



**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL
COMPARISON OF VEDIC WISDOM AND MODERN PRACTICES**

Anchal Srivastava

*Research scholar, Faculty of Humanities and social sciences
(Sociology),*

Dr. Amarpal Singh

*Research coordinator, Shri Ram Swaroop Memorial University
Lucknow, India*

Paper Received On: 20 MAY 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 24 JUNE 2026

Published On: 01 JULY 2026

Abstract

The problem of environmental conservation is one of the hot topics in the history of human development, which originated as a spiritual and philosophical study in ancient India and turned into a scientific based activity in the modern world. This paper will give a sociological reflection on how environmental conservation was carried out in the Vedic era to that of the current society. Texts of Vedic religion such as Rigveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda support the sanctity of nature, interrelation of all life and ethical responsibility towards natural forces. Modern conservation of the environment in contrast is very anthropocentric and influenced by scientific knowledge, policy frameworks and global sustainability movements. Through the analysis of the practices: resource management, sacred groves, organic agriculture, and the treatment of all forms of life, this paper has revealed that the Vedic teachings can still be used today to resolve the ecological issues that we are faced with today. Ancient knowledge, coupled with the current environmental policies, can be used to build sustainable resource utilization, biodiversity conservation, and a symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature.

Keywords: *Environmental conservation, Vedic period, modern period, sustainability, sacred ecology, anthropocentrism*

Introduction

Environmental conservation is the protection, preservation and sustainable management of nature and its resources and ecosystems. It includes activities to limit pollution, safeguard biodiversity and stop the decline of land, air, and water (UNEP, 2022). Conservation is meant

to sustain the equilibrium of ecosystems, fight climate change, and also secure the sustainability of resources to both the current and future generations. The environment has been seen as an important resource in the history of humanity since it is a source of survival resources, sustenance and growth of a society. Nature was not just a resource in the ancient Indian civilization but had a deep spiritual and cultural meaning. The Vedic tradition such as the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda are an expression of the worldview where natural elements were worshipped as a manifestation of divinity. Often, rivers, forests, mountains, animals, and celestial bodies were personified and were worshiped, accompanied by moral responsibility to the environment (Sharma, 2023). An example is the Atharvaveda (Prithvi Sukta, 12.1.12):

“Mata Bhūmih Putroham Prithivyāḥ”

‘or Mother Earth, I am your son, which accentuates the innate connection of human beings to nature. This piety stimulated ecological wise living, biodiversity protection and rituals which enhanced ecological stability’.

On the contrary, modern period is partial towards environmental conservation by using scientific, technological and policy-based approaches. Sustainability is accepted but usually with the scope of economic and development objectives and is viewed through the prism of anthropocentrism according to which nature is appreciated primarily due to its usefulness to humans (Ives et al., 2018). The increased disconnection with the natural ecosystems has been caused by industrialization, urbanization, consumerism, and technological progress, which in turn result in serious environmental problems, such as global warming, biodiversity loss, and pollution (Folke, 2011). In this paper, a sociological comparison of the environmental conservation practice in the Vedic age with modern times shall be presented. The paper will analyze the philosophical backgrounds, human-nature relations, and actual conservation practices during the two eras to discuss the ways in which ancient Vedic wisdom can guide and support modern ecological sustainability strategies.

Review of Literature

There is a strong ecological awareness woven with spirituality and environmental care found in the ancient Indian texts especially the Vedas. An example is the Rigveda, which stresses the holiness of natural things, rivers, forests, and mountains were treated as sacred objects and required reverence and care. This worship is not just a formal affair but it is translated into the real conservation activities. An example of such hymns is found in the Atharvaveda that appeals to the protection of forests and wildlife, indicating the inherent worth of biodiversity (Renugadevi, 2012). The philosophy of the Vedic, Ahimsa (non-violence) does not only deal

with human relations, but with all the living beings and helps to coexist with the nature in peace. This moral system has been central in the development of sustainable behaviours, including the creation of sacred groves and the ban on cutting down trees, which were the early types of conservation (Bhagwat, , 2006).

