



# Climate Change in Classical Indian Texts: Perceptions of Environmental Fluctuations and Their Contemporary Relevance

Anand Malviya<sup>1</sup>, Priya Parashar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Indore Institute of Law, Indore.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Indore Institute of Law, Indore.

---

## Abstract

Classical Indian texts, ranging to Vedic hymns and epics, Puranas, and scientific texts, such as the Brihat Samhita, have exposed advanced understandings of environmental changes, e.g., droughts, floods, and seasonal aberrations and these are organized by understandings of cosmic order (ṛta) and moral obligation (dharma). All these ancient sources reveal a unified way of thinking where focus was on interdependence, respect towards the elements of nature (Pancha Bhutas) and prophecy and premonition which is not reflected in the technocratic methods of today. These texts are discussed qualitatively in this paper to bring out their relevance to current climate conversation, and to suggest re-sacralization of nature and resilience solutions based on traditional wisdom.

**Keywords -** Climate change, classical Indian texts, Vedic ecology, ṛta, dharma, Brihat Samhita, environmental ethics, Pancha Bhutas, ancient meteorology

Received 01 Apr., 2026; Revised 06 Apr., 2026; Accepted 08 Apr., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

## I. Introduction

The present stage in history offers the stage of the never-before-seen global danger that the human-made climate change brings. The long-term effects, including the increase in sea level and weather shifts, involve loss of biodiversity, restrictions in resources, and, therefore, should involve multifarious, integrative, multidisciplinary oriented, and global coherent actions. The state-of-the-art features of modern science and technology have been rendering increasing credit to the other facet of the issue-the splendour of an inquiry into the varied cultural and historical treatment of the relations of human and environmental. Societies that were ancient, not having been equipped with modern scientific equipment, had a fine idea of their natural surroundings and had elaborately refined mechanisms of observation, interpretation and adjustment.

This is the place where an incredible reservoir of knowledge on human-environment relations found in classical Indian literature still lies unused. Varying and fading under the sun of thousands of years these ancient manuscripts fill out an amazing range of disciplines - philosophy, religion, literature, and up to the very border of early science - on the concept of an integrated worldview, in which all the living beings and nature are understood as interconnected.

## II. Literature Review

### *Environmental Perceptions in Classical Indian Texts*

History tells us that the old Indian books have been bearers of an ecological and subtle sense of the physical world even before the modern ecological science was born. We may push this ecological view to the uttermost extremes on the one hand by the strata of ancient Indian literature-the oldest sacred hymns, on the other the latest scientific collections and the latest of the epic verse. The ethos largely due to the religious and moral lessons, caused intense reverence towards the nature and a near instinct of the fine balance that had to be kept ensuring the harmony of the universe and the earth.

### ***Vedic Ecological Thought***

Nature gratifying Rigveda and Atharvaveda (c. 1500-500 BCE) represent the Indian ecological space as the source of philosophical thought. These are not exactly official on the issue of environmental philosophy, but they do bear an experience of nature that is expressed in myriad hymns, prayers and rituals all of which recognize that life and nature are sacred and are mutually reliant.

The Pancha Bhutas theory is by far the most important philosophy thought of all: the Earth (Prithvi), Water (Apha), Fire (Tejas), Air (Vayu), and Ether (Akasha). It is the all-embracing component of the entire world and its contents, living beings herewith. The picture of nature is given in a holistic form since humans are not the over and above or exterior of nature.

Atharvaveda Prithvi Sukta (Earth Hymn) is a prayer to the sacred mother Earth, whose health is dependent upon the moral nature of the actions by human beings (dharma). We have such statements as; Let me not strike your vitals, O Earth! are among the earliest shouts against ecologically disastrous projects, quite in keeping with the ethics of sustainability of our current era.

Once more, Vedas provide incisive accounts of natural process especially rain-dependent agriculture.

### ***Environmental Themes in Puranas and Epics***

Environmental themes are still elaborated in narrative, mythological, and moral exhortation terms in the Puranas (c. 4th century CE onwards) and the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Puranas confirm the sanctity of natural entities like rivers, trees and animals. As an illustration, the Vishnu Purana praises non-violence to animals and planting trees is always glorified as an act of righteousness. These religious mandates were effective cultural promotional drivers towards conservation.

