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# Weighing Attitude Over Legal ProvisionsApropos a Safer World: A Study Through the Religious Beliefs and Literatures Across Faiths

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## **Abstract:**

*The present state of ease and indolence has added to the woes we are in; development at the cost of environment, glitter and glitz, different economic verticals of the modern economy, and unscrupulous obsession for quick heights, all have fare equities in the present state of affairs, but the irony is that- We cry foul at the shadows of ghosts of our own making. We create the wound and prefer to scratch the same in the name of solutions. It is high time a man at the helm of affairs should rise to the occasion and not play second fiddle to problems. We must find solutions in our backyard and not in far-off places. The ancient Vedas propagate environmental protection, ecological balance, climatic cycle, rain, water cycle and other topics which unshakably replicate the high level of knowledge of people who saw, thought, and practised the Vedic wisdom in those times. A look at the present crisis certainly leads us in that direction to ponder and pragmatize our ideas about handling the menace of plastic in our daily life. This study aims to highlight and analyse some of the select excerpts from Vedic literature as well as practices and shall try to rationalize the same as a viable means of solution.*

**Keywords:** Vedic, Ecology, Humanity, Culture, Modernity, Economy, Apathy, Recycle.

## **Introduction:**

The current changes in the global environment can be traced back to the relationship between humans and the Earth. Human activity continues to accelerate, putting pressure on the planet's resources. Climate change is one of the most significant changes that have come off before humans today. The magnitude and severity of the impacts of global environmental change will depend on human responses at the individual, community, national and global levels. The "environmental damage" caused by the excessive use of natural resources has caused serious damage to human feelings and to the relationship between nature and people. With the introduction of plastic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we became addicted to plastic, and now a significant part of almost everything we have is made of plastic. But, while we're happy to use it, we're not good at reprocessing, and as of today - less than 10% of the plastic we produce is recycled. The other 50% ends up in landfills and the rest 40% or some more is dumped into the ocean, causing serious damage to our environment. It's not a question of who does what, or which country pollutes more than the other, which may lead to unnecessary controversy, but the fact is that, irrespective of the country of origin it affects one and all as the planet is a cumulative whole and we all share the same.

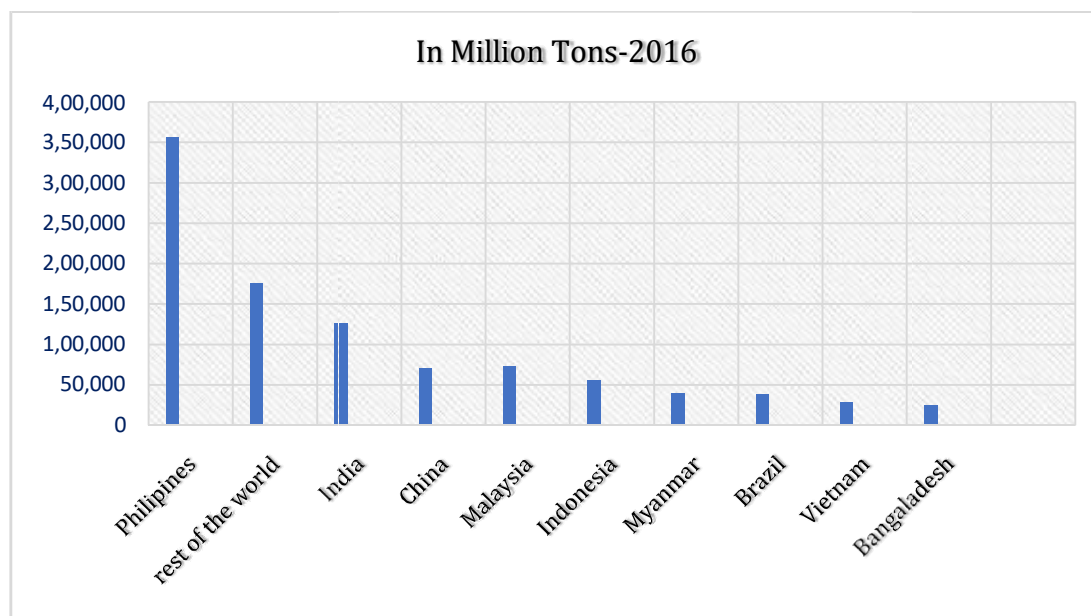
Any talk of plastic reminds us of the benefits associated with it. "Plastics are inexpensive, lightweight, strong, durable, corrosion-resistant materials, with high thermal and electrical insulation properties. The diversity of polymers and the versatility of their properties are used

