



# INDIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM: THE WAY FORWARD OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Dr. Rajani Chaubey

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jananayak Chandrashekhar University, Ballia

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the state of environmentalism in India and its implications for global environmentalism. India, a populous country in South Asia, faces significant environmental challenges due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and population growth. However, there is also a growing recognition of the importance of sustainable development and environmental conservation in the country. This paper explores the historical heritage of environmental patterns for life as well as the current environmental initiatives and policies in India, including efforts to address air and water pollution, conserve biodiversity, and promote renewable energy sources. It highlights the role of various stakeholders, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and grassroots movements, in driving environmental change in India. The findings suggest that while India faces complex environmental issues, there are promising developments and initiatives underway that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. These efforts can serve as a valuable model for global environmentalism, offering insights into strategies for managing environmental challenges within a diverse and rapidly developing country. The way forward for global environmentalism involves learning from India's experiences, promoting international cooperation, and adopting innovative approaches to address pressing environmental issues on a global scale.

**KEYWORDS:** Environmentalism, India, Global, Development, Conservation, Heritage

## INTRODUCTION

Indian Philosophy primarily evolved inherent to environmentalism. The environment has been given special importance in Indian Culture since ancient times, many components of the environment such as trees are worshiped and considered to be worshipable. The Peepal tree is considered sacred. The Banyan tree is also worshiped. Water, air, and fire are also worshiped considering them as Gods. Sea and rivers have also been considered worthy of worship. Rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Sindhu, Godavari, and Narmada are worshiped as sacred. Earth has also been given the status of mother. Various forms of environment have been worshiped in India since ancient times. How important is the environment in the culture of India, it is understood from the historical text in India.

A verse [slok] of Matsya Purana mentions the Indian environmental Philosophy, the verse translates to:

“The Earth is the mother, and we are her sons; the Earth bears all creatures just like a mother. For her, we are all equals, and she provides for all equally. Therefore, one should never exploit the Earth or harm her in any way.”<sup>i</sup>

This verse highlights the Earth's significance and role as a nurturing mother to all living beings. It urges people to treat the Earth with respect, refrain from exploiting its resources recklessly, and refrain from causing harm to it. This sentiment aligns with the principles of environmentalism, which emphasize the importance of sustainable practices and

protecting the natural world for the well-being of current and future generations. It can help to protect the nature by moral and ethical tool.

While the Matsya Purana may not be dedicated exclusively to environmentalism, it does contain wisdom and teachings that promote a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. These teachings reflect the traditional ecological wisdom found in various ancient Indian texts and philosophies that advocate living in harmony with the environment and recognizing the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural world. So, we should be a global person first, and keep harmonious approach about global environment because nature never discriminates against humans than why we make differences in the protection of nature. We are blaming each other (countries) for environmental pollution. And no any country wants to take moral responsibility to save the environment. Their stands for saving the environment only to avoid themselves as they are not exploiting the nature as other country. This attitude directly indicates the non-cooperative and non-coherent world. Considering this attitude about environment we must move to ancient Indian cultural ethics and moralities.

Ancient Indian culture is deeply rooted in a profound understanding of the environment and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Several aspects of Indian culture, including religious beliefs, rituals, literature, and traditional practices, demonstrate a strong emphasis on environmentalism and sustainability. some key aspects of Indian environmentalism as

reflected in ancient Indian culture we must learn from them to respect and protect our environment.

**Hinduism and Nature:** Hinduism, the predominant religion in India, teaches a profound reverence for nature. Many Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, contain hymns, prayers, and stories that depict the divinity of nature and various natural elements. Rivers, mountains, trees, and animals are often considered sacred, and there is an understanding that the divine is present in all living beings and the natural world. An example had been coated in Rigveda ॐ धराण्यै नमः<sup>ii</sup> (Om, salutations to Mother Earth.)

This is a simple invocation from the Rigveda that pays homage to Mother Earth. The Vedas, being vast and ancient texts, contain various hymns and verses that discuss the interconnectedness of life and nature.

