Indian culture, rural in particular, had to play a great role in the conservation of environment economy and Indian social life. Although it has, during the last century, deteriorated; and its importance has been overlooked with the advent of western culture and modernization; yet its importance could not be ignored. The Indian culture is ingrained in every walk of Indian life style, which is being performed as mythological rituals. During the last few decades it has been ignored, criticized and overlooked and Indian culture has changed to greater extent. Apparently its effects are being visualized, particularly in social, moral and environmental sides.

The biological community is complex and a self-maintaining system dependent on the sun as an external source of energy, but otherwise self-sufficient. It involves a series of cycles in which material is passed from organism to organism and between organism and inorganic environment. The biosphere, the zone of life over the surface of planet earth, is thus dynamic system in which living and inorganic processes are interlocked. In the undisturbed community large numbers of insects live on the leaves, roots, stem and fruits of seed trees. But the plants seem to survive nicely, despite the horde of insects they support. The insects are kept from reaching damaging number by checks and balance of nature by parasites, predators, diseases, dispersal problems and so on. Similarly, wild animals such as herbivores and carnivores in the forest are kept in balance. Thus the living organisms and their environment are inseparably interrelated and interactive. However with advent of men as a producer of food, new relationship was introduced in the system. The biosphere started changing from a system in itself into a “resource” for one of its component species, Homo sapiens. The three major components of the environment are the air, water and the land. These are shared by human beings, other animals and plants. Factors/pollutants affecting/disturbing these components lead to harmful effects on animals and plants in turn to the survival of human beings. Environmental pollution not only threatens the survival of human beings but also affects the vegetation and other animals including microbes. All the countries of the world are very much concerned with environmental pollution. Indian culture has evolved over the experiences of centuries and centuries of experiences of great scholars, teachers, intellectuals and “Rishis” (saints). Indian culture, i.e. moral responsibilities and duties one has to perform, like other religion not only teaches about spiritualism but tells about the way of life one has to live or has to perform throughout his life from childhood till death i.e. salvation. The Hindu dharma rituals by and large, generally have been denounced as superstitious acts, though it is deeply rooted in the maintenance and conservation of environment and wild life, and also in the enhancement and maintenance of social structure and economy, integrity morality and humanism. These are moulded in Indian life style as “Punya karma” i.e. the acts which have beneficial effects and are sustainable socially, economically and environmentally or “Pap karma” i.e. the acts which have harmful effects and are not sustainable socially, economically and environmentally. Such perceptions are clearly ingrained in their life style and can be visualized clearly; which may be classified in the following heads:

A. Protection and conservation of animals and plants – wild life protection

The tradition of wild life conservation in India dates back to Vedic period. Different caste groups in India often have an animal as sacred symbol and members of these groups consider it as their duty to protect these sacred animals. During ancient India kindness towards animals and respecting them was an integral part of social life and religion and helped in maintaining homeostasis in many ways.

1. Killing of animals is considered as ‘Pap’ and Worshipping animals i.e. Vahan of Devtas (Vehicles of various gods) such as tiger, cobra, and owl and vulture etc.is held sacred. This not only saved animals but also helped in maintaining prey base for carnivores, thus helped in maintaining ecosystem by preserving biodiversity. Apart from this some of the Indian villagers still use practices of Feeding insects and birds which conserves food of birds in turn birds and insects help in pollination seed dispersal of plants and fruit bearing trees. Providing drinking water to stray animals by constructing temple water tanks is still practiced in some part of the country in order to save precious livestock wealth. The best example of such practices helping in conservation of our precious wild life is lions of Gir, Gujarat which once reached extinction. Realizing the fact Nawab of Junagadh state of British India put restrictions on hunting of lions by Indian rulers and European merchants. But real story behind conservation of lions rests in the fact that around 99% population of Gujarat in India is

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vegetarian as they consider killing of animals as “pap karma” which helped in sustaining wide range and number of prey base for lions.

