

Biodiversity in **HINDUISM**

"I bow my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance." - Mahatma Gandhi

Hindu philosophy has always had a humane and dignified view of the sacredness of all life, and that humans are but one link in the symbiotic chain of life and consciousness. Throughout the long history of India, Hindus have shared a fascination with, and respect for, Nature and animals and has rightly been called up as a "environmental friendly religion". Hindus regarded rivers, mountains, lakes, animals, flora, the mineral world, as well as the stars and planets as manifestation of God and worshipped them.

No religion, perhaps, lays as much emphasis on environmental ethics as does Hinduism. It believes in ecological responsibility and says that the '**Earth is our mother**'. It champions protection of animals, which it considers also have souls, and promotes vegetarianism. It has a strong tradition of non-violence or ahimsa. Evergreen trees were regarded as symbols of eternal life and to cut them down was to invite the wrath of the **gods**. Groves in forests were looked upon as habitations of the **gods**. It was under a Banyan tree that the Hindu sages sat in a trance seeking enlightenment. Hinduism believes in the all-encompassing sovereignty of the divine.

Ayurveda, the science of life, which is a complete health and medicine system based on nature and its regenerating forces. Then we have **Vastu Shastra**, which teaches us how to place and build dwellings, according to the environment it is situated in. Another facet of Hinduism's environmental concern is to do with food is a very physical example: **vegetarianism**. Typically, Hindu social thought has always included an ecological dimension.

The Mahabharata, Ramayana, Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Puranas and Smriti contain the earliest messages for preservation of environment and ecological balance. Nature, or Earth, has never been considered a hostile element to be conquered or dominated. 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 Vedic Hymn to the Earth in Atharva Veda, - '**Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivyah**' means 'Earth is my mother, I am her son.' Mother Earth is celebrated for all her natural bounties and particularly for her gifts of herbs and vegetation. Her blessings are sought for prosperity in all endeavours and fulfilment of all righteous aspirations. " Pancha Mahabhutas (The five great elements) - **space, air, fire, water, and earth** - are the foundation of an interconnected web of life. 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 bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with the

natural world. **Dharma** - often translated as "duty" - can be reinterpreted to include our responsibility to care for the earth.

Animals were revered too. **Kamadhenu** was the wish-fulfilling cow, whose offspring are all the cattle on earth. The word "go" or cow was very important: gopura was the entrance to the village, gotra was the clan to which a person belonged, goshti was an assembly of good men, gosarga and godhuli represented dawn and dusk, while gopa and govalla were officials. Krishna even lifts Mount Govardhana to save cattle from Indra's wrath. **But the greatest honour given to animals was their elevation as the vehicles of the Gods**, - Shiva rode the bull, Vishnu the eagle, Brahma the swan, and so on.

'God is in all things and all things are in God'. The **Mahabharata** hints that the basic elements of nature constitute 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. In the **Charak Sanhita**, destruction of forests is taken as destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty. 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."

The **Rig Veda is a celebration of nature**, its hero the God of Rain. Nature has beautifully described in Rig Veda as:

*"Nature's beauty is an art of God.
Let us feel the touch of God's invisible hands in everything beautiful.
By the first touch of His hand rivers throb and ripple.
When He smiles the sun shines, the moon glimmers,
the stars twinkle, the flowers bloom.
By the first rays of the rising sun, the universe is stirred;
the shining gold is sprinkled on the smiling buds of rose;
the fragrant air is filled with sweet melodies of singing birds,
the dawn is the dream of God's creative fancy." (Rig Veda 1.6.3)*

A prayer that offers respect to nature and mother Earth now asks for her protection. In our arrogance and ignorance we have destroyed the environment of this planet. We have polluted the oceans, made the air unbreathable, desecrated nature and decimated wildlife. But the Vedantic seers knew that man was not something apart from nature, and, therefore, they constantly exhort us that, while we work for own salvation, we must also work for the welfare of all beings.



Biodiversity in ISLAM

"The absolute destruction of any species of animals or plant by man cannot be justified; nor should any be harvested at a rate in excess of its natural regeneration."