Beautiful stories of woods, flowing rivers, and high mountains-Abeit the Mahabharata, the Ramayana - are consecrated to the existence of human life. The topography is even more spiritual in the very idea of Aranyas-as forests of religious seclusion-that makes it. The negative tone is brought out metaphorically using unnatural or human action that fights against the annihilation of forests or disruption of ecological processes which are caused by cosmic order that holds man and nature together. As an example, in the Mahabharata, climatic anomalies like dark clouds and raging storms are seen as the harbingers of disaster just before the great battle hence the equating of environmental disruption with social conflict.

### ***Scientific Observations and Predictions in Treatises***

The level of development of scientific treatises in ancient India had become high, and in environmental cases, method of prediction had been developed and systematic observations made. The Brihat Samhita of Varahamihira (6th century CE) can be called a great work that included long descriptions of meteorology, climatology, and natural disasters. Specific contents involve detailed descriptions of the cloud formations and rains, winds, and omens to foretell droughts, floods, and earthquakes. Varahamihira thinks of categorizing clouds according to 4

their influence on rainfall and also prescribes means of prediction by the rainfall of monsoon using astronomical computations and natural occurrences.

Similarly, cyclic variations of seasons and their influence on weather must have been described in Surya Siddhanta-a ancient text on astronomy. Additional information regarding a tradition of climatic observations and their prediction is provided by Panchangaor Hindu almanacs which have been available since the time immemorial, which are based on weather signs which were purportedly passed down by generations. All this section of writings is an incredibly enriching and vibrant conceptualization of how ancient Indian communities perceived the environmental change, engaged with it, and reacted to it.

## **III. Methodology**

This study is a qualitative, interpretive study exploring ideas of environmental change in ancient Indian literature. The methodological approach is oriented at accessing the subliminal meaning of the texts under analysis, beyond the surface of the analysis, searching integrative knowledge of the past relations between human beings and the environment. The Vedic texts in question are chosen in the meaning of their being historically inclined towards natural phenomena: Rigveda and Atharvaveda, the Puranas and the scientific text of Brihat Samhita.

The approaches of the analysis of the texts are numerous. The passages are read closely, with an aim of comprehending their historical and cultural significance, looking at linguistic peculiarities and symbols. Thematic analysis seeks repetitive themes associated, such as, with respect to nature, interconnectedness, cyclical temporality, and environmental ethics, and conceptualizations of anomalies like protracted droughts or off-season rains.

Therefore, no interpretation is presented outside of the larger context of the history, society, and agriculture of ancient India. Then lays place a more devoted comparative discourse fixed to bring nearer to our scientific knowledge of a climate effects-not to anachronously foist some current ideas thereon but to at least trace out certain common ways and certain wiser ways.

**Findings: Perceptions of Environmental Fluctuations**

The written material reveals a well-developed understanding of variability of the environment but is closely tied to philosophical and ethical paradigms.

**Vedic Period (c. 1500–500 BCE): The Roots of Ecological Awareness**

During the Vedic age, the concept of ecological change naturally followed the perception of the concept of order in the universe (Rta) and a fundamental reverence of natural power, which was more probably venerated as deities. The world was dynamic and was controlled by cycles and rhythms which had to be understood and tuned into by humanity. 5

**Rta and Cosmic Equilibrium:** Rta was the fixed statute of cosmic order which governed the order of seasons, motions of the heavens, and of weather. Abnormal or disturbing environmental changes were plainly regarded as the violation of this cosmic order, and sometimes it was brought about by human action violating dharma. The continuation of Rta was vital to the health of the cosmic and human society, which indicated an intuition of the delicate balance in nature.

**Respect for Natural Elements:** A relationship of respect, mutuality, and protection of nature was a result of the divination of natural elements like Agni (fire), Vayu (wind), and Parjanya (rain). The hymns are not prayers to bring rain, but also acknowledgements of the life-giving nature of the monsoon, and the devastating nature of a lack of it.

**Weather Pattern Observations:** The Vedas have some very good records of seasonal patterns, the necessity of rains in time to do farming and the impact of storms and famines. Such observations, though not predictions as understood by scientists, show a culture that is very sensitive to its environment and to its inner cycles.

