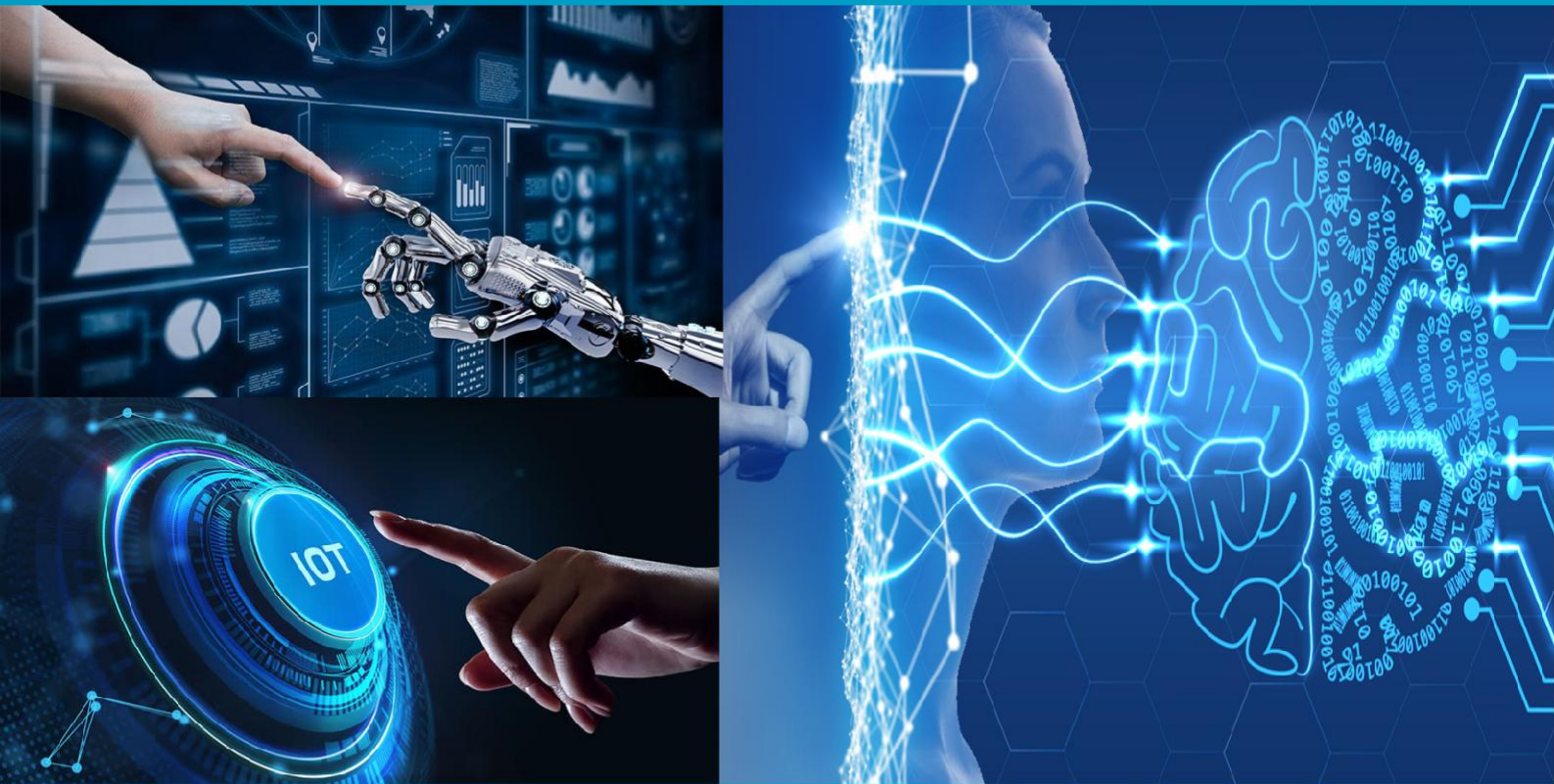




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# Environmental Awareness in Ancient India

