



Environmental, Education and Philosophy of Indian Sages

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ABSTRACT

Environmental education emphasizes understanding the interrelationship between humans and nature, promoting sustainable living and ecological balance. The philosophy of ancient Indian sages provides a profound foundation for such environmental ethics. Indian philosophy, as reflected in the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas, views nature as sacred and inseparable from human existence. The Rigveda describes the universe as one interconnected entity, emphasizing respect for all living beings. Similarly the Atharvaveda Venerates the Earth as “Mata Bhumi Putro Aham Prithivyah” – “Earth is my mother, and I am her child” a concept that nurtures ecological sensitivity and stewardship. Sages like Maharshi Kanad, Kapila, and Patanjali advocated a holistic worldview where ethical living included the protection of all forms of life. Environmental education, inspired by such teachings, focuses on creating awareness, values and attitudes that encourage responsible interaction with the environment. The Gandhian philosophy of Sarvodaya and Aparigraha further extends this ancient wisdom into modern sustainable practices. Integrating the ecological wisdom of Indian sages into environmental education can foster a moral and spiritual approach to solving modern ecological crises. This philosophical grounding promotes harmony between humans and nature, encouraging learners to adopt eco – friendly lifestyles rooted in compassion, balance and non – violence. Thus environmental education, guided by Indian philosophy becomes a transformative tool for



1. INTRODUCTION :

The relationship between environmental education and the philosophy of Indian sages represents a profound harmony between human life and nature. Since ancient times, Indian philosophy has emphasized that the universe is a unified whole where every living and non-living element is interconnected. These age so f Indian viewed nature not merely as are source to be exploited but as a divine manifestation deserving respect and protection.

By incorporating these age-old philosophies into modern environmental education, we can inspire learners to develop a sense of reverence for nature and adopt eco-friendly life styles. The wisdom of Indian sages thus provides not only spiritual insight but also practical guidance for resolving today’s environmental crises.

Environmental education is a multidisciplinary field aimed at developing awareness, attitudes, skills, and values necessary to protect and conserve the environment (UNESCO, 1977). In India, however, environmental ethics and ecological consciousness are not new concepts. The subcontinent’s philosophical traditions, shaped by Rishis, Munis, Yogis and spiritual teachers, provide one of the earliest and most profound ecological world views known to humanity.

Classical Indian literature from the Vedas (1500-500 BCE) to later scriptures epics, and commentaries – contains highly sophisticated reflections on ecology. These texts do not treat nature as a mere resource but regard it as sacred, conscious and interconnected with human life. As the Atharva, Veda states, “Mata Bhumi Putro Ahan Prithivyaah” – Earth is our mother and we are her children (Atharva Veda, 12/1/12).

In a world grappling with climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and resource depletion the ecological philosophy of Indian Sages has renewed relevance. This paper explores how their teachings align with modern environmental education and how they can enrich contemporary environmental ethics, policies and pedagogies.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Environmental Education :

Environmental education aims to :



- Develop awareness of environmental problems.
- Build knowledge of ecological systems.
- Foster attitudes that promote environmental protection.
- Encourage participation in environmental problem solving.
- Promote sustainable life styles (Unesco, 1977; UNESCO, 2014)

2.2 Philosophy of Indian Sages :

Indian sages viewed life as an integrated whole. Their philosophy includes :

- Holistic understanding of nature (Prakriti).
- Ethical living through Dharma.
- Harmony of the five elements (Panchbhutas)
- Compassion for all beings (Ahimsa).
- Non – Possession (Aparigraha).
- Concept of ecological balance (RTA).

3. Environmental Thought in the Vedic Tradition :

3.1 The Vedic View of Nature :

The Vedas present a deeply ecological world view. Nature – Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Sky – is revered as divine. Various deities, representing natural elements, highlight ecological interdependence :

- Agni (Fire)
- Vayu (Air)
- Varuna (Water)
- Prithvi (Earth)
- Surya (Sun)

This symbolic representation emphasizes the sacredness of natural phenomena and guide humans to live in harmony with ecological cycles (Radhakrishnan, 1996).

3.2 Prakriti and Purusha

The Samkhya philosophy describes creation through the interaction of :



- Prakriti (Natural Matter)
- Purusha (Consciousness)

Environmental disturbance arises when humans act against natural balance. Modern ecological science similarly recognizes ecosystem stability as essential for life.

3.3 Rta : The law of cosmic order Rta is the natural order governing the universe. Disrupting it leads to Chaos :

“The word rests upon Rta.” (Rigveda, 10.190.1)

Environmental degradation – pollution, deforestation, exploitation can be seen as violations of Rta.

3.4 Vedic Hymns for Environmental Ethics

Many Hymns promote environmental conservation :

- Prayers for clean rivers (Rigveda 10.9)
- Praise for forests (Rigveda 5.41.19)
- Importance of rains and fertility (Rig veda 7.101)

The Atharva Veda’s Earth Hymns (12.1) is one of the earliest expressions of eco-spirituality.

