CHAPTER 4
NATURAL JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN THE MAHÁBHÁRATA

The word 'justice' means the quality of being just or impartial. The *Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus-* has given the meaning of the word justice as fairness, authority exercised in maintenance of right, judicial proceedings, magistrate, and judge.¹ Sanskrit equivalent to the word justice is न्याय (niyanti anena; ni- i= ghañ), which means method, manner, way, rule, system, plan, fitness, propriety, decorum, law, justice, virtue, equity, righteousness, honesty, etc.² The word justice is often related to legal proceedings. But when it is related to the environment, it means that nature has offered a congenial atmosphere to all creatures for their survival without making any discrimination. Nature has its own law that is governing this world in a proper order. All the living and non-living objects of this material world are revolving within a particular cycle determined by the natural system. Therefore, treating nature fairly, taking due care of it and not violating its law etc., are some of the aspects for which nature gives a positive response. Thus, justice to nature ensures the same response from nature, i.e., justice to the living beings.

It has been proclaimed by various philosophical thoughts that nothing is above the law of nature. The human beings, who have been gifted with a unique intellectual power, should not have the absolute control over other creatures; rather they should learn to live abiding by the laws of nature. They should know that nature has offered due importance and equal justice to every creature. So, every living organism has the equal right to survive. Lives of all creatures are valuable and important as all of them contribute something to the natural system of this Earth. It is the moral responsibility of the human beings to adopt an ethical approach for understanding this law of nature, so that the cycle of life continues in this Earth.

Environmental justice is related to environmental ethics. As per the *Oxford*  

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¹ *Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus-* pp. 412
² *The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary* pp. 573
Dictionary & Thesaurus- iii, the word 'ethics' means moral philosophy, (set of) moral principles. Environmental ethics, an applied ethics is a part of environmental philosophy. It means a set of environmental values and code of conduct to maintain a pleasant relationship between man and nature. The book *Environmental Ethics A Dialogue of Cultures*, Ed. by R. P. Misra states: "Environmental Ethics is an internalized code of behaviour that produces an ecologically sound development process. Each culture has its own environmental code to maintain a harmonious relationship between man and nature ensuring continuing material and cultural enrichment of the society." Ethics deals with a moral philosophy that prescribes what is right and what is wrong. Whatever is right for the Earth and its environment comes under the purview of environmental ethics. It is also concerned with the responsibilities of the human beings towards the environment. Thus, it means the responsible human actions for the maintenance of the environment.

Respect to nature is one of the most important subjects of environmental ethics. Since a very early period, Indians were quite sensitive towards saving their environment. Our seers have advised us not to exploit nature and forbidden us from doing hostile activities against it. They have tried to generate environmental awareness among the common people, connecting the basic values with the affairs of the environment. For communicating the fundamental concepts of the environment to the masses, our seers have suggested a number of ethical principles that help to understand the basic philosophy to respect the divine within everything. Through their power of foresight they could visualise the present deplorable condition of the environment and propagated to overcome environmental crisis with spiritual response. The ethical values in connection with the preservation of various objects of the environment have been mentioned by Vedavyāsa in many occasions. The frequent mention of these ethical principles in the *Mahābhārata* sends the message that people should take initiatives to protect physical and biological objects of the environment. Human beings should ensure their welfare by giving due respect to the

living and non-living substances of this world. Protect the nature and save the Earth is the motto of environmental ethics. All these environmental values connected with environmental justice and ethics suggest that every one of us should take the moral responsibility to preserve bio-diversity and thereby protect the Earth.

Indian tradition upholds the principle of *ahimsā* (non-violence), which proclaims the compassionate attitude of the people towards animate and inanimate objects of nature. Our scriptures have taught us to submit to nature and warn us that any form of brutality to nature may detach us from this physical world. These scriptures have suggested us to preserve the quality of the environment and its sacredness. In the *Mahābhārata*, Vedavyāsa also suggested that insensitive attitude of the human beings towards animate and inanimate objects should not be encouraged. Rather, he advocated the moral values that help to maintain a peaceful coexistence of living and non-living world. These moral teachings are directly related to ethics.

In this chapter, the ethical values prescribed in the *Mbh.*, have been incorporated, where attempt has been taken to highlight natural justice and environmental ethics. These moral principles are equally relevant in today's world, when people are afflicted by environmental crisis generated by degrading moral and spiritual values.

A. *Ahimsā* (Nonviolence)

Environment includes both living and non-living components. It may be divided into two types- physical or abiotic environment and biological or biotic environment. Biological component of the environment comprises of animals (fauna) and plants (flora). Our ancient seers knew that animate and inanimate objects of nature support one another by mutually exchanging their properties. Therefore, they suggested that everything belonging to nature should be respected, worshipped and loved. Vedavyāsa, the composer of the *Mahābhārata* has also precisely suggested to stop atrocities to the biological components of the environment, i.e., animals and plants on various occasions by incorporating some
general statements like: ‘ahimsa paramo dharmah sarvaprānahbṛtām smṛtaḥ’ [Trans: Non-violence towards all creatures is the greatest virtue.], ‘na himsyād sarvabhūtāni maitrāyaṇagatascaret’ [Trans: We must not do harm to any creature and must live in amity with all.]. ‘dayāvān sarvabhūtesu hito rakto’nasuyakah’ [Trans: Be compassionate to all creatures, devoted to their welfare, be in love with all and renounce hatred.], etc.

In the 34th Ch. of the Sānti. of the Mahābhārata the act of slaughtering animals and birds was condemned. The composer of this epic advocated the principle of non-violence or ahimsā and encouraged protection of animals:

‘akārānī tu vakṣyāmi yānī tānī nobodha me/
lōkavedāviruddhāni tānyekāgramanāḥ śṛṇu/’

śarānāgataśantyāgo ................... ........../

rasānām vikrayaścāpi tīryogyonībādhasṭathā’

[Trans: I shall now mention order of acts, which menshould not do, viz., acts that are forbidden by men and the Vedas. Listen to me with rapt attention.......deserting one who seeks refuge.......selling salt and treacle, killing of bords and animals.]