- Environmental Protection in Islam (part 5 of 7)

Islam is the second largest religion often termed as Deen-e-Abrahami (Religion of Abraham) started by Prophet Mohammed in 6th century AD. Arabic word "Islam" means peace & submission. To live peacefully and progressively, the mankind needs healthy environment with ample natural resources. Islamic teachings and philosophy are intricately close to the concept of biodiversity conservation. There is no denying the importance of plants and animals as living resources of enormous benefit, without which neither man nor other species could survive. God has not made any of His creatures worthless: every single form of life is special and intricate and each warrants special respect. Every form of life is genetic resource, each species and variety is unique and irreplaceable - once lost, is lost for ever.

It has repeatedly been mentioned in Holy Quran through various verses to maintain the balance of nature. It has also warned time and again not to be wasteful to maintain peace and harmony with all other creations. Protection, preservation and compassion for God's creation other than the human beings can be regarded as "Haqqul Makhloof" (rights of animals/Plants etc) which is the third most important obligation in Islamic doctrine after "Haqqul-Allah" (rights of God) and "Haqqul-Insan" (rights of humans). There is hardly any chapter of Islamic "Fiqh, Ijma or Qiyas" (by-laws) that does not deal with animals and their habitat.

By virtue of their unique function of producing food from the energy of the sun, plants constitute the basic source of sustenance for animal and human life on earth. Planting trees and cultivating land instead of leaving it barren and unfruitful is an integral part of Islam. The Prophet Mohammad told his followers that they would be rewarded by God for taking care of the earth. God has said:

"Then let man consider his nourishment: that We pour down the rain in showers, and We split the earth in fragments, and therein make the grain to grow, and vines and herbs, and olives and palms, and gardens of dense foliage, and fruits and fodder - provision for you and your cattle." (Quran 80:24-32)

Islam has urged humanity to be kind to nature and not to abuse the trust that has been placed on the shoulders of man. In fact, to be kind to animals is an integral part of Islam for Muslims. In addition to their importance as nourishment, plants enrich the soil and protect it from erosion by wind and water. They also conserve water by detaining its runoff; moderate the climate and produce oxygen which we breathe. They are also of immense value as medicines, oils, perfumes, waxes, fibers, timber, and fuel. God has said in the Glorious Quran:

"Have you seen the fire you kindle? Was it you who grew its timber or did We grow it? We have made it a reminder, and a comfort for the desert dwellers." (Quran 56:71-73)

Animals in turn provide sustenance for plants, for one another, and for man. Their dung and their bodies enrich the soil and the seas. They contribute to the atmosphere by respiration and by their movements and migrations contribute to the distribution of plants. They provide food for one another and provide mankind with leather, hair and wool, medicines and perfumes, and means of conveyance, as well as meat, milk, and honey. And for their highly developed senses and perceptions and their social interrelationships, animals are accorded special regard in Islam. For God considers them living societies exactly like mankind. God has declared in the Glorious Quran:

“There is not an animal on the earth or any being that wings its flight, but are a people like unto you...”
(Quran 6:38)

The Glorious Quran mentions the aesthetic functions of these creatures as objects of beauty in addition to their other functions. God has made in plants and animals that which excites wonder and joy in man’s soul. It also mentions other functions which these creatures perform and which man may not perceive. God has said, “Do you not see that to God bow down in worship all things that are in the heavens and on the earth - the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals...” (Quran 22:18)

According to Muslim belief, the earth is a sanctuary in which mankind was made to dwell in comfort. The vast oceans, forests, and mountains that make up the bountiful planet have been subdued by God for our enjoyment and productive use. Further, God compels Muslims in the Qur’an to respect and revere the environment when he says, “Greater indeed than the creation of man is the creation of the heavens and the earth (40 : 57)

