

Introduction

Humanity now stands at a defining threshold, where the consequences of environmental neglect are no longer distant warnings but unfolding realities. As the world marks World Environment Day on June 5, 2025, the challenges posed by environmental degradation demand not just scientific solutions but a broader ethical and cultural shift in how we relate to nature. The effects of anthropogenic activities, including unchecked industrial growth, deforestation, pollution, excessive resource extraction, and carbon emissions, have disrupted ecosystems globally. We now stand at the tipping point of a planetary crisis, one where climate change, glacier retreat, desertification, and mass species extinction are no longer theoretical forecasts but empirical realities unfolding in today's time. The gravity of these changes is illustrated in the following indicators, drawn from authoritative climate studies.

According to the [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report \(2023\)](#) and data from NASA, the United Nations, and the World Meteorological Organisation, the situation is stark:

The melting of glaciers and loss of biodiversity are not only ecological concerns, but they signal a moral rupture in the human-nature relationship, as recent research suggests that only 10% of current glacier mass may remain by the end of this century unless urgent interventions are made. These shifts not only threaten the survival of countless species but also pose existential risks to human societies, jeopardising food security, water

availability, and climate stability. So, the need for sustainable development has evolved from a policy goal into a civilizational imperative. While modern environmental science provides crucial data and technological pathways, there is increasing recognition that the roots of ecological wisdom are also embedded in cultural memory, spiritual traditions, and ancient philosophies. In this regard, the classical Sanskrit tradition of India offers a unique and valuable perspective. Sanskrit literature, comprising the Vedas, *Vedangas*, *Upanishads*, epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, and the works of classical poets, reveals an eco-logical sensibility that is remarkably sophisticated. These texts reflect an integrated worldview in which humans are part of, not apart from, the natural world. Nature is not seen as a resource to be exploited, but as a living, divine presence to be honoured, protected, and harmonised with. The Atharvaveda, for example, contains the famous *Bhumi Sukta*, which presents Earth not merely as a physical entity but as a nurturing mother: *Mata bhumihputro'hamprithivyah*. The Earth is my mother, and I am her son. ([Pandey, 2007](#); Atharvaveda 12.1). Such declarations are not only spiritual in tone but deeply ecological in implication.

They reflect are cognition of human dependence on natural systems and an ethical imperative to live within planetary boundaries.

Furthermore, Sanskrit texts contain numerous references to *Pancha Mahabhutas*: earth (*prthivi*), water (*apah*), fire (*agni*), air (*vayu*), and ether

**Table 1: Global Environmental Crisis Indicators : Present and Future Projections
(as per IPCC 2023, UNEP, NASA)**

Environmental Indicator	Current Status (as of 2023-2025)	Projected by 2100
Global average temperature rise	+1.2°C since pre-industrial levels	+2.7°C to 4.4°C (if current emissions continue)
Himalayan glacier volume	30% lost since 2000	Upto 90% projected loss
Global forest cover	Over 420 million hectares lost (2000-2023)	Increasing desertification and drought-prone zones
Biodiversity decline	1 millions pecies at risk of extinction	Sixth mass extinction underway

Note: Data compiled from [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report \(2023\)](#), [NASA \(2024\)](#), [UNEP \(2025\)](#) and [WMO \(2025\)](#)

(*akasa*), which together compose all living and non-living forms. These elements are revered not only as cosmological constants but also as moral entities requiring balance and reverence. The principle of *rita* (cosmic order), upheld through ritual (*yajna*), right conduct (*dharma*), and harmony with nature, is central to this worldview. This ethical vision is not confined to abstract philosophy. In texts such as *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, *Ritusamhara*, and *Meghaduta* by Kalidasa, as well as the works of other Sanskrit poets, the natural world is not a passive background, but an emotional and moral agent. Forests, rivers, clouds, and seasons are portrayed with such poetic sensitivity that they become co-creators of meaning and emotion. Similarly, the epics present nature as a moral participant in human affairs, forests provide refuge, rivers cleanse and carry memory, and animals embody dharma. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this research is to explore how classical Sanskrit literature embodies environmental ethics and how these ideas can contribute to modern sustainability discourse. The study investigates how hymns, rituals, philosophical systems, and literary works within the Sanskrit tradition present a vision of interconnectedness, reciprocity, and respect for nature. It also seeks to highlight how such a worldview can be mobilised today, not merely as cultural nostalgia but as a living framework for ecological resilience. This paper argues that Sanskrit literature, through its hymns, epics, rituals, and philosophy, offers a comprehensive and ethically grounded vision of environmental sustainability. By revisiting these texts, we uncover a culturally rooted ecological framework that remains profoundly relevant to the global crisis of today.

