying the air. Tulsi, a Hindu-worshipped herb, has immense therapeutic potential (Singh 2015). "Trees with flowers and fruits fulfil this earth," says Mahabharata. Those who donate a tree are saved by those trees in the hereafter." Vedic scriptures emphasised protecting forests and wildlife. Cutting green trees was punishable. Vedic people protect habitation, afforestation, and non-pollution. Man cannot use nature, consciously or unknowingly. Man is taught to live in harmony with nature and see divinity in plants and animals.

Forests are a source of life and fertility, a shelter for nomads, and a model for societal and civilizational progress. All Vedic literature was revealed to sages in these retreats. Thus, Indian society and literature emphasised woods. In Indian literature, it's called Prakriti. In the Ramayana, Rama's whole trip went across woods and sea. The Pandavas spent their years of exile in the forest and forged matrimonial connections with forest tribes, which helped them in the Kurukshetra battle. Living in the forest taught them valuable lessons. Thus, forests became places to acquire deeper truths and sources of wisdom. As shown in earlier civilizations, woodlands were not home to uncivilised tribes or wild animals.

In contemporary India, old woods are holy groves. Tree worship before the Vedic period in India. Through adoration and exaltation of trees, man strove to reach and propitiate the deity, believing gods resided in plants and trees. Early Indians may have linked religion to plants to maintain ecological equilibrium. They worshipped tree as vrikshadevata (tree god) and forest as van devata (forest god) (Patra 2016, 41–45). Rigveda states, "If you wish to enjoy life's fruits and enjoyment after thousands of years, plant trees systemically." "less It forbids deforestation "Rivers cause extensive harm if their shores are damaged or destroyed, thus trees should not be chopped or uprooted (RV 5.54.6). "Don't remove healthy trees. Others would perish. Food chain breaks, world ends (RV6.48.17) (Pathak, Mandalia, and Yogesh Rupala 2012, 2). Atharva Veda emphasised water cleanliness. Pure water treats numerous illnesses and prevents future ones. It also protects wildlife and cattle. The PrithviSukta in the Atharva Veda is the oldest environmental incantation. Her blessings were sought for prosperity in all activities and fulfilment of all good ambitions. The Vedic seer says "Mata BhumihPutrohamPrithivyah" Son) (Patra 2016, 44–45). Ramayana (1000/900 BCE) and Mahabharata (900/800 BCE) mention the environment. In the Mahabharata, India was described as the region of seven contemplative mountains. In the Ramayana, Sita, the "ideal" Indian woman, was born from the earth (DhartiMata). It also relates how flora and fauna sympathised with Rama when Sita was taken by Ravana and paved his route in their own languages. Thus, man's close link with nature is shown (Roy 2005, 16–17).

Hanuman carried Sanjivani herb from Dronagiri Mountain to save Lakshmana's life. Ravana in the Ramayana asks, "I didn't cut down any fig trees in vaisakh, so why this calamity?" The above comments show how important trees are to our ecosystem. According to the saying, trees have supernatural powers of creation and death. In one, it saves life; in the other, tree chopping might cause death (Tanwar 2016, 2). Nature is an extension of awareness in Mahabharata. Every person is made of natural materials. Bhishma's mother was Ganga. All of Pandu's sons were born of natural ingredients, only Draupadi was a sacrifice. Gandhamadhanavyaasa's description mentions the many trees that provided a healthy atmosphere (Jairam Rajani 2016). The Mahabharata's Bhagavad Gita acknowledges the omnipresence of the highest god throughout nature. Lord Krishna states in sloka 20, chapter 10: "I'm in everyone's heart. I am all beings' origin, middle, and end. Everyone must be treated equally." Krishna compares the earth to a banyan tree

with endless branches where animals, people, and demigods roam. In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna declares, "I take a leaf, flower, fruit, or water presented with devotion" (Tanwar 216, 2).

Gautama Buddha's (6th-5th century B.C.) religious and philosophical teachings attempted to promote ecological harmony. Buddhism and Jainism espouse ahimsa (nonviolence). They rejected animal sacrifices and ceremonies and encouraged a compassionate, non-aggressive approach to nature and wise resource utilisation. All 24 Tirthankaras of Jainism were environmentalists. This indicates how man might gain utmost wisdom in a peaceful setting (Patra 2016, 47–48).

The Manusmriti, an ancient law treatise, prohibited animal cruelty and said the slayer of a cow would die as many times as the cow's hairs (Krishna 2017, 137). Water is public property, thus no one should contaminate it. He mentions air pollution. Impure substances should not be burned since their smoke is harmful. Manu's ultimate environmental ethics are atonement and self-realization following environmental sins. This sentence is modified for an elderly man, pregnant woman, or youngster in an emergency (Sachidananda 2006, 1–4). "He who injures innocent persons to give himself pleasure never achieves satisfaction in life or death," states the Manusmriti. This includes flora, animals, and sky and sea creatures (Krishna 2017, 125).

