



Research article

Ecological Knowledge and Environment: Voices from Indigenous Literatures of India

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Abstract

There has been a continual contest between the indigenous knowledge system and the Western world. Colonisation has devalued the indigenous knowledge and culture of the colonised communities. This paper attempts to define the indigenous and understand how the indigenous knowledge system in India has incorporated ideas and concepts that not only appreciate the world of nature but also emphasize the importance of preserving and conserving nature for a harmonious existence of all living beings, including humans. The author demonstrates here how indigenous literature in India has consistently emphasized not only the beauty of nature but also its power to reintegrate all forms of life and ensure the harmony of human beings with nature. Thus, the author argues that the traditional Indian knowledge system has always emphasized the relevance of ecology and nature; therefore, Western claims of ecological sustainability, environmentalism, and ecocriticism are not new to the Indian mind.

Keywords: Indigenous, knowledge system, India, Vedā, Akam, Puram, ecology, environment, decolonisation.

Introduction

This paper is born out of the need to both understand the indigenous knowledge system in India, which emphasizes the importance of nature and human beings' innate connection with their environment, and to counter Western concepts of ecology, environmentalism, and the like. The paper endeavours to analyse how these Western concepts are not novel ones when placed against the indigenous knowledge system in India. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, the word "indigenous" refers to things that "grow or live naturally in a place, and have not been brought there from somewhere else". (*Cambridge Dictionary*, n.d., indigenous)

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The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines indigenous as “produced, growing, living, or occurring natively or naturally in a particular region or environment”. (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d., indigenous) It also means “relating to or descended from the earliest known inhabitants of a place, and especially of a place that was colonised”. (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, n.d., indigenous) In this sense, it refers to the ‘native’ population/things of a place and, in turn, the knowledge system of the inhabitants of a place that was colonised. When used in this sense, the term ‘indigenous’ encompasses all aspects of life and the knowledge system of a geographical space that later came under colonial occupation. Thus, the indigenous knowledge system in India includes Vedic knowledge, Classical Indian literatures like Sanskrit, Tamil, Pali, and Prakrit. The term indigenous, therefore, has a close link with colonisation, and it refers to things, people, knowledge systems, and cultures of a place/region before colonisation of that place /region. It is in this sense that the term ‘indigenous’ has been used in this paper, and the words ‘indigenous’ and ‘traditional’ have been used synonymously to indicate all those cultural practices, including knowledge systems of the people before colonisation. Colonisation had spelled a disaster by methodically eradicating the precolonial culture’s ways of seeing, being, and interacting with other cultures and with themselves. Colonisation had, from its inception, denigrated indigenous knowledge and ways of being and considered it irrelevant and insufficient for ‘modern’ living. Indigenous knowledge is closely related to the land and environment of the people, and the colonial onslaught on the environment of the inhabitants in the name of industrial deforestation was a direct attack on Indigenous knowledge and its culture. Indigenous knowledge was not only dismissed from the lives of the now colonised people, but it was also not validated as an important part of academia. The colonial mission had a purpose behind this. Apart from “our physical subjugation, the process of colonization required the complete subjugation of our minds and spirits so that our lands and resources could be robbed from underneath our bodies”. (Wilson, 2004, p. 360)

The primary effect of colonisation was the destruction and constant disparagement of indigenous wisdom, which eventually led to the obliteration of indigenous wisdom from the memory of the colonised inhabitants. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong’O, colonisation acted as a

cultural bomb: The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately in themselves (Thiong’O, 1986, p. 3).

The colonised were compelled to acknowledge that their indigenous traditions were inferior to those of the European colonisers, and these indigenous ways of living and viewing the world were “incompatible with modernity and civilization”. (Wilson, 2004, p. 360) Thus, the colonialist project of empire building outrightly silenced the traditional voices of the indigenous people and repressed their indigenous worldview. New parameters were set for the colonised, and they were taught the worthlessness of their indigenous knowledge and tradition. This led to the blind parroting of the Western worldview and the extermination of indigenous wisdom. In that situation, Macaulay’s Education Minute of 1835 was one such crucial move that was deliberately structured to belittle the traditional system of knowledge in India and completely wipe it out from the minds and bodies of the imperialized Indians.