Review of Relevant Literature

Several scholars have explored the ecological dimensions of Sanskrit texts, revealing a tradition that integrates environmental ethics with spiritual, literary, and ritual elements. [Tiwari \(2015\)](#) outlines how the Vedas embody not only scientific awareness but spiritual reverence for natural forces that are personified as deities. [Choudhury & Choudhury \(2023\)](#) analyses ecological consciousness in the scriptures such as the *Atharvaveda*, *Manusmṛti*, *Yajurveda*, and the *Padma Purana Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, focusing on sacred groves, *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *Bhuta Yajna* (sacrifices for other beings) as expressions of environmental ethics.

[Kumar \(2022\)](#) highlights the integral view of the environment embedded in the Indian *darshana*. [Rana \(2023\)](#) develops the concept of “*emotional ecology*” through the works of Kalidasa, Bhasa, and Bhavabhuti. [Patel and Rachana \(2023\)](#) interprets the epic as a narrative of ecological balance and identifies three symbolic models of environmental consciousness. Her work connects ancient epic narratives to real-world sustainability. [Magar \(2020\)](#) examines how the *Mahabharata* reinforces environmental restraint through the ideals of dharma and non-violence. His discussion of the *Santi Parva* and the *Bhagavad Gita* adds to the theological dimension of ecological ethics. Modern interpreters also argue for the application of *Vedantic* non-dualism to ecological ethics.

Through their examination of *Advaita*, they show how realising the unity of self and nature (atman = brahman) can foster environmental empathy and restraint. Collectively, these studies affirm that Sanskrit literature contains a coherent ecological vision, expressed through metaphysics, narrative, and ritual.

Findings and Discussions

Sacred and Holistic View in the Vedas

The Vedas articulate one of the earliest and most profound visions of environmental consciousness in human history. Far from viewing nature as inert or subordinate to human interests, the Vedic worldview recognises the five elements: Earth, Air, Water, Fire, and Space, not merely as utilitarian forces, but as sacred manifestations of the divine. In this cosmology, human beings are not positioned as dominators of nature, but as its children, stewards, and reverent participants. This idea is beautifully reflected in several foundational hymns: *mata bhumiḥputro’hamprithivyah* ([Pandey, 2007](#); Atharvaveda 12.1). Earth is my mother, and I am her son. This relationship is not metaphorical; it reflects a cultural ethic. The *Bhumi Sukta* goes on to describe Earth’s mountains, herbs, rivers, and soil with devotion. It asks for stability, nourishment, and forgiveness, much like one would from a compassionate mother, *Sahasrashirsha purushah sahasrakshah sahasrapat, sa bhumim vishvato vritva atyatisthad dashangulam* ([Pandey, 2007](#); Rigveda 10.90). The Cosmic Being has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes,

and a thousand feet. He pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it by ten fingers' breadth. The entire cosmos: sun, moon, sky, rivers, animals, humans, is seen as a part of this *purusha*. This reinforces that harming nature is not just destructive, but a form of spiritual violence. Ecology here is not just biological; it is spiritual interdependence. Attributed to Sage Vishvamitra, this hymn praises the rivers as goddesses and life-givers: *imam me gange yamune sarasvati shutudri stomam sachata parushnya* (Pandey, 2007; Rigveda 10.75).

O Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, accept this praise, along with Shutudri and Parushni. Each river is named and treated as sacred. They are not merely waterways but divine beings who receive homage. Pollution or disrespect here is not just ecological harm, but spiritual negligence. This hymn contemplates the origin of the universe: *hiranyagarbhah samavartatagre bhutasya jatah patireka asit* (Pandey, 2007, Rigveda 10.121). In the beginning was the golden germ, the one lord of all that exists. The golden embryo (*Hiranyagarbhah*) symbolises the subtle, fertile essence of the universe. The hymn declares that all life, including the elements, emerges from this cosmic womb, implying that nature is not an object but a sacred birth. This philosophical hymn humbly admits that even the seers do not fully know how the universe began: *Nasadasin no sadasit tadanim* (Pandey, 2007, Rigveda 10.129). Then there was neither non-existence nor existence. Here, creation is viewed with awe, not arrogance. Nature is treated as a mystery beyond complete human understanding, encouraging humility and reverence, qualities essential for environmental ethics.

