

# Ancient Tactics and Modern Progress: A Dualistic Approach towards Sustainable India

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## Abstract

Historical evidences found from the time of Indus Valley Civilisation have shown elements of sustainability, primarily because of their dependence on natural resources and limited availability thereof. Before technological advancements took place, India had been a home of beliefs and practices such as yogic principle of Aparigraha, rain water harvesting system such as building of step well, protecting wildlife, respecting mother nature and use of reusable and recyclable products.

Even though there is a long history of Indian culture which demonstrates eco-friendly and sustainable products and practices, comfortable and luxurious lifestyle of present times with wide range of choices has led to practices which do more harm than good. This has resulted in the rise of popularity and emphasis on sustainable development and emergence of sustainable eco-friendly product and practices which were already part of the Indian culture.

The paper includes, along with a comprehensive study of ancient Indian practices; their present day importance in conserving environment and impacting economy, a survey study of Indians and their lifestyle choices and daily practices and how much they are influenced by environmental concern.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Economical Development, Indian Traditional Practices.

## Introduction

Long before technological advancements took place, India had a culture of using resources directly drawn from nature. Since resources were limited, people made sure to utilise resources in a sustainable way. This led to practices of respecting and even worshipping nature to the extent that nature was given status equivalent to the gods.

After industrial revolution took place, people were inclined towards leading their lifestyle in a comfortable and luxurious way rather than being driven by necessity. This led to increase in the usage of products such as plastics, petroleum, harmful chemical by-products produced in manufacturing units etc. Even though technological progress had made people's lives easier, the consumption and production of such products did more harm than good.

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A balance between the two approaches needs to be attained, so that progress does not thwart sustainable environment, and environmental concern does not prevent progress. The two need to complement each other in a way that suffices the need of present but also leaves sufficient resources for generations to come.

#### **Research Problem**

The research revolves around the central idea of sustainable lifestyle choices amongst the young adults and understanding the drive that prompted them to make those choices. Whether the choices made were driven by environmental concern or it was part of their household practice.

#### **Study Objective**

The highlight of the paper is to study cognizance in young adults about the practices and products that facilitate in achieving sustainable environment. Along with understanding the reasons that motivated them to incorporate or to not incorporate the practices in their lifestyle, the paper also intends to summarise the dualistic approach to attain environmental sustainability by assimilating ancient practices and methods in the scientific and technological progress.

#### **Methodology**

The study is divided into two parts: The First part deals with a study of the chronological order of environmental friendly methods and practices. Beginning from ancient sustainable and environment friendly methods that were prevalent in India to the modern technological progress made in the aforementioned field. This study is done by collecting secondary data from various books, journals and articles.

The second part includes a survey study which is based on a questionnaire of closed ended and open ended questions. The sample size was restricted to 100 random respondents for a selective study on awareness and adoption of sustainable practices, products and methods and identifying the reasons for not embracing the same. The restricted size of respondents limits the number of variables used for the study, which could be overcome by surveying larger groups, hence, leaving a substantial scope for further study.

#### **Environmental Sustainability In Ancient India**

Indus Valley Civilisation, or the Harappa as the site is known as, is not only one of the oldest civilisations of the world, but also the most developed civilisation of that time. The site extends from modern-day northeast Afghanistan to Pakistan and northwest India. The civilisation existed from 3300 BC to 1300 BC around the Indus Valley. Communities during ancient and medieval times are known to have inhabited the areas closer to fertile soil, rivers, plateau or wooded areas. This was done for following reasons:

- To have ease of access to natural resources to build tools and weapons
  - To obtain food by hunting and gathering
  - To have water easily available
  - To set up a dwelling place
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Since the natural resources were of limited substance and vital for the survival, people in those times took care to instil habits of respecting nature and using the resources diligently. This led to emergence of various beliefs and practices. Even though Harappan texts have not been deciphered, enough pictorial seals depict worshipping trees and animals.

People lived amidst nature and began to consider it as sacred. Essentially Water and Earth sustained life of living beings; hence, they were regarded as the Mother (life giver) and were worshipped. In Rig Veda, river Sarasvati is depicted as goddess, while in post-Vedic time, river Ganga is regarded as the sacred goddess. Many ancient texts like *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagvad Gita*, *Kautilya's Arthashastra* mention about environment and its sacredness. Buddhist and Jain teachings from Ancient India resonate with the idea of minimalistic way of leading life and being in harmony with the surroundings, plants and animals alike.

### **Present Scenario: Climate Change**

Human beings began to settle near the areas which provided adequate resources and made their life easier, for example, the Gangetic plains are densely populated because of its rich alluvial soil which is suitable for agriculture due to the availability of water. Increasing settlements led to deforestations and overuse of land. There has been a rise in the consumption of coals, petroleum in motor vehicles, and energy production has increased. A surge of waste is being produced by the industrial activities; this has contributed significantly in GHG emissions.

