CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the *Mahābhārata* has been explored from the environmental point of view. The perception of environment in the *Mahābhārata* is mainly based on the interrelationship and interdependence among various objects in nature, environmental ethics, cultural ethos, traditional values and sustainable development. In this epic, Vedavyāsa has lucidly described the four objects of life, i.e., *dharmā*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa* and made those accessible to the common people by extracting examples from nature or explaining those with the help of natural substances. This is because we believe that nature is our best teacher. We are guided by the laws of nature. During the period of the *Mahābhārata*, proximity of the people with nature might have encouraged Vedavyāsa to present before us various situations of real life, which have been compared with the natural objects or phenomenon.

In this thesis, from Ch. 1-7, it has been tried to establish the fact that the welfare of the human beings depends on the preservation of the environment and ecological balance. It has been found in this long discussion that Vedavyāsa has emphasised the early Indian tradition of maintaining a friendly relation with nature. In this epic, he has pointed out that nothing is beyond the all-embracing forces of nature, which is controlled by the divine power. Each and every creation of this universe is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. This has also been aptly stated in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*:

`devā manusyāḥ paśavah paksivrksasarisprāh /
rūpametadanantsya viśnorbhinnamiva sthitam //`\(^1\)

[Trans: The gods, human beings, animals, birds, trees and reptiles - belonging to various categories are nothing but various manifestations of eternal Viṣṇu.]

The early Indian writers have recognised that the divine spirit is present in every manifestation of nature. Here lies the greatness and exceptionality of their writings. Mahatma Gandhi has rightly acclaimed and saluted our ancient seers when

\(^1\) V. P., 1. 19. 47.
he said: "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".\(^2\)

The conception of the environment in the *Mahābhārata* starts with the importance of the forests, rivers, mountains, oceans, animals, etc., and ends with the reverence for the divine energy inherent in those creations. This spiritual understanding of nature is very essential at present, when we claim ourselves scientifically advanced and materially sound to assert our dominance over nature and other creatures. The *Mahābhārata* has sent its message that the human beings are not the masters of this universe, rather they have enriched their knowledge acquiring it from other living beings existing in this Earth. So, human beings should not alienate themselves from living and non-living objects of nature. Whenever human beings tried to dominate over nature and they became indifferent to its nourishment, that distance and indifference caused nature to display her fury in numerous ways. J. C. Kurian, in his book, *Plants that Heal* has stated that this alienation of the human beings from nature is the root cause of their problems: “Humankind in recent decades has alienated itself from nature. This distance and indifference has caused problems”.\(^3\) As the human beings are associated with every aspect of nature, it is their fundamental duty to protect their environment.

When we consider the *Mahābhārata* from the environmental point of view, various concepts of nature and spiritual explanations of the mysteries of these concepts come to light. In the principal findings of the thesis, an effort has been made to present a different approach of understanding nature. The aforesaid chapters of the thesis discussed the concepts of the environment, which are also relevant as far as the modern environmental study is concerned.

1st Ch. of the thesis, i.e., the Introduction has mentioned various concepts of the environment and the necessity of including those in the epic. Though Vedavyāsa

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2. www.hinduwisdom.info/Nature-worship.htm
did not mention these concepts separately, attempts have been made to compare these with the contemporary concepts of the environment. It is interesting to note that no fundamental difference has been found when both these concepts are compared. Protection of the environment by generating environmental consciousness among the people was the main objective of the composer of the Mahābhārata. It is also equally relevant in modern times, when our thoughts and actions have polluted the sanctity of our environment. In this Ch., efforts have been made to unfurl some of the environmental concepts reflected in entire Mbh. in separate chapters. It also contains the scope of the study and its objectives.

In Ch. 2 (Natural resources and their conservation in the Mahābhārata), Vedavyāsa suggested that the animals, trees, sacred groves, mountains, rivers, oceans, etc. protect us. So, it is our moral responsibility to maintain these resources for the benefit of the society. Reverence to the trees, rivers, oceans, mountains, etc., encouraging activities like digging up water tanks, ponds, etc., preserving biodiversities, creating artificial forests, penance groves and lakes, etc., found in the Mbh., presented the age-old idea of preserving natural resources and maintaining those for the sustainability of the living beings. Now-a-days, people have realised that conservation of natural resources is essential for improving the quality of our life. This understanding will be more fruitful when they will recognise various aspects of nature from spiritual point of view as it is suggested in the Mbh.

The 3rd Ch. of the thesis (Concept of Sustainable development in the Mahābhārata) reveals that the prolonged existence of the living beings on this Earth depends on the maintenance of the available resources. Rational exploitation, consumption, utilisation and restoration of the resources for sustainable development, exposed in this Ch., inform that the conception of sustainable development evolved in the mind of Vedavyāsa long before the development of this concept.

