
Progressive Advancement for Sustainable Environment in India

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Abstract

India has one of the most prosperous natural environmental assets which should not be abandoned by excessive consumption. Environmental sustainability is the maintenance of environment in such a way that its resources are used by current generations and preserved for the forthcoming. India has a rich culture of traditions and rituals since ancient time. Religious believes and traditions were thoughtful for environmental conservation and swapped around nature. During different ere various conservation strategies were designed and followed. But as time passed environmental resources tend to be exploited and need for their conservation arose. In Modern times since many decades there is not only a continuous effort to spread awareness for environmental sustainability, but various efforts have been made by governments in the form of protection acts, rules, and summits at national and international levels. This article is an effort to summarise sustainability practices from ancient time to current era, to compare them and discuss future perspectives.

Keywords: Environment, Conservation, Sustainability, Protection Acts.

Introduction

Nature has a great influence on the social and cultural traditions and life of a society. Since the ancient time caring for the environment has also been the fundamental part of life and we take great pride in our strong cultural bondage with the environment. As today we consider environmental sustainability as one of nation's prime goal, in ancient period too concern to environment was not underrated. This article includes environment concerned practices and awareness, rules from ancient time which was totally dedicated to nature to the current era when sustainability goal are not that easy to attain.

Ancient Practices

All Indian beliefs and religions are the great supporter and promoter of environmentalism. These were directive norms and guidelines to follow the religion, to execute certain rites and rituals that with due time became a part of life and ensured environmental sustainability. Tribal communities of India live in various eco-geo climatic areas with hills, forests, rivers and other natural resources. They have developed mechanisms to not only cope with the environment and but also have developed a close relationship with the surroundings via indigenous knowledge.

Worshipping of Nature

In Indian history, environmental protection efforts can be seen from very early to modern times. Every aspect of life and it non biotic connections were given utmost importance and via various traditions it was taught that all forms of life - plants, animals and human beings are closely interlinked and interdependent and that conflicts in any one of them would threaten the whole ecological balance of the universe¹. In ancient Indian literature, there are numerous references to various aspects of the environmental, preservation, protection, and suitable organisation. Since the early times of human history in India, environment has been worshipped in different aspects as trees, Sun, animals, mountains, water sources etc and hold a special place

of worship in Hindu theology². Vedas deal with the concept of Nature and Life, and have several recommendations on environment conservation, ecological balance, and weather cycle, indicating the high level of awareness among the people at that time³.

Nature as responsibility

According to the dharma, each person in the community should protect nature. There were five fundamental elements of nature called the 'Panchabhutas' and according to Hinduism the human body is composed of and related to these five elements and connects each of the elements to one of the five senses⁴. This relationship between senses and fundamental elements is the basis of human relationship with the environment. Religion says that nature and environment are inseparable part of our existence³.

Protection by Law

The Manusmriti is a primeval legal document which condemns brutality towards animals prevents people to pollute water and punishment was to be given for an environmental sin^{5, 6}. These innocent beings include the flora and fauna of the earth and creatures in the sky and under the sea⁵. According to Kautilya, it must be the moral duty of each person in the society to safeguard nature and in Arthashastra regulations about the environment were formed and fines related to the cutting of different parts of trees were provisioned⁷.

Arthashastra also showed the interest focused on wildlife in the Mauryan era in which selected forest areas were declared as protected and they were given name 'abhayaranya' comparable to 'sanctuary' in present time. There were fines and punishments prescribed, for offenders who capture, kill or molest elephants, deer, bison, birds, fish, etc³. Kautilya also conversed about the medicinal worth of trees and their treatments were covered under 'arboriculture' which brought about the formation and protection of gardens and organised plantation areas⁸.

The Harappan seals have been found and rise the assumption that their belief system concentrated around zoomorphism⁹. Wheeler also found a seal that was identified as a peepul tree, traditionally considered as the Tree of Creation¹⁰. Apart from revering tree, the Harappans were also familiar with various other methods to control and preserve water for irrigation¹¹. Various attributes of environmental conservation have been recorded by the foreign travellers like Megasthenes, Pliny, the unknown author Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, Ptolemy, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, Itsing etc., during different times⁷.

There are twenty-four Tirthankaras of Jainism which are intimately coupled with environment in more than one way and were able to attain ultimate understanding about pollution free atmosphere⁷. Asoka was alarmed about the wildlife and its significance and royal hunting was banned and burning of the forests without target was prohibited¹².

Recent Environment conservation Endeavours

In the current circumstances, globalization has transformed the very character and condition of the environment. According to National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement (1992)¹⁵, environmental management in India has been consisting of three prominent levels namely legal setting, institutional framework, and as per timely requirement.