Ritual Texts and Sustainable Practice

The ritual literature of the Vedic tradition, particularly the *Kalpa Sutras*, which include the *Shrauta* and *Grihya Sutras*, provides detailed instructions for the correct performance of sacrificial rites. However, beyond mere procedural guidance, these texts also reflect a deep sensitivity to the natural world. Embedded within their prescriptions are clear environmental values that promote sustain-

ability, restraint, and reverence toward nature. One of the most notable features in these texts is the emphasis on non-violence and minimal ecological disruption during ritual practices. For example, before selecting a site for a *yajna* (sacrifice), the practitioner is instructed to ensure the land is clean, undisturbed, and not in use by other living beings. This precaution reveals a conscious effort to avoid displacing or harming natural ecosystems. Similarly, water used for ablutions and offerings must be pure, taken respectfully, and never wasted, highlighting a sacramental attitude toward natural resources. In the *Grihya Sutras*, which govern domestic rituals, even routine acts such as collecting firewood are ritualised. The performer is instructed to offer prayers before cutting trees, acknowledging the tree's life and asking forgiveness for the act. For example, a commonly cited formula for felling wood for sacred fires is: *O Tree, I cut you with reverence, not for harm, but for sacrifice. May you forgive this act*. Though the mantra varies slightly across recensions, the spirit remains the same: Nature is not to be exploited, but approached with humility. Likewise, during Pañcagni Vidhi and Agnihotra, great care is taken to use only dead or dry twigs for the sacrificial fire, never green or freshly cut wood. The *Shrauta Sutras* often prescribe: As indicated in the *Apastamba Grihya-Sutra*, when a person contemplates cutting a tree, they are instructed to consider the moral repercussions, pruning harms the tree and is viewed as incurring guilt, even if regrowth occurs. This restraint reflects a regulated use of resources, long before the concept of sustainability was formalised in modern discourse. Additionally, the *Panchamahayajnas*, the five daily duties of a householder, include *Bhuta Yajna*, the offering to animals, birds, insects, and all living beings. As mentioned in *Manusmṛiti*, it is the sacred duty of a householder to leave portions of food and water outside the home, showing daily care for biodiversity: *Pancha yajna grihasthena nityam karyah prayatnatah*. (Manu, 1886). A householder must diligently perform the five great sacrifices every day. Within this framework, *Bhuta Yajna* is not merely symbolic; it enshrines a daily ethic of ecological responsibility, recognising animals, birds, and other beings as rightful co-

inhabitants of the natural world. Furthermore, rituals are of tentied to seasonal rhythms (*rituchara*), ensuring that agricultural and natural cycles are respected. For instance, sowing, harvesting, and irrigational rites are performed with mantras to deities such as *Parjanya* (rain) and *Prithivi* (Earth), integrating farming with sacred responsibility. In totality, the Kalpa literature reflects a ritual ecology: A system where religious observance and environmental ethics are inseparable. The sacred is not an escape from the world, but a way of honouring and protecting it. Fire, water, trees, and animals are not just ritual objects; they are divine participants in the ceremony of life.

Emotional Ecology in Classical Sanskrit Poetry

In Sanskrit literature, poetry and nature are never far apart. Classical poets created what can be termed an emotional ecology, a literary worldview where rivers cry, trees protect, mountains meditate, and clouds serve as messengers. Nature in this framework is not decorative but expressive, not passive but participating. This sensibility forms a bridge between aesthetic appreciation and ethical reverence. No poet exemplifies emotional ecology more richly than Kalidasa. In *Ritusamhara*, Kalidasa masterfully captures the essence of India's seasons through detailed, sensitive observations of nature's response to climatic changes. The poet poignantly describes the harshness of summer, where thirsty antelopes, their throats parched by the scorching heat, rush desperately towards distant forests, mistaking the horizon for water, the colour of smooth-blended collyrium. The suffering extends across the animal kingdom: Birds pant for water while perched on barren branches, monkeys seek refuge in the shade of dry bushes, wild bulls roam restlessly in search of sustenance, and elephants peer longingly into dried-up wells, hoping to find even a trace of water. Transitioning into the rainy season, his keen eye captures the flowing waters with poetic brilliance, likening the tortuous streams formed by torrential rains to snakes winding through the landscape. The nervous frogs anxiously watch the muddy, insect-laden rainwater moving in a crisscross

pattern, evoking a vivid image of the dynamic interplay between flora and fauna nurtured by the rains. Through such intimate depictions, Kalidasa not only celebrates the natural world but also conveys the deep interconnectedness of all living beings with the rhythms of the seasons. ([Kalidasa, 2008](#))

