

Environmental sustainability for 'Viksit Bharat': exploring the role of Vedic literature in shaping ecological consciousness

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Manuscript details:

Available online on <http://www.ijlsci.in>

ISSN: 2320-964X (Online)

ISSN: 2320-7817 (Print)

Cite this article as:

Sharma Lalita (2025) Environmental sustainability for 'Viksit Bharat': exploring the role of vedic literature in shaping ecological consciousness, *Int. J. of. Life Sciences*, Special Issue, A21, 51-58.

Article published in Special Issue of "International Conference on Futuristic Approach for Viksit Bharat (ICFAVB-2047) Organized by Government College, Dholpur (Raj.) Dated 23 and 24 Dec. 2024.



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ABSTRACT

India's aspiration to become 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) by 2047 requires an integrated approach that harmonises economic progress with environmental sustainability. This research paper explores the profound ecological consciousness embedded within Vedic literature and its relevance to contemporary sustainability challenges. The Vedas emphasise the interconnectedness of all life forms, advocating for reverence toward nature and sustainable resource management. Ancient Indian literature fosters environmental consciousness by depicting the human-nature relationship, critiquing ecological degradation, and advocating conservation ethics. Through hymns, philosophical discourses, and poetic traditions, these ancient texts emphasise environmental stewardship as essential for societal well-being. By exploring *Vedic* texts and their interpretations, this paper highlights how ancient wisdom can shape contemporary environmental policies and drive sustainable development strategies. The principles of *Rta* (cosmic order), *Dharma* (duty), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence) provide ethical foundations for conservation and ecological balance. This paper also examines how Indian literary traditions have consistently reinforced environmental consciousness, advocating for the protection of natural resources. Integrating Vedic ecological principles into modern governance, education, and policy frameworks can contribute to a sustainable development model for *Viksit Bharat*. India can cultivate a holistic and resilient sustainability framework by fostering an environmental ethos rooted in ancient wisdom and contemporary literature. This research paper argues that ecological awareness, conservation ethics, and sustainable living, guided by Vedic and literary traditions, are essential for achieving a balanced, ecologically conscious, developed India by 2047.

Keywords: Viksit Bharat, Environmental Sustainability, Vedic Literature, Nature, Ecological Consciousness, Ancient Wisdom, Sustainable Development, Conservation Ethics, Indigenous Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

India's vision of *Viksit Bharat* (Developed India) by 2047 extends beyond economic progress to encompass environmental sustainability and

ecological resilience. Achieving this goal requires a development model, that harmonises technological advancement with environmental responsibility. It is crucial to incorporate indigenous knowledge systems with contemporary sustainability methods in light of climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion. One of the oldest sources of knowledge, Vedic literature fosters peaceful coexistence between people and the natural world by providing deep insights into ecological consciousness.

The Vedas—*Rgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*, along with the *Upanishads* and other ancient scriptures, emphasise the interconnectedness of all living beings, recognising nature as sacred and integral to human existence. They introduce fundamental ecological principles such as *Rta* (cosmic order), *Dharma* (duty), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence), which provide ethical foundations for environmental conservation. These texts advocate sustainable living through balance, respect for biodiversity, and responsible resource management. Rather than positioning humanity as masters over nature, they present a holistic worldview in which humans are integral to an interdependent ecological system.

This research paper examines the ecological consciousness embedded in Vedic literature and its relevance to contemporary sustainability challenges. It explores key Vedic ecological principles, such as *Rta*, which upholds cosmic balance, and *Prakriti*, which views nature as a sacred entity rather than a mere resource for exploitation. The interdependence of *Puruṣa* (humanity) and *Prakriti* underscores ethical responsibilities in environmental stewardship.

As India strives towards achieving 'Viksit Bharat,' integrating ancient ecological wisdom into modern policies can cultivate a sustainable and environmentally conscious society. By harmonising time-honoured principles with contemporary sustainability strategies, the nation can achieve economic growth while preserving ecological balance.

