



HISTORICAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE FROM INDIAN SCRIPTURES

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Abstract:

This research paper explores historical environmental education from an spiritual perspective, drawing upon ancient Indian scriptures and literature such as the Shriramcharitmanas , Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha Sagar and Vedas. These texts provide profound insights into ecological balance, sustainable living, and reverence for nature. The study highlights how these teachings remain relevant in modern environmental discourse. The paper further discusses how these teachings can be integrated into contemporary environmental education, supported by specific case studies demonstrating their practical application.

Keywords:

Sanatan, Scriptures, Contemporary, Sustainable, Anandmay

Introduction:

Environmental education has been a significant aspect of human civilization. Ancient scriptures, especially those rooted in Sanatan Dharma, have extensively addressed ecological consciousness. Indian spiritual traditions view nature as divine and interwoven with human life, emphasizing sustainable practices and ethical governance. This paper examines how the scriptures present nature as sacred and integral to human existence, along with contemporary examples where these teachings have been successfully implemented.

Research Questions:

1. How do ancient Indian scriptures promote environmental consciousness?
2. What are the key environmental principles in the Ramayana, Bhagavata Mahapurana and other Vedas.
3. How can these teachings contribute to contemporary environmental education?

4. Are there real-world case studies where these principles have been applied successfully?

Findings:

1. How do ancient Indian scriptures promote environmental consciousness?

Ancient scriptures across various cultures promote environmental consciousness by emphasizing harmony between humans and nature. Here's how they convey this wisdom:

● Respect for Nature as Divine:

Respect for nature as divine means viewing nature not just as a physical entity but as a sacred, spiritual force worthy of reverence and worship. This belief is common in many ancient traditions, especially in Indian scriptures, where natural elements like rivers, mountains, trees, and earth are considered manifestations of divine power. Nature is seen as an expression of God or higher energy, encouraging harmony and balance with nature rather than exploitation.

This concept promotes environmental protection by instilling a sense of sacred responsibility towards nature.

◆ In Ramcharitmanas, the Ganga River is revered and depicted as a divine goddess, symbolizing purity, sanctity, and spiritual power. The Ganga not merely as a physical river but as a sacred entity whose blessings are sought for the fulfillment of desires and the well-being of devotees.

"Siya surasari kahe'u kar jori, Matu manorath purabu mori Pati devar sang kusal bahori, Aayi karau jehi poojan
toree."

(सिय सुरसरी कहेउ कर जोरी । मातु मनोरथ पूरबु मोरी ।।
पति देवर संग कुष बहोरी । आई करौं जेहि पूजन तोरी ।।)

(Reference: Tulsidas. Shriramcharitmanas. Gitapress, Gorakhpur. Dvitiya Sopan – Ayodhyakand – Chaupai 1-4, with Reference to Doha 102)

(When Lord Shri Ram, Mata Sita, and Lakshman ji. reached the banks of the Ganga River during their exile, they worshipped the sacred river. Mata Sita prayed to goddess Ganga addressing her as mother and seeks her blessings saying, I vow that after completing the exile safely with my husband Shri Ram and brother-in-law Lakshman, I will return and offer my heartfelt worship to you.)

◆ "Prithvi Sukta" from the Atharvaveda praise the Earth as a mother, advocating for sustainable use of resources.

Tasu no dhehyabhi nah pavasva Mata bhumih putro aham prithivya Parjanya pita sa u nah pipartu."

(यत्ते मध्यं पृथिवि यच्च नभ्यं यास्त ऊजेस्तन्वः संबभूवुः ।

तासु नो धेहाभि नः पवस्व माता भूमि पुत्रो अहं पृषधिव्याः ।

पर्जन्यः पिता स उ न पिपर्तु । 112)

Reference:(Atharva Veda, Prithvi Sukta, 12th Kanda, 12th Shloka. [Gita Press Gorakhpur].

(This verse beautifully illustrates the sacred bond between humanity and nature, where Earth is revered as the divine mother and rain as the nourishing father. It Referencelects the eco- spiritual philosophy of ancient Indian scriptures, emphasizing the interdependence of life forms and the importance of environmental balance. Such Referenceerences highlight the deep-rooted respect for nature in Indian tradition, promoting sustainable living and environmental preservation.)

2. What are the key environmental principles in the Shriramcharitmanas, Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha-Sagar and other ancient literature?

◆ Purification of Yamuna River water.

Krishna saw that the poisonous black snake had poisoned the water of Yamuna ji ,then with the intention of purifying the Yamuna, he drove the snake out of the river.

By the grace of Lord Krishna, the Leela-Manushya, the water of Yamuna became not only non-poisonous but also as sweet as nectar.

{Reference: Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha-Sagar, Dasham Skandha - Solahva Adhyay Kaliyapar Kripa - shloka 65-67 (Gita Press Gorakhpur) }

◆ Holy cow worship and importance.