While condemning violence against animals, Vedavyāsa has stated that the purchaser of flesh does himsā (violence) while purchasing, one who consumes meat does so by eating, the slaughterer also does violence by killing the animals. Thus, all the purchasers, eaters, slaughterers, sellers, etc, are directly and indirectly associated with the act of cruelty.

Vedavyāsa not only condemned the violent activities against the living objects but he has also suggested us not to be hostile against the inanimate objects. In the Drona., he has mentioned that by maintaining the purity of water, i.e., by not doing

6. Ibid., Vana., 213. 34 (A).
8. Mbh., Vana., 191 23 (B)
9. Ibid., Sānti., 34. 9 & 11 (B)
hostility to water, one can achieve the greatest virtue. On the other hand, by polluting it with biological refuses, one endures the same punishment that one undergoes by touching the brāhmanas, cows and fire by feet. This has been echoed in the promise of Arjuna before the killing of Jayadratha in the Drona. of the Mbh:

'sprṣato brāhmano gāṇca pādenāgniṇca yā bhavet //
yāpsu ślesma purīsāṇca mūtram vā muṇcaṭāṃ gatih /
tām gaccheyam gatih kastāṃ na cedhanyām jayadratham //

[Trans: The punishment that one suffers by touching the Brāhmanas, cows and fire, with one's feet, the penalty that one gets by throwing phlegm or excretions in water and the punishment that one gets by discharging urine in water, that miserable end shall be mine, if I do not slay Jayadratha.]

In early Indian society, right and wrong actions of the human beings were connected with virtue and vice. For any wrong action, the offender suffered physical and mental punishments. Especially, the killing of animals was considered to be a great offence. The activity of a hunter was condemned by Vedavyāsa in V. No. 3, Ch. 28 (āstike sauparne) of the Ādi. of the Mbh. They have been mentioned as sinners, as they insensitively kill animals and birds. They are the enemies of the environment. So, their death has been recommended in the hands of Garuda. In the Ramāyana also Ādikavi Vālmiki, being extremely moved by the deep wailings of a female crane on the death of her male partner, cursed the fowler who pierced that crane. A verse, in anustuv metre, came out spontaneously from his mouth as an outburst of his grief. The curse of Vālmiki got its expression in the form of a verse that the fowler would not be able to obtain the fruits of prosperity in his lifetime:

'mā nisāda pratisthām tvamagamah sāsvatīh samāh /
yat krauṇcamithunādekamabadhīh kāmamohitam //

[Trans: O nisāda (fowler), you can never attain prosperity in eternal period of time, as you have slain one out of a pair of cranes, who were engaged in amorous play.]

11 Mbh, Drona., 73. 30 (B) - 31.
12. Rāmāyana, Vālmiki, Bālakānda, 2. 15.
Animals and birds were adored in ancient India. In the *Mbh.*, Vedavyāṣa strongly believed in the tradition of non-violence. The high status of living beings has been proclaimed by him when he said: ‘प्राणिमाबधस्तता सर्वायायां मतो मामा’ [Trans: Methinks, keeping from doing any injury to any animal is a cardinal virtue.] In this epic Śrīkrṣṇa told Arjuna that non-violence to animals is one of the best principles. The inhuman act of a hunter was criticised by the composer of the *Mbh.* This has been reflected in the speech of the hunter himself in Ch. 146 of the Śānti. *Mbh.*, where a hunter is repenting for his own profession:

‘ахо манма нṛसांसाय गर्हिताय स्वकर्मान् /
adharmāḥ sumahān ghoro bhaviṣyati na samsayāḥ

[Trans: Alas, dreadful will be the sin, the outcome of my own acts. I am highly ruthless and blameable.] In V. No. 3, Ch. 28 (āstike sauparne) of the Ādi. of the *Mbh.*, Vedavyāsa criticised the fowlers as ‘पपिः’, ‘निर्ग्रह्न’ and ‘दुरात्माः’, when Vinatā, the mother of Garuda told him to kill the hunters for his food while he would go to bring nectar to release his mother from the slavery of the snakes:

‘पपिनाम नास्तलोकानन्म निर्ग्रहनानां दुरात्माननां/
निसादानां सहास्रानि तनं भुक्तमर्तमाननाय

[Trans: Consume thousands of Nīśadas (hunters), who are the sinners, dwellers of the remote places, brute and evil-minded and bring the Ambrosia.] They have been degraded to the category of ferocious animals and snakes for their violent acts:

‘ये नṛसंसा दुरात्मानं प्राणिप्राणघारं नाराः /
udvejanīyā bhūtānāṁ vyālā īva bhavanti te

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15. *Mbh.*, *Śānti.*, 146. 25
[Trans: Those cruel and wicked men who destroy the lives of other creatures are always like venomous snakes, a source of trouble to all creatures.]

In V. No. 2 & 4, Ch.147 (āpaddharmaparvani lubdhakoparatau) of the Śānti. of the Mbh., we find that the sacrifice of the life of a pigeon brought repentance to a fowler, where he has condemned his occupation. This condemnation of the fowler is actually the words of Vedavyāsa, through which he has criticised the occupation of a hunter:

‘kimīdrṇaṁ nrṣamsena mayā krtamabuddhinā
bhavisyati hi me nityam pātakam krtajīvinah/
ṣubham karma parītyajya so'ham sakunilubdhakahnrṣamsasya mamādyāyam prayāadeso na samśayah //

[Trans: Alas, cruel and senseless that I am, what have I done! I am, forsooth, a mean wretch! Great will be my sin, which will last forever. (2)
Alas, renouncing all sorts of honourable occupation, I have become a fowler! A cruel wretch that I am, forsooth this noble pigeon, by sacrificing his own life, has taught me a great lesson. (4)]

B. Tradition of Vaiśvadeva Sacrifice

In ancient times, various activities relating to the welfare of an individual as well as of the society were included in the daily activities of a person. Those activities indicate that the lives of ancient Indian people were regulated by ethics. The performance of vaiśvadeva sacrifice in India highlighted that ethical tradition.