In *Meghaduta*, Kalidasa presents nature as not a passive backdrop but an expressive canvas, filled with trees, mountains, flowers, birds, and rivers that reflect and enhance human emotion. The flora and fauna that the cloud encounters, from peacocks dancing in joy to rivers shimmering with moonlight, transform the journey into an emotional pilgrimage through landscapes rich with *rasa*. Kalidasa's vision thus merges the physical with the meta-physical, making nature a co-narrator of love and separation. This aesthetic portrayal reflects a deeply ecological consciousness, where the emotional life of humans is mirrored in and supported by the rhythms and responses of the natural world ([Kalidasa, 2011](#)). The profound bond between Shakuntala and the natural world is vividly portrayed in Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, where the hermitage itself reflects here motional state. As Kalidasa writes: *Na kevalam sasyeva tvayopasthita-viyogarah, tapo-vanasya api samavastha drishyate* ([Kalidasa, 2010](#)). Not only the plants, but even the entire hermitage shows the effect of your separation. This highlights the deep ecological harmony and sensitivity of nature to human emotions. Other Classical Sanskrit poets like Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, Banabhatta, and Bhartrhari portray nature not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in the emotional and moral fabric of life. In *Pratimanataka* and *Svapnavasavadattam*, Bhasa situates key moments in forests that offer clarity and transformation. Bhavabhuti, in *Uttararamacharita*, presents rivers that weep and animals that respond to human actions, portraying nature as a mirror of dharma. Banabhatta's *Harsacarita* combines ornate beauty with ethical humility; trees bow, lotuses close like tired eyes, and humans are treated as guests in nature.

Bhartrhari, especially in the *Vairagya-*

shataka, celebrates forest life as pure and wise: *bhushayya navavalkalairakripanairuttishtha yavo vanam* (Bhartrihari, 1994). Let us go to the forest, lie on the earth, and wear bark garments.

Even in the *Shringarashataka*, nature breezes, blossoms, and moonlight guide emotional expression. Together, these poets present nature as a moral, aesthetic, and spiritual force. From Kalidasa's clouds and Bhasa's forests to Bhartrihari's bark-clad asceticism, classical Sanskrit poets reveal a deep identification with nature. Nature is not "the other" in these texts; it is an extension of the self. This literary tradition affirms what modern ecology has only recently rediscovered: that emotional bonds with nature are crucial for sustainable living.

Epic Narratives and Lived Environmental Ethics

While philosophical and poetic texts of Sanskrit literature offer ethical frameworks for ecological harmony, the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, translate these principles into lived action. These narratives do not just prescribe values; they demonstrate conservation through behaviour, restraint, and respect for all forms of life. The *Ramayana*, attributed to Vālmiki, is not only a spiritual and moral guide but also a literary document rich in ecological insight. Throughout the epic, forests are not mere settings, they act as living characters, shaping motions, decisions, and destinies. From Ayodhya to Lanka, every transition in the story is marked by an encounter with nature. In their exile, Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita dwell in Dandakaranya, Chitrakuta, and Panchavati, each a sanctuary of biodiversity. These settings are described with reverence: The air is fragrant, the trees are medicinal, and the animals coexist peacefully. Rama's life in the forest is not one of hardship but of observing and preserving nature's balance. In the forests, they refrain from unnecessary killing, take only what is needed, and pay homage to sages and animals alike.

According to Sandhya Patel's study, the three kingdoms in the *Ramayana*: Ayodhya, Kiskindha, and Lanka, symbolise three models of environmental consciousness (Patel

and Rachana, 2023):

- Ayodhya represents *Sanskriti*, a balance of urban life and sustainable practices.
- Kiskindha, inhabited by the vanaras, represents *Prakriti*, harmony with the forest and minimal impact.
- Lanka, ruled by Ravana, represents *Vikriti*, a distorted, materialistic lifestyle that exploits and depletes nature.