Under Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha Sagar ,when the demoness Putana came to kill baby Shri Krishna by applying poison to her breasts, Krishna suckled her, ultimately leading to her demise, After this, the gopis along with Yashoda and Rohini protected the body parts of the child Sri Krishna from all possible ways by means of singing, swinging the tail of the cow etc., they first bathed the child Shri Krishna with cow urine, then applied cow urine on all his body parts and then applied cow dung on all the twelve body parts and protected him with the names of Lord Keshav etc.

**{Reference: Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha-Sagar, Dashm Skandha—chhatha Adhyay
--Putna Uddhar shloka 20-21 (Gita Press Gorakhpur)}**

◆ Animal Protection and compassion towards animal

In Ramayana when Lord Ram met Jatayu in the forest, the noble bird was grievously wounded after bravely fighting Ravan to protect Sita. Moved by Jatayu's sacrifice, Lord Ram embraced him like a father and performed his last rites with great respect, showcasing his immense compassion and devotion towards all beings.

“Jal bhari nayan kahahin Raghurai Taat karm nij te gati paai.

Parahit bas jinh ke man mahin.

Tinh kahun jag durlabh kachhu nahin.”

जल भरि नयन कहहिं रघुराई । तात कर्म निज तें गति पाई ॥

परहित बस जिन्ह के मन माहीं । तिन्ह कहूँ जग दुर्लभ कछु नाहीं ॥

(Reference: Tulsidas. Shriramcharitmanas. Gitapress, Gorakhpur. Tiritiya Sopan – Aranyakand – Chaupai 4-5, with Referenceerence to Doha 30.)

(Lord Ram said to Jatayu,

“You have achieved this status due to your own deeds, I have no credit for this. Those who have the welfare of others in mind

There is a feeling that nothing is rare for them in this world, that is, they get everything.

Leave this body and go to my abode, Saketalok. What can I give you, all your desires

Because I became your son, your condition improved. Your unending love for me At this time, you have attained all the four liberations due to the effect of your karma. I have removed all the four liberations from your lotus hands.

I did this and took you in my lap and thus you attained Sayujya Mukti. I am near you.”)

◆ Hanuman Ji told Vibhishan Ji that Lord Ram's love and compassion extend even to animals like monkeys, who may seem of no use to others. Yet, Lord Ram cherishes and values them with the same affection as he does for all beings."

"As main adham sakha sunu mohu par Raghubir, keenhi kripa sumiri gun bhare bilochan neer."

अस मैं अधम सखा सुनु मोहू पर रघुबीर ।

कीन्ही कृपा सुमिरि गुन भरें बिलोचन नीर ॥

(Reference: Tulsidas, Shriramcharitmanas. Gitapress, Gorakhpur. Pancham Sopan – Sunderkand – Chaupai 3-4, with Referenceerence to Doha 7)

“Here Hanuman Ji, while introducing his poverty told Vibhishan Ji that whoever even whoever takes the name of us monkeys in the morning, he does not get food that day. O friend, listen to the qualities of the Lord, I was born in such a lowly monkey caste, Raghuvir Shri Ram blessed me”

◆ Protection of Oceans, Hills and Mountains.

Lord Ram protected the ocean, as it is a natural resource and home to many living creatures, by choosing forgiveness over destruction."

"Sabhay Sindhu Gahi Pad Prabhu Kere. Chhamahu Nath Sab Avagun Mere."

सभय सिंधु गहि पद प्रभु करे।

छमहु नाथ सब अवगुन मेरे॥

(Reference: Tulsidas, Shriramcharitmanas. Gitapress, Gorakhpur. Pancham Sopan – Sunderkand – Chaupai 1 with Reference to Doha 59)

The ocean got scared and caught hold of the feet of the Lord and said, O Lord! Please forgive all my seven faults. O Lord! The actions of the sky, air, fire, water and earth are inert by nature, that is why I did not accept your request.

“Sunat Binit Bachan Ati Kah Kripal Musukai.

Jehi Bidhi Utarai Kapi Kataku Taat So Kahahu Upai."

सुनत बिनीत बचन अति कृपाल मुसुकाई।

जेहि बिधी उतरै कपि कटकु तात सो कहहु उपाय ॥

(Reference: Tulsidas, Shriramcharitmanas. Gitapress, Gorakhpur. Pancham Sopan – Sunderkand – Doha 59)

hearing the very humble words of the sea, the kind Shri Ram smiled and said, O honourable one! Please tell me the way in which the monkey army can cross the sea. I have no insistence on drying you up, but I want a way for the monkey army to cross the sea. So please tell me the way in which you remain in your form and my monkey army can also cross the sea.