The practice of vaiśvadeva sacrifice in India expresses the respect, care, love and compassion of the human beings towards other living beings. This actually generates the spirit of fellow feeling, cultivates sacrificing attitude, removes disparity among living creatures and thus it upholds the principle of non-violence. This has been referred to in the Mbh., where the grhasthas (Householders) are instructed to

offer food to other creatures before taking their own food:

\[vighasāṣi bhavet tasmānṇityam cāmṛtabhojanah /\]
\[vighaso bhuktasesam tu yajñāsesam tathāṁrtam \] 22

[Trans. He who eats Vighasa eats ambrosia. That, which remains after dedication in a sacrifice, is (also) regarded as ambrosia.] 23

The Mbh. also encourages human beings to develop the habit of offering food to other fellow creatures:

\[dhigastu tasya tad bhuktam krpanasya durātmahah/\]
\[yo datvātīthihūtebhūyah pitṛbhyaśca dvijottamah /\]
\[śistānyannāni yo bhūkte kim vai sukhātaram tatah /\]
\[ato mrśṭataram nāyat pūtām kiṃcīcchātakrato \] 24

[Trans: Therefore the wise cry “fie” on the food that a mean wretch like a dog or a Rakshasa eats at another’s house. If after feeding the guests and the servants and offering food to the Pitris an excellent Brahmana. (32)

Eats what remains, there can be none happier than he. O Shatakratu, there is nothing sweeter or holier. (33)] 25

The vaiśvadeva sacrifice is performed in the morning and evening, where food is offered even to the creatures of lower category like dogs, candālas and crows:

\[śvabhyaśca svapacebhyaśca vayobhyascavaped bhuvi /\]
\[vaiśvadevaṁ hi nāmaītat sāyaṁ prātaśca diyate \] 26

[Trans: By scattering morning and evening food on the earth for dogs, Chandalas and birds, a person should perform the viśvadeva (sacrifice).] 27

In Ch. 30 of the Vana., Draupadi recollected the memories of their regular mode of eating. They used to take their food after offering a part of the food to the guests and

22. Mbh., Vana., 2. 60.
other living beings. The importance of vaisvadeva sacrifice in the life of Yudhishṭhira has been mentioned in the following verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
'yadidam vaisvadevam te sāntaye kriyate grhe / \\
tad datvāthihbhūtebhyo rājan śiṣṭena jīvai \|^{28} \\
\end{align*}
\]

[Trans: Having distributed duly, O king, all to the guests in the Vishvadeva sacrifice that is solemnized in your house for your peace you live upon what remains.]^{29}

This concept of bhūtayajña reflects the concern of the human beings for their fellow creatures. The Taittiriya Āranyaka, describes Paṇca Mahāyajñas, which include bhūtayajña, where food is offered to the lower creatures: ‘yadbhūtebhyo balim harati tadbhūtayajñah santisthate^{30} [Trans: Offering food to creatures (like birds and animals etc.) completes the Bhūta-yajña.]^{31} This distinguishing aspect of Indian culture was associated with the way of life of its people. This also upholds the doctrine ‘yatra jīvah tatra śivah’. [Trans: Where there is life there is Almighty (Śiva).]

Manu has spoken about vaisvadeva sacrifice in the 3rd Ch. of the Manusāṁhitā:

\[
\begin{align*}
'viśvebhyaścaiva debebhyo balimākāsa utkṣipet / \\
divācarebhyo bhūtebhyo naktāncāribhya eva ca // \\
pṛṣṭavāstuni kurvita balim sarvātmabhūtaye / \\
pitṛbhyo baliśeṣantu sarvam dakṣinato haret // \\
śunācā patitāṃsāca śvapacāṃ pāparoginām / \\
vāyasānāṃ krmināṃca sanakairnirvapēdhuvi \|^{32} \\
\end{align*}
\]

[Trans: Enchanting ‘viśvebhyo debebhyo……’ (for the sake of Gods) etc., one should offer oblations towards the sky for the sake of animals that move at day time and at night. Then moving towards back and enchanting ‘sarvātmabhūtaye…..’ (for the sake of all beings) etc., offer oblations to all creatures on the ground and thereafter moving to the south, offer the remaining oblations to the forefathers by enchanting ‘pitṛbhyaḥ…’ etc.

30 T. U., 2. 10. 86. Telang & Chaubey’s New Vedic Selection, Pt. 2, p 574
31 Eng.Trans., Ibid.
32 M. S., 3. 90-92.
(for the sake of forefathers).

Thereafter, taking another pot, offer oblation for the sake of dogs, *patita, śvapaca* (one who eats flesh of dogs), *pāparogi* (one who suffers for sin), crows and insects and carefully place the pot on the ground.]