Modern environmental conservation is on the contrary marked by a policy and scientific method. The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the emergence of different environmental regulations, global treaties, and conservation policies to address the effect of human beings on the environment. These are conservation of biodiversity, pollution control and sustainable management of resources. However, the issues that come along with the effective execution of these strategies remain even after the tremendous improvement. There is still a threat concerning the ecological situation with the problem of climatic change, the destruction of habitats, and the loss of biodiversity. It is also likely to be effective to synchronize the modern scientific solutions with the classical ecological information as, as the scholars claim, it will, possibly, lead to the further preservation of the natural resources and will offer a more holistic and culturally adequate paradigm of the environmental management (Bargah, S. 2025).

However, the latest researches claim that a synthesis of the Vedic ecological ideas and the modern conservation measures should be made. As a case in point, Kalauni (2023) deals with the implementation of such a concept as Karma (action) and Dharma (duty) into the sustainable development in which people and communities are moral culpable towards the environment. Bhagwat, (2006) in the same breath, discusses the practical applicability of the Indian ethos in providing principles to govern the environment and one can refer to ethics and moral principles that may prove valuable in the current environmental concern. The government of India and its efforts through the programmes like the *Namami Gange* and mass tree plantation campaigns indicate an increasing awareness on the need to combine the traditional values of conservation with the current conservation programs. The goal of these programs is to restore life back to the ecosystem and encourage a feeling of communal responsibility to the environment protection.

Methodology

The current research uses the qualitative research method to compare and contrast the environmental conservation activities during the Vedic era with the contemporary era. Given the historic and sociological character of the subject matter, the study focuses on the textual analysis, critical interpretation and a comparative framework to discuss ancient and modern sources. The main idea is to come up with the philosophical underpinnings, cultural beliefs and real-world actions of environmental management during the two eras and determine how they

relate to the present-day sustainability dilemmas. The study research design is put in perspective as comparative sociological research, the aim of which is to determine the similarities, differences, and continuations between the Vedic environmental principles and the contemporary conservation. The research uses the primary and secondary sources. The *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*, as well as specific *Upanishads*, particularly, the *Isha Upanishad*, are examples of primary sources that contain information on ethical and sustainable exploitation of natural resources. The secondary sources include academic books, scholarly articles, and academic journals all of which are concerned with environmental, sociological, and sustainability studies. Also, the current government reports, environmental policy, and case studies were discussed to learn about the current conservation strategies and world sustainability models.

Several methods were used in data collection. To conduct a systematic analysis of Vedic hymns and mantras on nature, sacred groves, water conservation, and biodiversity, textual analysis was carried out. Modern literature and case studies were analyzed through content analysis, which gave information on current conservation practices, policy interventions, and technological interventions. The ancient Vedic principles were then compared with the current environmental strategies and how the traditional knowledge can be used to inform the current practices in managing resources, protection of biodiversity, renewable energy and waste management was done.

Significance of the Study

The given paper is extremely applicable to the academic and practical world, as it was a concession of the ancient knowledge of the environment and the modern issues with the ecological problems. First, it illustrates the philosophical and cultural prevailing situations of the environmental conservation during Vedic era that focused on the moral, spiritual, and social aspects of the human-nature interaction. Conversing about the method of how the ancient people perceived natural things as sacred and part of life, the research can help to understand the holistic human perspectives on the sustainability, which are overlooked by contemporary science (Sharma, 2023; Ives et al., 2018). Second, the paper provides a comparative approach of Vedic and modern conservation practices and reflects a part of survival and incompatibility between environmental ethics, resources regulation, and attitude of the human towards the nature. This comparative prism can help the policy-makers, educators, and environmentalists realize that the traditional ecological knowledge can be used in conjunction with the modern scientific methodology in a bid to tackle severe problems of climate changes, disappearance of biodiversity, pollution and unsustainable consumption. Third, the study has implications to the