◆ Shri Govardhan Parvat Pujan

The Govardhan Parvat Pujan by the Brijwasis at the request of Shri Krishna can be Referenceerred to as an eco-spiritual tradition or sacred environmental practice. This event symbolizes the reverence for nature and highlights the interdependence between humans, animals, and the environment.

Shri Krishna encouraged the Brijwasis to worship Govardhan Parvat instead of Indra Dev, emphasizing that the mountain plays a crucial role in:

- Bringing rains through its ecosystem.
- Providing fodder (charan) for Gau Mata (cows).
- Offering shelter and resources for humans, animals, and birds.

This tradition signifies the divine relationship between nature and life, promoting the message of sustainable

living and environmental conservation through religious practices.

Shri Krishn said that

“We are eternal forest dwellers, forests and mountains are our home. 24. TheReferenceore, let us prepare to perform the Yajna of cows, Brahmins and Giriraj. Let this Yajna be performed with the same materials that have been collected for the Indra Yajna.

Lord Krishna himself bowed to that form of His along with the other residents of Vraja and said, 'Look, what a wonder it is! The King of Mountains has appeared in person and has showered his blessings on us. || 36 || He can take any form he wants. He destroys those forest dwellers who disrespect him. Come, let us bow to this King of Mountains for the welfare of ourselves and the cows.”

(Reference: Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha-Sagar, Dashm Skandha-Chaubeesva Adhyay- Indra Yajna Nivaran-shloka 23-37)

The above instances from Shriramcharitmanas and Shrimad Bhagwat Sudha-Sagar clearly show how animals, rivers, oceans, and mountains are given importance in Sanatan Dharma. They highlight their significance in nature and their role in maintaining the ecological balance."

3. How can these teachings contribute to contemporary environmental education?

Indian scriptures emphasize that nature must not be exploited but preserved for future generations, aligning with sustainable development principles in contemporary environmental education.

Rivers, forests, and mountains are seen as living entities, similar to the modern rights of nature movement, which advocates legal personhood for ecosystems.

These scriptures teach that harming nature leads to ecological imbalance and suffering, reinforcing the cause-and-effect relationship (karma) in environmental actions.

This aligns with modern efforts to promote environmental ethics, encouraging people to act as guardians of the planet.

4. Are there real-world case studies where these principles have been applied successfully?

The below case studies illustrate how the environmental principles embedded in Hindu scriptures have been effectively translated into real-world actions, fostering a culture of sustainability and reverence for nature.

❖ The Chipko Movement

In the 1970s, the Chipko Movement emerged in the Himalayan region of India as a grassroots effort to prevent deforestation. Villagers, predominantly women, embraced trees to protect them from being felled by contractors. The movement drew inspiration from Hindu scriptures emphasizing the duty to protect all forms of life. This non-violent protest not only curbed deforestation but also raised awareness about environmental conservation across India.

❖ Govardhan Ecovillage

Established under the guidance of Radhanath Swami, the Govardhan Ecovillage in Maharashtra, India, exemplifies sustainable living rooted in spiritual ecology. Spanning 75 acres, this model farm community integrates principles from Hindu scriptures to promote harmony between humans and nature. The ecovillage emphasizes sustainable solutions in areas like water conservation, waste management, and organic farming. Its efforts have been recognized with several awards, including the Skoch Platinum Award for integrated water conservation.

❖ The Bhumi Project

Launched by the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, the Bhumi Project is a global Hindu response to environmental issues, particularly climate change. Drawing upon teachings from Hindu scriptures, the project mobilizes Hindu communities worldwide to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Initiatives include the "Hindu Declaration on Climate Change," which calls for adherence to dharmic principles in addressing environmental challenges. The project has facilitated events like Hindu Environment Week, engaging thousands globally in environmental awareness activities.

Research Solutions:

In today's scenario, several challenges are associated with the application of historic environmental education mentioned in Hindu scriptures. These scriptures, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and other ancient texts, emphasize the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. However, the following problems hinder their relevance and implementation:

1. Lack of Awareness and Accessibility to Scriptures.

Many people are unaware of the rich environmental wisdom embedded in Hindi scriptures due to the lack of translation and promotion.

Ancient texts are often written in Sanskrit or archaic Hindi, making them difficult to understand for the modern generation.

To overcome the above issue the following solutions are advisable:

- Translate key scriptures into modern Hindi and English with simple explanations.
- Use storytelling formats to make them engaging for younger generations.
- Create a website or mobile app with easy-to-read translations.
- Use social media (Instagram, YouTube, Linked In) to share short videos, info-graphics, and reels explaining these concepts.
- Introduce workshops in schools and colleges on ancient environmental wisdom.
- Collaborate with universities and research institutions for academic studies and publications.