to make a vast array of products that bring medical and technological advances, energy savings and numerous other societal benefits” (Andrady & Neal 2009)

But at the same time, we probably forget to register the drawbacks associated with it. As opined by Yardley and Cozens:

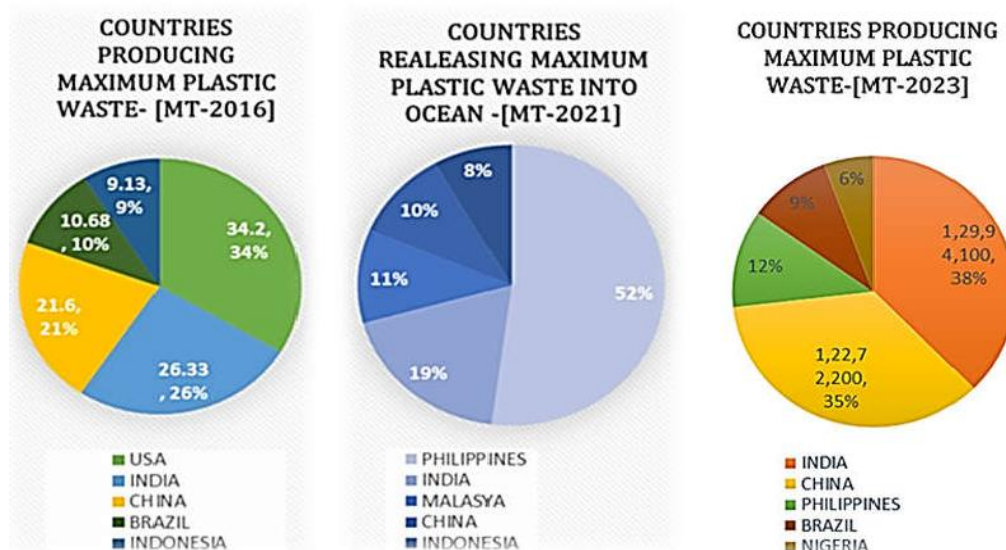
*“The durability of plastics and their potential for diverse applications, including widespread use as disposable items, were anticipated, but the problems associated with waste management and plastic debris were not. In fact, the predictions were ‘how much brighter and cleaner a world [it would be] than that which preceded this plastic age’ (Yardley & Cozens 1945, p. 152).*

The Present paper is an attempt to present an unbiased understanding of the future challenges, opportunities and the most compelling priorities. This will incorporate information from the environment and human health, as well as other areas of select references as the primary source of information, but we would generally draw the reader to discussions on specific thematic analysis. The aim is to look at the issue of pollution from several angles including plastic waste. The impact of plastic waste on the environment and wildlife, problems of use, and disposal. This will highlight how the traditional **Vedic** way of living, awareness, attitude, and a shift in perception can play a role in the mitigation of the menace caused by overflowing polluting habits in our feverish daily life. Although, a rough estimate of recent research mentions the top five contributors to plastic waste that ends up in the ocean are China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, to make a difference we all need to do our part to reduce the malefic impact. Plastic has a huge impact on our oceans, wildlife, and ultimately on us as a human species.