sociological literature on the environmental behavior where culture, religion and philosophical beliefs influence the attitude and practices in the ecological stewardship. The book facilitates the combination of environmental ethics with religious beliefs by indicating the applicability of old Vedic teachings; Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), and respect towards the natural elements to the modern environmental management. Lastly, the research can play an important role in ensuring environmental education and sustainability. It proposes an average approach that takes into account the technological progress and integrates it with the time-tested wisdoms in an attempt to welcome individuals and communities to lead sustainable lives, preserve the biodiversity and eventually enjoy a mutually agreeable coexistence with the surrounding natural world. The article suggests the potential to have more sustainable, equal and spiritually conscious futures by returning the modern world to ecological values of the past.

Philosophical Foundations

The Vedic literature, such as *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Atharvaveda* highlight the sanctity of nature and the ethical duty of a human to achieve a balance of nature. The key idea of this vision of the world is the notion of *Panchamahabhutas*, the five great elements, *Akash* (ether), *Vayu* (air), *Agni* (fire), *Jala* (water) and *Prithvi* (earth) that make up the physical world and who are worshipped as gods (Renugadevi, 2012). People believed in a spiritual ethos that is based on personification and worship of rivers, forests, mountains, and animals and had the role of encouraging humans to coexist with the surroundings. As an example, the *Atharvaveda* talks about *Mother Earth* (Prithvi) as a caring and protecting power, which highlights the long-standing filial relationships between human and nature.

Modern conservation of the environment, in its turn, is highly scientific, policy-oriented, and anthropocentric. As much as sustainability is accepted, nature is in most cases appreciated because of its usefulness to the human beings. The current conservation strategies are aimed at reducing the impacts of environmental degradation by utilizing new technologies, laws, and policies, and international initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs, 2022). Such philosophical visions as deep ecology and shallow ecology also distinguish the current approaches, as the former encourages radical shifts in human nature relations with nature and the latter supports conservation, as long as it benefits people (Naess, 2017).

In spite of those distinctions, both the Vedic and modern approaches are concerned with the well-being of the ecosystems, which, however, do not have equal methods and motivations. Vedic philosophy incorporates ecological ethics in the spiritual and social life, encouraging

symbiotic relationship with nature, and modern practices are characterized by scientific reasoning and technology interventions and implementing policies. This comparison highlights the possible applicability of Vedic wisdom to supplement modern environmental policies to provide a model of ethical, sustainable and culturally-resonant conservation behaviors.

Relationship with Nature

During the Vedic era, a human being was seen to be a part of the nature and not distinct. The Vedic worldview placed a symbiotic connection with the environment with forests, rivers, mountains, and the heavenly bodies being worshipped as manifestation of divinity. This inherent respect to nature was embodied in sacred groves, festivals and rituals. As an example, the *Aranyani Suktam* of *Rigveda* praises the goddess of forests, describing forests as peaceful, mystical, and sacred places that provide not only ecological but also spiritual health (Bhagwat, , 2006). Trees such as Peepal were divines and rivers such as *Saraswati*, *Ganga* and *Yamuna* were regarded as forces that sustain lives. The concept of Ahimsa, which means non-violence, was applied to any living creature, and a moral coexistence between humans and animals and plants emerged (Sharma, 2023). This religious and philosophical system encouraged environmental preservation, sustainable consumption of resources, and biodiversity protection and held conservation at the heart of everyday living and cultural practices.

On the contrary, there has been great disconnection of human beings with nature especially with urbanization, industrialization, technology and consumerism of the modern period. Economic growth tends to be valued much more than ecological protection in the contemporary societies, thus causing ecological degradation, pollution and the loss of habitats (Ives et al., 2018). Human relations with nature have turned out to be rather utilitarian and anthropocentric and conservation is often explained by the necessity to benefit people instead of to act according to the ecological principles. Ideas like human centrism are those where human beings are at the centre of ethical inquiry to which other species and ecosystems are considered a means to an end, they are more of a resource meant to improve human needs (White, 1967). However, the new ecological movements, including renewable energy movement, the preservation of the biodiversity, and the sustainable farming are directed to the reconstruction of the previous state between people and natural environment one more time and the elimination of the adverse influence of the industrialization and urban culture.