The process of decolonisation and the recovery of indigenous voices and knowledge systems starts with the idea that indigenous wisdom has not only sustained our lives and culture from time immemorial, but it also has the potential to solve some of the major crises the entire

world is witnessing today. (Wilson, 2004, p. 362) The dominance of the West has always tried to keep indigenous knowledge apart from academia, but with decolonisation, it is being argued and shown that indigenous knowledge can “enrich, engage and transform the Western scientific project”. (Wilson, 2004, p. 362) It is essential to remember that indigenous knowledge originates from the land through the relationships people develop with the fundamental forces of nature, as evident in the various hymns of the *Ṛgvedā*. For instance, in the Book I of the *Ṛgvedā* the different hymns celebrating the natural forces are *sūrya* (sun), *varuṇa* (rain), *vāyu* (air), *agni* (fire), *vanaṣpati* (tree), *Ṛtu* (season), and *Ūṣā* (dawn). A look at the Hymn XLVIII celebrating “Dawn” will succinctly evince this relationship developed between the people and the natural forces. The hymn says, “Dawn on us with prosperity, O Ūṣās, Daughter of the sky”. (Griffith, 2018, p. 42) It becomes clear that dawn is associated with prosperity because it is the time when people go to work and secure their livelihood. It goes on to say, “Ūṣā comes carefully tending everything:/Rousing all life she stirs all creatures that have feet, and makes the birds of air fly up”. (Griffith, 2018, p.43) The hymn reinstates this relationship and says that with the coming of dawn all lives start afresh. It further states, “Shine on us with thy radiant light.../Bringing to us great store of high felicity, and beaming on our solemn rites”. (Griffith, 2018, p.43) The poet-seer is here requesting Ūṣā to always bless all lives with her radiant effulgence and bestow felicity. Similarly, the Hymn L, on “Sūrya” describes the sun as “the God who knoweth all that lives” (Griffith, 2018, p. 44). This establishes a relationship between the natural force in the form of the sun and not only humans but also all living beings. The speaker asks Sūrya to “remove my heart’s disease, take from me this my yellow hue”. (Griffith, 2018, p. 45) This clearly reveals that indigenous people shared a relationship with the natural forces, and they believed that through these hymns, they could reach out to these forces and ask for their benevolence. The later sections of this paper will discuss more of these hymns. These relationships are transmitted and practised in the socio-spiritual system and are lived in the mind and body of the indigenous people. It goes without saying that in the absence of the ecosystem, indigenous people cannot nurture these relationships. (Simpson, 2004, p. 378) With these ideas, this paper will try to analyse how the indigenous wisdom inherent in the traditional literature has always tried to forge a balance between the world of nature and that of human beings so that nature can be both preserved and conserved. Indigenous knowledge in India has always harped on the peaceful and just coexistence of the natural world and the human world. The environment is the backbone of human civilisation, and indiscriminate exploitation of the natural world will spell doom for human society. Indigenous knowledge system, as opposed to the ‘modern’ West, did not harp on materialist progress; rather, it emphasised a socio-spiritual well-being where the human and natural world depended on each other for survival. A śloka from the ‘Devī Kavacham’ of Sri Sri Chandī explicitly pronounces not only the importance of the natural world but also evinces the significant reliance of human life on the world of nature. It says,
 “So long as the earth is able to maintain mountains, forests, and wooded tracts
 Until then the human race and its progeny will be able to survive in this earth.”
 (Jagadishwarananda, 1990, p.39)