Ancient Wisdom and Reverence for Nature

Indian literature has long emphasised a profound reverence for nature, fostering ecological consciousness and sustainability. Rooted in ancient wisdom, these traditions highlight the interconnectedness of all living

beings and recognise nature as sacred, instilling a deep sense of responsibility toward environmental stewardship. This perspective discourages exploitative practices and promotes harmonious coexistence between humans and the natural world. A key theme in Indian literature is conservation ethics, where narratives illustrate the consequences of environmental degradation and advocate for responsible resource management. By portraying the delicate balance of ecosystems, these texts inspire sustainable practices that minimise human impact and promote ecological preservation. Ecological responsibility is another fundamental principle, portraying humans as stewards of the planet with a duty to safeguard biodiversity and ensure sustainability for future generations. These teachings urge individuals and communities to adopt ethical environmental practices that nurture and protect natural resources.

Indian literature also celebrates harmonious coexistence, portraying nature as a living entity with intrinsic value. By emphasising respect for ecological cycles, these narratives encourage lifestyles aligned with nature's rhythms, minimising environmental harm while fostering sustainability. Many literary works address social and ecological justice, highlighting the struggles of marginalised communities affected by environmental exploitation. By amplifying their voices, these texts advocate for equitable and sustainable development that prioritises both human and ecological well-being. Through these interconnected principles: reverence for nature, conservation ethics, ecological responsibility, harmonious coexistence, and social and environmental justice. Indian literature provides timeless wisdom for contemporary sustainability efforts. By integrating these ecological values into modern development strategies, India can cultivate an environmentally conscious society, ensuring that 'Viksit Bharat' 2047 is both economically and ecologically resilient.

Vedic Literature: A Timeless Repository of Ecological Wisdom

Vedic literature forms the bedrock of Hindu religious and philosophical thought, comprising sacred texts believed to be divinely revealed. It is classified into four primary categories: *Samhitas*, which contain hymns and prayers dedicated to deities and form the core of the *Rigveda*, *Samaveda*, *Yajurveda*, and *Atharvaveda*; *Brahmanas*, which

elaborate on Vedic rituals and ceremonies, such as the *Aitareya Brahmana* and *Shatapatha Brahmana*; *Aranyakas*, or "Forest Treatises," which bridge ritualistic traditions with philosophical exploration, as seen in the *Aitareya Aranyaka* and *Brihadaranyaka*; and *Upanishads*, which delve into metaphysical concepts, the self (Atman), and the ultimate reality (Brahman), exemplified by the *Chandogya Upanishad* and *Mundaka Upanishad*.

Beyond these core texts, *Vedangas* provide auxiliary knowledge in areas like phonetics, grammar, and astronomy. The *Sutras* offer practical guidelines on rituals and law, while the *Dharmashastras* lay the foundation for Hindu legal and ethical principles. The *Arthashastra*, authored by Kautilya, explores governance and statecraft, while the *Kamasutra* focuses on human relationships and pleasures. The *Puranas*, rich in mythological narratives, offer insight into Hindu cosmology and historical traditions.

The significance of Vedic literature lies in its profound influence on Hindu religious practices, social structures, and philosophical traditions. The *Upanishads*, in particular, signify a shift from ritualism to spiritual inquiry. These texts also provide invaluable perspectives on ancient Indian history, governance, and linguistic evolution, shaping later traditions such as *Buddhism* and *Jainism*. Vedic literature is a vast intellectual and spiritual treasure, seamlessly blending rituals with deep philosophical wisdom, and continues to serve as a cornerstone of Indian civilisation.

India's Timeless Environmental Ethos: Lessons for a Sustainable Future

India has a long-standing tradition of environmental stewardship, deeply rooted in ancient texts that emphasise humanity's duty (*dharma*) to protect nature. Scriptures such as the *Vedas* and the *Arthashastra* highlight the interconnectedness of all life and the sacredness of natural elements like trees, water, land, and animals. Recognising the vital role of a balanced ecology for human survival and societal well-being, ancient Indian civilisations adopted sustainable practices, including advanced irrigation systems and careful forest management. The concept of "Earth as Mother" reflects a deep reverence for nature, discouraging its exploitation.

Despite this rich heritage, modern India faces pressing environmental challenges, including pollution and resource depletion, which threaten public health and quality of life. However, traditional practices offer valuable solutions. Sustainable lifestyles—incorporating waste recycling, earthen utensils, plant-based products, eco-friendly cooling systems, and wellness practices like yoga and Ayurveda demonstrate an intrinsic understanding of ecological balance. Reintegrating these time-tested principles can foster a more sustainable relationship with the environment, benefiting both present and future generations.