**Classical Period (c. 500 BCE–1200 CE): From Reverence to Systematic Observation**

The Classical Period was characterized by the change of the majorly reverential feelings to more systematic observation and prognostication, particularly in the scientific treatises, though the philosophical roots of the Vedic period were still preserved.

**Close Observations of Anomalies in the Environment:** The ancient texts like the Puranas and the Epics contain some description of what may be perceived as a significant shift in climatic conditions. These include prolonged droughts leading to famines and social upheavals and catastrophic floods and strange rains which are seen as bad omens or even consequences of adharma (unrighteousness). Although not historical in all cases, these accounts indeed provide expression to the past experiences of the climate fluctuation. Some books also allude indirectly to changes in the courses of major rivers, a mechanism that is supported by modern geology, such as the drying up of the non-existent Sarasvati River.

**Methods of Prediction in Scientific Treatises:** Brihat Samhita is a classic example of what can be called regular attempts at prediction of weather. Varahamihira classified the types of clouds to make predictions of the rain and developed methods of predicting the arrival and stay of the monsoon by combining both celestial and terrestrial factors. Another section in the book is concerning the prediction of an earthquake according to the portends like the unusual animal habits and weather conditions. This was a highly advanced system of observation and prediction, despite being rooted in astrological logic, and was in use over many centuries.

**Philosophical and Ethical Facets:** The dharma concept was extended to include the preservation of the natural environment, and the concept of ahimsa (non-violence) was extended to all life. Direct prohibitions of forest clear-cutting, water pollution, and animal cruelty are also included in the Puranas, and are typically punishable by religious penance. This powerful ethical framework provided a culturally entrenched way of guaranteeing sustainable practices.

Both phases of the reports document a conceptualization of environmental change that was active and evolving with an ethical and philosophical foundation that offers a substantial counterpart to technocratic modernity on its own.

#### **IV. Discussion: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Climate Discourse**

The scrutiny of the traditional Indian literature on environmental perception closely indicates wandering through a treasure trove of ancient wisdom, which is very applicable in climate considerations today. The primitive societies did not possess the intellectual framework of the current climate science, but their observations and reaction to environmental shifts is a treasure trove of information. The simplest divergence is the conceptual methodology. Modern climatic science has the option of using empirical data and mathematical models to

understand anthropogenic climate change. Ancient Indian literature, in its turn, explained the variation in the environment within a holistic system that took into consideration observation, combined with philosophy, ethics, and religion. However, the events they document, such as prolonged droughts, catastrophic floods, off-season weather can have equivalent in our modern classification of extreme weather events. The old concepts of *Rta* and *dharma* granted the human-environment relations with a highly efficient ethical framework, which presupposed that disproportions in the natural order were often caused directly by the human moral failures (*adhama*). This created a sense of a duty to maintain ecological equilibrium, the antiquity of the modern anthropocentric paradigms that are inclined to isolate human behavior and their ecological footprint.

### **Parallels and Divergences**

Modern ecology and the ancient Indian philosophy share the emphasis on interrelatedness of the natural world. The accounts of cyclical events especially the monsoon reflect a primitive form of consciousness akin to the current scientific curiosity of the climatic patterns. The ancient sensitivity to the social impacts of environmental disturbances famines and migrations caused by drought, among others, is comparable to the recent studies on climate vulnerability. Sustainability-related ethical injunctions also have similarities with modern conservation ethics.

Nonetheless, there do exist notable differences. Old texts attribute real change of the environment to cosmic genesis or ethical factors, whilst modern science ascribes principal causality to the same to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Methods of prediction: during ancient times astrologers discerned signs, today meteorologists can make predictions based on numerical models into which observations and satellite data are fed. Where ancient texts attribute the causes of environmental change to the fact that they are cosmic or moral causes, the anthropogenic release of greenhouse gases is the major cause of modern science. Prediction techniques vary ancient astrology was searching for indicators; modern meteorology uses numerical models but based on observations and satellite data. Also, unlike in the ancient climate ideas that were usually local or regional, the contemporary climate crisis is universal and therefore needs concerted efforts of the international community. Potential of Ancient Indian Knowledge Despite all these variations, a lot of knowledge is taught by classical Indian literature that can significantly contribute to environmental ethics and policy nowadays.