**Ayurveda and Herbal Medicine:** Ayurveda, the traditional system of medicine in India, is deeply connected to nature. It emphasizes the use of natural herbs, plants, and minerals for healing purposes. The Ayurvedic approach focuses on balancing the elements of nature within the body to maintain good health and prevent illness. A verse defines it appropriately

"वन्द्याः पुष्पाणि सुगन्धिनीः सुस्थिता, आरोग्यमेव ते परं निगदन्ति ।  
ऋग्वेदः वैद्यस्य प्रमाणं प्रदाति, आयुर्वृद्धिं च यः समर्पयन्ति ।"<sup>iii</sup>

Translation: "In the fragrant wilderness, blossoms reside, they proclaim health as life's ultimate guide. Rigveda declares, with wisdom so vast, Longevity thrives where healing plants are cast."

One such verse also presents the harmony between nature and life

"योनिः पृथिव्यां पुत्राः पुत्रिण्यो योजिजानि वा ।  
वनस्पतीनां योजिजां वदन्त्याहुयः परम् ।"<sup>iv</sup>

Translation: "From the womb of the Earth, are born her sons and daughters, and from the womb of plants, they say, is born what is even more than that."

**Vedic Ecology:** The ancient Vedic texts provide insights into ecological principles. Vedic rituals and practices involved a deep understanding of natural elements and their significance. For example, rituals such as Agnihotra (fire offerings) were performed at specific times of the day to harmonize with the natural rhythms and promote ecological balance.

"अग्निं यमं यमीयं यज्ञमध्वरं वरं ह्य होतारं रत्नधातमम् ।"<sup>v</sup>

Translation: "I invoke Agni, the divine fire, the supreme leader, the invoker, the bestower of wealth, the most brilliant priest, and the one who holds the precious jewels." This verse is the first verse of the Rigveda, and it is often recited at the beginning of Agnihotra ceremonies to invoke the presence and blessings of Agni, the fire god. Keep in mind that different traditions and

practitioners may have variations in the specific verses used during Agnihotra.

**Ahimsa (Non-Violence):** The principle of Ahimsa is central to many Indian philosophies, including Jainism and Buddhism. It advocates non-violence towards all living beings, promoting compassion and empathy for animals and nature. This concept underpins many environmental movements in India that focus on protecting wildlife and preserving the ecosystem

"अहिंसा सत्यमक्रोधस्त्यागः शान्तिरपैशुनम् । दया भूतेष्वलोलुप्त्वामृतत्वं चैव  
च ।"<sup>vi</sup>

Translation: "Non-violence, truthfulness, absence of anger, renunciation, peacefulness, non-malignancy, compassion toward all living beings, absence of covetousness, gentleness, modesty, and steadfastness in virtue—these, O scion of the Bharata dynasty, are (the qualities) born of the divine nature."

This verse from the Bhagavad Gita highlights the importance of ahimsa and compassion toward all living beings.

**Traditional Farming and Agriculture:** Ancient Indian agricultural practices were often based on sustainable methods, such as crop rotation, organic fertilizers, and water conservation techniques. The principles of living in harmony with the land and respecting its resources were integral to traditional farming practices.

"यः पृथिव्यां त्वयाधितिष्ठन्नो वनस्पतीनां वन्द्याः । ऋतेन पुष्टो विचरन्नराः स  
नो मर्त्योऽवसीदति ।"<sup>vii</sup>

Translation: "He who, on Earth, standing firm, pays homage to the plants, who, by truth, nourishes and moves about—such a mortal prosper for us."

This verse highlights the idea of respecting and nurturing the plants and the Earth. The emphasis on truth and harmony with nature is evident in the context of sustainable living.

**Festivals and Rituals:** Many Indian festivals and rituals are tied to nature and agricultural cycles. For instance, festivals like Makar Sankranti, Pongal, and Baisakhi celebrate the harvest and seasonal changes, fostering a connection with nature and expressing gratitude for its abundance.