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974

After the UN Stockholm Conference of 1972, for the first time, India formed the Prevention of water pollution act to preserve the quality of water from any form of pollutants. According to the act state has exclusive power over water resources and is principally accountable for its management. Earlier few states like Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, J & K, Assam, Kerala, and other union territories have forward laws in their state assembly under article 252 of the constitution¹⁸.

Forest Conservation Act, 1980

Forest conservation act states that under this act for the diversion of forest land into non-forestry areas in the country. For the purpose, a central government official was established called as Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) for monitoring purpose under the Ministry of Environment Forest climate change MoEFCC (Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 1980)¹⁶.

The Air Prevention and Control of Pollution Act, 1981

The air pollution act was passed by the central government in India to face the increasing air pollution across the country, carrying specific aim to reduce and control wide range of air pollution. It aims on the preservation of air condition by barring toxic and hazardous gases and pollutants to spread like limited use of such gases, liquid, and solid substances which can change the air quality. The act was strictly enforced because of the 'Bhopal Gas Tragedy' (Gas Leak Case) (Central Pollution Control Board, 1981)¹⁹.

The Environment Protection Act, 1986

In 1986, India launched its Environmental Protection Act (EPA), for the protection of natural resources due to continuous use and loss of natural environmental resources in ongoing economic and developmental activities. The act pursues to prevent illegal forest cutting and degradation and environmental resource manipulation and was formed due to UN's Stockholm Conference' in 1972 led challenges of framing a sustained environment in which India via its Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, 1986 was also a founding contributor. According to the act from to time specialised and organized bodies will be formed to monitor and observe the environmental conditions¹⁷.

National Forest Policy, 1988

National forest policy act was undertaken to resolve the problem of the exploitation of natural resources, forest depletion, illegal cutting of trees, and supply of wood for business purpose. It was recommended by Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) in 1952 later known as Forest policy act.

National Conservation Strategy, 1992

The National Conservation of Strategy (NCS) act came to existence after the World Earth Summit (1992) held in Rio de Janeiro and focussed on improvisation of sustainable development. Establishment of environmentally friendly developmental technology, Conservation of forest resources and protection of wild animals, Fight for Poverty mitigation, Promotion of ecological development, Development of inclusive growth strategy without social cost, Protection of natural resources and human environment were set as standards for the achievement of conservation and sustainable development.

National Biodiversity Act, 2002

National Biodiversity Act (NBA) was implemented after the UN Conservation of Biological Diversity (CBD) Act and aims to conserve the biological resource within a specified territory of a independent country which identifies its authority to exploit them. (MoEFCC, 2002)²⁰.

National Environmental Policy, 2006

The National Environmental Policy (NEP) states, “National environmental policy primarily is a policy strategy which seeks to maintain and empower the regulatory bodies for the sound implementation through its policy agenda by following the previous approach in the light of present knowledge and collective experience”²¹.

The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) act was implemented in India in 2010 as a judicial and administrative arm and its preamble states that “the act will have to observe for the effective and speedy disposal of environmental cases to the victim and will strongly redress of their liability”. It aims to provide fast disposal of the case hearing on a primary price to the client or involving sides (National Green Tribunal, 2010)²².

New Green Laws Initiatives

National Hydrogen Mission (NHM) was announced by the government on 15 August 2021, to meet India’s unconventional energy demand and to produce an substitutional source of renewable energy. This is a comprehensive scheme, that involves all energy sources including solar, wind, and electricity together. Government has decided to fulfil this goal by 2029 (Bhaskar, 2021)²³. Government has announced, India’s milestone towards achieving a green India, in a ‘clean and sustainable’ way, in the next two and half decades and India made it more progressive under COP 26 commitment which is by the 2070 Net-Zero Policy (The Economic Times, 2022)²⁴.

Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) was launched by government which commits to reform the drinking water supply in rural India, implementing of decentralized and community-driven program, and facilitating women’s engagement in the water supply chain system. (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, 2019)²⁵.

Current Environmental Issues and Challenges in India

Carbon emission, pollution and global warming challenges are still on. India is facing natural disasters like floods, storms, earthquakes, droughts, and so on. Even United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) stated that from 2000 to 2019 the human losses ratio was more than 75 thousand in India (Atlas Magazine, 2022)²⁶. In addition to these, India also faces other numerous environmental numbers and challenges which can be a reason to high poverty, land conflict, and climate change. There are emerging issues like Plastic pollution, marine and coastland erosion and security, and other interests of environmental security.

Conclusion

Thus, we can conclude that in ancient times of India people were much aware about the environment and its sustainability. Their daily routines were concentrated around nature and its protection. Since then, people adopted many techniques to solve specific environmental challenges and the progressive attitudes for sustainability were adopted. But sadly, we have in due course forgot those principles and exploited the nature for developmental purposes. In modern times many acts and rule were framed by governments. But now more

than forming acts and legislatures a proper awareness and a true adaption is necessary for the attainment of sustainable environment.

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