The concept of virtue is associated with the performance of *vaiśadeva* sacrifice. Vedavyāsa has advocated the performance of this sacrifice for bringing more and more people in the mission of protecting the environment. Through this performance he has tried to generate sympathetic attitude of human beings towards all living objects of nature. A reward of merit is attached to it to understand the moral spirit that taking care of each and every creature is to make our existence safer in this world. He has stated that he, whoever likes other creatures as his own self and he who recognises that the divine energy is present in the entire creation, never does any harm to those objects. That person achieves the same blessings that one gets from visiting the tirthas: ‘*atmopamaśca bhūteśu sa tirthaphalamāsnute*’.\(^{33}\) [Trans: He who considers all creatures as his own self, enjoys the fruits of Tirthas.\(^{34}\) Vedavyāsa has propagated that while we look for our welfare we should also take care of the welfare of the lower animals. The *vaiśvadeva* sacrifice upgrades the non-violent spirit of Indian culture. Restriction from doing violence to any creature ‘*bhūteswadroha*’ was considered as a pious act and even boons were sought to gain friendly attitude necessary for maintaining a good relation with all creatures. In V. No. 2, Ch. 35 of the *Udyoga.* of the *Mbh.*, Vedavyāsa has advised that kindness to living creatures is more auspicious than taking a holy bath in the tirthas:

\[
\text{‘sarvatirtheśu vā snānam sarvabhūteśu cărjavam /} \\
\text{ubhe tvete same syātāmārjavain vā viśisyate //}^{25}
\]

[Trans: Bathing in all the holy places and kindness to all beings- both these are equal. Perhaps kindness is better.\(^{36}\)]

\(^{33}\) *Mbh.*, *Vana.*, 82. 12 (B)


\(^{35}\) *Mbh.*, *Udyoga.*, 35. 2.

C. Crime and Punishment and Remedial measures

In early days, maintaining a good relationship with other objects of nature was considered to be a great virtue, which was related to environmental ethics. When disregarding these ethical principles, the human beings indulge in doing hostile activities against nature; they suffer the consequence of their wrong actions. Thus, the concept of pāpa (sin) was originated from the ignorance of the moral principles and offering due respect to these ideals was connected with punya (virtue). Attainment of virtues through the protection of the environment was encouraged by Vedavyāsa to communicate the moral responsibilities of the human beings towards nature. Justice to nature and maintaining the basic qualities of nature was considered as a virtuous deed that deserved to be rewarded. That reward was not something material in nature. It was related to the attainment of virtues. For making people more concerned about improving their surroundings, each and every good activity related to the protection of the environment was associated with the attainment of virtues.

Attainment of the highest merits by proper treatment to the animals has been reflected in the Mbh. in several times. The epic has forbidden the atrocities of the human beings on lower animals, especially on the cows: ‘abadhyā brāhmanā gāvo jñātayah śisavah striyah’.[37] [Trans: The Brahmanas, cows, blood relations, infants and women must not be killed.]38

‘brāhmanesu ca ye śurāḥ strīsu jñātisu gosu ca /
vrntādiva phalam pakvam dhṛtarāstra patanti te II’[39]
[Trans: Those who are harsh towards the Brahmanas, women, blood relations and cows fall, O Dhṛtarāstra, like ripe fruits from their stalks.]40

Prohibition has been imposed on the selling of a cow. It has been stated that if someone sells a cow, the sufferings of a seller continue up to his third generation: ‘sā

gaurvikrayamāpanṇā hanyāḥ trīpurusam kulam'.

[Trans: If that cow is sold, three generations of the giver’s family would be lost.]

V. No. 30 of the Drona. of the Mbh. recognises the divine essence of the cows and mentions that he, whoever touches the cow by feet, suffers in the hell. The cow is the best among the four-footed animals: ‘gaurvaristhā catuspadām’. [Trans: Among the quadrupeds, the cow is the best.]

‘ghātakah khādako vāpi tathā yaścānunmayate /
yāvanti tasya romāṇī tāvad varṣāṇī majjati’

[Trans: He who..............sells a cow, or kills one, or eats the flesh of a cow, or they who, for the sake of money, allow a person to kill kine. all these, viz., he that kills, he that eats, and he that allows the destruction, rot in hell for as many years as there are hairs on the body of the cow so killed.] Therefore, none should even think of injuring a cow: ‘manāsā gośu na druhyet’ [Trans: One, again, should not, in even his mind, do an injury to a cow.]

In the Arthaśāstra, Kautilya is of the opinion that the slaughterer of a cow should be given capital punishment: ‘svayām hantā ghātayitā hartā hārayitā ca badhyah’ [Trans: One, who slaughters a cow, encourages the act of slaughtering, steals or encourages stealing, deserves death penalty.]

In the Anīmāṇḍavyopākhyāna of the Ādi. of the Mbh., the sufferings of the sage, Anīmāṇḍavya, produces before us how the effect of atrocities on a lower creature brings hardship to the human beings that persists in their whole life. The story of Anīmāṇḍavya brings out the truth that the great persons like the sages were also not free from the painful consequence that one suffers for injuring other forms of lives. The sage Anīmāṇḍavya was pierced by a śūla (a spear) by the royal security

41. Mbh., Vana, 200. 29 (B).
43. Mbh., Ādi., 74. 57 (A)
44. Ibid., Anuśāsana., 74. 4.
46. Mbh., Anuśāsana., 73. 22 (B).
48. Kautiliyam Arthaśāstram [Pt -1], 2 29. 46.
personnel of a king named Dharma, without any fault of him. That sage survived in that condition for a long time due to his extraordinary power of penance. He went to Dharma to know the reason of his punishment. When the king came to know that the sage was not guilty, he apologised to the sage and attempted to set him free from the sharp weapon. But he failed to free him completely from the śūla. A part of śūla, fixed inside the sage caused unbearable pain, which led him to Dharma to know the cause of his sufferings. Dharma told him to recollect whether he had done any misdeed for which he had to endure the pain. Then the sage told that he had done a single sin in his childhood by piercing a bird with the blade of a grass. After that he engaged himself in profound austerity. However, he could not compensate his sin by penance:

\[\begin{align*}
&'isīkāyā mayā bālyād viddhā hyekā śakuntikā/ \\
&tat kilviṣam smare dharmā nānyat pāpamaham smare //^49
\end{align*}\]

[Trans: O Dharma, I cannot recollect any other sin of mine except one, when in my childhood, I pierced a little bird with the blade of a grass.]

\[\begin{align*}
&'tanme sahasramitam kasmāṃnehājayat tapah\ ^50
\end{align*}\]

[Trans: I have practised penance for a long period of time to expiate a nominal sin, but my practice failed to relieve me from the effect of that sin.]