The antithesis between the two periods indicates that what was once a comprehensive ecological consciousness of spiritual consciousness of the Vedic period has now become a far more scientific and policy consciousness in this present period. However, in the new ecological problems such as global warming, the loss of biodiversity and also the misuse of resources is

the one to show us that the old ecological practices will never be of the old. The interdependence of life and sustainability in the existing environmental policies with the addition of the Vedic ideas of environmental stewardship will allow one to develop ethical, sustainable, and culturally sensitive conservation policies.

Vedic Ecological Practice in the Modern times.

The Vedic environmental guidelines are classical tips that have continued to be highly handy in the modern-day conservation efforts. Sustainable utilization of natural resources is one of the main principles of the Vedic thought. Other teachings like the Isha Upanishad also preach moderation and against excess and use of such resources should be done in a sensible manner that can restore ecological balance (Renugadevi, 2012). This in the contemporary nomenclature can be interpreted to the need to promote sustainable living patterns, minimize wastage, water saving, energy saving and greener consumption patterns.

The Vedic culture also involved planting of trees and forest protection. Trees were believed to be sacred and in the majority of cases trees were anthropomorphized such as Van Mahotsava a tree planting festival. These traditions promote the current afforestation and reforestation programs, the preservation of the sacred groves, and the agro forestry programs to maintain the ecological balance and bio diversity (Bhagwat, 2006). On the same note, the aspect of organic farming was also highlighted in other writings such as Krishna Parashara Smriti where the natural way of farming was explained with acknowledgement to crop rotation, application of organic fertilizer. Modern sustainable agriculture is using these means to decrease the consumption of chemicals, enhance the wellbeing of soil, and secure the possibility of food production in the future (Kalauni, 2023). Vedic ethics focus on the principle of Ahimsa or non-violence which extends to all forms of life and promotes co-existence. This principle in modern environmental discussions justifies animal welfare and encourages vegetarianism and conservation activities that reduce the damage to the ecosystems (Sharma, 2023). The other key concern of Vedic beliefs was water conservation, and rivers like the ganga were respected and kept clean and holy as life sources. Contemporary analogies are the river rehabilitation projects, water treatment projects, and policies that are meant to curb pollution.

Moreover, Vedic scriptures put much emphasis on the utilization of renewable energy and the worship of Surya (the Sun) as the giver of life. This is currently translated to encouraging the use of solar and wind energy among other renewable energy sources to decrease the use of fossil fuels and lessen the emission of greenhouse gases (Bargah, S. 2025). The understanding of waste management involved Rita or cosmic order that prompted cleanliness, composting, and recycling in order to balance the society. Similarly, herbal medicine and biodiversity

conservation, which are emphasized in the Atharvaveda, support the conservation of medical plants and the conservation of biodiversity to offer a platform of sustainable healthcare solutions (Renugadevi, 2012). Lastly, Vedic concepts like *Aparigraha* (non-possessiveness) champion a simple way of living, which the discourse on modern sustainability takes to decrease consumerism and ecological harm. With the help of these ancient practices, the current societies are able to promote spiritual ecology, environmental stewardship, and a positive relationship with nature integrating ethical, cultural, and practical methods of conserving the environment. The uses of the Vedic environmental value to the current operations have immense possibilities of realizing sustainability, moral guardian and ecological balance. The policies might be based on the Vedic values of respect to the biodiversity and sacred groves and rivers which might allow the community-based conservation, sustainable agriculture and ethical treatment of animals (Sharma, 2023). The Vedic practices and doctrines can be utilized in the form of a model when it comes to formulating afforestation programs and water conservation programs which would be appealing and acceptable culturally in socially acceptable dimensions of handling the environment.