Islam emphasizes all measures for the survival and perpetuation of these creatures so that they can fully perform the functions assigned to them. Love for nature and its conservation has been strongly backed in teachings of many Islamic Sufis, poets and philosophers. The absolute destruction of any species of animals or plant by man cannot be justified; nor should any be harvested at a rate in excess of its natural regeneration. This applies to hunting and fishing, forestry and wood-cutting for timber and fuel, grazing, and all other utilization of resources. It is imperative that the genetic diversity of living beings be preserved - both for their own sake and for the good of mankind and all other creatures as is reflected in the following lines of Qur’an (31 : 10)

*“He created the heavens without any pillars that you can see;
He sat on the earth- mountains standing firm lest it should shake with you
He scattered through it beasts of all kinds, we send down rain from the sky
And produce on earth every kind of creature, in pairs.*



Biodiversity in **SIKHISM**

*"The Lord infused His Light into the dust, and created the world, the universe.
The sky, the earth, the trees, and the water - all are the Creation of the Lord. (SGGS page 723)*

The Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, declares that the purpose of human beings is to achieve a blissful state and to be in harmony with the earth and all of God's creation. The Sikh Gurus showed the world the way to live in harmony with the environment and all their constructions adhered to this principle. Guru Har Rai, the seventh Sikh Guru developed Kiratpur Sahib as a town of parks and gardens. Located on the banks of tributary of the Sutlej, he planted flower and fruit bearing trees all over the area. This created a salubrious environment, attracting beautiful birds to the town and turning it into an idyllic place to live in. The Sikh Scriptures emphasize the importance of the elements in this Shabad /hymn (SGGS page 146):

*"Air is the Guru, Water is the Father, and Earth is the Great Mother of all.
Day and night are the two nurses, in whose lap all the world is at play.
Good deeds and bad deeds-the record is read out in the Presence of the Lord of Dharma.
According to their own actions, some are drawn closer, and some are driven farther away.
Those meditated on the Naam, and departed after having worked by the sweat of their brow
O Nanak, their faces are radiant in the Court of the Lord and others are saved along with them"*

Further, 'Gurbani' refers to various species of trees, eulogizing species, which are useful to the world and its various beings and creatures. The Gurus inferred that it is not the girth, size, or beautiful flowers that determine the significance of a tree but its usefulness that makes it important. The trees that have sanctity in Sikhism include Bohr (*Ficus bengalensis*), Pipli (*Ficus religiosa*), Jand (*Prosopis spicigera*), Garna (*Capparis horrida*), Karir (*Capparis aaphylla*), Phalahi (*Acacia modeta*), Reru (*Mimasa leucophloea*), Luhura (*Cordia latifolia*), Tahli (Shisham), Imli (Tamarind), Amb (*Mangifera indica*), Harian velan, Neem (margassa), Ritha (*Sapindus mukorosa*), Kalp (*Mitragina parvifolia*) and Ber (*Zizyphus jujube*).

Perhaps no other religion has given so much importance to vegetation the way Sikhism has. Four of the most sacred trees associated with the Sikh shrines, namely beri of 'Dukh Bhanjani Beri' of Sri Harmandir Sahib, 'Beri of Baba Budha' (also of Sri Harmandir Sahib), Beri of 'Gurdwara Ber Sahib' of Sultanpur Lodhi and 'Beri of Lachi Ber' of Sri Harmandir Sahib highlight the role that trees have played in Sikh history. The world started talking about environment and ecological balance only during the past three to four decades while the Gurus realized their significance more than 500 years ago.

The importance of Air, Water and Earth to life has been emphasized over and over again in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The earth is referred to as the mother and as such requires our respect. Great care needs to be taken to ensure that no damage occurs to it while the Sikh is going about his or her daily life. The pollution of these three elements is against the principles laid down by the Gurus. On page 723 of SGGS, the Guru says – **"Air, water, earth and sky – the lord has made these His home and temple"**. The Sikh Gurus built many Gurdwaras surrounded by large pools which supported marine life, especially fish. This was clearly a sign to live in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it.

“Guru Nanak Devji Said - “Within the universe, Earth was created to be a shrine”. According to Sikh’s faith half of the worlds living beings reside in the sea and half on land. Sikh Gurus have narrated many stories of their love for animal, birds, trees, vegetation, river, mountain, sky and biodiversity as a whole. It says that man as superior creation should come for the sustainability of the earth, care for animals, and stress on planting trees. Killing any animal is also strictly prohibited. This belief provides strong support for biodiversity conservation.