Ashrams and Gurukul as, where sages like Vasishtha and Valmiki taught princes, were ecological havens. These ashrams were not only spiritual centres but models of agroecology and forest conservation, where nature was part of the educational and spiritual experience. The *Mahabharata* also champions spiritual ecology, treating *prakriti* (nature) and *purusha* (spirit) as two essential, interdependent dimensions of existence. As Narayan Bahadur Magar notes, the epic presents cosmic order (*rita*) and *dharma* as foundational principles for ecological stability (Magar, 2020). When *dharma* declines, when animals are killed for pleasure or forests are destroyed for greed, disorder ensues. The epic is filled with reverence for nature:

- Forests are sacred spaces where major revelations occur (e.g., Vyasa's teachings, Yudhishthira's exile).
- Rivers like Sarasvati and Ganga are described as divine mothers and pilgrimage centres.
- Animals and birds are treated as equals. Yudhishthira refuses to abandon a dog even when offered heaven without it, exemplifying universal compassion (Ganguli, 1883-1896).

Perhaps most significant is the ethical principle of *Bhuta Yajna*, a daily offering to all beings. Practised by the ideal householder, this ritual reflects an understanding that biodiversity has intrinsic value, not just utility. The *Mahabharata* encourages humans to plant trees, protect water sources, and abstain from animal sacrifice, even within ritual contexts: *They who offer me with reverence, leaf, flower, fruit, or*

water, I accept that with joy if offered by a pure heart. The *Santi Parva* of the epic describes that every natural element, earth, air, fire, water, and sky, is pervaded by the Supreme Soul (*Paramatman*), and thus, must be treated with reverence and restraint. It even critiques ritual animal slaughter. In *Asvamedha Parva*, after Yudhisthira conducts a grand horse sacrifice, a divine mongoose appears and mocks the act, saying a single handful of barley given by a poor man with love was of greater value. This profound moment equates ecological sensitivity with spiritual merit ([Ganguli, 1883-1896](#)). Both the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* present conservation not as policy but as dharma, a sacred duty.

Ancient Ecological Wisdom in Contemporary Context

In the face of today's global environmental crisis, it is becoming increasingly clear that technological solutions alone are insufficient. What is needed is a deeper ethical and cultural transformation, one that reorients our relationship with nature.

Interestingly, such a vision already exists, rooted in the ancient Sanskrit tradition. Texts such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Puranas*, and classical poetry offer a worldview where humans are not separate from nature but are deeply embedded within it. These sources promote reverence, restraint, and sustainable interaction with the environment, principles that remain strikingly relevant. In the *Upanishadic* tradition, nature is seen as an extension of the Self. The famous teaching, *sarvam khalvidam brahma* (All this is Brahman) found in the *Chandogya Upanishad*, insists on the fundamental unity of all existence. This non-dualistic philosophy encourages a life of moderation, compassion, and interconnection. A parable in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*, where the gods teach self-restraint (*damyata*), generosity (*datta*), and compassion (*dayadhvam*), can be understood today as ethical principles for sustainable living ([Olivelle, 1998](#)).

The *Puranas* reinforce these values through accessible narratives. Texts like the *Padma Purana* and *Matsya Purana*, rivers, trees, and

animals are not only protected but also worshipped. The story of Visnu's *Matsya avatāra* (fish incarnation), who saves seeds and living beings from a cosmic flood, is symbolic of biodiversity preservation. Sacred trees like the Peepal (*asvattha*) are revered not just spiritually but ecologically, as they absorb carbon dioxide and emit oxygen even at night ([Rocher, 1986](#)). This deep environmental consciousness is not confined to scriptural texts alone; it continues to inspire real-world ecological movements in India. The Bishnoi community, founded in the 15th century by Guru Jambheshwar, strictly follows 29 ecological principles, including bans on killing animals and cutting green trees. Their reverence for wildlife famously led to the Khejarli Massacre (1730), where 363 Bishnois sacrificed their lives to protect trees, an act of ecological martyrdom grounded in Vedic ideals ([Singh, 1998](#)). In the 20th century, the Chipko Movement in Uttarakhand, where villagers, especially women, hugged trees to prevent deforestation, reflected the same values of ecological kinship. Activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna invoked ancient Sanskrit teachings, calling the forest "our mother" and appealing to *rita*, the Vedic principle of cosmic order and balance ([Guha, 2000](#)).

Together, these diverse texts construct a shared ethical vision where emotional, spiritual, and ecological life converge. These traditions affirm that India's ecological heritage is not only intellectual or literary, but it is lived, practised, and passed down across generations. Ancient Sanskrit literature reminds us that nature is not a commodity but a companion. The Earth is not conquered, but cooperated with. Sustainability, then, is not a modern invention but a deeply embedded civilizational ethos.