Dharma informed him that his present suffering was the result of piercing that small bird in his childhood:

\[\begin{align*}
&'patangahānāṃ puccheṣu tvayesīkā praveṣitā / \\
&karmanastasya te prāptaṁ phalamet tapodhāna //\ ^51
\end{align*}\]

[Trans: O ascetic, once you pierced a small bird (in the backside) with the blade of a grass and now you are suffering the consequence of that action.]

Indian ethics advocates that mental suffering of a small sin may not minimise even after the performance of various virtuous activities. The suffering of a small sin

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49. *Mbh*, Adi, 63. 94
multiplies and lasts long: ‘adharma evam viprarse bahuduḥkkhaphala-pradaḥ’ [Trans: O viprarsi (Great brahmin), misdeeds are causes of misfortunes.] The Dharmasāstras have instructed that any kind of crime leads to punishment. Particularly any harm to the living creatures may lead to a severe penalty as was suffered by Animāndavya. Punishment may either physical or mental. Even after the completion of the period of physical punishment, mental sufferings may kill an offender silently. In mental punishment, an offender has to fight with his conscience. In that case, atonement is prescribed for minimising his offence.

This episode suggests that the life of a living organism, however small, is always valuable as it is also a part of our environment. So, killing of a small creature was condemned in Indian philosophy as well as in the Mbh.

In Ch. 118 (sambhavaparvanī pānducarite) of the Ādi. the Mbh., Vedavyāsa expressed his view that none could escape from the mental agony after doing a wrong deed. Even the powerful human being like a king also suffered the penalty of providence when he did any activity, which was against the principles of ethics. In this context, the references of the death penalty of the king Pāndu and Kaṁsa may be cited. As a result of their unparliamentary works, they had to meet their tragic end.

In Ch. 118 of the Ādi., Pāndu killed a deer, a sage (Kindama) in disguise, who was engaged in amorous play with his female partner. Pāndu after killing came to know the harsh reality that the deer was none but a sage. The pierced deer (sage) bewailed and cursed Pāndu to face a similar type of consequence at the time of his enjoying the highest physical pleasure. Pāndu being cursed decided to take refuge to penance for expiation. He thought that he could compensate his sin by taking care of the living beings of this world:

‘prasannavadano nityāṁ sarvabhūtahite rataḥ /
jangamājangamam sarva-mavihīṁsaṁscaturvidham //
svāsu prāsviva sadā samah prānabhṛtāṁ prati /
ekakālam charan bhaiśyām kulāni daśa paṁca vā ṃ //’

52. Mbh., Ādi., 107.12 (B).
53. Ibid., 118. 11-12.
I shall be ever cheerful; and I shall be devoted to the good of all creatures. (10-B)

I shall not harm any of the four orders of the creation, either mobile or immobile. I shall treat them all equally, as if they are my own children. (11)

I shall daily beg my food from only five or ten families. (12-A)\(^{54}\)

This incident reflects the environment-friendly nature of the ancient Indian society. Service to the living beings was considered to be one of the better means to compensate the crime of killing an animal. The sin accumulated by killing animals can be minimised by protecting the lives of animals belonging to the same species. This has been referred to in the V. No. 29, Ch. 152 of the Śānti. of the Mbh:

\[
\text{‘yāvatah prāṇino hanyāt tajjātiyāṃstu tavātah /} \\
\text{pramīyamānānunmocya prāniḥā vipramucyate //}^{55}
\]

[Trans: A slayer of creatures is purged of his sins by saving from impending danger as many creatures of that particular kind as have been killed by him.]\(^{56}\)

The amount of sin caused by the act of cruelty to the animals was compensated by performing atonement. As a part of the expiation it has been prescribed that:

\[
\text{‘tiryagyoniḥbadham kṛtvā drumāṃścītvetarān bahūn /} \\
\text{trīrātram vāyubhakṣah syāt karma ca prathayannarah //}^{57}
\]

[Trans: Having killed a bird or an animal, or cut down living trees, a person should declare his sin publicly and fast for three nights.]\(^{58}\)

Ch. 49 (rājadharmanuşāsanaparvani rāmopākhyāne) of the Śānti. of the Mbh. depicts that once Agni approached to Kārtavīryārjuna, the son of Kṛtvārya as a suitor. Kārtavīryārjuna agreed to fulfill his desire. Then Agni blazed up in the tip of the arrow of Kārtavīryārjuna and began to burn the mountains and trees:

\[
\text{‘sa tasya puruṣendrasya prabhāvena mahaujasah /}
\]

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55. Mbh., Śānti., 152. 29.
57. Mbh., Śānti., 35. 34
Through the prowess of that foremost of men, viz., the powerful Kartavirya, the god of fire consumed mountains and great forests.

When Agni burnt the hermitage of the sage, Apava, he cursed Kartavirya, that his arms would be chopped by Parasurama at the time of battle:

\[
tvayā na varjitam yasmān namedam hi mahād vanam
\]
\[
dagdham tasmād rāma bāhūmste chetsyateo'ṛjuna
\]

O Arjuna, since you have burnt my vast forest instead of protecting, therefore, Rāma (of Bhṛgu's race), will cut your arms at the time of battle.