The above-quoted lines from *Sri Sri Chandī* explicitly evince that the Indian seers from time immemorial were aware of the significance of nature and how nature sustains human lives. They therefore made no mistakes to vociferously announce in their compositions that nature is of utmost importance if the human race wants its progeny to live and prosper. Western knowledge and science, with their over-dependence on material prosperity, have landed

human civilisation into a quandary. No doubt human beings have lost their association with nature, and the flora and fauna that surround them are depleting at an alarming rate due to the threat of ‘development’ and ‘progress’. Indigenous knowledge, while embracing the essence of ancestral knowing, is a bridge between human beings and their environments. (Akena, 2012, p. 601) The hazardous residues of industrialization and the production of toxic wastes resulting from European global expansion have not only led to the creation of ecological imbalance but have also pushed human society to the threshold of disaster and chaos. The world we are leaving behind for posterity is nightmarish. In a nutshell, these concerns have led to the development of environmentalism and ecocriticism which now have become a genuinely international movement “occurring with lesser or greater intensity in a variety of countries across the globe” (Guha, 2014, p. 3) and there has been a plethora of writings across cultures revealing and analysing the loss of the natural landscape and the urge to protect, nurture and conserve it from the destructive technological lifestyles that have been a hand-me-down from Western materialism. Industrialisation, along with colonisation, led to large-scale ecological destruction. “The British were, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, unquestionably the world leaders in deforestation” (Guha, 2014, p. 6). Across their colonies, forests were decimated in the name of economic growth and industrial development, and the other colonial powers followed suit. This continuous and sustained decimation of forests, along with ecological degradation, was perceived as an environmental crisis. It is essential to emphasize that this crisis, which we are currently witnessing, is largely engineered by colonial lust and ambition for prosperity and wealth. As a consequence of this, the environmental movement has consciously harped on the preservation and conservation of the rights of nature and sustainable lifestyles. Indigenous literature and the traditional literary texts have always thrived in the world of nature. As already mentioned, with the rapid depletion of the ecology and the threat of climate change, ‘western’ literature has been producing a deluge of different genres of literature advocating the loss of forests and the ‘green’. Academic rubrics like ecology and literature, environment and literature, green literature, and so many others are fast gaining ground, and this has become a trend in academia, which is largely enamoured by concepts and ideas imported from the West. Previously colonized countries must look back at their indigenous literatures before mimicking these very Western concepts.

A look into the indigenous literature of India will reveal that the Indian weltanschauung has always believed that life consists essentially of “a process of interchange between the life substance and the environment”. (Choudhuri, 1999, p. 1) Indian thought upholds the need to preserve the environment and consequently be preserved by it. So, in a way, it is a cyclic process of unity between nature/environment and human beings, and as Indranath Choudhuri says, “. . . all life is one, and inner reality and external reality are mutually dependent. Traditional India looks upon man and nature as waves of the same river.” (Choudhuri, 1999, p.1)

A look at the two traditions of Indian literature – Vedic literature and Sangam literature – exemplifies that the entire cosmos is interlinked and is of equal value. Vedic literature testifies to this intrinsic value of nature and stresses that the entire nature is a part of an indivisible life force uniting the world of humans, animals, and plants. A close look at the *R̥g Vedā* displays that the various natural forces have been represented as “devas” or the Shining Ones, and the Vedic sages are in awe of the powers of these natural forces, which are beyond human knowledge and control, and so they are to be worshipped. The chief among them is Indra, and

there is Agni, Sūrya, Sāvitrī, Ūṣā, Prithvi, Varuna, and the different rivers like Sindhu and Sarasvati. Thus, the environment was sacred to these people and they realised that they are 'one' with nature. Nanditha Krishna says

man had to recognise what powers of nature he could not control and was thus compelled to resort to prayer to win the cooperation of the winds and rains to ensure the regularity of the monsoon, for the control of earthquakes, forest fires, and all major elements of nature" (2017, p.4).