Courtesy: visualcapitalist.com

Recent studies have shown an alarming picture of the growing plastic waste. Amongst the top 5 polluting nations across the world as per the world population review that shows-



The figures above show the substantial contribution of India towards the global pollution ratio, and to an extent between 2016 and 2023, India has reached a level where it leads the table of polluting nations. The facts and figures given above are just the tip of the iceberg, not to speak of other verticals of pollution including air pollution which has reached an alarming level in major cities of the world, and there too, India leads the list. The question before us is – when the cultural and religious foundations of a country are quite vocal about the environment and its protection, when Nature is treated as divine, how can a nation so soon be the most polluting industry? The imminent answer that comes to our mind is about the growing withdrawal from nature, and the changing lifestyle, or the discernment and deviations from those ideal paths or could be a thorough indoctrination of rash consumerism of the modern world that is insensitive towards nature.

“According to the World Health Organization (WHO), some of the world’s most polluted cities are - Karachi, New Delhi, Beijing, and Lima amongst others. However, many developed nations also have air pollution problems. Los Angeles, California, is nicknamed Smog City.” [National Geographic, 2021]. Although of late, the 'Kyoto Protocol' is in place to bring in laws to regulate emissions and reduce air pollution, the ongoing deliberation across nations is that- how fast we can achieve visible results. In this scenario “cap the trade” appears to be less effective, since it doesn’t address the popular behaviours contributing to air or water pollution. For example:

The air quality of metros particularly Delhi, where apart from the vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, dust by constructions, and stagnant wind due to geographic locations, Agricultural stubble burning grossly contributes to the air pollution and smog in Delhi. The stubble burning has become a headache for the Govt. for quite some time. Since the harvest period for rice and wheat is very short, the straw from the last harvest requires to be removed as soon as possible. Hence, despite several regulatory provisions and initiatives by the government, the farmers resort to their age-old practice of the cost-effective and time-saving approach of burning those as and where basis and are reluctant to renounce rather stick to the traditional practice of burning. Thousands of crores are spent every year by the central government in India to check such activities, besides the ban imposed on such practices, it has not yet yielded satisfactory results.

Three things come out of it – 1. Commercial needs, 2. Financial considerations, and 3. Human apathy rooted in the attitude towards pollution besides regulatory paralysis appears to be responsible for such depletion in air quality. If only people's behaviours can be addressed, and farmers are sensitized towards nature, ecology and the menace of pollution, probably the bulk of the issue could long have been solved.

Now, when recycling is slower than the pace of pollution when indolence and propriety dictate the go of society, and when the glitter of the modern world is louder than the teachings of the religious scriptures, to consider nature as properties of enjoyment and materials worth plunder leads us towards the '*widening gyre*'. The need of the hour is to be careful - prior to the philosophical second coming, we need to have a second look towards the same age-old teachings and preaching of our own Vedic hymns and practices, that advocates nature as divine. Hence, this is our divine duty to protect nature, maintain the balance of ecology, and be the guardian of millions of species around we are co-dependent either knowingly or unknowingly, and should ensure a better world for the next generations to breathe at ease. This is possible, provided we bring in a considerable alteration to our perception, our attitude, behaviour, and habits. This may be difficult but not impossible.

This appears difficult in the sense people have developed habits to take shortcuts, and are always in search of ease, and in the process have developed an attitude of negligence, which has to be addressed by building the perception towards ecology. This is possible in the sense that- if, despite modern means of rich harvest there is a growing demand for organic food, manures, and pesticides, since people have grown health conscious. In health sectors, there is an interest shift towards- Naturopathy, Ayurveda, and Generic medicines. In this scenario then the task at hand won't be difficult to achieve.

It is important that every one of us ought to come forward to play a role at least by refusing to buy products that contain microbeads, drinking tap or filtered water, and not adding bottled water to the landscape by adopting nature-friendly items and products that is perishable and do not add to pollution. Contrary to the popular belief that plastic is disposable, is far from the truth, every item we throw away takes up valuable space in a landfill or contributes to ocean pollution. With our planet in danger, it becomes our religious duty and every one of us must do what we can to use natural resources. reduce plastic, use and improve the present state of recycling, etc. Awareness amongst the retailers as well as supporting the government to bring in the most important changes in the policies towards plastic use is equally important to discourage sell and spread of polluting materials.