"समानी व आकृतिः समाना हृदयानि वः । "समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः  
सुसहासति ।"<sup>viii</sup>

Translation: "May your intentions be harmonious, may your hearts be in unity; let your minds be in accord, just as all the various aspects of the universe are in harmony."

this verse conveys the idea of living in harmony and unity with the natural world, which were basic goals to celebrate rituals and festivals in India.

While these aspects of ancient Indian culture reflect

environmental values, it's essential to recognize that historical practices and beliefs were influenced by their time's prevailing social, economic, and technological contexts. Modern environmental challenges require a holistic approach that combines traditional wisdom with contemporary scientific knowledge and sustainable practices to address the complex issues facing our planet today.

In India, rivers and seas have held immense significance in shaping the cultural, social, and environmental aspects of the country. Throughout history, Indian civilization has thrived around major rivers, which have been revered as sacred and considered the lifeblood of the land. The relationship between Indian environmentalism and rivers and seas can be seen through the following perspectives:

**Sacred Rivers:** Several rivers in India, such as the Ganges, Yamuna, Saraswati, Godavari, and Narmada, are considered sacred and hold deep spiritual and religious significance. They are often personified as goddesses and are worshipped by millions of people. This sacred connection fosters a sense of responsibility and reverence towards these rivers, driving conservation efforts to protect their purity and ensure their flow is sustained.

"गङ्गे च यमुने चैव गोदावरि सरस्वति । नर्मदे सिन्धु कावेरि जलेऽस्मिन्  
सन्निधिं कुरु ।"<sup>ix</sup>

Translation: "May the Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri, come and be present in this water."

**Rituals and Water Conservation:** Traditional Indian rituals and ceremonies often involve the use of water from rivers or seas. For instance, water from sacred rivers is used for purification and blessings during various ceremonies. These rituals instill a sense of respect for water and foster an understanding of the importance of water conservation. As many examples evolved in our Ved and Purana the Rigveda, one of the oldest Vedic texts, contains hymns that express gratitude for water and recognize its life-sustaining properties.

"O Waters, verily those healing balms of yours, with which ye cleanse the body's defilement, bestow them on us, your offspring, freely, and make us rich in food and famous."<sup>x</sup>

One another verse from Atharvaveda invokes water for purification and healing.

"As rivers, rich in sweets, flow to the ocean, filling it fully without restraint; so, Agni, flow to us with milk and fatness, and bring us wealth in horses, kine, and heroes."<sup>xi</sup>

**Riverfront Cities:** Many ancient Indian cities were established along the banks of rivers, as they provided a source of water for agriculture, transportation, and sustenance. The settlement patterns, urban planning, and architectural designs of these cities were influenced by the presence of rivers, showcasing the integration of human life with the natural environment.

**River Conservation Movements:** Over the years, India has witnessed various environmental movements focused on the conservation of rivers. These movements aim to raise awareness about pollution, dam construction, and unsustainable water usage, advocating for better river management and protection. Some of the movements have made milestones for river protection as Narmada Bachao Andolan, which opposes the construction of large dams on the Narmada River. Led by activist Medha Patkar, it supports the rights of local communities and environmental sustainability, Yamuna jive Abhiyan, the Save Ganga movement, Brahmaputra board conservation movement. These movements highly indicate the value of rivers in India from ancient to the present time.

In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of preserving and restoring the health of rivers and seas in India. The government, civil society organizations, and the general public are increasingly coming together to promote environmentalism focused on the protection and sustainable use of these vital natural resources.

**National Green Tribunal (NGT):** The National Green Tribunal was established in 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010. It is a specialized judicial body that handles cases related to environmental protection and conservation. The NGT has the authority to hear cases and deliver judgments on matters related to the environment, including forest conservation, air and water pollution, and other environmental issues.

**Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA):** The Environment Impact Assessment process is governed by the Environment Impact Assessment Notification, which mandates the assessment of potential environmental and social impacts of development projects before they are approved. In 2020, the government proposed amendments to the EIA notification, which sparked debates and discussions about potentially weakening environmental regulations.

**Wildlife Protection Act:** The Wildlife Protection Act, of 1972, aims to protect and conserve wildlife and their habitats. It provides legal measures for the protection of wildlife and regulates hunting, poaching, and trade in wildlife and their derivatives.

**Air and Water Pollution Control:** The government has various laws and regulations in place to control air and water pollution, including the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. These laws provide for the prevention, control, and abatement of air and water pollution.

**Renewable Energy Initiatives:** The Indian government has taken several initiatives to promote renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. The National Solar Mission and the National Wind Mission are some of the prominent initiatives aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy in the country's energy mix.

**Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign):**

Launched in 2014, this campaign focuses on sanitation, waste management, and improving the cleanliness of public places. It aims to address issues related to open defecation, solid waste management, and overall hygiene.

**International Commitments:** India is a signatory to international environmental agreements like the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The government has taken steps to align its policies and actions with these international commitments.

**Forest Conservation:** The Forest (Conservation) Act, of 1980, governs the diversion of forestland for non-forest purposes. It aims to ensure that forest resources are used sustainably and that adequate compensatory afforestation is carried out.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** The Companies Act, of 2013, introduced a provision for companies to spend a certain portion of their profits on corporate social responsibility activities, which can include environmental initiatives.

**Plastic Waste Management:** The government has introduced rules and regulations to manage plastic waste, including the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, which emphasize recycling and waste reduction.

These are just a few examples of Indian government laws and actions related to environmentalism. It's important to note that environmental issues and policies are continually evolving, and new developments may evolve with new policies for sustainable environmentalism.

### Provisions of Indian environmentalism in the Indian constitution

The Indian Constitution does not clearly contain provisions committed merely to environmentalism, but it does incorporate several clauses and principles that have been interpreted to encircle environmental protection and sustainable development. Some applicable provisions in the Indian Constitution that incline to environmental concerns such as:

#### Article 48A - Protection and Improvement of Environment:

This article was inserted into the Constitution through the 42nd Amendment Act, of 1976. It states: "The State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country."<sup>xii</sup> This provision highlights the State's responsibility to secure environmental protection.

**Article 51A(g) - Fundamental Duties:** Part IV-A of the Constitution deals with the Fundamental Duties of citizens. Article 51A(g) requires citizens to "protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures."<sup>xiii</sup> This highlights the duty of citizens to contribute to environmental preservation.

**Article 21 - Right to Life:** The interpretation of Article 21,

which guarantees the right to life, has been extended by the courts to include the right to a clean and healthy environment. The Supreme Court has held that a clean environment is integral to the right to life.

#### Article 39(b) and (c) - Directive Principles of State Policy:

These provisions highlight that the State shall direct its policy towards securing the ownership and control of the material resources of the community to promote the common good and fend off the concentration of wealth. These principles can be interpreted to guide sustainable and equitable resource management. Article 47 - Duty of the State to Raise the Level of Nutrition and the Standard of Living and to Improve Public Health: While not directly focused on the environment, this article highlights the State's responsibility to improve public health, which can be closely linked to environmental factors.

#### Article 253 - Power of Parliament to Make Laws for Implementing International Agreements:

This article empowers the Parliament to make laws for the implementation of international agreements, including those related to environmental protection.

#### Article 243G - Powers and Functions of Panchayats:

Part IX of the Constitution deals with Panchayats. Article 243G mentions that Panchayats shall be given powers and authority to prepare plans for economic development and social justice, which could include environmental considerations at the local level.