1. **Re-sacralising Nature:** Since the world is confronted by global environmental degradation due to an instrumental conception of nature, the ancient Indian concept of nature as intrinsically sacred can help stir up a tincture of reverence and respect towards the planet hence generating a potent moral force of action.

1. **Holistic Viewpoint:** The integrated worldview, because the human well-being cannot be separated from the ecological one, could become the stepping-stone towards the more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to climate problems, the hubs of the ethical, social and spiritual problems, in addition to the technological ones.

1. **Ethical Duties and Dharma:** Dharma-idea as the principle of righteous action is a culturally relevant ethical foundation of climate action, which emphasizes that individuals, on the one hand, have a collective and, on the other hand, an individual obligation to ensure ecological balance.

2. **Resilience and Adaptation:** The traditional development of water management and ancient stories concerning dealing with the uncertain environment contain historical insights into resilience and adaptation.

## **V. Conclusion**

The paper has shown that the classical Indian treatises provide the Indian approach to change the environment with a very delicate understanding of the complex interaction between the natural phenomena and people. The ecological concept has a very high standard in these texts because they are based on the ideas that are permeated with philosophy, morality, and spirituality and originate in the Vedic understanding of cosmic order (*Rta*) and on more systematic studies of observation in classical texts.

The ancient Indian society was highly sensitive to climatic conditions like drought and heavy rains. They regarded their circumstances holistically with no possibility to differentiate human interaction and the well-being of nature. This led them to feel responsible and conserve nature, not exploit it.

The Indian philosophy has offered an environmental set-up which showed a thousand other similarities like being interconnected and moving in a cycle. Although the causal explanations and nurturing mechanisms no longer align their efforts with the modern science, there are still some deliberate courses of ecology-interinfluences, protective care, and sustainable practices, and to some extents are very much concerned in the current climate crisis. The moral necessities found in the ancient manuscripts can become a moral anchor of clothes that binds more firmly all our collective will to high solidarity on this noble platform that opposes world climate crisis.

In an era where the world is concentrated on the accumulating problems of climate change and everything that it entails, Indian wisdom of antiquity is brought up with some lessons that are perennial and that do not necessarily abide by scientific or economic interests. It demands the compilation of any significant response into a comprehensive frame of reference of ethical and spiritual and cultural concerns in the hosting of a sustainable and resilient future. This revival of the old knowledge systems will provide an opportunity to generate a new kind of awe and reverence towards nature, based on which all the people will be able to accept the ecological balance, which will be enriched with this old wisdom as a framework and inspiration to conduct the international climate agenda in the name of climate justice.

### References

- [1]. Bhattacharjee, A. (2023). *Environmental ethics in Hindu scriptures: Ancient wisdom for modern challenges*. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391990242>
- [2]. Chapple, C. K. (2006). *Hinduism and ecology: The intersection of earth, sky, and humans*. Harvard University Press.
- [3]. Das, K. (2022). Rta and Dharma: The ancient Indian concept of law and justice. *LinkedIn Pulse*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/rta-dharma-ancient-indian-concept-law-justice-krishna-das>
- [4]. Dwivedi, O. P. (2000). *Dharmic ecology*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- [5]. Frawley, D. (2001). *Ayurveda and the mind: The healing of consciousness*. Lotus Press.
- [6]. Ghosh, A. (n.d.). Of ecological harmony and sustainable development. *UVU Global Engagement*. <https://www.uvu.edu/global/docs/wim22/sdg16/sdg16-ghosh.pdf>
- [7]. Giosan, L., et al. (2012). Fluvial dynamics of the Indus Valley Civilization. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(26), E1722–E1728. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1112743109>
- [8]. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2023). *AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate change 2023*. IPCC. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>
- [9]. Iyengar, R. N. (2009). Variability of rainfall as per *Brihat Samhita*. *Scribd*. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/6343475>
- [10]. Kumar, A. (2023). Varahamihira's *Brihat Samhita*: Unravelling ancient Indian meteorology. *Culture and Heritage*. <https://cultureandheritage.org/2023/10/varahamihiras-brihat-samhita>