In ‘Guru Granth sahib’, the trees have been given much importance to the extent that even the parts of the trees have been looked upon as God. The groups of trees planted near holy places are called “Guru Ke Bagh” or the Garden of Guru. The devotees of Sikh religion have traditionally been planting useful miscellaneous tree species near Gurudwaras, tanks, ponds etc.

It seems, however, that humans have drifted away from that ideal due to which the earth is today saturated with problems. Its lakes and rivers are being choked, marine life getting extinct, forests being denuded and smoky haze enveloping around the cities of the world. The environmental crisis caused by humanity’s exploitation of nature is leading to the depletion of renewable resources, destruction of forests and overuse of land for agriculture and habitation. Today pollution is contaminating air, land, and water. Smoke from industries, homes, and vehicles is in the air. Industrial waste and consumer trash is affecting streams and rivers, ponds and lakes. Much of the waste is a product of modern technology; it is not biodegradable and not reusable, and its long-term consequences are unknown. The viability of many animal and plant species, and possibly that of the human species itself, is at stake.

We are called to the vision of our Gurus and their ideology/teachings that life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a thriving/bountiful nature. Human beings need to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Sikhs believe that an awareness of that sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for our survival. A new “environmental ethic” dedicated to conservation and wise use of the resources provided by a bountiful nature can only arise from an honest understanding and dedicated application of our old, tried and true spiritual heritage.



Biodiversity in **CHRISTIANITY**

*“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them.
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy” (Ps. 96:11-13).*

Like other religions, Christianity teaches that all of creation is a loving act of God and if the humans destroy God's creation, there is always a risk of destroying themselves. The verse *'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it'* (Ps. 24:1) proclaims that the Earth is of God and we are accountable to God for how we use other creatures.

Throughout the Bible up to the last chapter of Revelation, we find the mention of a variety of trees. Apart from trees, we also find citation of birds, wild animals, sea creatures and other animals in Bible. The King James version of the Bible mentions seven flowers, seven vegetables, several spices, and thirty-seven differently named trees. John Calvin (d. 1564) wrote in his commentary on Genesis that the *"custody of the garden was given in charge to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition that, being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain."*

Out of the estimated 5 to 15 million species of living organisms which live on earth, only 1.75 million have been identified. Many species which though not known by specialists are equally essential in the food web of the biosphere. It is estimated that from 1% to 10% of the world's species could become extinct in the next 25 years, mostly as a result of human activities. This rate of extinction is 50 to 100 times the average expected natural rate of extinction and in some areas may rise to 1,000 times.

According to the Bible, all creatures are good in themselves and they are not just for our use. In this regard, Pope John Paul II said - *'Nature should be respected and preserved so that by establishing a healthy proper relationship with it, people can be led to contemplate the mystery of God's greatness and love.'* Similarly, according to Archbishop of Canterbury, *"God's glory is to be found in the whole of the vast order of the universe and in the miraculous detail of nature in all its forms"*.

A tree is a vertical figure projected toward Heaven and its vital strength reminds us of the victory of life over death. The trees have a deep religious meaning and throughout the Bible, we find citation of its different species at a number of places, some of which are:

The Sycamore or Fig Tree: It is the first species mentioned by name in the Bible. Its fruit is green and not easily detected among the leaves until it is nearly ripe. Jesus came to a fig tree, desiring fruit, but found only leaves. He cursed the tree, and it dried up from the roots. Adam and Eve used fig leaves to try to hide their sinfulness from the eyes of a searching God. One time a fig tree was used to enable someone to see Jesus.

Olive Tree: It is another tree of importance which became the Biblical symbol for the nation of Israel. This tree has been called an emblem of peace, prosperity, and wealth. When the olive crop fails, it is considered to be a sign of divine wrath. Olive oil was also used in the tabernacle for light and ceremonial anointing by the priests of God. It even finds a place in the book of Genesis.