This implies that the hermitages were the centres of preservation of wild life and the protectors of those hermitages took the ecological responsibility of preserving the wild life as they had spiritual and psychological bonds with the animals and plants of those sacred places. Any harm to the bio-diversities of the protected areas was liable to severe punishment as it is referred to in the story of Kārtaviryārjuna.

Manu has also stated that the parts of a tree, i.e., its leaves, flowers and fruits should be utilised in a proper manner and the destroyers of trees be punished properly:

\[
vanaspatinām sarvesānupabhogo yathā yathā
\]
\[
tathā tathā damah kāryo himsāyāmīti dhāranā
\]

When someone damages a tree and misuses the leaves, flowers and fruits, then the king will give severe and simple punishment to the offender as per the degree of his offence.

This means that if anyone misuses and damages the trees, that person deserves punishment from the authority.

The concept of hermitages in India was deep-rooted in philosophy and

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59 Mbh., Sānti., 49. 40
60. Eng. Trans. by: Dutt, M. N., Vol 6, p 72
61. Mbh., Sānti., 49. 43.
62 M. S., 8. 285.
religion. The effort of the sages to preserve forests, mountains, rivers, animals, etc., expresses the eternal bond of humanity and nature. Through the description of hermitages and forests, Vedavyāsa actually tried to install the spirit of this eternal bond. These hermitages were the centres, where the daily life of the sages used to pass in association with the natural life. The eternal messages of Vedavyāsa are still relevant, as these are the motivating factors to learn the ways of achieving harmony with man and nature.

To minimise the dire consequences of the punishment of harming the living and non-living objects of nature, Vedavyāsa has suggested a few remedial measures among which non-violence, truth and absence from anger, etc., are considered as the essential qualities that remove sins in all the four stages of life: ‘ahiṃsā satyamakrodhah sarvāśramagatam tapah’.\(^63\) [Trans: Abstention from injury, truth, and absence from anger, yield the merit of penances in all the modes of life.\(^64\)]

Indian tradition has recognised the importance of all forms of life. Service to the living beings is considered to be the greatest virtue to achieve salvation. The reference of this is available in the Śānti. of the Mbh:

\[\text{‘yadā na kurute bhāvam sarvabhūtesu pāpakam /} \]
\[\text{harmanā manasā vācā brahma sampadyate tadā /} \]^65

[Trans: Then only a person attains to Brahma when he does not behave sinfully towards any creature in thought, word, or deed.]\(^66\)

\[\text{‘dānam bhūtābhayaśāhuh sarvadānebhya uttamam /} \]
\[\text{vravimi te satyamidam śraddadhasva ca jájale /} \]^67

[Trans: Of all gifts, the promise of harmlessness to all creatures is the greatest. I tell you truly, believe me, O Jajali.]\(^68\)

\[\text{‘yasmānno dvijate bhūtam játu kiñcit kathaścana /}\]

\(^{63}\) Mbh., Śānti., 191. 15 (B).


\(^{65}\) Mbh., Śānti., 262. 16.


\(^{67}\) Mbh., Śānti, 262 33.

\(^{68}\) Eng Trans by: Dutt, M. N., Śānti., 262. 34, Vol. 6, p. 409.
so'bhayam sarvabhūtebhyah samprāpnoti mahāmune //

[Trans: He whom, O great ascetic, no creature fears in the least, does not himself fear any creatures.]

'na himsyād sarvabhūtāni maitrāyanagataścaret /
nedam jīvitamāsādyat vairam kurvita kenacit //

[Trans: We must not do harm to any creature and must live in amity with all. In this our present existence we must not avenge ourselves on any creature.]

Vedavyāsa advised: 'vrtha pasūmālam bhān naiva kuryānā kārayet', i.e., ruthless killing of animals is to be stopped. This shows that the Mbh. has followed the spiritual tradition of India that laid much emphasis on environmental ethics.

D. Justice to nature

In Ch. 64 (aṁśavataram) of the Ādi. of the Mbh., Paraśurāma declared war against the ksatriyas and vowed to eliminate them from the society. Apprehending the extinction of the ksatriyas, the ksatriya women approached the brahmins for continuation of the ksatriya community. Then the new generation of pious ksatriyas came into being. They performed sacrifices and other religious activities in various places. As a result, Indra also showered sufficiently at proper time:

'tathā dharmapare ksatre sahasrākṣah satakratuh /
svādu deṣe ca kāle ca varṣenāpālayat prajāh //

[Trans: And (Indra) the deity that performed one hundred sacrifices and who has one thousand eyes, seeing that all the Kshatriya sovereigns ruled their kingdoms very virtuously, poured down vivifying showers of rains at the proper time and at the proper place and thus protected all creatures.]
The congenial environment improved general health of the people. So, no incident of untimely death occurred in those places: ‘na bāla eva mriyate tadā kascijanādhipa’\textsuperscript{75} [Trans: O king, no one died in early age.]

The subjects were concerned about natural justice, as calves were not deprived of the due share of their mothers' milk. The cows were not milked so long their calves were not satisfied (from their mothers' milk): ‘phenapāṁśca tathā vatsān na duhanti sma mānavāḥ’\textsuperscript{77} [Trans: Men never milked the cows as long as the calves remained dissatisfied from the milk of their mothers.] The females, cows and other animals begot their young ones in stipulated time. The trees also produced flowers and fruits as per the cycles of the seasons:

\[‘kāle gāvah prasūyante nāryaśca bharatarśava / bhavantyṛtuṣu vrksānāṁ puspāni ca phalāni ca \]\textsuperscript{78}

[Trans: Both women and kine gave birth to offspring at the proper time and trees bore flowers and fruits at their proper seasons.]\textsuperscript{79}

The vaśyas used the bulls for the purpose of agriculture, but they did not engage weak bulls and cows for the said purpose:

\[‘kārayantah kṛṣiin goviṣṭāh vaiśyāḥ ksitāviha / yuṇjate dhuri no gāśca kṛṣāṅgāścāpyajivayan \]\textsuperscript{80}