The GHG emissions have increased significantly. In the year 2019, a total of 43 billion tons of carbon dioxide emissions was produced from all sources.

India produces close to 20000 tonnes of plastic waste each day of which only about 40% is collected. The uncollected plastic finds its way in the environment, polluting the earth as well as the oceans. The Fast Fashion industry alone contributes to 10% of global greenhouse gases emission, uses up to 93 billion cubic meters of water every year and dumps plastic fibre equivalent to 50 million plastic bottles.

Recently, in the year 2019-2020, Australia experienced the worst Bushfire season. A direct correlation between Bushfire and climate change has been made stating that the rise in global temperature resulted in severe fire. The Bushfire has affected wildlife and has led to death of thousands of animals.

Human society has progressed at the cost of plants and animals. Even though technological progress made people's lives comfortable, the comfort came at the price of destroying our planet which is home not only to the flora and fauna but also human beings.

### **Survey Study**

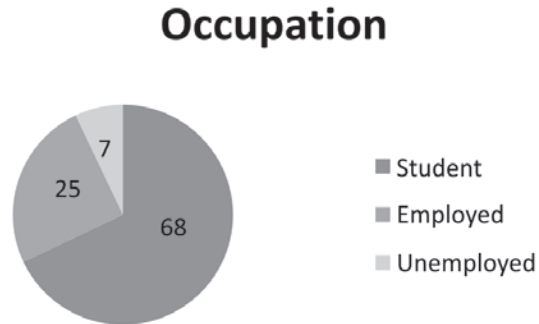
The survey was conducted to assess the habits of the respondents which either directly or indirectly affect the environment. The survey was conducted online.

#### **General Profile of Respondents**

A sample size of 100 of young adults aged between 18 and 25 was selected to study their eco-friendly practices, usage of products and incorporation of methods. The composition of occupation was as follows:

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Chart 1: Occupations of Respondents



### Findings

The study was conducted in the following 5 sections to assess the lifestyle choices of the respondents and how environmental friendly are their choices:

- Integration of Environmental Friendly Practices
- Usage of Environmental Friendly Products
- Adoption of Environmental Friendly Methods
- Reasons for their Lifestyle Choices
- Future Course of Action

The detailed findings are as follows:

- Environmental Friendly Practices

Table 1: Environmental Friendly Practices amongst Respondents

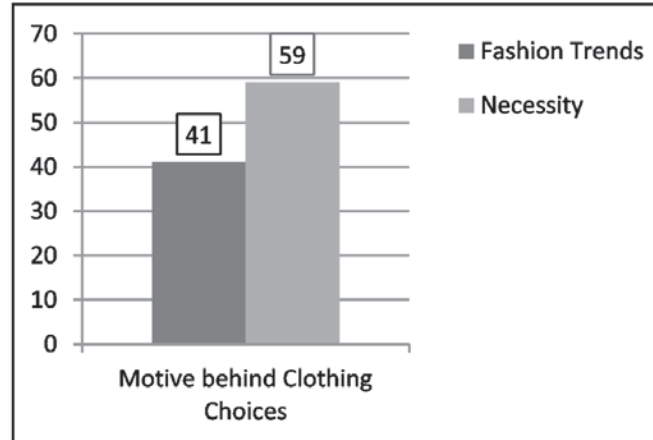
Practices	Yes	No
<b>Reuse of Leftover Food</b>	74	26
<b>Segregation of Dry and Wet Waste</b>	64	36
<b>Encouraging Eco-friendly Practices in Family and Among Peers</b>	90	10

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The table above shows the various practices of respondents. 74% of the respondents stated that they use leftover food from last night. 64% of them said that they do segregate dry waste and the wet waste before disposal. Out of the 100 respondents 90 of them encourage their family and peers to adopt environmental friendly practices.

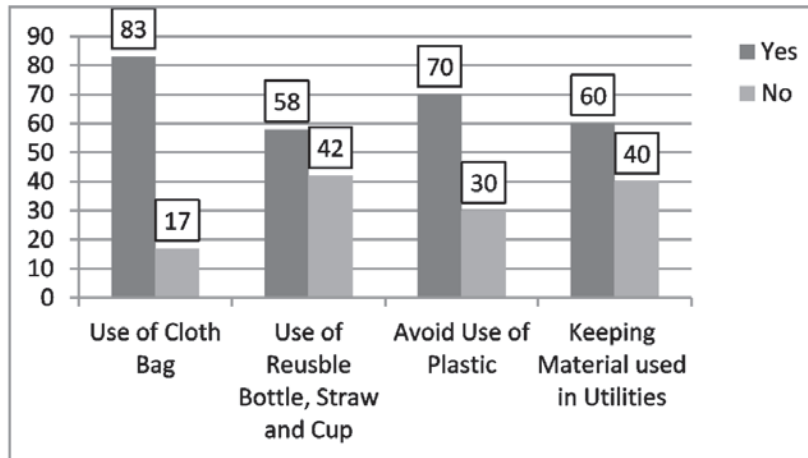
**Chart 2: Motive behind Clothing Choices of Respondents**



Total of 59 respondents said that their clothing choices while shopping were influenced by necessity rather than fashion trends.