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**ABSTRACT:** In Modern Days Environmental Science And Ecology Is Subject Of Modern Science In Which We Study Environment And Its Constituents. Environmental Degradation As A Phenomenon Can Also Be Defined As Deterioration Of The Earth's Natural Surroundings, As A Result Of Excessive Exploitation Of The Available Resources. The Natural World Has Been Totally Altered By The New And Improved Methods Of Production. Present-Day Mankind Is Being Confronted By Serious Crises Due To The Depletion Of Natural Resources And Environmental Degradation Causing Great Damage To Human Sensibility, Man's Harmonious Relation-Ship With Nature. June 5, 2011 Was Decided To Be Celebrated As World Environment Day By The United Nations General Assembly In 1972 And The Number Of Ngos And Private Agencies Working For The Cause Of Environment Protection Has Been Increased Tremendously In India In The Last Two Decades. With All These Positive Signs Of Awareness, This Paper Is An Effort To Examine Our Forgotten Culture Which Was Very Environment Sensitive. Ancient Literature Reveals A Full Knowledge Of The Undesirable Effects Of Environmental Degradation, Whether Caused By Natural Factors Or Human Activities. Hindu Philosophy Has Always Been Very Environment Friendly And They Were Very Sensitive About Environment. The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita And Puranas Be Full Of The Messages For Preservation Of Environment And Ecological Balance.

**KEYWORDS:** environmental, awareness, ancient, India, resources, human, puranas, Bhagwad Gita

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vedas Are Universally Accepted To Be The Most Precious Indian Heritage. The Vedas Have Knowledge Of All Types And The Main Vedic Views Revolve Around The Concept Of Nature And Life. Vedas Contained Several References On Environment Conservation, Ecological Balance, And Weather Cycle. This Indicates The High Level Of Awareness Of The People At That Time. In Ancient India, Protection And Cleaning Up Of Environment Was The Essence Of Vedic Culture In Hindu Philosophy Forests, Trees And Wildlife Protection Held A Place Of Special Respect. Cutting Green Trees Was Prohibited And Punishment Was Prescribed For Such Acts. The Vedas Attach Great Importance To Environmental Protection And Purity. They Persist On Safeguarding The Habitation, Proper Afforestation And Non-Pollution. In Fact, Man Is Forbidden From Exploiting Nature. He Is Taught To Live In Harmony With Nature And Recognize That Divinity Prevails In All Elements, Including Plants And Animals. The Rishis Of The Past Have Always Had A Great Respect For Nature. [1,2]

A Verse From Rig-Veda Says, "Thousands And Hundreds Of Years If You Want To Enjoy The Fruits And Happiness Of Life Then Take Up Systematic Planting Of Trees." The Term Pollution Did Not Exist At That Time But They Call It Poisoning Of Environment. They Believe That The Five Great Elements (Space, Air, Fire, Water And Earth) That Constitute The Environment Are All Derived From Prakriti, The Primal Energy And Our Human Body Is Composed Of These And Related To These Five Elements, And Connects Each Of The Elements To One Of The Five Senses. [3,4] The Human Nose Is Related To Earth, Tongue To Water, Eyes To Fire, Skin To Air And Ears To Space. This Bond Between Our Senses And The Elements Is The Foundation Of Our Human Relationship With The Natural World. For Hinduism, Nature And The Environment Are Not Outside Us. They Are An Inseparable Part Of Our Existence, And They Constitute Our Very Bodies. The Vedas Stress The Need For Protection And Development Of Forests. Human Beings Have To Safeguard The Trees. The Vedas Emphasize That The Plants And Trees Are The Treasures For Generations. It Is Amazing That The People In Vedic Times Regarded Nature And The Environment In A Holistic Manner And Revered Each Of Its Constituents And Entities By Carefully Preserving Them. "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". "Do Not Cut Trees, Because They Remove Pollution." (Rig Veda, 6:48:17) "Do Not Disturb The Sky And Do Not Pollute The Atmosphere." (Yajur Veda, 5:43) Besides Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Sutras And Other Sacred Texts Of Hinduism Contains A Number Of References Of The Worship Of The Nature. Our Sanskrit Mantras Daily Remind Us That Our Rivers, Mountains, Trees, Animals And The Earth Deserve Respect And Dignity. [5,6] The Upanishads Are A Collection Of Texts That Contain Some Of The Central Philosophical Concepts Of [Hinduism](#). Some Of Which Are Shared With [Buddhism](#) And [Jainism](#). Hinduism Recognizes That The Human Body