Vedic literature further reinforces ecological consciousness by emphasising the sacredness of nature and the interdependence of all living beings. This worldview discourages exploitation and promotes environmental responsibility. Indian literary traditions also depict the consequences of ecological degradation, advocate for sustainable living, and highlight the struggles of marginalised communities facing environmental injustices. By weaving together themes of ecological responsibility, social justice, and nature's intrinsic value, literature serves as a powerful tool for fostering environmental awareness and inspiring collective action toward sustainability.

Humanity's deep connection with nature has been recognised for centuries across diverse cultures. This understanding is often found in ancient writings, which advocate for responsible resource management through self-control and a commitment to sustainable living. These texts frequently emphasise the importance of sacrifice, suggesting that we should be willing to give up immediate pleasures for the sake of the planet's long-term well-being. They highlight the link between individual actions and resource conservation, implying that collective individual efforts can significantly improve the sustainability of our natural resources. The *Upanishads*, for instance, taught:

Whatever is there on this ever-changing world of ours,
...Therefore, you should nurture yourself
With only that portion of resources
Which has been showered upon you.
Must you not covet anything more than that, for after all
To whom do all these natural endowments really belong?
(Isoponisd, verse 1)

This verse highlights the link between personal behaviour and environmental responsibility. It emphasises that a sustainable lifestyle, one that preserves resources for future generations, requires conscious effort and self-discipline. Individuals must practice self-restraint by limiting consumption and avoiding waste. As the Upanishads taught, this conscious and disciplined approach is essential for ensuring the availability of resources for both present and future needs. The *Vedas* and *Upanishads* have also described the importance of natural resources such as water, energy, and all other living natural resources. For instance, the *Atharva Veda* says:

Which has ocean, abounding rivers and flowering streams, where all these are sustaining, flowing and shading. Let that earthly nature make us worthy for our first drink, of divinely flow. (Atharva Veda:Bhumisuktam, 12/1/3). This verse from the *Atharva Veda* celebrates the Earth's abundance, highlighting its oceans, rivers, and streams as sources of sustenance and life. It acknowledges nature's nurturing role and urges humans to be worthy recipients of its divine offerings. The phrase "first drink of divinely flow" signifies the sacredness of water, emphasising gratitude and responsible stewardship towards the environment. The verse thus reinforces the Vedic ethos of ecological harmony and reverence for nature.

Echoes of Environmental Consciousness: Ancient Wisdom for a Sustainable Bharat

The foundation of environmental consciousness in Indian thought is deeply rooted in ancient scriptures like the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. These texts emphasise the interconnectedness of all beings and the inherent sacredness of nature. The concept of *Rta*, representing the cosmic order and harmony, highlights the importance of maintaining balance within the natural world. The *Vedas*, for example, personify natural forces like wind, fire, and water, recognising their divine essence and urging harmonious coexistence. The interdependence of all living components is essential for a healthy environment. The modern tendency to exploit nature disrupts this delicate balance. While contemporary concepts like Earth Day and Earth Care promote respect for nature, these ideas echo ancient Upanishadic wisdom:

"This earth is helpful to all beings and all beings are helpful in this earth. The same is true with shining immortals embodied being which is this earth" (3/5/1). During the Vedic period, the balance between humanity and nature was paramount. Resource conservation was considered crucial for the well-being of every individual and society as a whole. This is reflected in verses like:

Let clouds shower upon us rain waters in plenty at the right time.

May our plants grow in great abundance, laden with ripened fruits, may we win enough treasures unacquired so far and conserve the resources properly for the well-being of all (*Yajur Veda*, 22/22).