[Trans: The Vaishyas tilled well the earth with the help of bullocks and they never yoked kine to the plough. They carefully fed the lean ones.]\textsuperscript{81}

E. Consequence of injustice to nature

Ch. 99 (sambhavaparvāṇi ṛpaṃvākhyāṇe) of the Ādi. of the Mbh. relates that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Mbh., Ādi., 64. 17 (A).
\item \textsuperscript{76} Eng. Trans. by: Dutt, M. N., Vol. 1, p. 98
\item \textsuperscript{77} Mbh., Ādi., 64. 22 (B).
\item \textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 64. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Eng. Trans. by: Dutt, M. N., Vol. 1, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Mbh., Ādi., 64. 21.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Eng. Trans. by: Dutt, M. N., Vol. 1, p. 98.
\end{itemize}
among the vasus, Dyauh was the person who ran off with the cow of Vaśistha. For this act, he had to live in this human world for a long time. The great sage Vaśistha told that he (Dyauh) would be a pious human being in his next birth, but he would not be blessed with child. That vasu Dyauh was none but virtuous Bhīṣma.

In fact, the above incident affirms the respectable status of a cow in ancient Indian society. The cow was the highest symbol of purity and auspiciousness. It was associated with the domestic affairs of the Indians. Therefore, the gift of a cow was applauded to be the highest gift. If a person did any cruel treatment to a cow then a serious punishment was conferred on him as Dyauh was cursed by the great sage Vaśistha and he had to take birth in a lower category.

The accumulation of supernatural power by animals (cow) has been depicted in the Ādi., Ch.174 (caitrarathaparvani viśvāmitraparābhave) of the Mbh. The value of the kāmadhenus was understood by both Vaśistha and Viśvāmitra. Viśvāmitra approached Vaśistha and sought his kāmadhenu (Nandini). But Vaśistha denied to his proposal. Viśvāmitra offered ten crores of cows and his kingdom in exchange of the kāmadhenu. This offer also could not impress Vaśistha.

‘nandinīṁ samprayacchasva bhūṁksva rājyaṁ mahāmune /

Then Vaśistha said:

‘devatātithipitrartham yājyārthaṁca payasvini //
adeyā nandinīyam vai rājyendeṇi tavaṇagha /’82

[Trans: O great Rishi, give me (your) Nandini (cow) and enjoy my kingdom. O sinless one, this milk-giving cow is kept by me for the purposes of the celestials, the Pitris and the guests and for my sacrifices, Nandini cannot be given (to you) in exchange of even your kingdom.]83

As a result, by applying force Viśvāmitra tried to fulfil his desire. At this condition, the cow itself showed its supernatural power against Viśvāmitra and his troops. Subsequently, Viśvāmitra and his soldiers were defeated and had to leave the place. Their cruel action resulted a grave situation, where the royal force was overpowered.

82. Mbh , Ādi., 174. 17 -18 (A)
83 Eng Trans, by: Dutt, M. N., Vol. 1, 175. 16 (Partly) & 17, p. 266.
by the super power of a cow:

\[
\text{āditya iva madhyāhne krodha} \text{dhiptavurplevabhau} / \\
\text{angāravarṣam muṅcanti mūhurba} \text{dhiito mahat} //^{84}
\]

[Trans: Blazing in anger, she soon became fearful to look at as the sun at midday. She incessantly began to shower burning coals from her tail.]^{85}

The kāmadhenu took the side of her owner, a pious Brahmin, and defended the illegal approach of Viśvāmitra. Here atrocities of Viśvāmitra and his troops on an animal (a blessed cow) have been expressed. It is condemned by the destiny in the form of a kāmadhenu.

Cruelty to the cows was condemned in the Dharmāṣṭras^{86} and in the Yajurveda.^{87} The importance of a valuable cow in the society has been expressed here. Multipurpose utility of the cows in ancient Indian society has been stated in this reference. Exchange of cows, particularly selling was not encouraged; rather cows were treated as mothers: ‘---gām vā lokasya mātaram’.^{88} [Trans: The cows are but the mother of the human beings.] The cows were the symbols of holiness, energy and power. Cruelty to the cows was a serious offence and its consequence was dangerous. This has been clearly depicted in the story of Nandini, where the soldiers of Viśvāmitra had to face a stern revenge from aggrieved Nandini. Even the value of a kingdom and the power of a king bowed down before the power of a cow.

F. Administrative role in maintaining natural justice and environmental ethics

Vedāvyāsa has given the descriptions of the ideal kings who gave equal

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84. Ṣmbh., Ādi., 174. 35
86. On this Manu has said: ‘ācāryaṇcā pravaktāram pitaram mātaram gurum / \\
na himsyād brāhmaṇān gāscā sarvāṁścava tapasvinah // ( M. S., 4 162.)
87. Cruelty towards cows is criticised in the Yajurveda: ‘gām mā himslh’. (Yaju. 13. 43).
88. Ṣmbh., Vana., 131. 6 (A).
importance to protect the human beings, animals and birds. In this respect the most suitable example is the episode of the king Śivi, the son of Usīnara found in the Vana. of the Mbh. In this story, the highest amount of effort of the king to save the life of a bird is found. The episode of Śivi, incorporated in Ch.208 (mārkandeyasamāsāparvani pativratoṇakhyāne brāhmaṇa-vaśādhasamāvāde) of the Vana. of the Mbh., provides a rare example, where the king (Śivi) was ready to offer the flesh of his own body and even he was also ready to sacrifice his life for saving the life of a pigeon (Agni) from a hawk (Indra).