Implementation of these principles has a few issues in the contemporary societies however. Excessive use of the technological world, hyper-urbanization, industrialization, and consumerism have distanced human beings with the natural world and relegated conservation ethics that lie within the spirituality to the backseat (Ives et al., 2018; White, 1967). The economic growth and environmental protection are a manifold problem and both solutions that ought to bind the traditional knowledge and also the scientific and policy-driven perspectives are a hybrid one. The research fields of the future will involve the integration of the traditional ecological knowledge into the teaching program, stimulation of the studies on how the Vedic practices may be applied to the sustainability science, and, development of the community-wide conservation schemes that will align the cultural values with the current technology. Having this power to reconcile ancient wisdom and the contemporary environmental practices, the societies can sell the concept of sustainable ways of life, less ecological destruction and moral and ethical obligation to nature. Not only has it contributed to the resolution of the ecological crisis, it has also resulted in building a healthier human-nature relationship, which in the long term has resulted in the ecological and social welfare (Kalauni, 2023).

Wisdom of the Past and Sustainability of the Future.

The relative analysis of environmental conservation during the Vedic era and the contemporary era has revealed some shocking differences and some encouraging points of convergence.

During the Vedic era, the relationship between man and nature was very spiritual, moral and holistic. Nature was not a resource but seen as a divine and living system that was sacred. The rivers like *Saraswati*, *Ganga*, or *Yamuna* were venerated as life-sustaining, forests were regarded as sacred groves and animals were treated as inseparable elements of the ecosystem (Sharma, 2023). Vedic teachings such as the Atharvaveda and Rigveda express ideas such as Ahimsa (non-violence), moderation in the consumption of resources and respect to biodiversity which informed daily lives and community practices. These spiritual and moral necessities gave rise to the culture of making ecological responsibility intersect with social and moral responsibilities that developed into the practices of sustainability based on reverence and long-term thinking.

Modern environmental conservation, on the contrary, is instrumental, scientific, and anthropocentric. Conservation policies, technological developments and international sustainability movements tend to adopt the usefulness of nature to the benefit of man other than its value. Human contact with natural systems has been eroding ecological consciousness and moral accountability as urbanization, industrialization, consumerism, and digital lifestyles continue to separate people further and further (Ives et al., 2018; White, 1967). Though contemporary culture has yielded quantifiable results to reduce environmental harm, including the use of renewable energy and the reduction of pollution and biodiversity damages, they tend to lack the cultural and moral incentive that has long supported a harmonious nature. Thus, the environmental degradation, the resources depletion, and ecological crises remain the issues despite the serious research and policy efforts.

In spite of these variations, the Vedic principles and the contemporary sustainability objectives have a stunning similarity, which implies that they can be combined. Moderation in resource consumption, respecting biodiversity, organic farming, and a simple lifestyle can be associated with present-day attempts at sustainable consumption, agroforestry, renewable energy use, and improving waste management (Kalauni, 2023; Bargah, S. 2025). As an example, a series of afforestation initiatives, inspired by the idea of the sacred groves, may contribute to creating a community of interested and responsible ecological guardians, whereas the revival of rivers, in reference to the sacredness of the water bodies, can lead to the development of the ecological awareness on the one hand and ecological awareness as the cultural one on the other hand. Such illustrations demonstrate that Vedic ecological wisdom could be used as an addition to contemporary science, which gives conservation strategies ethical, cultural, and social aspects. Moreover, the significance of interdisciplinary and holistic approach to environmental conservation is also brought in the paper. However, instead of seeking the technological or

legal solutions, the combination of the ancient philosophies and the modern science mechanism can result in more powerful and more culturally-originally sustainable results. An example is that the Vedic principle of non-violence of all life may be applied to formulate the contemporary policies of anti-wildlife protection but the principle of Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) may be applied in the policies of overconsumption and minimalism. The traditional ecological knowledge can be incorporated in the education systems to inculcate environmental awareness at an early tender age and make a generation of the youths with the attitude of moral responsibility and scientific knowledge.