As of now studies have focused on waste management, and recycling, but have ignored the human interaction with plastics and how to control waste generation. This human angle being the root, studies must be augmented in that direction, primarily, there should be a focus on changing behaviours and relationships between plastic, pollution, and people, which is now very limited. A review of the available data and related literature claims this as a 'knowledge gap'. From this point of view, we believe that it is important to understand the evolution in the behaviour of people and society to make sound and effective pronouncements regarding the polluting behaviours and use of plastic.

This is a question of sustainability, both defensive and offensive strategies can be adopted, besides efficient use of plastics and waste management policies, progressive research aimed at exploring the behavioural aspects, becomes inevitable. Behavioural change, and Motivation, can improve our current attitudes connected to plastic use and the veracity of plastic waste. It is agreed that understanding the behaviour of the 'Person-Plastic' relationship is important to identify the opportunities and limits that can help to be effective and efficient in addressing a desired change. Worthwhile to note that Individuals of eminence have been quite vocal and consistently spell out this particular behavioural aspect on occasions to spread awareness to revolutionise the idea. A few such examples can be cited below:

Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations once urged mankind:

*"Let us be good stewards of the Earth we inherited. All of us have to share the Earth's fragile ecosystems and precious resources, and each of us has a role to play in preserving them. If we are to go on living together on this earth, we must all be responsible for it."*[Vedic Wisdom]

Sri Dalai Lama too urged in a similar line:

*"It is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weaker members and to preserve and tend to the environment in which we live."* [Exoticindiaart]

In both the above statements, statesmen of the suture of Annan and the spiritual guru Dali lama, appeal to the human behavioural aspects and the spiritual moral ground people should adhere to. The second thing we find is that spirituality and ecology can't be separated, in that case, the Vedic consciousness stands paramount. Indian civilizational realism is based on the idea of the protection of nature that links back to 'Rig Veda' [the oldest of four Vedas]. The Vedic teachings not only celebrate the idea of "Paryavaran" it ensures in all its practices, 'pujas and Hawans', it prioritizes environment.

### ***Vedic Teachings and Practices:***

The Vedic literature created a religion of nature worship. In fact, four *Vedas* - *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*, combine human culture and natural philosophy in the manner of natural religion. The culture of sacrifice taught in the Vedic hymns reflects the knowledge of humanity, freedom and nature. The Vedic followers developed the concept of environmental ethics from the Vedic view of the astrophysical and metaphysical unity of nature and the ethics of natural law in the form of '*Riti*,' '*Dharma*' & '*Karma*'. We can relate Vedic beliefs of nature to the natural theological philosophy of the modern period with ecological research in environmental ethics of the late 20th century to find the relevance and logic behind the Vedic teachings.

'Hawans' are an important part of every ancient tradition. When different festivals or family events such as weddings, births or family events, other good or bad times, like death, etc. People perform '*Hawan*' and the '*Hawan Samagré*' is formulated with various herbs, ghee, wood, and pure cow's milk, because the necessity of '*Hawan*' and '*Yagna*' is to purify the environment. It is now considered a waste, but finally, the world has come to agree on its effectiveness after various experiments and studies. The smoke produced from '*Hawan*' purifies the air and, through respiration, it cleanses the body and mind as per earlier belief now has found Western

buyers. A piece of camphor used in every household to perform 'Arti' has now proved itself to have antibacterial properties, and the burning of camphor creates an antibacterial zone in every house. All these attributes are very important for a healthy environment.