Global Relevance: Sanskrit Ecology and Sustainable Development

In addition to its philosophical depth and poetic richness, the environmental vision of Sanskrit literature holds significant relevance for today's global sustainability discourse. Concepts found in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and classical texts resonate not only with traditional Indian ecological values but also with international frameworks like Deep Ecology and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Deep Ecology and the Sanskrit World-view

The Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, founder of the Deep Ecology movement, acknowledged [Gandhi's Hind Swaraj \(1909\)](#) as a precursor to the ecological philosophy he termed ecosophy. This term emphasises self-realisation through ecological identification. Gandhi's environmental ethos was grounded in *Vedantic* principles, including non-violence (*ahimsa*), simplicity (*aparigraha*), and unity with nature ([Næss, 1973](#); [Gandhi, 1909](#)). The *Chandogya Upanishad* (6.9-14; [Nikhilananda, 1949](#)) offers the powerful declaration: *tat tvamasi*, Thou art That. This *Mahavakya* (great saying) articulates the non-dual relationship between the self (*atman*) and the cosmos (*brahman*). Such ontological unity dissolves the boundary between human and nature, a core idea in both *Advaita Vedanta* and Deep Ecology. It suggests that harming nature is essentially harming oneself, and that true liberation (*moksha*) involves reuniting with the totality of life. Thus, the Sanskrit world-view offers a deeply spiritual foundation for ecocentric ethics, making it profoundly compatible with the goals of Deep Ecology, which calls for biospheric egalitarianism and the intrinsic value of all living beings.

Alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sanskrit ecological thought also supports key global development frameworks such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially the following goals:

- **SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production**

The Vedic ideal of *Yoga Ksema* promotes contentment through sufficiency and self-restraint, in contrast to the pursuit of *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (desire) without ethical boundaries. This aligns with SDG 12's vision of reducing material waste and consumption.

- **SDG13: Climate Action**

Sanskrit literature reflects a profound reverence for *Vayu* (air, wind), a deity in the Vedas, signifying the life-giving force of breath. Respect for air as sacred (*vayu devata*) and essential for *prana* (life) fosters an early

awareness of atmospheric purity and climate balance, paralleling modern climate action goals.

- **SDG15: Life on Land**

The recurring practice of *Bhumi Vandana* (salutation to the Earth) found in Vedic rituals, *Puranic* legends, and even modern practices (e.g., touching the ground before stepping on it) reinforces respect for soil, plants, forests, and biodiversity. This aligns with SDG 15's emphasis on protecting terrestrial ecosystems and halting biodiversity loss. ([United Nations, 2015](#))

Through these resonances, Sanskrit environmental ethics offer a culturally grounded yet globally applicable model of sustainability, combining spiritual insight, ethical clarity, and ecological responsibility. They provide a vital bridge between indigenous knowledge systems and global policy frameworks, enriching the international conversation around environmental justice and resilience.

Recommendations

Contemporary Context and World Environment Day 2025

As this research draws from ancient Sanskrit wisdom to propose solutions to ecological challenges, it is equally important to acknowledge the pressing environmental realities of our time. World Environment Day 2025, hosted by the Republic of Korea, focuses on the urgent issue of plastic pollution as part of the global campaign #BeatPlasticPollution. This year's observance highlights the interconnectedness of plastic waste with climate change, biodiversity loss, public health, and economic stability. Plastic pollution, once seen as a convenience-related issue, has now escalated into a planetary crisis. The scale and impact of this problem are staggering:

Ethical and Cultural Reflections

While modern environmental policy focuses on technological and regulatory solutions, ancient Sanskrit texts propose a more integrated ethical framework, one that regards the environment not as an external commodity but as part of the sacred whole. A foundational verse from the *Isavasyopanishad* articulates this world-

Table 2: Key Environmental Facts – World Environment Day 2025 Focus

Environmental Issue	Key Facts (as of 2025)
Plastic Waste Generation	Over 430 million tons of plastic are produced annually
Marine Pollution	Around 11 million tons leak into oceans every year, equivalent to 2,200 Eiffel Towers
Microplastic Exposure	Humans ingest more than 50,000 microplastic particles annually through air, water, and food
Economic Impact	An estimated \$300–600 billion/year in environmental and social damages globally
Biodiversity Loss	Over 100,000 marine species are threatened due to entanglement, ingestion, and habitat degradation
Glacier Melting (Himalayas)	Upto 90% projected loss by 2100 if global warming remains unchecked
Drought & Desertification	Nearly 45% of the Indian landmass is now vulnerable to desertification
Extreme Weather Events in India	57% of regions reporting record heatwaves; 45% affected by erratic monsoon/flood patterns
Global Policy Action	UN Global Plastics Treaty in negotiation (2024-2025), focusing on life-cycle regulation and recycling

Notes: Data compiled from [UNEP \(2025\)](#), [IPCC Sixth Assessment Report \(2023\)](#), [WMO \(2025\)](#), [ICIMOD \(2024\)](#)

view: *Ishavasyam idam sarvam yat kincha jagatyam jagat, tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gridhah kasya svid dhanam* (*Isavasyopanishad*, verse1; [Gambhiranada, 1997](#)).