Cedar tree: The life span of this tree is believed to be of over two thousand years. It was chosen for building not only the temple of the Lord but also Solomon's house and other public edifices in Jerusalem. It was also used for roofing the temple of Diana at Ephesus and Apollo at Utica. The cedar forests in Lebanon were famous and people traveled great distances just to see them. Their life span was often over two thousand years.

Oak Tree: Another tree known for its longevity and stands as a witness to certain events. In the time of the patriarchs, Jacob took the false idols from the members of the household and buried them under an oak. It was by an oak tree that, years later, Joshua took idols from the nation of Israel, who promised to serve only the true God. When the land of Israel was oppressed by Midian, the Angel of the Lord appeared under an oak tree where it made a covenant with Gideon to deliver Israel from their oppression.

Palm Tree: The Palm tree is a sign of joy and happiness and also the symbol of life. This may be the reason why a huge number of martyrs in the book of Revelations were dressed in white robes and holding Palms in their hands. An oriental proverb says that the Palm tree's feet are rooted in water and its head in the fire.

Locust-tree: Another legume, very common in the Holy Land, is the evergreen carob or "locust-tree." Its seed pods, from 6 to 10 inches long, full of a sticky pulp and honey-like syrup when ripe, are used as food for livestock as well as people.

The response of people of this religion on Biodiversity Conservation has been immense. With the deterioration of the environment, more and more Christian clergy are coming up with stronger conviction to restore a healthy environment on this planet for the survival of mankind. Foltz (2003) said - "To date, the strongest high level rhetoric by far has come from the Economical Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, who has declared environmental degradation to be a Sin." Similarly, Dieter Hessel (1998) who contributed enormously towards Biodiversity Conservation and Christianity, has illustrated seven key themes most of which relate to the subject of conservation and are quite logical and convincing.

Let us not forget the verse – **"Jesus was with the wild animals"** mentioned in Mark's Gospel which explains human relationship with nature that includes peace and companionship with the wild animals.



Biodiversity in **BUDDHISM**

It is the belief of Buddhism that moral consciousness, the human mind, the human body, the external world consisting of fauna and flora and society are intricately interconnected. It is also believed that human ignorance is the primary cause of the reduction of biodiversity and the destruction of the natural ecosystem on the planet. Buddhism has long advocated reverence and compassion for all life.

The original, genuine teaching of Buddhism is a theory of universal interconnectedness, which, by dismantling the separate, continuous ego-self, leads to identification with and responsibility for the whole world of beings. Buddha believed in bodily existence and hence to the food chain and to nature as it actually is. While environmentalism emphasizes that natural resources are limited, Buddhism is more direct in encouraging individuals to limit their resource consumption to the optimal satisfaction of the four basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

There are a lot of forests and trees that are directly associated with Gautama Buddha. Creation of gardens near the monasteries and stupas seems to have been derived from the description of the gardens of Nalanda and Takshasila during the time of Lord Buddha. A lot of references to forests have been made mostly in Tripitakas, Attakathas and Jatakas from the Buddha period, some of which are stated below:

Lumbini Vana: According to Pali literature, Lumbini vana was lying between the Kapilavastu kingdom in the west and Devadaha kingdom in the east. Divyavadana gives detailed description of this forest and mentions that Lord Buddha was born in this forest under an Asoka tree.

Ambapali Vana: Various Buddhist literatures have described about this forest which was situated towards Vaisali. Lord Buddha before travelling to Kusinagar for his Mahaparinirvana spent the last year of his life in this forest. Before he travelled to Kusinagar, Lord Buddha accepted the food offered by Amrapali, the owner of this forest, who presented this forest to Lord Buddha and the monk community.

Asoka Tree: The Asoka tree is considered the birth tree, since it was this tree in the Lumbini Vana under which Siddhartha Gautama was born. There are some early sculptures depicting the branch of the Asoka tree which Mayadevi held during the time of delivery.

The Bodhi Tree: The Sacred Fig tree also called the Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) in Hindi, is a species of banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), which is native to India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and China. The Bodhi Tree was a large and very old Sacred Fig tree located in Bodh Gaya, about 100km from Patna under which Gautama Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment or Bodhi. According to Buddhist texts the Buddha, after his Enlightenment, spent a whole week in front of the tree, standing with unblinking eyes, gazing at it with gratitude.