Vedic ethics of conservation emphasised the equitable sharing of natural resources. Righteousness was seen as the path to achieving both resource development and conservation. Respect for nature, coupled with knowledge of the natural world and the benefits of conservation, formed the basis of environmental ethics in the Vedic and Upanishadic periods. This is beautifully expressed in the *Atharva Veda* :

May thy earth, supporting and sustaining diversity of human race and multiplicity of voices, traditions and customs, varying in accordance with natural habitats envelop us with overflowing cascading resources like an unmoved milch-cow of extreme gentleness.(12/1/45)

The Rigvedic verse envisions the earth as a nurturing force, sustaining diversity and providing abundant resources in harmony with nature. This aligns with *Viksit Bharat @2047*, which promotes inclusive growth, environmental sustainability, and equitable resource distribution. Rooted in the Indian philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, it emphasises the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment. Indian philosophical traditions recognise nature as sacred, advocating for ecological balance and conservation. Verses from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* highlight the ethical use of resources and the need for environmental harmony. 'Viksit Bharat' integrates ancient wisdom with modern policies to ensure holistic development. Sustainable tourism, inspired by these principles, showcases India's heritage while fostering

responsible travel. Progress and environmental harmony go hand in hand, shaping a self-reliant and ecologically conscious nation. By adopting mindful policies, India can lead in global sustainability efforts. This vision ensures prosperity while preserving cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

Vedic Principles for Environmental Sustainability in Viksit Bharat 2047

Achieving *Viksit Bharat* by 2047 requires a development model where economic progress and environmental sustainability coexist. Vedic literature, with its profound ecological insights, provides a timeless foundation for fostering environmental consciousness and responsible resource management. Central to Vedic thought is the interconnectedness of *Puruṣa* (humanity) and *Prakṛiti* (nature), emphasising ethical responsibility toward conservation. The Vedas regard nature as sacred, advocating for mindful resource utilisation and ecological balance through principles like *Rta* (cosmic order), which underscores the need for sustainable living in harmony with natural equilibrium.

These principles have direct applications in modern sustainability efforts. In agriculture, Vedic wisdom promotes organic and biodiversity-friendly farming, reducing chemical dependence while conserving natural resources. The reverence for natural forces as energy sources aligns with the transition to renewable energy, reducing fossil fuel dependency and mitigating climate change. Similarly, Vedic teachings inform urban planning by emphasising green spaces, sustainable infrastructure, and pollution control, which are essential for creating livable cities. Environmental education rooted in these principles fosters ecological consciousness, instilling values of responsibility and respect for nature in future generations.

A critical challenge in achieving sustainable development is water security, as scarcity threatens ecosystems and livelihoods. Factors like watershed mismanagement, overexploitation, and pollution exacerbate the crisis. Ancient Indian traditions, reflected in the *Rgveda* and *Bhumi Suktam*, revere water as sacred, emphasising responsible stewardship. The *Atharva Veda* calls for honouring nature's gifts, aligning with the need for sustainable water management. By integrating these time-

tested principles into modern governance, India can restore ecological balance, ensure equitable access to resources, and build a resilient future.

Water Security for a Sustainable Viksit Bharat: An Urgent Imperative

In line with the Upanishadic view of nature, a critical challenge facing the modern world, and central to the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat', is the growing inadequacy of water resources to meet the needs of all living beings. This scarcity is driven by multiple factors, including mismanagement of watershed areas, overexploitation of surface water, unplanned groundwater use, and pervasive pollution. Recognising water's fundamental role in sustaining life, a principle deeply embedded in ancient wisdom traditions, underscores the need to treat it as sacred. This reverence for water, a cornerstone of Bharat's cultural heritage, aligns with the *Rg-veda*'s affirmation of water as a vital natural resource. The *Rg-veda* eloquently states:

The water that pour down the sky or flow on the surface or
else which is available from canals, tanks, wells dug onto
the ground or else which are gushing out spontaneously.
And those rushing down to oceans which are pure and
sanctifying.
May all such water-bright and beautiful protect me in this
world. (*Rg-veda* 7/49/2).

Water security is crucial for a sustainable and prosperous *Viksit Bharat*, ensuring the well-being of all citizens. Since Vedic times, water has been revered as a sacred life force, with scriptures emphasising its responsible use. The Vedic people practiced sustainable resource management, a principle relevant today as India balances energy needs with environmental conservation. Ancient wisdom highlights the importance of harnessing natural energy sources like water, wind, and solar power. Despite advancements, global dependence on fossil fuels threatens ecological balance. To achieve *Viksit Bharat*, India must integrate traditional knowledge with modern technology for sustainable water management and a renewable energy transition. This approach will secure natural resources, drive economic growth, and strengthen environmental resilience.