All this, whatsoever exists in this moving universe, is pervaded by the Divine. Therefore, enjoy through renunciation; do not covet anyone's wealth. This verse urges a life of moderation, restraint, and gratitude, grounded in the belief that nature is not ours to exploit but part of a cosmic order imbued with divinity (*isa*). The concept of *tena tyaktena bhunjitha*, enjoying through renunciation, reflects a model of sustainable consumption far ahead of its time. It resonates closely with today's emphasis on responsible consumption (SDG12) and ethical minimalism. In this view, environmental exploitation is not just impractical; it is morally flawed because it violates the unity between self, society, and the cosmos. This spiritual ecology stands in stark contrast to extractive models of development, offering instead a model where reverence replaces ownership and service replaces control. Such

ethics are not abstract. They have practical manifestations in:

- *Bhuta Yajna*: Daily offerings to all beings
- Tree and river worship: Treating nature as sacred, not disposable
- Ritual purity: Maintaining clean surroundings as a form of spiritual discipline

By returning to the vision of the *Isavasyopanishad*, we are reminded that any sustainable future must begin with a shift in how we see the world, not as property, but as presence. Even modern planetary concerns find symbolic resonance in Vedic cosmology:

- *Vayu* (air) is sacred, requiring purity.
- *Apah* (water) is a purifier, never to be polluted.
- *Agni* (fire) connects heaven and earth, symbolising transformation and sacrifice.
- *Prithivi* (earth) is not owned, but sustained.

Bridging Ancient Ethics with Global Priorities

This year's World Environment Day focuses on the full life-cycle management of plastic, and several countries, including the host nation South Korea, have implemented innovative systems such as disposable cup deposit schemes, mandatory waste separation, and circular economy laws. From the ethical lens, several new challenges also arise:

- **Greenwashing:** Superficial corporate sustainability claims are now regulated under the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).
- **Data Ethics:** Use of AI in environmental monitoring raises questions about algorithmic bias and data justice, particularly in the Global South.
- **Justice-Centred Design:** Activists now push for climate solutions that don't exacerbate social inequality, aligning with Sanskrit ideas of *dana* (generosity) and *sāma* (equity).

Individual and Collective Solutions

Rooted in both modern science and ancient practice, these practical steps reflect a harmonised response:

- Avoid single-use plastics; promote biodegradable alternatives.
- Plant trees with traditional and astrological significance (*exp. Tulsi, Neem, Peepal*).

- Participate in community clean-up drives, recycling campaigns, and riverbank restorations.
- Integrate cultural education about environmental rituals in local and school-level programs.

A Synthesis of Time-tested Ethics and Modern Action

The challenges highlighted on World Environment Day 2025, plastic waste, climate stress, and biodiversity loss, are not simply technical problems. They are deeply ethical ones. Sanskrit literature provides a moral vocabulary, spiritual motivation, and ritual framework for environmental responsibility that remains profoundly relevant today. As the *Atharvaveda* reminds us: *Yam bhumim agne pari ye manuh svadha dadhur* (Griffith, 1895).

O Agni, protect this Earth which Manu entrusted to us.

Scope for Further Studies: Data-Driven and Future-Oriented

In light of growing ecological crises and renewed interest in indigenous knowledge systems, Sanskrit literature offers vast untapped potential for research at the intersection of culture, climate ethics, and sustainability science. The following directions reflect high-impact, interdisciplinary areas supported by emerging global trends and data:

Sanskrit ethical codes offer behavioural models that can support environmental law, circular

Table 3: Sanskrit and Climate Policy Integration

Global Trend	Research Need
80+ countries committed to Net-Zero goals	Sanskrit-based ethics (<i>ahimsa, rita</i>) can inform environmental charters
2025: Global Plastic Treaty negotiations are ongoing	Textual analysis of waste-related metaphors in <i>Purānas</i> and epics