Is Composed Of And Related To These Five Elements, And Connects Each Of The Elements To One Of The Five Senses. The Human Nose Is Related To Earth, Tongue To Water, Eyes To Fire, Skin To Air And Ears To Space. This Link Between Our Senses And The Elements Is The Foundation Of Our Human Relationship With The Natural World. For Hinduism, Nature And The Environment Are Not Outside Us. They Are An Inseparable Part Of Our Existence. "As The Wide-Spreading Nargodha (Sanskrit For Banyan) Tree Is Compressed In A Small Seed, So At The Time Of Dissolution, The Whole Universe Is Comprehended In Thee As Its Germ; As The Nargodha Germinates From The Seed, And Becomes Just A Shoot And Then Rises Into Loftiness, So The Created World Proceeds From Thee And Expands Into Magnitude." The Varah Purana Says, "One Who Plants One Peepal, One Neem, One Bar, Ten Flowering Plants Or Creepers, Two Pomegranates, Two Oranges And Five Mangos, Does Not Go To Hell." [7,8]

## II.DISCUSSION

The Hindu Religion Also Stresses Awareness In The Conservation Of Trees. In The Epic Ramayana Ravana, When Faced With Calamity, Speaks As Follows:... I Have Not Cut Down Any Fig Tree In The Month Of Vaisakh, Why Then Does This Calamity Befall Me? This Serves As A Good Example To Illustrate How Hindus Respected Trees Which Constituted A Large Part Of Our Environment. In The Words Of The Ancient Immemorial Indian Poet, [Kalidasa](#): "The Himalaya Is A Great Devatatma, A Great Spiritual Presence, Stretching From The West To The Eastern Sea Like A Measuring Rod To Gauge The World's Greatness." The Mahabharata Hints That The Basic Elements Of Nature Constitute [9,10] The Cosmic Being — The Mountains His Bones, The Earth His Flesh, The Sea His Blood, The Sky His Abdomen, The Air His Breath And Agni (Fire) His Energy. The Whole Emphasis Of The Ancient Hindu Scriptures Is That Human Beings Cannot Separate Themselves From Natural Surroundings And Earth Has The Same Relationship With Man As The Mother With Her Child. Planting And Preservation Of Trees Are Made Sacred In Religious Functions. "The Purchaser Of Flesh Performs Himsa (Violence) By His Wealth; He Who Eats Flesh Does So By Enjoying Its Taste; The Killer Does Himsa By Actually Tying And Killing The Animal. Thus, There Are Three Forms Of Killing: He Who Brings Flesh Or Sends For It, He Who Cuts Off The Limbs Of An Animal, And He Who Purchases, Sells Or Cooks Flesh And Eats It — All Of These Are To Be Considered Meat-Eaters." [11,12]— The Mahabharata Bhagavad Gita, Contain Many References To The Omnipresence Of The Supreme Divinity, Including Its Presence Throughout And Within Nature. In Sloka 20, Chapter 10, [Lord Krishna](#) Says, "I Am The Self Seated In The Heart Of All Creatures. I Am The Beginning, The Middle And The Very End Of All Beings". All Beings Have, Therefore To Be Treated Alike." In The Bhagavad Gita, Krishna Compares The World To A Single Banyan Tree With Unlimited Branches In Which All The Species Of Animals, Humans And Demigods Wander. Indian Consciousness Is Full Of Trees And Forests. Various Trees, Fruits And Plants Have Special Significance In Hindu Ritual. Hindu Religious Scripts, Stories, And Rituals Have Attempted To Drive Home The Importance Of Preserving Nature By Deifying It Through The Centuries. Lord Krishna Says In The Bhagavad Gita (9.26): "Patram Pushpam Phalam Toyam, Yo Mey Bhaktya Prayachhati Tadaha Bhakti Yupa hutam Asnaami Prayataatmanaha" I Accept A Leaf, Flower, Fruit Or Water Or Whatever Is Offered With Devotion. The Coconut Tree And The Coconut Are Sacred And Are Offered To God During Worship. Mango Leaves Are Used As Festoons During Pujas And Auspicious Events. All Flowers And Leaves Of Plants Are Used During Worship For Pushpa Puja And Patra Puja. The Lotus Is A Sacred Flower And Plant For Hindus. The 'Tulsi' Plant Or Indian Basil Is An Important Symbol In The Hindu Religious Tradition. [13,14]