Harnessing Nature's Power: Ancient Insights and Modern Energy Challenges

The Vedic people, like us, grappled with choices regarding energy sources. From that era to the present day, the debate about energy options has continued. Currently, most nations rely heavily on fossil fuels, the dominant energy source. While renewable sources like water, wind, and solar energy exist and are the subject of extensive research, they are not yet sufficient to meet the global energy demand. The Vedas contain numerous verses highlighting the importance of harnessing natural energy sources. One such verse states:

May Ye, O wise ones, harness all around the energies held fast by the stars and the earth. Collect all over the available nutrition inherent in the trees and make use of all energies available in running waters. Hold on and utilize the power of the thunderbolts of the sky and that of the crafts flooded with rays .

(*Rig Veda*, 6/47/27 and *Yajur Veda*, 29/53)

The *Rg-veda* period demonstrates an early understanding of the Sun's immense energy potential. Recognized as a supreme power, the Sun was revered and worshipped. This reverence is reflected in verses like:

May we, with the help for bright solar energy be free from all wrongs committed against the inviolable earth, so that wealth can be produced (*Rg-veda*, 5/82/6).

This highlights the Sun's immense energy potential and emphasises responsible resource utilisation for wealth generation while respecting the earth. Ancient Indian wisdom promotes harmony between humanity and nature, advocating for ethical and sustainable energy use. This aligns with modern environmental challenges, urging a shift towards renewable sources like solar power .By embracing these principles, *humanity* can achieve sustainable development while safeguarding ecological balance. Ancient wisdom teaches that true progress lies in harmonising growth with nature, ensuring responsible resource use, and fostering long-term environmental resilience.

Harmony Between Humanity and Nature: Lessons from Ancient Wisdom

The deep interconnection between living and non-living components of nature is beautifully articulated in ancient texts. The *Yogavasistha* emphasises this relationship,

illustrating how wise individuals perceive rocks as friends, trees as kin, and even wild animals as companions:

To wise, pieces of rock turn out to be friends, Trees in the forest become near relations, Even in the midst of a forest, the wild animals along with their siblings become thy kith and kin (Yogavasistha, 6/2/102/3).

This verse reflects the essence of ecological harmony, reminding us that sustainable development must be rooted in conservation and the equitable use of natural resources. True progress can only be achieved when human advancement does not come at the cost of environmental degradation but instead fosters coexistence. The principle of equity must be upheld not just among humans but also between living and non-living elements of nature.

The *Yogavasistha* further highlights the purity of nature's consciousness, untainted by ownership or pride:

That nature which exists in the grass, shrubs, and creepers during the height of their seasonal flush, but without any feeling of mine-ness or selfish pride, Is what is known as pure consciousness(Yogavasistha, 6(2)/106/8).

This profound understanding aligns with modern sustainability goals, where true development means fostering a relationship with nature that is free from exploitation and self-interest. The *Rigveda* further reinforces this concept, praying for harmony between human beings and nature:

"Let the herbs be pleasant to us; May the outer space, the waters, and the atmosphere be kind.

Let gracious be to our land's protector whom we may follow unhindered." (*Rigveda*, 4/57/3)

These Vedic teachings remind us that the foundation of *Viksit Bharat* lies in an ecological balance where human progress and environmental well-being go hand in hand. By integrating this wisdom into modern policies, India can ensure that its path to development remains sustainable, equitable, and in harmony with nature.

Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Sustainable Development

Indian literature plays a vital role in fostering environmental awareness, yet several challenges persist. Ensuring wider accessibility, particularly among younger

generations, is crucial for cultivating ecological consciousness. A significant hurdle remains in translating literary engagement into concrete environmental action. Additionally, literature must continue addressing contemporary issues such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss to stay relevant in the 21st century.

Despite these challenges, Indian literature offers immense opportunities. It deepens individuals' understanding of their relationship with nature, fosters ecological responsibility, and inspires collective action. Contemporary writers like Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Vandana Shiva highlight the tension between rapid development and environmental degradation, critiquing ecological destruction while advocating for sustainable practices. Their works encourage readers to reconsider their connection with the natural world and emphasise the need for ecological justice. By integrating literary insights with environmental activism, Indian literature can significantly contribute to shaping a sustainable *Viksit Bharat*. It has the potential to bridge the gap between awareness and action, nurturing a society where development and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.