The worship of natural forces was not done because these sages, our ancestors, were uneducated or uncivilised as the West wanted us to believe; rather, they were extremely erudite and intelligent observers of the natural world and rejoiced together with the transcendental Creator. The different 'suktas' of the *Ṛg Vedā*, like the "Nādīstuti Sukta" and those on the Sun, Fire, and Earth, evince an explicit appreciation of nature. A detailed study of the hymns of the *Ṛg Vedā* evinces the fact that the sages were not only extolling the different natural forces like Agni, Sūrya, Varuna, and Ūṣā, but they were also singing praises of the rivers, waters, plants, cows, and food. In the last book of the *Ṛg Vedā*, there is a hymn called the "Praise of Herbs" (Griffith, 2018, XCVII, p. 922). Plants were sanctified for their different beneficial concerns. For their role in providing food and health, plants became the blessings of Mother Earth. As Nanditha Krishna says, "people worshipped the tree as a symbol of fertility essential for the survival of early man" (Krishna, 2017, p.117). In the hymn on the "Praise of Herbs", it is said

The healing virtues of the Plants stream forth like cattle from the stall –

Plants that shall win me store of wealth, and save thy vital breath, O man" (Griffith, 2018, p. 923).

This reveals the importance of trees and herbs in human lives and also brings out the fact that plants and trees have to be worshipped and venerated so that they can nourish and enrich human lives. Again, the hymn on "The Rivers" (Griffith, 2018, LXXV, p.892) praises the river Sindhu and lauds the Ganges, Yamunā, Sutudri (Sutlej), Parusni (Iravati, Ravi), Sarasvati, Asikni (Chenab), Vitasta (Jhelum), Gomati, and others. Rivers are sacred because all forms of life depend on water; they are the source of survival and energy. The *Ṛg Vedā* calls the rivers goddesses because of their life-giving forces. Water supports and nurtures all living beings, and because of it, the soil can be irrigated. The hymn on "Waters" (Griffith, 2018, XXX, p. 839) thus extols, "For, wealthy waters, ye control all treasures: ye bring auspicious intellect and Amrita" (Griffith, 2018, p. 840). Thus, water has the potential to bring "amrita" or elixir, since without water, no living being can exist on Earth. It also says that waters are the "Mothers of the world..." (Griffith, 2018, p. 840) Thus, we find that the *Ṛg Vedā* praises rivers and waters to make human beings understand the significance of this natural resource. Further, it not only exemplifies the natural forces but also has many 'sukta's on the cow, forest, trees, and medicinal plants. Thus, nature and her ecology, the importance of the environment, and the management of the natural resources are important aspects of these hymns. Nanditha Krishna says that the "...natural phenomena are the manifestations or expressions of the gods and not the gods themselves. They express the principles that govern the world and the cosmic order, *rita*." (2017, p. 2) In fact, Shiva and his family are one of the supreme examples of the need to protect, preserve, and conserve biological diversity. His family shows the harmonious relationship among nature, animals, birds, rodents, and human beings.

Similarly, a reading of Sangam poetry reveals an interpretation of nature towards an ecological awareness. The major themes of Sangam poetry are love and war, which have been

categorised into ‘Akam’ and ‘Puram’ respectively. ‘Akam’ poetry consists of the major portions of Sangam poetry. Sangam poets not only “. . . treat nature but also resort to it to describe human life in its varying aspects, like love and war. They knit together the feelings of man and the beauties of nature in closest bonds and warmest associations.” (Varadarajan, 1957, pp. 2-3) In ‘Akam’ poetry, the feelings and passions of the lovers are depicted along with pictures of nature and the natural world. The life of a couple of lovers is described against the background of time and place, called “*mutalporu!*, the emotional experience is called *uripporu!* and there is *karupporu!* which entails the objects of the environment (Varadarajan, 1957, p. 4). The poetic world of the Sangam poets “is one of correspondences between time, place and human nature” (Murali, 1998, p.157). “In the Tamil system of correspondences, a whole language of signs is created by relating the landscapes as signifiers to the ‘uri’ or appropriate human feelings.” (Ramanujan, 1985, p.241)