Kautilya's Arthashastra, An Ancient Indian Treatise On Administration, Economic Policy, Taxation, Diplomacy, Planning And Other Dimensions Of Statecraft, Remains Very Much Relevant In Today's World As Well. The Text Was Influential Until The 12th Century, When It Disappeared. It Was Rediscovered In 1904 By R. Shamasastri, Who Published It In 1909. The First English Translation Was Published In 1915. This Treatise Provides Lot Of Knowledge About Environment And Its Conservation. It Describes The Maintenance Of Public Sanitation And Preservation Of Environment, Forest And Wildlife. Even In The Affairs Of The State, The Administration And The Ruler Were Directed To Preserve And Promote Environmental Welfare. In The Arthashastra, Kautilya Suggests The Need To Develop Abhayaranya Or Abhayavana, Forest And Animal Sanctuaries, [15,16] Where Trees And Animals Would Both Reside Free From The Fear Of Slaughter. Kautilya Also Prescribed The Post Of A Forest Superintendent And Penalties For Poaching And Causing Damage To Forests, Especially Productive Ones. In Topic 35, He Recommends That The "Superintendent Of Forest Produce" Appointed By The State For Each Forest Zone Be Responsible For Maintaining The Health Of The Forest, Protecting Forests To Assist Wildlife Such As Elephants (Hastivana), But Also Producing Forest Products To Satisfy Economic Needs, Products Such As Teak, Palmyra, Mimosa, Sissu, Kauki, Sirisha, Catechu, Latifolia, Arjuna, Tilaka, Tinisa, Sal, Robesta, Pinus, Somavalka, Dhava, Birch, Bamboo, Hemp, Balbaja (Used For Ropes), Munja, Fodder, Firewood, Bulbous Roots And Fruits For Medicine,





Flowers. The Arthashastra Also Reveals That The Mauryas Designated Specific Forests To Protect Supplies Of Timber, As Well As Lions And Tigers, For Skins. Kautilya Gives The Notion That New Forests Were To Be Planned, At The Time Of A New State Having Been Established, On An Unoccupied Land And The Land Unsuitable For Agriculture. The Arthashastra's Directives On Water Indicate That It Was Regarded As A „Collective, Not A Private Commodity“ And Was Considered Extremely Precious. Fines Were Also Prescribed For A Number Of Acts That Adversely Affected Water Bodies, „For Obstructing Or Diverting A Water Course“, For „Damaging Embankments“ Etc. He Emphasized On Efficient Water Management And The Detailed Instructions On How To Do It. He Recommended Practices For The Conservation Of Natural Resources, Especially Living Resources. He Was Aware That The Future Productivity Of Natural Resources Is Linked To Their Appropriate Conservation. Also, In Line With Hindu Traditions, He Recommends Kindness Towards Animals. Arthashastra Reveals The Attention Focused On Wildlife In The Mauryan Period: Certain Forests Were Declared Protected And Called Abhayaranya Like The Present Day 'Sanctuary'. Heavy Penalties, Including Capital Punishment, Were Prescribed For Offenders Who Entrapped, Killed Or Otherwise Molested Elephants, Deer, Bison, Birds, Or Fish, Amongst Other Animals.[17,18]