Kautilya's Arthashastra, an ancient Indian book on administration, economic policy, taxes, diplomacy, planning, and statecraft, remains important today. Influential till the 12th century, R. Shamasastri found and published the work in 1909. 1915 saw the first English translation. This book covers environmental and conservation expertise. It describes public cleanliness and environmental, forest, and wildlife protection. Even in state issues, administrators and rulers were urged to promote environmental welfare (Tanwar 2016, 3). Contains environmental legislation. Kautilya said protecting nature is everyone's dharma (moral obligation). Kautilya imposed fines for tree cutting. For cutting the delicate sprouts of fruit trees, flower trees, or shade trees in a municipal park, a punishment of 6 panas shall be imposed; for cutting the minor branches, 12 panas; and for cutting the major branches, 24 panas. The first amercement is for cutting their trunks, and the second is for falling them. For flowering, fruiting, or shady plants, half the fee applies (Patra 2016, 49).

In the arthashastra, Kautilya advises creating abhayaranya or abhayavana, forest and animal sanctuaries. Poaching and damaging trees was forbidden and punitive, especially for fertile forests, according to Kautilya. In topic 35, he recommends that the "superintendent of forest produce" appointed by the state for each forest zone be responsible for maintaining the forest's health, protecting forests to help wildlife such as elephants (hastivana), and producing forest products to satisfy economic needs, such as teak, palmyra, mimosa, sissu, kauki, sirisha, catechu, latifolia, arjuna, tilaka, tinisa, sal, The arthashastra also stated that the Mauryas protected wood and lions and tigers for skins. Kautilya suggested planting fresh woods on vacant territory when a new state was founded.

### **History of Environmental Protection in Ancient India**

An appraisal of the historical background to environmental protection in India would indicate that forests & wildlife were considered as vital ingredients of the global system. Here, the entire scheme of environmental preservation was essentially duty-based. In this sense, the ancient Indian society accepted the protection of the environment as its duty to do so.

**Hindu Era**

Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads and other Hindu writings describe trees, plants, wildlife, and their relevance to humanity. Yajnavalkya Smriti punished tree-cutting. Kautilya's Arthashastra, published in the Mauryan period, recognised the need for forest administration, while Ashoka's 5th Pillar Edict addressed animal care. The little inhabitants of Mohenjadarro and Harappa lived in harmony with the ecology and their needs. Hindu civilization was aware of deforestation and animal extinction's environmental impacts.

**Mughal Era**

The relationship between man and nature is held in high regard in Islam. Nevertheless, during the Medieval period, the only contribution that Mughal emperors made was the establishment of magnificent gardens, fruit orchards, and green parks. These were used as vacation resorts, palaces of retreat, or temporary headquarters during the summer season. During this time, the Mughal emperors were known as the "Garden Emperors." Even though they were great lovers of nature and took great pleasure in spending their spare time in the natural environment, the common opinion among environmentalists has been that the Mughal emperors did not make any efforts toward forest conservation. This is despite the fact that they enjoyed spending their spare time there.

**British Era**

The British invasion of India resulted in the exploitation of India's natural riches as well as a complete lack of concern for the conservation of the natural environment. An overview of early environmental regulation indicates that, in addition to the forest laws, legislation from the nineteenth century also partially controlled two other components of the Indian environment. This is something that is shown by a general review of early environmental legislation. The Oriental Gas Company Act of 1857 and the Shore Nuisance (Bombay and Kolaba) Act of 1853 are two examples of the early legislation that was passed in an attempt to address the problem. The Indian Penal Code was enacted in 1860, and one of its provisions stipulated that a person is liable for a fine if they knowingly pollute the water in any public spring or reservoir. In addition, the Code criminalised irresponsible conduct using toxic chemicals that threatened life or caused injury, and it outlawed activities that constituted a nuisance to the general public. The Bengal Smoke Nuisance Act of 1905 and the Bombay Smoke Nuisance Act of 1912 were both pieces of legislation passed with the intention of reducing air pollution. When it came to the preservation of wildlife, early law was restricted to certain geographical areas and certain species; this was done with the intention of preserving biodiversity. It should come as no surprise that the government of the United Kingdom has adopted legal measures with the purpose of reducing pollution and preserving natural resources. Despite the fact that these laws were passed by the British government not with the intention of preserving the natural world but rather with the purpose of generating cash for themselves, they should be seen as the first step toward the scientific conservation of natural resources. In spite of the fact that these actions were taken with ulterior objectives, British-enacted legislations have made a substantial contribution to the development of environmental jurisprudence in India.

**International Efforts**

Ecologists see growth based on the burning of large quantities of inexpensive fossil fuels, which is destabilising the climate, but economists see a world economy that has risen by leaps and bounds over the previous half-century. - Professor Lester R. Brown The rapid growth of economics, science, and technology has demonstrated huge implications in the form of a deterioration of ecological balances. The international community has voiced significant concern over the preservation of the environment and the enhancement of environmental quality in response to the widespread incidence of environmental disasters. Significant advancements were happened in the world scene in the midst of some serious efforts.