It's important to note that while these provisions put the groundwork for environmental protection and sustainable development, certain legal frameworks for environmental regulation, pollution control, conservation, and other aspects of environmentalism are usually established through separate legislation, as mentioned in the previous response. Additionally, judicial interpretations by Indian courts have played a noteworthy role in shaping the environmental jurisprudence in the country.

Several countries around the world have drawn inspiration from India's environmental initiatives and provisions, particularly in the areas of sustainable development, conservation, and renewable energy. We must discuss a few examples of countries that have adopted environmental provisions or practices from India:

#### Bhutan - Gross National Happiness (GNH):

Bhutan has adopted a holistic approach to development by focusing on Gross National Happiness (GNH) rather than merely relying on economic indicators. This approach, similar to India's emphasis on sustainable development and well-being, considers environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and good governance as essential components of national progress.

#### Bangladesh - Solar Home Systems (SHS):

Bangladesh has implemented a successful Solar Home Systems program, providing solar-powered electricity to rural households. This initiative draws inspiration from India's efforts to promote solar

energy and increase access to clean and affordable electricity through programs like the National Solar Mission.

**South Africa - Environmental Rights:** South Africa's constitution includes a right to an environment that is not harmful to health or well-being, similar to India's interpretation of the right to a clean environment as a fundamental right. This provision has been used to strengthen environmental protection efforts and to address pollution and degradation.

**Costa Rica - Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES):** Costa Rica has implemented a Payment for Ecosystem Services program, where landowners are compensated for conserving and protecting their natural resources. This approach aligns with India's efforts to promote sustainable land management and reward communities for their conservation efforts.

**China - Afforestation and Reforestation Programs:** China has undertaken large-scale afforestation and reforestation projects to combat desertification and promote environmental conservation. These initiatives share similarities with India's afforestation efforts, such as the Green India Mission under the National Action Plan on Climate Change.

**Germany - Feed-in Tariffs for Renewable Energy:** Germany's adoption of feed-in tariffs to incentivize renewable energy generation, particularly solar and wind power, was influenced by similar policies in countries like India. India's National Solar Mission, with its focus on promoting solar energy through incentives and feed-in tariffs, has served as a model for other countries exploring renewable energy development.

**Rwanda - Plastic Bag Ban:** Rwanda's successful ban on plastic bags drew inspiration from India's efforts to curb plastic pollution through regulations and public awareness campaigns. India's Plastic Waste Management Rules, aimed at reducing plastic usage and improving waste management, have influenced similar actions in other nations.

**United Arab Emirates (UAE) - Desert Afforestation:** The UAE has launched ambitious initiatives for desert afforestation and sustainable land management, inspired by India's efforts to combat desertification and promote reforestation in arid and semi-arid regions.

These are just a few examples of how India's environmental provisions and practices have influenced other countries' approaches to sustainable development, conservation, and environmental protection. Environmental challenges are global, and sharing successful strategies and initiatives can contribute to a The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals designed to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges. While the SDGs are not directly inspired by Indian environmentalism, they do align with many principles of environmental protection and sustainable development that are also promoted by India and other countries. The provision of a safe environment is wholeheartedly addressed through several of the SDGs and their associated indicators. Some of them are:

**SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation:** This goal aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. It includes targets related to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and the protection of water-related ecosystems. India's focus on improving water quality and access to clean water is aligned with the objectives of this goal.

**SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy:** This goal focuses on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. It highlights the importance of transitioning to renewable energy sources, which resonates with India's efforts to promote renewable energy, particularly through the National Solar Mission.

**SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:** This goal aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. It includes targets related to air quality, waste management, and green spaces. India's initiatives to create smart and sustainable cities align with this goal's objectives.

**SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production:** This goal promotes sustainable patterns of consumption and production, including reducing waste generation and improving resource efficiency. India's focus on waste reduction, recycling, and sustainable consumption practices contributes to this goal.

**SDG 13: Climate Action:** This goal calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. It emphasizes strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards. India's commitment to addressing climate change, as seen in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts, aligns with this goal.