### III. RESULTS

In The Galaxy Of The Prophets Of Humanism Of The 20th Century, Rabindranath Tagore, The Nobel Laureate, Occupies A Frontal Position. He Churned Out Poems, Plays And Short Stories Emphasizing The Need To Protect Nature. Human Interaction With Nature Was A Persistent Concern Of Rabindranath Tagore From His Very Early Age. Nature Runs As A Consistent Theme In All Of Rabindranath Tagore's Work. He Was An Environmental Pioneer And Wanted Harmony Between Progress And Preservation. He Had Been Expressive About The Exploitation Of Environment Even A Century Ago. Tagore First Became Concerned About Man's Impact On The Environment After Seeing An Oil Spill At Sea On His Way To Japan In 1916, Decades Before An Environmental Movement Emerged In The West. Archana Bhattacharjee Analysed Tagore's Selected Nature Poems, Written A Century Back Viz. "The Tame Bird Was In A Cage" And "I Plucked You Flower" In The Light Of The Above Theory To See What Kind Of Message To Humanity They Carry Regarding Environmental Threats The World Is Facing Today. In His Time Problems Like Water And Air Pollution, Problems Of Development Waste, Habitat Destruction, [19] Threats To Bio-Diversity, Resource Depletion And Global Green House Problems Were Not Properly Understood And Recognised. Tagore With His Sensitive Farsighted-Ness Realised The Basic Links Between Industrialism, Consumerism And Militarism And Properly Felt That The Success Of Growth Ultimately Would Lead To Its Own Demise. He Wrote Poems, Plays, Short Stories And Also A Separate Group Of Lyrics In The Form Of Poems For Songs Under The Name Of "Prakriti Parjaay" (Here, Prakriti Means Nature And Parjaay Means Genre), Emphasising The Need To Protect Nature As Well As Our Mother Earth. Tagore Not Only Wrote Extensively On Man's Relationship With The Environment But Implemented It Too By Building Santiniketan. It Is Surrounded By Greenery On All Sides. He Created An Example For The Whole World In Terms Of The Relationship Between Nature And Humans.[20]

If We Look Back Into Our Ancient Literature, It Provides A Good Deal Of Knowledge About Each And Every Aspect Of Life. We Have Rich Literature Inherited By Our Ancestors. In Case Of Environment Conservation We Can Learn A Lot From Our Ancestors. Dr. Abdul Kalam's Words: "Ancient India Was A Knowledge Society That Contributed A Great Deal To Civilization. We Need To Recover The Status And Become A Knowledge Power. Spirituality Must Be Integrated With Education. We Should Ignite Our Dormant Inner Energy And Let It Guide Our Lives. The Radiance Of Such Minds Embarked On Constructive Endeavour Will Bring Peace, Prosperity, And Bliss To The Nation." Our Ancestors Have Long Been Among The Most Outspoken Defenders Of Nature's Balance. For The Hindu, Nature Is Sacred, To Be Respected And Cared For. Thus We Can Say That Ancient Indians Were Very Much Aware About The Ecology And Sustainability. It Helps In Solving Specific Environmental Problems And The Modern Principles Of Sustainability Were Adopted At That Time. But Unfortunately We Have Forgotten Those Golden Principles Which Can Be Very Helpful In Now Days. To Have A Balanced, Peaceful Life, We Should Not Create Disturbances To Our Surroundings. We Should Make Extensive Efforts In Planting Trees, Conserving Soil, Protecting Biological Diversity, And Finding New Ways Of Producing Natural Energy Could Help To A Greater Extent In Maintaining A Balanced Environmental Harmony In Our Present World.[19,20]