- Environmental Friendly Products

**Chart 3: Usage of Environmental Friendly Products by Respondents**

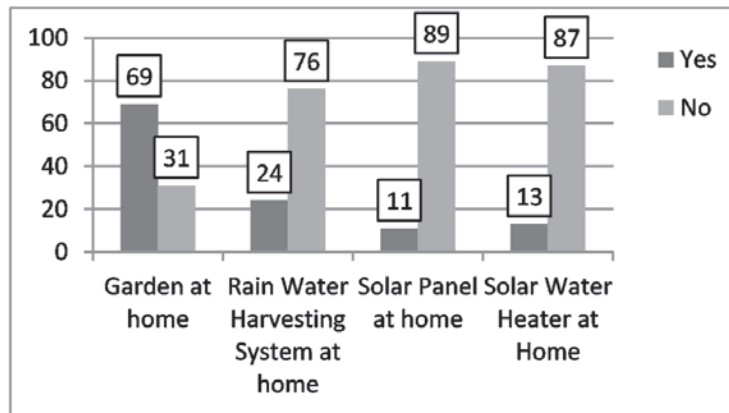


From the chart above, it can be inferred that the majority of the respondents use environmental friendly products. 83 out of the 100 said yes to carrying cloth bag with them while shopping, 58 said yes to using reusable bottle, straw or cup while going out, 70 of them said yes to deliberately avoiding the usage of plastic and 60 respondents said yes to keeping the material used in everyday utilities in mind and the impact they have on the environment.

- Environmental Friendly Methods

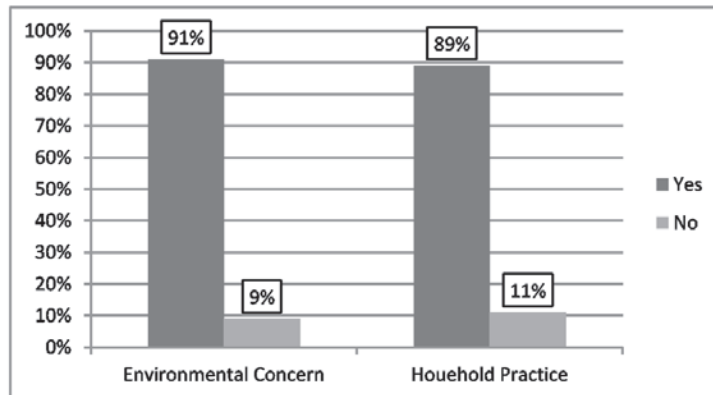
The method chosen were those which could be applied at personal level. The chart shows that the 69 respondents have a garden at their home, but only 24 of them have Rain Water Harvesting system at their home and only 11 and 12 respondents said yes to having a Solar Panel for Electricity and Solar Water Heater at their homes respectively.

Chart 4: Adoption of Environmental Friendly Methods amongst Respondents



- Reasons for the Choices Made

Chart 5: Reason(s) for incorporating Eco-friendly Lifestyle

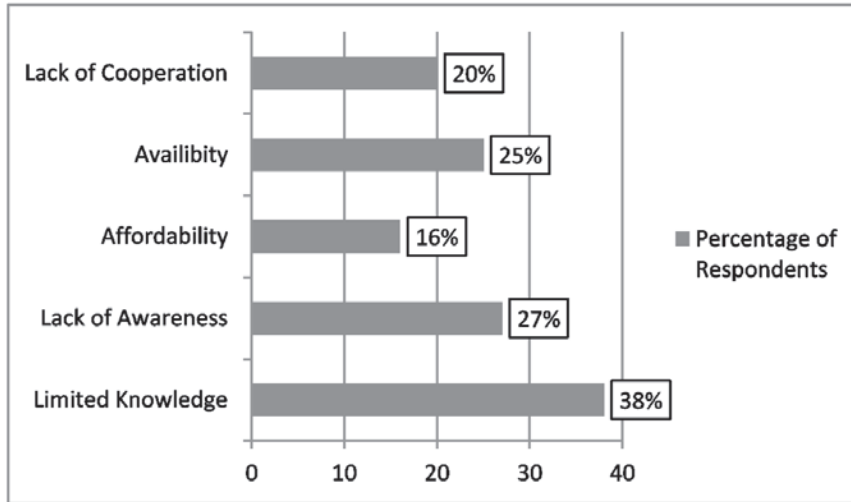


Out of the respondents who incorporated environmental friendly practices, 91% of them said that they adopted the practices out of environmental concern and 89% of them said that the practices such as reusing leftover food from last night, taking cloth bag with them while shopping, cloth shopping habits, etc., were part of their household practices.