The ‘Aintinai’ or the five-fold categorisation of the environment includes ‘*kuṛiñci*’ (mountain region), ‘*mullai*’ (forest or pastoral tract), ‘*marutam*’ (agricultural region), ‘*neytal*’ (coastal region), and ‘*pālai*’ (arid desert tract) (Varadarajan, 1957, p.6). The word ‘*tiṇai*’ refers to landscape, or in a broader way, it is the environment. Each of these five landscapes has its specific flora and fauna. The Sangam poets have noticed that each of these landscapes influences human emotions and activities at particular seasons and even during specific times of the day. The Sangam poets with their acute observatory power of nature have comprehended that the natural world has profound influences on the life and emotions of human beings. This paper refers to two instances that bring out how nature becomes the stage for the setting of different human impulses. In ‘Akam’ poems, ‘*kuṛiñci*’ becomes the setting for the meeting of the lovers in late winter at midnight. The rough mountain regions with their steep cliffs, the darkness, and the cold create a dramatically appropriate ambience and heighten suspense and longing for the new lovers (Varadarajan, 1957, p. 8). The ‘*pālai*’ region becomes the setting for the parting of lovers and their pining in separation. It is the noon time of hot summers, as this time of the day intensifies loneliness and solitude. Thus, the “actual objective landscapes of Tamil country become the interior landscapes of Tamil poetry.” (Ramanujan, 1985, p.241) Since ‘Puram’ poems dealt with themes of war and battle, nature played a restricted role. The poets varied their scenes and settings in these poems of war as and when it was required (Murali, 1998, p. 158). It can be said that the Sangam poets made conscious efforts towards the formulation of an environmental aesthetics, where the human ‘*bhāva*’ finds correspondence in the natural *vibhāva* (Murali, 1998, pp.157-158). Each of the ‘*tiṇai*’s has its own respective flora and fauna. For instance, ‘*kuṛiñci*’ has lion and bear as its specific animals, and the tree is the sandalwood tree. Again, the ‘*pālai*’ region has elephant and ‘*pālai*’ wolf. Thus, the poets looked at the entire environment as one unified whole where the comprehension of meaning is interlinked to all and everything (Murali, 1998, p. 160). A holistic view has always been propounded and believed by the traditional Indian poets and seers. Progress and development according to the traditional Indian attitude means harmony with the rhythms of nature.

The Indian *weltanschauung* understands that human life depends upon everything that surrounds him, and this sustains him. This automatically directs human beings to be constantly reminded of the environment and ecology. Humans need to work with nature and not against her; this is the crux that Indian literature has manifested from time immemorial, as we have already tried to understand in our above discussion of Vedic literature and Sangam literature. Nature does not serve simply as a background for literature; rather, Indian literature has

always tried to depict that the rhythms of human life and those of nature correspond, coexist, and coalesce with each other (Baindur, 2015, p. 141). Kālidāsa is one of the representatives of this Indian spirit and worldview of a whole and integrated life where humans, plants, and animals not only share a beautiful camaraderie but also stand in a deep unity among them. In Kālidāsa's works, one can see a concord between nature and human beings. When Śakuntalā was abandoned by her mother, the birds looked after her until Sage Kanva found her out. Kanva's hermitage is a place where nature, human beings, animals, and birds live together with mutual help and trust. In fact, hermitages are places where there is complete union between the human world and the non-human world. The hermitages are usually situated in a serene place between the 'nagara' or the town/city and the 'araṇya' or the forest. In the hermitage, one can witness harmony between humans and nature. Śakuntalā and her friends' regular action of watering the plants is not merely a result of duty, but she loves to water them as she shares deep sisterly affection for them. This sisterly affection of Śakuntalā is revealed and reiterated when she says, "na kevalam tata niyogah eba astime sodara-sneha api eteṣu" (Kalidasa, 1996, p.62). This statement of Śakuntalā is important as it reveals that nature is significant not only for the benefit of human beings only but there is a deep bond of the heart that exists between humans and nature. There is love, compassion, and respect for the world of nature. It is imperative to say that the Indian seers and poets understood the importance of conserving the world of nature, thereby being preserved by nature. The association of nature and human beings is not mechanical, nor is it impersonal. Let us here turn our discussion towards the *Ṛtusamhāra*.