2. Feeding aquatic animals such as fish, turtles. During ancient period lord Siddhartha Gautam has proclaimed “a man is not noble because he injures living creatures. He is called noble because he does not injure living being. He has compassion for all living creatures”. King Ashoka had also realised importance of animals and proclaimed “the beloved of god desires the following in respect of all creatures, viz. non-injury to them, restraint in dealing with them and impartiality in the cause of crime committed by them”. He not only banned hunting of few animals but also established world’s first sanctuary near ‘Vikramshila’ around 2200 years back to conserve aquatic dolphin, now the national aquatic animal of India. Thus making aquatic dolphins’ world’s first animal to be conserved.

3. Environmental friendly agricultural practices
   a. Rotational cropping- rotational cropping pattern was in vague but now it is well established that rotational cropping maintains the fertility of soil; it also helps in preventing diseases among crops. Normally microbes and insects are species specific; thus the rotational cropping was not only helpful in preventing the microbes and insects population which spread diseases but also helped in increasing soil fertility. Thus this practice helped in reducing the use of fertilizers, chemicals and insecticides. These fertilizers, chemicals and insecticides have become not only a source of environmental pollution and water pollution but also have disturbed population of microbes and pollinating insects which were helpful in maintaining the natural homeostasis through biodegradation waste too.

   b. Use of organic manure and insecticides - up to first half of twentieth century cow dung and greens were used as manure which were very helpful in keeping fertile capacity of soil and prevented soil and water pollution. Apart from this people used to apply plant products such as ashes particularly cow dung and neem leaves ash was used as dusting powder and oils for protecting the animals and plants against insects and pests.

4. Worshiping and Plantation of green tree is ‘PUNYA KARMA’- Had the saints or Indian intellectuals not realized the importance of green trees, they would have not preached for the plantation of trees. Worshiping trees as adobe of Devas was held sacred, these include mainly the trees/plants which have medicinal value or purify the air thus helping in preventing the environmental pollution they emphasized for plantation, especially for fruit trees, medicinal plants and timber plants, which also benefitted the men economically and environmentally. Such plants helped human beings in solving their food and many health problems by providing fruits and herbal medicine. Medicinal plants also helped in controlling insects which were destroying their usable materials. Big trees provide canopy to protect seedling and small growing plants from scorching sun rays and storms. Their root system as well as plants growing under the trees provided a mechanism to prevent the soil erosion caused by rain and wind. Thus by reducing flow of water helped in recharging the ground water. This system not only provided protection and nutrients to shrubs and grasses but provided congenial abode and also nutrients to microbes, which help in biodegradation a key component in maintaining biological and environmental homeostasis.

5. Destroying or cutting green tree is ‘pap karma’ as protecting green plants helped in maintaining environmental homeostasis and also protected human beings from complete starvation. However with the advent of modern civilization green trees were destroyed in mass, by cutting green forest to meet their ever increasing demand of wood. First victim of modern civilization seems to be the green trees and forests, thus their destruction in mass has disturbed the environment, which has now been realized when environmental problems are threatening the very existence of human being. Hence it has right been said that ‘pap’ karma is source of ‘dukh’ i.e. the act which has harmful and detrimental effects and brings out miseries and troubles.

6. Social forestry was practiced more scientifically to ensure clean air and to maintain sustainability of daily requirement. In Indian villages every villager used to maintain few trees of neem, mahuva, mango and peepal in front of their house and also in corners and small areas besides maintaining a common orchard of village.

Forest cover is gradually reducing throughout the country. According to a study, Uttar Pradesh has been left with a meagre forest cover area after division of Uttaranchal as a separate state. The per capita forest cover is only around 0.01 hectares in U.P. due to population explosion, poverty and rapid urbanisation the scope of increase in forest area is very limited but adopting social forestry, agro forestry in particular is liable to increase the forest cover. reviving the tradition of social forestry and other cultural measures is not only capable of increasing the forest cover, but is also capable of meeting the problems of fuel wood, fodder, timber, environmental degradation and watershed problems. 