Here the generosity of an administrator and his concern for the security of the life of a small creature have been presented in a very simple manner to generate awareness in the mind of the human beings that the life of every creature is very precious and it is the duty of an administrator to give security to all forms of lives. Vedavyāsa has also given the accounts of the ideal states, where the kings gave stress on the tradition of non-violence or ahimsā. The ruler himself promoted moral principles and took the ecological responsibility of protecting the living and non-living objects of nature. In this respect he has cited the rule of the king Sāntanu, who was committed to provide security to the animals. Under his administration, restrictions were imposed on the killing of animals apart from sacrificial purposes: ‘na cādharmena keṣāṅcit prāṇināmabhavad badhah’

In the Ādi. of the Mbh., description of the Cedi kingdom is found, which got into prominence due to the abundant natural resources. In that kingdom, the cows were not used for commercial purposes like carrying goods; ‘yunjate dhuri no gāśca kṛṣāṇaṁ saṁdhukṣayanti ca’ [Trans: Lean kine are never yoked to the plough or to the cart engaged in carrying merchandise.]

Again while describing the duties of a king in Ch. 89 of the Sānti., Bhīṣma is found to give instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira that the cutting of trees, laden with fruits,
should not be encouraged by a pious king:

{\textit{vanaspatin bhaksyaphalan na cchindyurvi\ṣaye tava} \\
\textit{brāhmanānām mulaphalan dharmyamāhurmaniṣinah} \cite{92}

[Trans: Let not fruit growing trees be cut down in your dominions. Fruits and roots are the property of the Brahmanas. The sages have declared this as an injunction of religion.]\cite{93}

Vedavyāsa has also stated that the influence of the quality of a ruler is reflected on his subjects and activities (administration). As is the king, so are his subjects:

{\textit{rājīḥi dharmīṇi dharmiśṭhāḥ pāpe pāparāḥ sadā} \\
\textit{rājanamanuvartante yathā rājā tathā prajāḥ} \cite{94}

[Trans: If the ruler is religious, the ruled are also religious. If the king is irreligious the subjects are also irreligious. The subjects follow the king, as is the king so are the subjects.]

In the \textit{Sānti.} of the \textit{Mbh.} it has been stated that:

{\textit{rājñāḥ hi pūjīta dharmastathā sarvatra pūjyate} \\
yad yadācarate rājā tatprajānāṁ sma rocate \cite{95}

[Trans: If the king honours it, righteousness is honoured everywhere. Whatever acts and things a king likes they are liked by his subjects.]\cite{96}

The term quality here means humanity, justice to nature, providing security to the life and property of the human beings. When a ruler becomes impudent, he becomes indifferent to these qualities and in that way he himself becomes the root cause of the sufferings of the subjects. This has been referred to in Ch. 38 of the \textit{Sabhā.} of the \textit{Mbh.} In this chapter it is described that in the supremacy of Kamsa, sufferings of men and animals knew no bounds. He had done many atrocities to the Brahmins and cows. Ultimately, he had to face his destiny. Due to his injustice to the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{92} \textit{Mbh., Sānti.}, 89 1.
\item \cite{93} Eng. Trans. by: Dutt, M. N., Vol. 6, p 139
\item \cite{94} \textit{Bhojaprabandha of Ballaladeva}, 44.
\item \cite{95} \textit{Mbh., Sānti.}, 75. 4.
\item \cite{96} Eng. Trans. by: Dutt. M. N. , Vol. 6, p. 117.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
human beings and nature, he had to suffer the death penalty in the hands of Lord Krsna, who assured protection to the brahmins and cows by killing Kamsa:

\[ \text{yadartham ca mahāteja gāstuv govrsabheksanah } \]
\[ \text{rarakṣa kamsasya badhāllokanāmabhirahsita } / \text{\textsuperscript{97}} \]

[Trans: Lord Kṛṣṇa, whose eyes resemble the eyes of the bulls, having enormous strength and who is the protector of the world, saved the cows and the brahmins by killing Kamsa.]

The story of Kamsa suggests that whenever a ruler becomes impudent and neglects his duties, total administrative system breaks down. His atrocities to the human beings and animals finally bring a fatal consequence, i.e., his death.

The environmental ethics demands that destruction of the natural resources and damage to the public properties should be avoided even at the time of crisis. The 

\[ \text{Mahābhārata.} \]

has also informed us about the concern of a ruler to preserve the natural resources and the sanctity of the holy places during the time of a war. This fact has been affirmed when Yudhisṭhira’s army was encamped far away from the cremation grounds, temples, hermitages and other holy places as the encroachment of these places would destroy vast tracts of forests, agricultural lands and causes a great damage to the animals and their habitats:

\[ \text{parihṛtya smasānāṃ devatāyatanāni ca } \]
\[ \text{āśramāṃśa maharṣiṇāṃ tirthānyāyatanāni ca } / \text{\textsuperscript{98}} \]

[Trans: Yudhiṣṭhira, the son of Kunti, of a great intelligence, ordered his army to be encamped in the remote, delightful and sanctified grassy places excluding the cremation grounds, temples, hermitages of the great sages and also other holy places.]

From the above mentioned references it becomes clear that Vedavyāsa has suggested the human beings to act in a reasonable way as per the law of nature.

\textsuperscript{97} \text{Mahābhārata., Sabha., 38. 277}
\textsuperscript{98} \text{Ibid., Udyoga., 152. 2 - 3.}
Nature has given us everything. So, human beings should also express their gratitude to it by improving the quality of the environment and not harming living and non-living objects of this world. The *Mbh.* has recommended that the right behaviour and sympathetic treatment of the human beings help to minimise the problems relating to the environment. Thus the *Mbh.*, as a moral instructor, has suggested the ways to solve the environmental problems by changing our outlook towards nature. The epic declares that the solution of the environmental problems does not lie in external matters but it lies in our minds.