The *Ṛtusamhāra* reveals a moving account of the six seasons. In the words of Radhakrishnan, the *Ṛtusamhāra* displays "not only Kalidasa's vision of nature's beauty but also an understanding of human moods and desires" (2021, p. XXVIII). The *Ṛtusamhāra* shows the changing life of humans, animals, plants, and birds in the six seasons – summer, rain, autumn, frost, winter, and spring. Each of the six seasons is described in separate cantos. The six cantos clearly mark a direct interaction between the world of nature and that of human beings. It needs to be mentioned that the seasons form an order of nature. "Nature and environment change but follow a pattern of an annual cycle to which the humans respond..." (Baindur, 2015, p. 159) As one reads the *Ṛtusamhāra* it becomes evident that with the changing seasons, not only humans respond but also the whole of nature – the flora, fauna, water bodies - everyone responds and their responses vary with the change of seasons. Everyone acclimatizes themselves to the changing season so that life can move ahead. He describes the predicament of not only humans but also animals and plants in the various seasons, especially in the summers. He not only stops at this but also shows how the flora and fauna come together to support each other during the extreme weather conditions.

Elephants spray cool water ...to soothe themselves from the scorching sun...they roam searching for water, unafraid of lions anymore (2021, p.15)

The poet again says,

Peacocks their bodies and souls wilting under the sun's piercing rays ..wedge their heads into the discs of their dazzling plumes

and do not kill the serpents slithering nearby (2021, p.16)

Singed by the scorching sun rays

frogs leap out of the muddy marsh

and sit under the hood parasol of a tired and thirsty cobra (2021, p.18)

In these sections what is important to note is the fact that the animals have kept their natural instinct, that of the predator and prey, at bay because they can even understand that the scorching heat of the sun has parched the natural world so they cannot attack and kill their prey in such unforeseen weather condition. There is a sense of empathy among the animals and birds for each other. Since there is a scarcity of water in the ponds, rivers, and lakes due to the scorching heat of the sun, the different animals try to bathe as frequently as possible to keep themselves cool. Human beings apply sandal paste and wear light clothes to keep themselves cool. This indicates that not only humans but also the entire flora and fauna make every effort to adapt as the seasons change. This also marks a clear interaction between nature and the human and non-human world.

Amorous women flirting with their/playful moves...ignite flames of love/in the hearts of tired travellers like a lovely evening/lit up by the glistening moon (2021, p.12)

Women with curvaceous hips, their feet coloured.../mimicking the sonorous crying of hamsas, /stir desire in the hearts of young men” (2021, p. 5).

This shows how there is an interaction between human desires and the world of nature. Baidur says Kālidāsa

intends to weave the seasons together as an aesthetic crown on nature’s head. The poet pays attention to all of the senses and tries to recreate for us the experience of the season (2021, p.159).

It is not a mere description of the different seasons but rather how the changes in nature affect human and non-human lives and the ways it is dealt with so that the world of nature and human beings can move on harmoniously without harming each other. In modern parlance, this is one of the most significant messages that Ṛtusamhāra offers to the readers, which is nothing short of ecological awareness.

Then comes the rain with his

war elephants in their rutting season,/glowing flashes of lightning – his tapering victory flag, /and roaring thunder – the sound of beating war drums/welcomed by the crowd of lovers with maddening cheers (2021, p. 29).

Again, it shows how human beings and lovers welcome the monsoon season. After the blazing heat of the summer, the monsoon heralds back life on earth. The poet says,

Take pity on prayers of thirsty Chatakas.../pouring generous showers..tapping of rain sounds sweet to the ears (2021, p. 31).