King Asoka was most diligent in paying homage to the Bodhi tree, and held a festival every year in its honour in the month of Kattika. The Bodhi tree and the Sri Maha Bodhi propagated from it are famous specimens of Sacred Fig.

The Sal Tree: Some scholars identified the Sal tree as the one Lord Buddha was born under. However, most Buddhist literature mentions that Lord Buddha passed away (into Mahaparinirvana) under a Sal tree. There are some sculptural panels showing that Lord Buddha passed away in between two Sal trees.

The Banyan Tree: From ancient times, the banyan has been an object of worship with religious and sacred values. Buddhist literatures describe Lord Buddha to have spent his fifteenth rainy season at Kapilavstu in Nigrodharam (monastery constructed in a Banyan forest).

The Jamun Tree: There are several references regarding the association of this tree with Lord Buddha. A sculpture depicting the first meditation of Siddhartha shows that while living at his father's palace, Siddhartha was brought to sit under a Jamun tree (*Syzygium cumini*) to witness a ploughing contest as a representative for the king.

Animals in Buddhist Doctrine: Animals have always been regarded in Buddhist thought as sentient beings, different in their intellectual ability than humans but no less capable of feeling suffering. Furthermore, animals possess Buddha nature (according to the Mahāyāna school) and therefore an equal potential to become enlightened. Moreover, the doctrine of rebirth held that any human could be reborn as an animal, and any animal could be reborn as a human. An animal might be a reborn dead relative, and anybody who looked far enough back through his or her infinite series of lives would eventually perceive every animal to be a distant relative. The Buddha expounded that sentient being currently living in the animal realm have been our mothers, brothers, sisters, fathers, children, friends in past rebirths. One could not, therefore, make a hard distinction between moral rules applicable to animals and those applicable to humans; ultimately humans and animals were part of a single family. They are all interconnected.

The Jātaka stories which tell of past lives of the Buddha in folktale fashion, frequently involve animals as peripheral or main characters, and it is not uncommon for the Bodhisattva (the past-life Buddha) to appear as an animal as well. The stories sometimes involve animals alone, and sometimes involve conflicts between humans and animals; in the latter cases, the animals often exhibit characteristics of kindness and generosity that are absent in the humans.

Also recorded in the Jatakas is how, in a past life as King Shibi, Shakyamuni sacrificed himself to save a dove from a hawk. Recorded in the Golden Light Sutra, is how Shakyamuni in a past life, as Prince Sattva, came across a starving tigress and her cubs, he fed himself to them so that they would survive.

The above examples taken from/found in Buddhist literature show that Buddhism strongly advocates the conservation of all kinds of life forms existing in nature.



Biodiversity in **JAINISM**

"Ahimsa-paramo-dharmah" - is one of the basic virtues of Jainism, which means non-injury to living beings. To kill a living being is considered to be the greatest of sins. Practice of non violence is not just limited to humans or animals but is extended to all forms of life. All living beings are regarded as equal. Jainism also stresses on the moral responsibility of the humans in their mutual dealings and relationships with the rest of the universe and hence it is a religion of compassion which aims at the welfare of all living beings.

An important principle of Jainism as expressed in **Sutrakrta-anga** (1.11.33) is:

'A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated'.

Jain Agams depict nature in a very unique way as it says that five main elements of nature; Prithvi (land, soil, stones, etc), *Jal* (Water resources including cloud), *Agni* (Fire), *Vayu* (Air) and *Aakash* (Sky) are living creatures and must be treated as living beings. These five types of elements go on to form five classes of beings (as shown alongside) such as vegetation, trees and plants, fungi and animals. This unique concept of Jainism restricts its followers from harming any living creature and eventually leads to limited consumption as well as help protect the environment.