An interesting conclusion can be drawn by this chart that the practices incorporated by respondents in their day to day lives are not only influenced by environmental concern but also because the practices are also part of their household habits.

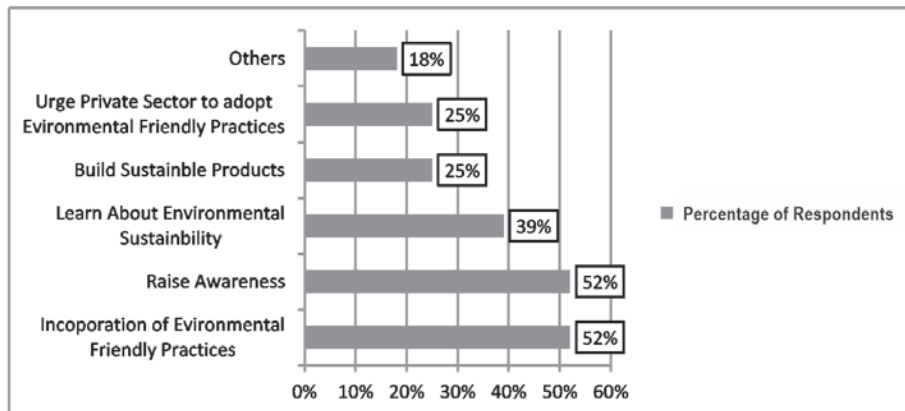
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Chart 6: Reason(s) for not incorporating Eco-friendly Lifestyle



The respondents were asked to opt for all those reasons because of which they did not adopt or incorporate certain practices in their lives. After the completion of the survey the top reasons came out to be limited knowledge about sustainable environmental practices (38%) and lack of awareness about the products and practices (27%) which facilitate the attainment of sustainable environment. Other reasons included affordability and practicality of the products, availability and lack of cooperation from family and friends were opted by 16%, 25% and 20% of the respondents respectively.

Chart 7: Future Action(s) to be taken by Respondents



The chart above shows future course of action(s) a respondent would be taking in a time frame of one year to contribute towards achieving a sustainable environment. 52% of the respondents opted for Incorporation of environment friendly practices in their lives as well as to raise awareness amongst their family and peers. 39% of the respondents opted to learn more about environmental sustainability, 25% chose to work towards building sustainable products as well as to urge private sector to adopt environmental friendly practices. 18% of the respondents suggested other actions that they would be taking to achieve environmental sustainability.

Those other suggestions included use of public transport, e-vehicles, making environmental sustainability study part of school curriculum, get influencers to propagate eco-friendly norms to impact large masses, lawful mandating of the practices to certain extent etc.

### **Inferences And Conclusion**

The survey showed that 76% (average) of the total respondents have eco-friendly practices (segregation of waste, using leftovers, etc) incorporated in their lives. Only little over of 50% shop for clothing based on necessity. A shift in shopping habits and wardrobe practices is needed since the Fast Fashion Industry is close to 10% contributor in global GHG emissions.

Increasing consumption of plastic is yet another threat to our environment, because of which Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 15 August, 2019 set a target to phase out single use plastic. In the survey, an average 67.75% of the respondents incorporated habits such as use of cloth bag, reusable bottle, avoiding use of plastic, etc.

Even though 69 respondents have a garden at their home, on an average 84 of the respondents out of the 100 did not have environmental friendly and technologically advanced methods such as Rain Water Harvesting, Solar Panel for electricity and Solar Water Heater at their home.

Hence it can be concluded that traditional practices of using resources optimally and diligently are part of majority of the households, though the advanced techniques are yet to reach many people at the individual level.

The top two reasons for not leading a sustainable lifestyle were lack of knowledge and lack of awareness. Interestingly, top future course of action suggested was to incorporate such practices in their lives. Thus, there is a willingness to bring changes in their lifestyle for the environmental sustainability.

In ancient India, the lives of people were not easier in comparison to today's time because technological advancements due to industrial revolution had not taken place. In modern era, when advances did take place, the life of a person became comfortable, even luxurious, but the environment suffered because of it. Therefore it is vital to recognize the importance of our surroundings and balancing progress by maintaining harmony with nature.

### **Limitations**

The limitation of the survey is the restricted sample size of 100 respondents. Another limitation could be the short questions that were asked. The brief questions asked could be elaborated and the habits and practices of larger number of respondents could be studied in greater detail, thus, leaving a scope for further studies.

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