*"Camphor has a variety of uses including being used as: an industrial plasticizer; an insect repellent; food and beverage flavouring; and medicinally as an antipruritic, mild analgesic, and counterirritant." [Adkins 2023]*

The Vedic literature clearly instructs people to promote the relationship between man and nature, to achieve ecological balance, and above all, to develop patience and trust, so that there will be a new order for the benefit of the community. It is important that people in the Vedic period respected nature and the environment by looking at it holistically and safeguarding its components and organizations with care. This is reflected in the following Vedic hymns addressed to air, soil, water, crops and vegetables.

*"Do not harm the environment; do not harm the water and the flora; earth is my mother, I am her son; may the waters remain fresh, do not harm the waters... Tranquillity be to the atmosphere, to the earth, to the waters, to the crops and vegetation." - [Sharma 2009]*

*"The Vedic hymns to the earth, the prithvisukta in atharvaveda is the oldest manifestation of environmental concern —matabhumih putroham Prithviah" (earth is my mother and I am herself) speaks volumes regarding allegiance of Vedic people towards nature. - [Krishna 2016]*

It is our approach towards the environment and the situation that determines our perception of it. This also highlights the fact that how values and morals are passed down from generation to generation by preaching and percolating the same message. The ancient Indians carried a deep respect for environmental justice and valued it to the point of sacredness and worshipped all those things we call 'nature'. The irony of the matter is that such respect and devotion, though still dominant, have been affected over time by slow but steady interpolations of modern consumerism where nature is exploited rather than worshipped. This attitude should change and we need to bring in a change in popular perception through the wisdom of antiquity to make them more conducive towards nature. Our Vedas and Puranas are not short of many supplications about nature and its glorification.

To protect the environment, the 'Rig Veda' says:

*"madhu vātāḥṛitāyate madhuḥsaratti sindhavaḥ mādviḥnaḥ santuṣadhi. madhu naktamutusāsu madhumatpārthiva rajah madhu kṣorastu suryah mādhirgābo bhavantu naḥ" (Rigved a, 1/9 0/6,7,8)*

Our happiness emanates from the environment we live in. The river gives us water, the sun blesses us with light, night and a fine morning. They help us grow food and vegetables; the vegetative world is enlivened by them. Our cows feed us with holy milk and the followers of Vedic principles understood this; they had long realized that nature is the source of health and happiness, and hence, they considered them all to be gods and worshipped all those for centuries.

*“taccakṣurdevahitaṇ purastacchukamuccarat pasyema śaradah śatan jivema saradah śatan śṛnuyam śaradah śatan prabravam śaradah śatamadinah śyāma śaradah śatan bhuyahca śaradah śatāt.” (Yajurveda-36/24)*

The narrations of Vedic gods always carry some symbolic significance, all of which have profound meaning and are thematically linked to nature and ecological balance. 'Surya' is therefore associated to the sun, the source of heat and light that sustains everything. 'Indra' is associated with rain, harvest and wealth. "Agni" is the god of fire and change and governs all transformation. Vedic hymns are full of simple yet universal words that imbue people with the idea of the importance of nature.

- ❖ Plants are mothers and Goddesses. (Rig Veda Samhita x-97-4)
- ❖ Trees are homes and mansions. (Rig Veda Samhita x-97-5)
- ❖ Sacred grass has to be protected from man's exploitation (Rig Veda Samhita vii-75-8)
- ❖ Plants and waters are treasures for generations. (Rig Veda Samhita vii-70-4)
- ❖ We invoke all supporting Earth on which trees, lords of forests, stand ever firm (Atharva Veda 12:1:27)
- ❖ “Do not cut trees because they remove pollution.” (Rig Veda 6:48:17)
- ❖ “One should not destroy the trees.” (Rig Veda Samhita vi-48-17)

[kermani, 2021]

### Teachings across Faiths:

It's not only Hinduism but all major religions of the world preach in one voice the importance of nature and how to protect our environment from pollution, how ecological balance can be maintained for the human civilisation to thrive, some of the excerpts from the UN Conference on the environment held in China can be cited here for clarity.