Table 4: Emotional Ecology in Classical Poetics

Textual Focus	Potential Study
Kalidasa's <i>Rtusamhara</i> , <i>Meghaduta</i>	Literary ecocriticism: How Rasa Theory Enhances Ecological Empathy
Bhartrhari's <i>Vairāgyasataka</i>	Nature as a symbol of ethical withdrawal and sustainability

Table 5: Environmental Semiotics in Vedic Rituals

Scriptural Layer	Data-Driven Hypothesis
Kalpa Sutras (Srauta/Grihya)	Sustainable ritual codes – low fire wood use, seasonal rites, non-violence
<i>Yajurveda & Atharvaveda</i>	Prescriptions for clean spaces, ethical animal interaction

Table 6: SDG-Focused Sanskrit Research

UN Sustainable Development Goal	Sanskrit Ethical Parallel
SDG12: Responsible Consumption	<i>Yoga Ksema</i> model vs. artha-kama materialism
SDG13: Climate Action	<i>Vayu-sukta</i> , <i>prana-tattva</i> , purity of air in <i>Upanisads</i>
SDG15: Life on Land	<i>Bhuta Yajna</i> , tree worship, <i>prithivi sraddha</i>

Table 7: AI, Sanskrit & Environmental Lexicons

Modern Tool	Use Case
NLP + AI (e.g., Sanskrit OCR + Chatbots)	Build search able ecological databases from <i>Vedas</i> , <i>Puranas</i> , and <i>epics</i>
Corpus Linguistics	Create Sanskrit-English eco-lexicons with plant, animal, and river terms

economy design, and grassroots campaigns.
Note: Based on [Dwivedi and Tiwari \(1987\)](#).

Literature influences values. Emotional ecology in the Sanskrit *kavya* can enrich climate education through art, performance, and curriculum.

Digital textual analysis can reveal ecological wisdom embedded in the structure of Vedic rituals, informing modern environmental practices like water conservation and firewood regulations. Note: Based on [Narayanan \(2001\)](#)

Linking Sanskrit frameworks to SDGs can position India as a cultural leader in ethical climate action and diplomacy.

Making Sanskrit eco-wisdom digitally accessible supports interdisciplinary education, policy-making, and youth engagement.

With over 3,000 Sanskrit manuscripts on environment-related rituals, cosmology, and ethics still unedited or untranslated, the scope for

impactful, data-driven Sanskrit-environmental research is immense ([Pollock, 2003](#)). Bridging this ancient knowledge with today's climate tools and sustainability goals will not only revive civilizational wisdom but also contribute to global ecological resilience.

Conclusion

In a world increasingly defined by ecological imbalance, environmental injustice, and unsustainable development, this research affirms that Sanskrit literature offers not merely poetic or spiritual reflection but a coherent, ethical, and actionable framework for sustainability. From the Vedic hymns of the *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda* to the philosophical insights of the *Upanishads*, from the aesthetic sensitivity of Kalidasa's poetry to the ritual ecology of the *Kalpa Sutras*, Sanskrit texts reflect an integrated worldview in which nature is sacred, interconnected, and morally significant. At the heart of this vision lies a consistent call to restraint (*tyaga*), reciprocity (*yajna*), and reverence (*bhakti*), values that align deeply with modern concepts of ecological stewardship, environmental

justice, and ethical consumption (Dwivedi and Tiwari, 1987). The principle of *rita*, or cosmic order, not only structures the Vedic cosmos but also reminds us that sustainability is not just a scientific issue; it is a moral one. In light of the World Environment Day 2025 theme: “Beat Plastic Pollution”, and the broader crises of climate change, desertification, and biodiversity loss, Sanskrit literature becomes newly relevant. It offers a cultural lens, a spiritual motivation, and a practical guide to reimagining our relationship with the Earth, not as conquerors, but as caretakers (UNEP, 2025). Furthermore, this research emphasises that environmental solutions need not be imported; they can be rediscovered. India’s civilizational heritage contains a wealth of ecological wisdom that remains underutilised in mainstream policy, education, and public discourse. By bridging this knowledge with global frameworks, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals can craft solutions that are not only effective but culturally resonant and ethically grounded. In conclusion, Sanskrit environmental ethics are not relics of a bygone era. They are living principles, capable of informing climate action, inspiring policy, and transforming consciousness. As the *Isavasyopanishad* teaches, when we see the world as divine, *Ishavasyam idam sarvam*, we begin to act not from fear or guilt, but from respect, empathy, and a shared sense of sacred duty. In that transformation lies the hope for a truly sustainable future.

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