In the 4th Ch. (Natural justice and environmental ethics in the Mahābhārata) of the thesis, we find that Vedavyāsa has given stress on the right and wrong actions of the human beings and advocated the principle of ahimsā, i.e., Non-violence. The Mbh. has highlighted that divinity prevails in all elements of nature. So,
violent action on any of these elements is liable to punishment that may be compensated by doing service to the living and non-living world. The right actions of the human beings towards the environment are highly needed at present when people have narrow understanding of the world and therefore, they have been disconnecting themselves from the psychological bond once they had with all the elements of nature. In this regard, the Mahābhārata may guide us towards the right direction to have a broader outlook to understand the concepts of the environment.

The discussion of the Interdependence, Co-existence and Interrelationship in the environment has been incorporated in the 5th Ch. of this thesis. This interrelationship is the basic thing, which makes everything a part of the complete whole. If a single unit suffers here, it disturbs the condition of other and somehow the whole system is affected. The explanations of Vedavyāsa regarding interrelationship among various units of nature suggest that the concept of ecology, which studies this principle of interrelationship, existed in India since a very early period. Today, human beings know well that this interdependence is the basic thing needed for living peacefully with other living and non-living objects. But, to realise the importance of this principle of interrelationship, people should have to understand the bond of friendship and the Mahābhārata may communicate the mutual bond existing between the human beings and other objects of nature in a better way.

The environmental concepts mentioned in the Mbh. are relevant till today, as the values related to these concepts help a great deal to minimise the spiritual crisis which is the very root of our present environmental crisis. This very fact has been presented in Ch. 6 (Problems of the environment in the Mahābhārata) of the thesis. In this Ch., it has been tried to establish that the human beings should not have their supremacy over nature; on the other hand, they should possess a friendly attitude towards it. In this Ch., references have been cited from the Mbh. that whenever people tried to establish their supremacy over nature, they became the victims of the fury of nature.

The development of the society depends on the proper management of the natural resources. This has been discussed in Ch. 7 (Concept of environmental
management in the *Mbh.*) of the thesis. Vedavyāsa has highlighted the conservative approach of environmental management, which is more relevant in this present era. References of the *Mahābhārata* have been collected in this Ch., where we get rational exploitation, proper utilisation and regeneration of resources and the role of the administrators in protecting the natural resources. Vedavyāsa has pointed out forest management, water management and advised people the measures to be taken at the time of disaster. Thus, it is quite clear that the *Mbh.* has produced before us the time-tested strategies of environmental management, which may even be applicable in modern times for improving the condition of the society.

In Ch. 8 (Conclusion), efforts have been made to know the observations of Vedavyāsa for leading a peaceful life. When water, air, herbs, etc., become favourable, the living beings enjoy a peaceful life. He has visualised this world where nature will be our constant companion. The long discussion of the environmental concepts in this great epic sends a message that so long the living beings survive in this world, they will have to integrate themselves with the natural life. Harmony with nature and reverence to nature are the two important features of Indian life. Vedavyāsa has propounded that people should have to revive these two aspects of Indian culture not only to change their attitude towards nature, but also to survive long in this beautiful world.

The eternal messages of the *Mbh.* are still significant as the conservation of flora and fauna, afforestation, controlling population and pollution and thereby ensuring welfare to the people are the main objectives of the Govt. But without people's participation and awakening, Govt. cannot fulfill these objectives. The U.N.O. has also acknowledged our accountability towards the planet Earth. The year 2007 was declared as the International Earth year and that continued up to the year 2009. The U.N.O. seems to follow the messages of the *Mbh.*, when it suggested the moral responsibilities of the human beings for the preservation of the environment. It has pointed out that people should understand the changing trend of life, i.e., the evolutionary process of life, preserve the medicinal quality of various herbs and utilise those for the health of the living beings, generate environmental consciousness among people, minimise the exploration of the underground sources
of water, etc. Without the consciousness and involvement of the people these cannot be materialised. The U.N.O. has also declared that anything contrary to nature should not be encouraged.4

The U.N.O. has reminded us about our moral responsibilities which are not meant for the application of a certain place or to be done within a definite time frame. These responsibilities have been suggested by our ancient seers as well as by the composer of the Mahābhārata. These were considered sacred earlier and are also equally important in modern times. Vedavyāsa has cited many stories and incidents where he has declared the good results of the activities done for the improvement of the environment. The concepts of virtue and vice associated with the activities remind us of the outlook of our ancestors and their way of life in harmony with nature.

The Constitution of India has also laid importance on ancient India's philosophy, which teaches us to protect our ecological systems that ensure our sustenance. National Conservation Strategy and Policy Statement on Environment & Development, Govt of India, Ministry of Environment & Forest, June 1992, has highlighted in its preamble that "In the past, we had a great tradition of environmental conservation which taught us to respect nature and to take cognizance of the fact that all forms of life - human, animal and plant - are closely interlined and that disturbance in one gives rise to an imbalance in other's." Following that great tradition, conscious efforts have been made in our constitutional provisions and environmental legislation and planning objectives, to maintain purity of the environment along with the development of the nation.