### **United Nations Conference on Human Environment**

The United Nations Conference on Human Environment was held in Stockholm in June 1972. It was the first time that the attention of the world was brought towards the environment. This event took place against the backdrop of some earnest attempts to tackle the problem of pollution management. The Declaration on Human Environment was approved, which included twenty-six principles, with the primary goal of overcoming environmental problems related to the development of states and providing clean and healthy living conditions. The Declaration on Human Environment contained twenty-six principles. The Stockholm Declaration included a method to construct an action plan for the improvement of the human environment, which was an essential component of the document. In addition, the proclamation declared that both economic and social growth were required in order to provide a healthy environment for man. [Citation needed] This, in turn, has been dubbed the Magna Carta of the environment, from which one can draw two significant inferences: i. Mankind possesses the fundamental right to freedom, equality, and adequate conditions of life in an environment of quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being; and ii. Mankind carries a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. Both of these inferences are important. COPONUD: Conference of the United Nations on Environment and Development The United Nations General Assembly called for a summit on the environment to be held in Rio de Janeiro from June 3rd to June 14th, 1992. This meeting is widely regarded as the event that most significantly advanced efforts to protect the natural world during the past ten years. At the Conference, which was the greatest meeting of world leaders to ever take place in the course of human history, participants deliberated and sketched out a strategy for the continued existence of the planet. In the context of international discussions, this brought a fresh perspective to the challenges of development and the environment. The primary purpose of the Summit was to establish a foundation for global partnership between developed and developing countries, on the one hand, as well as governmental agencies and private organisations. Another objective of the Summit was to find an equitable balance between the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations. This would allow for a more equitable distribution of the burdens that will be placed on future generations. Two conventions, one on biological diversity and another on climate change, were signed as a result of the Rio Conference, which counts as one of the conference's more concrete successes.

### **Constitutional Mandate on Environmental Protection**

When it was first put into effect, the Constitution of India did not include any provisions that were both directly related to protecting the natural environment and specifically worded. It's possible that the people who wrote the Indian Constitution back then didn't give it much thought since they thought it was a minor issue. Because of this, it most likely did not even have the expression environment within it. However, in reality, it only comprised a few directives to the state on various issues of public health, agriculture, and

animal husbandry. These Directives were not and are not currently legally enforceable in any court. However, a detailed examination of the numerous sections that existed previous to the 42nd Constitutional Amendment indicates that several of the Directive Principles of State Policy indicated a very modest leaning toward environmental preservation. This was discovered as a result of the examination. It is possible to deduce this from Article 39(b), Article 47, Article 48, and Article 49. These directive principles put an obligation on the state, both individually and collectively, to create circumstances for the improvement of the general health level in the country as well as to safeguard and develop the natural environment. In the case *Assam Sillimanite Ltd. v. Union of India*, it was decided that the term "material resources of the community" contained in Article 39(b) refers to any and all things that have the potential to generate wealth for the community. This interpretation of the term "material resources" was upheld. It has been determined that this concept encompasses not only resources that have previously been vested in the state but also those that are now owned by private individuals. In *Municipal Council, Ratlam v. Vardhichand*, the Supreme Court made the observation that the State will realise that Article 47 makes it a paramount principle of governance that are steps taken for the improvement of public health as amongst its primary duties. This was in reference to the case where the State was defending itself against allegations that it had violated this provision. It is clear from reading these articles that the Constitution of India did not ignore environmental concerns to the extent that some distinguished jurists have asserted it does. Even though the term "environment" does not appear anywhere in the Constitution, the goal of the articles that came before it was to preserve the earth's natural resources and, as a result, the natural environment. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that an expansion of constitutional provisions to include aspects relating to the environment did not take place until the late 1970s, following a strengthening of public interest litigations and an increased commitment from the Central Government. This expansion of constitutional provisions took place.

## **Conclusion**

The country of India is currently facing a number of mounting environmental challenges. The expanding economic growth and the fast growing population, which has reached 1.35 billion and is currently occupying the world's second biggest position, both contributed to the carelessness of the environment since there were far more serious concerns to handle. As a result of humanity's relentless pursuit of so-called growth, its relationship with environment has gradually been obscured through time. According to the findings of the study, it is abundantly clear that humans have progressed from the stage of being hunters and gatherers to that of becoming modern humans in stages. They improved their living conditions to a point where they were more comfortable, at which time they concurrently got more powerful and selfish. The goal of humankind is to exercise dominion over all aspects of the planet. Its significance is demonstrated by the words of Mahatma Gandhi, who said that "the world gives enough to meet everyone's need; but not for anyone's greed." The entire character of the environment as well as its overall quality have been transformed as a result of globalisation in the current context. The globe has shrunk into a global village, which is a civilization focused on knowledge and efficiency, but which lacks values related to the environment. The care for nature was greater at the time of the pre-Vedic period, but finally it has fallen steadily through the years. A discerning observer cannot refute the fact that in the process of growth of mankind through the ages, human beings have distanced themselves from nature. Every one of the early Hindu texts places an emphasis on the conservation of natural resources and maintaining ecological harmony.

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