- Organize discussion forums, webinars, and storytelling sessions in local communities.
- Partner with religious and cultural organizations to incorporate environmental teachings into discourses.
- Work with government bodies to include scriptural environmental teachings in educational curricula.
- Collaborate with NGOs focused on environment and culture to promote awareness.

2. Impact of Materialism on Environment and Mental Well-being: A Path Towards Sustainable Living.

In today's world, the excessive focus on materialistic goals has led to environmental degradation and the erosion of traditional values like simple living and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness). The modern lifestyle encourages over consumption, exploitation of natural resources, and an increasing detachment from sustainable practices. People often fail to distinguish between Sādhana (means) and Sādhya (ends), leading to an imbalance where wealth and possessions become the ultimate goal rather than tools for a meaningful life. This materialistic pursuit fosters greed, uncontrolled desires, and dissatisfaction, ultimately affecting mental well-being and increasing stress levels.

To address this issue, individuals must learn to differentiate between means and ends, ensuring that material wealth remains a facilitator rather than a purpose in itself. Teaching the younger generation to practice self-restraint (control over desires) is essential to prevent greed-driven lifestyles. Integrating ancient wisdom—such as the concept of Aparigraha—into modern education can promote mindful consumption, environmental responsibility, and inner satisfaction. By cultivating contentment and sustainable habits, society can shift from a consumption-driven model to one that prioritizes mental well-being and ecological balance.

3. Decline of Ethical and Spiritual Values in the Modern Generation: Its Impact and the Path to Restoration

In contemporary society, there is a noticeable decline in ethical and spiritual values, especially among the younger generation. Influenced by materialism, social validation, and a culture of excessive display, many individuals have lost interest in their own traditions and moral principles. This shift has led to a lack of inner fulfillment, resulting in increased cases of stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. The detachment from core values and meaningful living has left many feeling empty despite external success, pushing them towards unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, excessive partying, and social media validation. Instead of seeking temporary happiness through superficial means, the younger generation must strive to become Ānandmay (blissful and content from within), which comes from a life rooted in purpose, ethics, and inner peace rather than fleeting pleasures.

To counter this growing crisis, individuals must reconnect with ethical and spiritual teachings from ancient scriptures and integrate them into daily life. Small, conscious efforts such as practicing gratitude, self-discipline, and contentment can bring a sense of peace and

purpose. Instead of seeking temporary pleasure in clubs and superficial socializing, young people should engage more with nature, meditation, and introspection to reduce stress and enhance well-being. Additionally, recognizing the significance of festivals and traditional values by celebrating them with family can strengthen moral foundations and reinforce a sense of belonging. By embracing these teachings gradually, society can cultivate a balanced, mentally stable, and ethically conscious generation that thrives in true inner bliss (Ānandmay jeevan) rather than momentary happiness.

4. Impact of Social Media Overuse on Productivity and Environmental Responsibility: A Path to an ĀnandmayEarth

In today's fast-paced digital era, people, especially students, spend excessive time on social media and unproductive activities, leading to a decline in meaningful engagement with society and the environment. The constant distraction of virtual platforms diverts attention from self-growth, service to others, and environmental consciousness. This negligence has contributed to increasing mental restlessness, lack of discipline, and reduced social responsibility, ultimately distancing individuals from a purpose-driven and fulfilling life.

To overcome this issue, individuals must audit their time and consciously allocate their free hours to constructive and service-oriented activities. Engaging in tree plantation, Gau seva (service to cows), helping the needy, cleaning water bodies, and spreading awareness about environmental preservation among family and friends can foster a sense of responsibility and fulfilment. Additionally, dedicating time to meditation, yoga, and pranayama is crucial, as purified breath (śuddh saws) leads to purified thoughts (śuddh vichār), which ultimately results in a purified and harmonious life (śuddh Jivan). By embracing these practices, individuals can contribute to making the world a happy and blissful home, ultimately achieving the vision of an ĀnandmayEarth, where inner peace and environmental sustainability coexist.

Conclusion:

The ancient Indian scriptures offer profound wisdom on environmental preservation, emphasizing a spiritual connection between nature and human well-being. The teachings urge us to treat the environment with reverence, showing compassion towards animals, Refrain from polluting sacred rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna, and recognizing the significance of the holy cow (Gau Mata)—a divine abode of 33 crore deities. By reviving these age-old values, we can restore balance between nature and humanity.

Practicing Gau Seva (service to cows), planting trees on special occasions, and spreading awareness about environmental protection are vital steps in nurturing a sustainable future. When we foster love (Prem) and goodwill (Sadbhavana) towards all living beings, we align ourselves with the highest spiritual principle—"Sabse Unchi Prem Sagai" (Love is the supreme bond).

By integrating these teachings into our daily lives, we move closer to the vision of an ĀnandmayEarth—a world where environmental harmony, spiritual consciousness, and human compassion coexist, creating a truly blissful and sustainable planet for future generations.

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