Lastly, it is also possible to establish an ecological consciousness of the spiritual nature by enticing the wisdom of Vedas to the already limited conservation endeavors. Such a style would force human beings to view themselves as part of the nature and not an outsider and this would be able to make them take action to sustain the ecosystems, reduce climate change and intergenerational equity. The modern civilizations have been able to create the models of the sustainability, not only logically and technologically, but also socially, morally and culturally plausible with the help of the ancient spiritual and moral teachings. Summing up, it is possible to say that the ancient traditions of Vedas and the contemporary environmental policy are not the converse but rather the complement one to another. Science and technology contributed to transforming the modern conservation into a more inhumane process and the laws of Vedas to a domain of moral qualities, cultural topicality, and general account of this world. The reason is that it can assume an overlap of the two visions towards more moderate, moral, and sustainable human-natureal relations which will be able to solve the environmental dilemmas of the modern world, and a more advanced ecological awareness which will be embedded in cultures.

Conclusion

The timelessness of the ancient wisdom of the environment is supported by one of the comparative studies conducted concerning the state of environment conservation during the Vedic era and the modern era which justifies the old knowledge as being applicable in solving the existing environmental problems. The rivers, forests, mountains and the living animals formed a part of the nature which was considered by the Vedic philosophy as divine and whole and spiritual oneness to the nature. The Ahimsa (non-violence), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) and biodiversity reverence practise were done so as to enable the sustainable practices, ethical stewardship and ecological stability. The ecological ethics in everyday life was an instrument of social, cultural necessity and was institutionalized in the form of rituals, celebrations and sacred groves. The contemporary environmental conservation, in its turn, is

scientific, policy-based and anthropocentric and was intended to serve the interests of human beings, through intercession of technology and control. Although it has managed to mitigate some of the health disasters of the environment, it is evident that the modern manners cannot operate in the absence of the moral and spiritual connotations that provided the primitive civilizations of the ancient days to care about the nature per se. With the modern ways being implemented in the already existing practices, the Vedic teachings will be a holistic approach to sustainable development. The contemporary approach of the science and the chances to unite the ethical, cultural, and spiritual values enable to provoke the more responsible usage of the resources, the preservation of the biodiversity, the usage of the renewable energy, the recycling of the wastes, and the ecologically friendly development. The kind of integration is not limited to the problem of the ecological degradation, but the way of living in the harmony, in minimalism and socially responsible form is also established. Finally, the Vedic methodology of the environmental conservation provides timeless values that can be reproducible to the modern process, provides culturally acceptable, ethics-inspired and environmental-friendly means of environmental safeguarding. Incident of these archaic values can be used to govern the future at which it would be just that the environmental and conducive to the well-being of people and the environmental aspect.

References

- Bargah, S. (2025). *Environmental ethics in Indian thought: Ancient answers to modern environmental challenges*. *International Journal of History*, 7(6), 10–18.
- Bhagwat, S. A., & Rutte, C. (2006). *Sacred groves: potential for biodiversity management*. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 4(10), 519-524.
- Folke, C., Jansson, Å., Rockström, J., Olsson, P., Carpenter, S. R., Chapin III, F. S., ... & Westley, F. (2011). *Reconnecting to the biosphere*. *Ambio*, 40(7), 719-738
- Ives, C. D., Abson, D. J., Von Wehrden, H., Dörninger, C., Klaniecki, K., & Fischer, J. (2018). *Reconnecting with nature for sustainability*. *Sustainability science*, 13(5), 1389-1397.
- Kalauni, M. B. (2023). *Vedic Beliefs on Environment and Sustainable Development*. *Journal of Development and Social Engineering*, 9(01), 112-121.
- Naess, A. (2017). *The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary*. In *The ethics of the environment* (pp. 115-120). Routledge.
- Renugadevi, R. (2012). *Environmental ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India*. *African Journal of History and Culture*, 4(1), 1-3.
- Sharma, S., & Sharma, K. (2023). *Environment and society: Climate change and sustainable development*. Routledge India.
- UNEP. (2022). *Making peace with nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies*
- White Jr, L. (1967). *The historical roots of our ecologic crisis*. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203-1207.