4. Upanishadic Ecology : Interconnectedness of life

The Upanishads emphasize unity of all existence :

“Sarvam Khalvidam Bramha” – All this is Brahman (Chandogya Upanishad 3.15.1)

Key Ecological Teachings :

- Interdependence : All beings arise from the same universal source.
- Unity in the self never hates” (Isha Upanishad 6).
- Moderation : “ Tena tyaktena bhunjitha” – Enjoy with renunciation (Isha Upanishad 1)

This principle supports sustainable consumption and discourages over – exploitation of nature.



5. Epics and Environmental Morality

5.1 Ramayana

Valmiki's Ramayana highlights the ecological values of forest living (Vanavasa). The forest is depicted not as wilderness but as a sacred space enabling harmony, meditation, and ecological balance.

Examples include :

- Reverence for rivers like Ganga and Godavari.
- Compassion for animals and forest beings.
- Sustainable living by sages in hermitages (Ashrams).

5.2 Mahabharata

The Mahabharata offers insights into environmental justice :

“Dharma Sustains the earth.” (Mahabharata, Shantiparva 90.24)

The story of king Prithu reflects sustainable land management. The Bhagavad Gita adds a macro – ecological dimension :

“All beings are sustainable by food, food is produced from rain, rain comes from sacrifice (ethical action).” (Gita 3.14). This establishes a chain linking ethics, nature, and sustainability.

6. Buddhist and Jain Environmental Ethics

6.1 Buddhism : Compassion for all life Buddha's teachings emphasize :

- Ahimsa (Non – Violence)
- Karuna (Compassion)
- Middle Path (Moderation)
- Interdependence (Pratityasamutpada)

Buddhist monastic rules prohibit harming plants, animals, and even. Small organisms – an advanced form of ecological ethics (Gyatso, 2000)

6.2 Jainism : Ahimsa and Aparigraha

Jain Sages formulated one of the strongest ecological principles in world philosophy :



- Non – Violence toward all beings
- Non – Possession or minimal consumption.
- Respect for jiva (life) in water, air, and plants.

Mahavira Taught :

“One who disregards earth, water, fire, air, and vegetation disregards his own existence.” – Acaranga Sutra

These principles align closely with sustainable development.

7. Yoga and Environmental Consciousness

Yoga : as described by Patanjali is not only a physical discipline but also an ethical and ecological system.

7.1 Yamas and Niyamas

Important environmental principles include :

- Ahimsa – Non harming of all beings Aparigraha – non – greed
- Saucha – Purity of environmental and self
- Santosha – Contentment

A Yogic lifestyle promotes harmony with nature, simplicity, vegetarianism and respect for biodiversity.

7.2 Panchamahabhuta (Five Elements)

Ayurveda and Yoga teach that the body is composed of :

- Earth (Prithvi)
- Water (Apas)
- Fire (Agni)
- Air (Yayu)
- Space (Akasha)

Environmental balance directly affects human health. This aligns with modern ecological models linking pollution to lifestyle diseases.



8. Tribal and Folk Ecological Wisdom

Indian Sages were often inspired by indigenous tradition. Tribal communities practice :

- Sacred groves (Devrai)
- Conservation of rivers and forests.
- Ritual protection of species (e.g., peepal, banyan, snakes)

These traditions provided a practical model of environmental education for centuries (Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

9. Relevance of Sages Philosophy in modern Environmental Education

9.1 Ethical Foundation for Sustainability modern environmental education an incorporate :

- Vedic respect for nature
- Buddhist compassion
- Jain minimalism
- Yogic discipline
- Tribal conservation practices

9.2 Cultural context for Indian learners

Indian wisdom provides native ecological values, making environmental education culturally meaningful.

9.3 Promoting Sustainable life styles

Teaching on :

- Non – Violence
- Simplicity
- Moderation
- Reverence for life
- Eco – friendly living
- Circular economy
- Environmental justice
- Climate ethics



9.4 Value – Based Education

Environmental protection requires not just knowledge but values. Indian philosophy naturally integrates ethics with environment.

10. Practical Integration into curriculum Environmental education inspired by Indian sages can include :

10.1 Textual Studies

- Case studies from Vedas, Upanishads, Gita.
- Stories of Sage – environment relationships

10.2 Experiential Learning

- Meditation in natural environments
- Tree planting as spiritual duty
- Rituals celebrating rivers and biodiversity

10.3 Community Projects

- Water conservation inspired by Vedic hymns
- Ahimsa based animal welfare campaigns
- Sacred grove restoration

11. Conclusion :

The ecological philosophy of Indian sages provides a holistic, ethical, and spiritually rich framework that complements modern environmental education. By integrating concepts such as Prakriti, Rta, Ahimsa, Aparigraha, and the unity of all life, environmental education can move beyond scientific knowledge toward cultivating deeper ecological consciousness. The ancient Indian world view – rooted in respect, restraint and reverence for nature offers practical insights for addressing contemporary environmental crises. Reviving this wisdom can inspire sustainable living, environmental stewardship and a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world.



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