**SDG 14: Life Below Water and SDG 15: Life on Land:** These goals focus on the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and terrestrial ecosystems. India's initiatives to protect and restore coastal and marine ecosystems, as well as efforts to promote afforestation and biodiversity conservation, contribute to these goals.

**SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:** While not directly related to environmentalism, this goal highlights the importance of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, which play a role in enforcing environmental regulations and ensuring the safety of communities.

It's important to note that the SDGs are a collaborative global effort, and while specific provisions of Indian environmentalism might not directly inspire the SDGs, the goals reflect shared values and commitments to environmental protection, sustainability, and the well-being of people and the planet. India, like other countries, contributes to the achievement of these goals through its policies, programs, and initiatives focused on creating a safer and more sustainable environment. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: India is likely to continue its commitment to addressing climate change through mitigation measures (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation strategies (building resilience to climate impacts).

This could involve further expansion of renewable energy capacity, implementation of energy-efficient technologies, and initiatives to promote sustainable land use and forest conservation.

**Renewable Energy Expansion:** India has set ambitious targets for renewable energy capacity, and it might further ramp up its efforts to transition to a low-carbon energy system. This could involve increased investments in solar, wind, hydro, and other renewable energy sources.

**Air and Water Quality Management:** Given the ongoing concerns about air and water pollution in India, plans might include stricter regulations and measures to improve air and water quality. This could involve increased enforcement of pollution control laws, adoption of cleaner technologies, and promotion of sustainable urban development.

**Conservation of Biodiversity and Ecosystems:** India is likely to continue its efforts to conserve its rich biodiversity and ecosystems. This might involve initiatives to protect endangered species, expand protected areas, restore degraded ecosystems, and promote sustainable agriculture and forestry practices.

**Plastic Waste Management and Circular Economy:** India could focus on reducing plastic pollution through improved waste management and the promotion of a circular economy. This might involve stricter regulations on single-use plastics, investment in recycling infrastructure, and public awareness campaigns.

**International Environmental Diplomacy:** India has been an active participant in international environmental negotiations and agreements. Plans might involve continued engagement in global forums to address issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable development.

**Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Urbanization:** Given India's rapid urbanization, there might be a greater emphasis on creating green infrastructure, sustainable transportation systems, and eco-friendly urban planning to promote livable and environmentally friendly cities.

**Capacity Building and Public Awareness:** Plans could include efforts to enhance environmental education, awareness, and public participation. This might involve initiatives to engage communities, schools, and businesses in environmental conservation and sustainable practices.

**Research and Innovation:** India might prioritize research and innovation to develop new technologies and solutions for environmental challenges. This could involve investment in clean technologies, green innovations, and sustainable agricultural practices.

It's important to note that the specifics of India's plans for environmental protection and global environmentalism will depend on a variety of factors, including political priorities,

technological advancements, international agreements, and public engagement.

## CONCLUSION

Indian environmentalism presents a dynamic and context-specific approach that synchronizes traditional wisdom with modern sustainability practices. As a pivotal player in global environmentalism, India must balance economic development with ecological conservation. The way forward involves collective efforts, policy innovation, and community commitment. Embracing renewable energy, conservation initiatives, and sustainable agriculture are pivotal. By integrating indigenous knowledge and fostering international cooperation, India can push the broader global environmental movement toward a more strong and inclusive future, where environmental protection aligns perfectly with societal progress, ensuring a sustainable legacy for generations to come.

## REFERENCE

1. verse that reflects environmental ethics is found in the Matsya Purana (Chapter 114, Verses 20-22).
2. A verse from Rigveda
3. ibid
4. Atharvaveda 12.1.34
5. Rigveda 1.1.1
6. Bhagvadgeeta 16.2
7. Rigveda 10.16.5
8. Rigveda 10.191.4
9. Rigveda 10.75.5)
10. Rigveda 1.23.21
11. Atharvaveda 10.7.25
12. Indiakanon.org
13. ibid