Thus, the arrival of monsoon not only relieves human beings from the drudgery of heat but it also quenches the thirst of plants, animals, birds, and insects, and humans and nature rejoice as the raindrops fall on earth. The poet says, “the earth smiles like an elegant lady/draped in nature’s colourful jewels”. (2021, p.33) Generally, the human world is compared with nature, but here Kalidasa compares nature in the form of the earth with humans. This again brings out a relation of camaraderie and a bond of unity between nature and human beings. The monsoon rains wash down the banks of the river, the waters sullied with mud, and the uprooted trees rush to meet the ocean. Kalidasa compares this again with a wanton woman who rushes to meet her lover, forgetting about her reputation and that of her family. Thus, the poet humanises nature to reveal the close relationship between the world of nature and that of human beings. The monsoon is called the life-force of all the living beings. This season is full of fast movement and speed; there are the peacocks dancing, the gushing rivers inundating the banks, and the winds swaying the trees.

Autumn is much quieter with clear nights and the autumnal moon delighting all of nature. The poet describes the different flowers of the season and the agricultural landscape. He says, “Look, the autumn has arrived like a charming bride!” (2021, p.57). The rice plants cover the fields. For the poet, autumn has a very dignified look, and he says, “white reigns all around, pleasing the eyes” (2021, p. 58). The rivers flow quietly, and the clouds move in a stately manner in procession. The clear night sky with the autumnal moon torments the separated lovers. The poet says,

The autumn night, dressed in moonlight,
glistening – the veil of clouds gone.. (2021, p.63).

The season of frost makes the plants to wilt. The poet says

lotuses withered away, dew falling heavily,
these ring in the fine season of frost (2021, p. 83).

Frost is the time for “joyous carnival of lovemaking” (2021, p.87). It is a carnival of lovemaking for both humans and non-humans. The black swans “courting in the crystal-clear, chilly waters, captivate everyone’s heart” (2021, p. 91). The poet again compares the season of frost with the separated lovers. He says,

The Priyangu creepers have turned pale, /my love, lying exposed in freezing cold,/facing
constant onslaught from the icy wind,/like ashen face of women parted from their lovers
(2021, p. 92).

Winter has the mood of lovemaking, yet the nights are not much enjoyed due to extreme cold. He says,

It’s comforting to keep the windows shut, fires lit/and bask lazily under the sun../..Men
enjoy this season in the company of grown-up women (2021, p.102).

We thus see that human beings adapt to the different seasons so that life continues in the usual way. Then comes the most celebrated of all seasons, namely spring. The singing of the koel bird, the blossoms of the mango and the ashoka, and kimsuka flowers adorn the world of nature. “Trees are abundant with flowers, ponds with lotuses... .” (2021, p.118) Nature is suddenly bedecked with different colourful flowers and there is a spring in every foot and joy in every heart.

The spring brings good fortune to all/for water in the pools is good for swimming... and
beautiful women enjoy wearing jewelled girdles (2021, p.119).

Spring brings new warmth to the hearts of lovers. Not only nature but also the human and non-human world is filled with love and happiness.

Crazy cuckoo drunk on Mango nectar, /kisses his mate passionately, /so do the honeybees
hidden inside lotus petals, /make love to their sweethearts (2021, p.130).

Thus, nature is completely in a celebratory mood during this time of the year. Seeing the swinging mango trees laden with coppery leaves and full of bloom, the hearts of women ache with desire (2021, p.131). Also, the Ashoka tree with its full bloom and the “intoxicated honey bees” (2021, p.133) kissing the tender mango buds fill the hearts of lovelorn youngsters with desire and longing. This clearly shows how the world of nature, with its flora and fauna, influences the lives of human beings and stirs emotions in them. He ends the season of spring by celebrating the god of love, Kama. One can say that the ending of *Rtusamhāra* is extremely significant; the poet says, the formless love-god, along with his friend Vasanta, may “bring you and the succeeding generations evermore joy!” (2021, p.144). Thus, the poet is not only singing about the beauty and close association of the natural and human world, but he also has the implicit expectation that the seasons of nature will always bestow joy and happiness