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

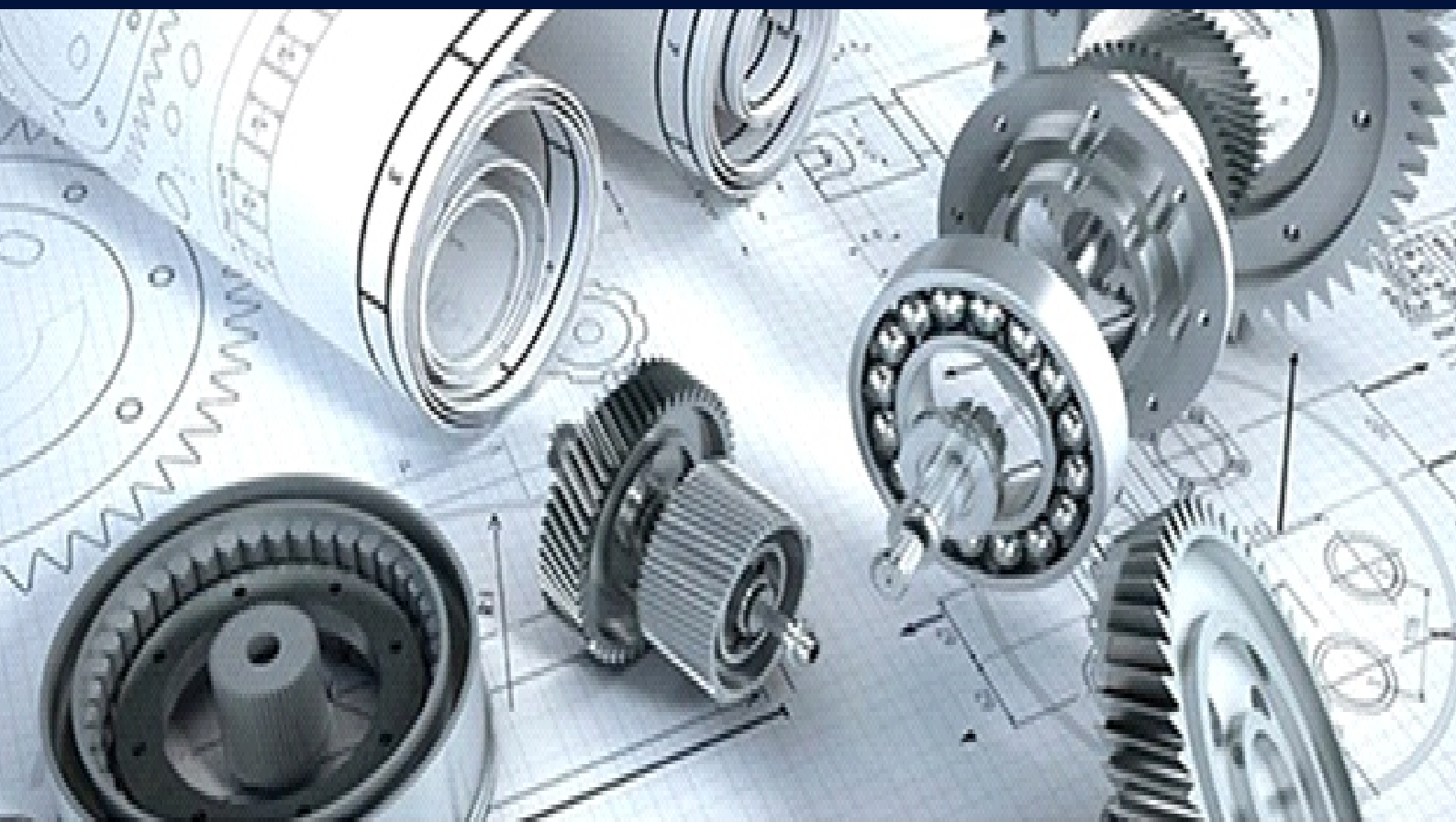
There is an urgent need for environmental awareness in order to re-establish the broken link between modern man and nature. The belief that nature can be exploited indiscriminately can be shattered only when man realizes that the price he is paying for manipulating nature is in fact making man reach the end of his 'carrying capacity'. The impact of climate change is having a drastic effect on life on earth leading to global warming, green house effect, natural and



manmade disasters. Global environmental awareness is of recent origin. But in India, evidence of this awareness can be found even in the pre-Vedic Aryan period. Whether it was due to awe and wonder or love and respect for the nature, the ancient Indian societies founded on the Vedic philosophical traditions had established a way of living that was in tune with nature and its surroundings. These ancient Indian thoughts throw light upon the protection of flora and fauna, about the importance given to panchamahabhutas, fundamental principles of ecology, about the importance of performing yajnas and providing administrative rules on environmental issues.[20]

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