The Indian Constitution has assigned the duties for the State and all citizens through article 48 A and article 51 A (g) of the Section on Directive Principles of State Policy which state that the "State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife in the country" and "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes and rivers and wildlife,

and to have compassion for the living creatures". So, our social, political, cultural, economic and scientific progress, etc., should be always without compromising the environment. The Constitution of India has also given importance to evolve a pattern of life that will be happy in conformity with the natural world.

Being the citizens of a country like India, which possesses a rich heritage of environmental knowledge, it is very unfortunate if we are unable to present a good environment to our future generation. It is even more shocking that educated elite section of people of the society have become indifferent to take care of nature, though they know its consequence well. Their materialistic attitude to lead a luxurious life has caused a great damage to the wild life and forests. Human destructive activities are responsible for environmental degradation. At this present juncture several questions creep in our mind- shall we allow these things to continue? Or shall we wait for our destruction? We have only two alternatives- either we have to take the responsibility of restoring the damage we have already done to our environment or we will have to present a world to our next generations which has lost all its beauty. Here a few lines from 'For My Son' of Eastrine Iralu, the blooming poet of Nagaland are quoted, which express our lamentation:

"Some day you will ask
Why the birds no longer sing?
Some day you will ask
Why the flowers don't smell
As sweet as I said they used to do?
Some day you will ask my son
Why rivers no longer have fish?
And wonder where all the
Rainbows have gone!"
Therefore, it is the ethical responsibility of the human beings to maintain the sanctity of the environment.

Sustainability of the human beings depends on the desire of mankind to change their outlook towards the environment. They have two options before them either they have to live in proximity with nature, submitting themselves to its great force or have to make themselves prepare for their annihilation. It is better if the human beings choose the right option to live in harmony with nature. But, it is not an easy task to change the attitudes of the people: It may be expected that as an intelligent creature mankind will certainly think for its own survival and provide a good environment to other creatures to survive in this world. Especially, the people of India, as the successors of a great cultural heritage, may take the benefit of modern technological knowledge and blend that with the spiritual knowledge of ancient India.

Who does not prefer to live a peaceful life? Our seers have visualised that for leading a peaceful life peace must prevail in all the three regions - bhūloka, dyuloka and antariksaloka. Now-a-days when mankind thinks for the peaceful environment of this world, the seers of ancient India were concerned for the peace of the three worlds:

\[ \text{dauh sāntirantarikṣam sāntih prthivi sāntirāpah sāntirosadhayah sāntih} / \]
\[ \text{vanaspatayah sāntiriviṣe devāḥ sāntirbrahma sāntih sarvam sāntireva sāntih sā} \]
\[ \text{mā sāntiredhi} \]  

[Trans: Let peace be prevailed in the sky, in the space, in the Earth, in water, medicinal herbs, trees (forests), gods, Brahman (Supreme power), in all worlds (three worlds) and peace of peace (ultimate peace) – all kinds of peace rest on me.]

Unfortunately, we, the people of India, possess a narrow outlook of our past. Even after inheriting a great treasure-house of knowledge, we could not understand the value of that knowledge. But, if the human beings wish to survive in this world, they have to search out the wisdom of ancient India and materialise the universal

messages of our seers sooner or later and the Mahābhārata may be a proper pathfinder in this regard. Let this auspicious thought be generated in the minds of the human race, so that no one suffers in this world: \textit{mā haścit duhkhabhāk bhavet} [Trans: Let nobody suffer in this world].

Our seers visualised this world, where nature will be the constant companion of the human beings and other creatures. But, today, people of India, being infatuated by the materialistic way of life of the people of the western countries, have discarded the wisdom of our ancestors and neglected their thoughts. As a consequence, we, the Indians have lost our respectable status once we used to possess. Our seers realised that to keep our external environment pure and clean we should have to purify our inner self. But, now-a-days we are only concerned about keeping the external environment free from pollution. So long we do not become conscious enough to realise the wisdom of our seers and revive these in our lifestyle, we will not be able to do welfare to the human race. So, assimilation of modern scientific knowledge with our traditional spiritual knowledge and giving these a right direction is the only solution to control our present environmental crisis: \textit{nānyah panthā vidyate ayanāya}\textsuperscript{8} [Trans: There is no other way out.]

We should not possess a negative approach, rather we should take positive resolutions to implement the thoughts of our seers for the welfare of the people of this world: \textit{tanme manah śivasankalpamastu}\textsuperscript{9} [Trans: Let my mind (our minds) take auspicious resolutions.]

\textsuperscript{8} Yaju S (Sukla), 31. 18
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 34. 1.