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| Hinduism:     | “There is an inseparable bond between man and nature. For man, there can't be an existence if removed from nature” – [Amma, 2011]  |
| Buddhism:     | Our ancestors viewed the Earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case only if we care for it” - [Dalai Lama, 1990]  |
| Christianity: | “We must treat nature with the same awe and wonder that we reserve for human beings, and we do not need this insight in order to believe in God or to prove his existence. We need it to breathe; we need it for us simply to be” - [Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, 2010] |
| Islam:        | Devote thyself single-mindedly to the faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah, - [Qur'an, 30:30]   |
| Jainism:      | “Do not injure, abuse, oppress, enslave, torment, torture, or kill any creature or living being”- [Mahavira]   |
| Judaism:      | And God said: “Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon  |

the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed – to you it shall be for food” - [Gen 1:29]

Sikhism: “You yourself created the universe, and you are pleased ... You, Yourself the bumblebee, flower, fruit and tree” [Guru Granth Sahib, Maru Sohele, p.1020]

Taosim: “The original nature is the eternal law. To know the nature’s law is to be enlightened. To know the constant law of nature is to be generous. Being generous, one is impartial, one is the sovereign, sovereign is the nature itself”- [lao-Tzu, Tao te Ching, Chapter 16]

[UNGP 2019]

There are many initiatives and discussions between religious and faith leaders and international organizations, especially several initiatives under the aegis of the United Nations [UN]. Some of the important discussions include the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative. This initiative brings together the commitment, influence, and ethos of different religions to restore the world’s forests and supports the indigenous peoples who see them as protectors. Similarly, ‘Greenfaith’ is a global multi-faith movement for safety and the environment. Some of the recent examples can be cited here to show – how environmental activists and groups are actively drawing religion across faiths into action for ecological needs.

In 1985, the World Wildlife Fund founded the UK-based Alliance of Religion and Conservation to partner with churches to work together to protect the environment. WWF’s Sacred Earth: Faith for Conservation works with faith-based organizations and faith-based communities to pledge that the land is a sacred responsibility that requires our attention. Similarly, in November 2017, recognizing the importance of faith communities as key actors, the United Nations "Environmental Program" pledged to achieve the Sustainable Developmental Goals and help support the 2030 Agenda initiative that indicates that "spiritual values motivate the individual behaviour of more than 80% of people".

## Conclusion:

India has a rich history and tradition that dates back to thousands of years. Our Vedas are the oldest scriptures and represent wisdom and knowledge. For ages, people have adapted to nature, but without the motif of destroying it as it is today. Our scriptures seldom propagate the destruction of nature rather imbibe the value of trees and plants, their beauty and charm. It gives their due place and value in life, their relationship with people and, above all, justifies their divinity. It is beyond question that the environment shall always remain man’s permanent master. The study of the environment that the ancient Indians had since childhood helped to develop in them a sense of pride, respect, understanding, gratitude, a relationship and helped to build a mental faculty to stay in agreement with the natural environment. In the current situation, global changes modify the nature and quality of the environment.

The world has become a "global village". We do live in an information-rich society which is not very respectful towards the environment. The need of the hour is to focus on ancient Indian practices which must be rejuvenated to give modern humans a sense of nature. Scientists are constantly studying the vulnerability of the Earth’s environment and tracking changes resulting out of global warming. Economists warn that the growing disaster is affecting people’s quality of life, and policymakers are focused on creating policies to reduce the health and environmental



impacts of human development. Scientists now call it "Green Spirituality". The main idea of "Green Spirituality" is how religion and the environment are interconnected, and how religious roles can provide hope for a better future. It promotes reflection and connection with the world. This is high time, "Green Spirituality" should be encouraged across faiths, propagated amongst the believers to abide by the commandments of the scriptures and holy souls they follow and should seek to use spiritual practices from around the world to support efforts to restore Earth's ecosystems and prevent future disasters.

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