**B. Conservation of water and protection of water pollution**

About 70% of our cultivated land falls under the rain-fed areas. Most of the arid and semi-arid regions
have concentration of eroded and degraded resources. Loss of vegetal cover followed by soil degradation through erosion has resulted inlands lacking water as well as soil nutrients. Water shed management is one of the critical factors for improving agricultural production, restoring ecological balances and increasing the productivity, in- turn survival of the human being and other animals. Some of the practices which affected the watershed management, had been recognized in India and adopted as culture are illustrated as below:

1. Worshipping and protecting wells from pollution by making a small Shiv temple on one side of well.
2. Worshipping rivers helped in judicious utilization of water and kept rivers clean.
3. Making “Baweries” (under-ground water storage structure) was very much prevalent in water scarce areas and were major source of water for domestic purpose particularly in deserts and semi deserts regions. These were being dogged/ constructed to harvest the rain water in the areas where water scarcity was being experienced. This not only helped in solving water problem but was also helpful in maintaining ground water level. Considering the value of these effects construction of “Baweries” and wells were considered as “Punya karma”.
4. Temple tanks were constructed at the entrance of temples which acted as a water source for human beings, animals and was also helpful in recharging of underground water and also acted as a niche for aquatic animals.
5. Feeding aquatic animals was also considered as sacred and people used to feed and protect fish and turtles, particularly in rivers, ponds and temple tanks. These aquatic animals also used to feed on other flora and fauna of the water source, thus they helped in cleansing the water sources and in keeping water clean.

Most of the wells in villages become dry during summer; number of such wells is gradually increasing even rivers which were once flowing with considerable amount of water are being scarce of water. Underground water level is also going down gradually; availability of water for domestic and other purposes is also reducing; availability of water for domestic and other purposes is also decreasing. According to estimate, only 84% of India’s urban and 78.4% of rural population has access to drinking water. As per indications, India as a whole may face severe water stress by 2050 with per capita availability of only 1389 cubic meters as against the minimum required 1700 cubic meters. Adoption and revival of Indian/ rural culture, which we used to practice even up to few decades back will be helpful in maintaining the water problems.

All these have significant role in the prevention of environmental deterioration and global warming, which has now been realised globally when it is endangering the very existence of life on the earth due to global warming and environmental pollution, which is increasing gradually. Environmentalist are now advocating to resort too many such practices in order tom prevent further increase in global warming and environmental pollution.

The international green cross (formed in Rio-de- Janeiro in 1992) projected a new ideology for change in human nature as against the present day conquest of nature. The fact that conservation can begin at home and can become a part/ way of life, firmly ingrained in personal habits and ethics need to emphasize. The man was once in spiritual relationship with environment, as trees and rivers were worshiped. This form of paganism helped to preserve the trees and kept the rivers clean as well. Imparting more or less sense collectively, slogans like saving the planet, protect the earth, world environmental day, earth day, wild life week and so on are now being raised or celebrated to create awareness among masses. Mikhail Gorbachev, ex-president of erstwhile USSR once realized the importance of ancient thoughts and mentioned that “without ecology of spirit and ecology of thoughts all our efforts to save mankind would be pointless. When science and rationality cannot help us, there is only one thing that can save us; our conscience and or our moral feelings”.

Intellectuals’ saints and “Rishis” during the past over the centuries had realized the impact of these practices. In order to educate masses and bring these practices in their daily routine saints and Rishis taught in such a way that these practices became part of their life and routine affairs or practices; which gradually was transformed as a culture and became the Indian tradition or culture. These practices were widely adopted by the Indians, which continued over the centuries and still are in existence particularly in the villages and tribal areas. Elucidation of Vedic scripture and understanding of Vedic scripture, in particular “Pap karma” and “Punya karma” enlighten us about the maintainability of the biodiversity, ecology, nature and universe by adopting the “karma” or acts ingrained in the Indian rural culture; which has socially, economically and environmentally beneficial and sustainable effects.

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