Lord Mahavira, who lived in forests and jungles most of the time during his asceticism, attained Keval Gyan (omniscience) on the bank of river Rijuvalika below a Sal tree. It is noteworthy that Mahavira is the 24th and last Tirthankar of Jain and all others also lived their ascetic life in similar manner. They preached sitting in Samavasharana after enlightenment. The Samavasharana itself is a complete ecosystem. Lord Mahavira has clearly warned in Acharanga Sutra (first Jain Anga Sutra) that contamination of any natural resource is not desirable in any case. He has gone into details of contamination. Jainism considers these as weapons to creatures (natural resources).

Due to their perception of 'livingness' of the world, Jains hold an affinity for the ideals of environmental movement. The practice of non-violence in Jainism fosters an attitude of respect for all life forms and assumes the most extreme form. Many Jains wear mask to prevent individual creatures from getting killed while breathing and speaking. The advanced monks and nuns would sweep their path to avoid trampling on insects.

One of the ways Jain monks or the followers of Jainism, observe non violence is by restraining themselves from eating the roots like potato, radish, carrots, ginger etc, especially during the 4 months of rainy season. The reason behind this is they think that during harvest of these vegetables, earth is dug out and the soil organisms are killed more during rainy season. Jains called this period as "Chaumasu" or "Chaturmas". In this period, even the monks do not wander from one place to another in order to avoid any unintentional killing of any form of life. For example, on a rainy day, they would observe fasts as they cannot walk on the wet streets to get "Gochari" (get food for themselves).

Jain scriptures motivate people for minimal consumption. They emphasize on *Tyaga* (Sacrifice). Jain *Shravaka / Shravikas* (Laymen and women) are preached to minimize their *Bhoga* (Consumables). The seventh vow for Jain households is *Bhogopbhog Pariman Vrata* (Vow). This vow restricts them from unlimited consumption of natural resources. Moreover, this vow is a *Shiksha Vrata* (Educational vow). It preaches its observers to learn and educate themselves towards limiting their consumables.

In Jainism, there are 24 Tirthankaras in different generations who revitalized the Jain order every time. The first tirthankara, Bhagvan Rishabhath is said to have received perfect knowledge under a Banyan tree, making the tree sacred to Jains. All 24 tirthankaras have one tree species associated with each of them, under which they are believed to have achieved enlightenment.

Non violence against animals: A famous tale about the merciful King Megharath (whose soul became the sixteenth Tirthankara – Bhagvan Santinath) exemplifies the teachings of the Jain dharma – it is the utmost duty of everyone to protect and help those who are less fortunate than us. Apart from ‘Ahimsa’, all the Jain vows are easily apt to be interested in ecological terms. For example, ‘Aparigraha’; the discipline of non-possession, prevents one from indulging in the acquisition of material goods, one of the root causes of current ecological concerns.

In this tale, two Gods from the court of Indra took the form of a pigeon and a hawk respectively, in order to see whether there actually were kings who were brave and merciful enough to lay their own lives for those who came to them for shelter. On earth, King Megharath was sitting in his court surrounded by his courtiers, when a pigeon flew in from an open window and fell into his lap. At the very instant, a hawk flew into the court and demanded the pigeon, saying it was its prey. King Megharath said that since the pigeon came to him for shelter he cannot give it to the hawk, but offered his own flesh in return. The hawk stated that it wanted the same amount of flesh as the pigeon, so a weighing scale was brought in and the pigeon was put on one while the king cut out some of his own flesh and put it in the other. But no matter how much of his own flesh he put in the scale, the pigeon remained heavier. The king finally got ready to put his entire body on the scale, disregarding protests from his courtiers, saying that it was his duty to protect the bird over anything else. Hearing this, the pigeon and the hawk returned to their divine forms and praised the king for his mercifulness.

Jainism believes that an awareness of the sacred relationship between humans and the environment is necessary for the health of our planet, and for survival of mankind. We are called to the vision of our Tirthankaras and their philosophy that life, for its very existence and nurturing, depends upon a bountiful nature. Human beings need to derive sustenance from the earth and not deplete, exhaust, pollute, burn, or destroy it. Only a healthy “environmental ethic” dedicated to conservation and wise use of the resources can save our planet.