to posterity. This is primarily because the natural world, the flora and fauna, play a vital role in shaping and sustaining the lives of human beings. Nature provides the human world with powders, incense, and perfumes, which are obtained from different plants and herbs, and these enhance the beauty and charm of women. Thus, the human world is dependent on the world of nature in more than one way, and losing this world of nature will completely destroy human civilisation. One can definitely say that the cyclical nature of the seasons not only indicates the responses of humans and birds, animals, and insects, but it also foregrounds the changing mood of nature and humans. *Ṛtusamhāra* not only immerses the readers in the world of nature in a visual manner, but it does so in an emotional and sensorial way. The fundamental connection between seasons and sensuality is foregrounded in the *Ṛtusamhāra*. For Kālidāsa both the themes of nature and human emotions are intertwined so intimately that they seem to be inseparable (Baindur, 2015, p. 158). Thus, it is possible for Kālidāsa to transform the cloud into a messenger conveying the message of the estranged lover to his wife in *Meghadūta*. As mentioned already Kālidāsa never treats nature simply as a backdrop for his writings; the cloud messenger in *Meghadūta* is therefore never described as a passive witness of the different geographical locations through which it moves rather the arrival of the cloud messenger indicates the inception of different activities in the lives of both the humans and non-humans. It satiates the parched earth, cools down people, and rejuvenates the natural landscape. The cloud messenger and the different seasons in *Ṛtusamhāra* evince the splendour and majesty of the interrelationship between the natural world and that of the human world, and thereby exhorts that nature is essential and has to be preserved. This again reiterates my point that nature in indigenous Indian literature and philosophy is not merely a physical entity; rather, nature is embedded in every minute fabric of the human and non-human world, influencing and reflecting the different emotions, passions, and activities of the human and non-human lives. Thus, the relationship between humans and nature is a deep-seated bond and is integral to every experience.

Ṛtusamhāra creates a dialogic plane where issues that concern the world of humans and that of nature have been both addressed and articulated. The traditional Indian ethos has always reverberated the sentiment to “live in harmony with nature, in a relationship of mutual dependence”. (Choudhuri, 1999, p.175) Nature is not to be dominated, but it has to be empathetically understood. The external world is to be brought into direct relationship with human emotions and moods, and then only can the world of nature and humans coexist in mutual trust and adoration. Development and progress do not mean destroying the equilibrium that exists between nature and human life. The Western notion of development and scientific progress have raped nature and rendered the environment desolate while indigenous Indian culture, as discussed above, has always valued, revered and worshipped nature and the natural world. Harmony with nature and not discord is the essence of the Indian view from precolonial times, and this has been succinctly expressed in her traditional texts. Indigenous Indian culture has understood from time immemorial that their surroundings - the earth, fire, water, air, and space are to be taken care of and revered; otherwise, human life will be jeopardised. Thus, in the Indian context, indigenous literature also tries to emphasise this holistic view where nature and human life move in a holistic way. It has already been discussed above, and in conclusion, it can be said that the Indian tradition already has this wisdom in relation to nature and its conservation and preservation. The Western concepts of environmentalism, ecocriticism, ecotopia, and the like are not new to the traditional Indian worldview. A profound look into the indigenous literatures will

showcase the harmonious ways of living that have already been prescribed in it. The time is ripe to reclaim the indigenous voices, the indigenous wisdom, and ways of living from decades of colonial denigration. The complete revoking of the colonial mind, which has taught the colonised to devalue their indigenous knowledge and traditional ways of living, has to begin in their own minds and communities. It is imperative to understand that decolonisation is about “ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (Said, 1994, p. 6), hence the colonised have to stop subscribing to Western concepts like environmentalism, ecocriticism and green literature and delve deep in to the traditional resources of wisdom, philosophy and literature and uphold them in front of the West.

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