Bridging Ancient Wisdom and Modern Sustainability: Challenges and Contemporary Relevance

The wisdom of the Vedas offers valuable guidance for environmental sustainability, yet translating these ancient principles into modern practice presents several challenges. One key challenge is bridging the gap between traditional ecological knowledge and contemporary scientific understanding. Integrating Vedic insights with modern scientific approaches can lead to more effective and contextually relevant solutions for sustainable development. Another significant challenge lies in addressing the socio-economic factors that contribute to environmental degradation. Issues such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to resources often exacerbate ecological problems. Therefore, sustainability strategies must tackle these underlying social and economic concerns alongside environmental preservation efforts.

Promoting widespread awareness and understanding of Vedic principles is also crucial for their effective implementation. Engaging diverse stakeholders, including communities, policymakers, and businesses, is essential to

fostering a collective vision for sustainability. A holistic approach that combines traditional wisdom with modern innovations can help drive meaningful environmental action. Despite these challenges, the contemporary relevance of Vedic principles remains undeniable. As India strives to achieve *Viksit Bharat 2047*, integrating ancient ecological philosophies with modern sustainable practices can serve as a powerful tool for fostering an environmentally conscious and resilient nation. Several initiatives already reflect this synthesis—such as the revival of traditional water harvesting techniques inspired by Vedic texts to combat water scarcity and the growing emphasis on organic farming and agroforestry, rooted in Vedic principles of sustainable agriculture. Community-based conservation efforts, reflecting the Vedic emphasis on collective responsibility, have proven effective in protecting forests and wildlife. These examples demonstrate the potential of blending ancient wisdom with modern approaches to address contemporary environmental challenges, paving the way for a sustainable and ecologically balanced future.

CONCLUSION

As India advances towards its vision of *Viksit Bharat* by 2047, environmental sustainability must be at the core of its developmental framework. Economic progress alone cannot define true development; it must be accompanied by ecological balance and responsible resource management. This research has underscored the significance of Vedic literature in shaping environmental consciousness and its potential to inform contemporary sustainability strategies. The ancient texts emphasise the interconnectedness of all living beings, advocating for harmony between humans and nature through principles of *Rta* (cosmic order), *Dharma* (duty), and *Ahimsa* (non-violence). These philosophical foundations offer a time-tested ethical approach to ecological stewardship, resonating with modern environmental challenges.

Indian literary traditions, from the Vedas to contemporary ecological narratives, have played a crucial role in fostering environmental awareness. Ancient scriptures depict nature as sacred, encouraging a lifestyle that respects natural cycles and discourages exploitative practices. Meanwhile, modern literature continues this legacy, critiquing environmental degradation and advocating for sustainable alternatives. This continuity

highlights the enduring relevance of India's cultural wisdom in addressing ecological crises. This paper reaffirms that sustainable development in India must be rooted in a fusion of ancient wisdom and modern innovation. By integrating Vedic principles with contemporary scientific advancements, India can cultivate a development model that is not only economically robust but also environmentally resilient and socially just. Policies, education systems, and governance structures must reflect this ecological consciousness, ensuring that sustainability becomes a collective responsibility at both institutional and individual levels.

Furthermore, the principles of Vedic literature offer a blueprint for global sustainability efforts. Concepts such as reverence for nature, responsible consumption, and ecological justice transcend cultural boundaries and provide valuable insights for addressing pressing environmental issues worldwide. As India strives to lead in sustainable development, embracing this holistic approach can set a precedent for a future where economic growth and environmental stewardship coexist in harmony. Ultimately, the journey towards *Viksit Bharat* requires a paradigm shift—one that sees sustainability not as an external challenge but as an integral part of national progress. By drawing from its rich philosophical heritage and aligning it with contemporary environmental strategies, India can build a future that ensures ecological stability, intergenerational equity, and a thriving natural world. In doing so, it will not only secure its sustainable future but also contribute meaningfully to global environmental conservation efforts, reinforcing the vision of a truly developed and ecologically responsible nation.

Conflict of Interest: None of the authors have any conflicts of interest to disclose. All the authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

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