

# NEXT IAS

## SUMMARY OF DOWN TO EARTH

[16–31 MAY, 2025]



### DELHI CENTRE:

**Vivekananda House:** 6-B, Pusa Road, Metro Pillar no. 111, Near Karol Bagh Metro, New Delhi-110060 | Phone: 8081300200

**Mukherjee Nagar:** 1422, Main Mukherjee Nagar Road, Near Batra Cinema, New Delhi-110009 | Phone: 8081300200

**JAIPUR CENTRE:** A-1, Lion's Colony, Sitabari, Near The Theme Hotel, Tonk Road, Jaipur-302018 | Phone: 9358200511

**PRAYAGRAJ CENTRE:** 31/31 Sardar Patel Marg, Civil Lines, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh - 211001 | Phone: 9958857757

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Subjective Questions

## Evolving Role of Nature in Literature

### Context

- In literature, new trends, new questions and new proximities regarding nature are being clearly articulated.

### Role of Nature in Literature

- Nature has been an integral part of Indian literary traditions for centuries. From the hymns of the Vedas to contemporary poetry, nature has shaped narratives, enriched symbolism, and served as a medium for artistic and philosophical exploration.

### Nature in Classical Literature

- In ancient texts like the **Rig Veda**, nature was deified, with poets composing hymns that celebrated rivers, mountains, and celestial forces.
- Sanskrit poets like **Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti** infused their works with vivid natural imagery—**Kalidasa's Meghadutam** portrays clouds as messengers of longing, while **Bhavabhuti's verses capture nature's grandeur and intense energy.**

### During Medieval Period

- During the **medieval and early modern periods**, nature remained a metaphor for **human emotions—love, loss, and spiritual transcendence.**
- **Tulsidas and the Spiritual Symbolism of Nature:** In the 16th century, Tulsidas continued the tradition of infusing nature into literature. His epic **Ramacharitmanas, particularly in Aranyakanda**, showcases a deep connection between nature and human sorrow.
  - As Ram wanders through the forest in grief after Sita's abduction, his interaction with trees, rivers, and animals reflects a poetic rendering of loss and separation—a theme **reminiscent of Kalidasa's Vikramorvasiya.**
- **Nature in Bhakti Poetry:** Whether describing the monsoon, the Himalayas, or sacred rivers, their poetry reflected spiritual yearning and divine

connection, reinforcing the idea that nature was not separate from the divine but a manifestation of it.

### Modern Times: Shift Towards Environmental Awareness

- **Industrialization and Changing Literary Perspectives:** Literature began recognizing the consequences of ecological damage, with industrialization and urban expansion.
  - Writers moved beyond romanticized portrayals **to depict nature as fragile and threatened.**
  - The rise of environmental consciousness in literature reflected real-world concerns about deforestation, pollution, and species extinction.
  - It is seen in the works of Vinod Kumar Shukla, Dhruv Shukla, Udayan Vajpeyi, Mangalsh Dabral, Arun Kamal, Anamika, Teji Grover, and many others, who weave ecological consciousness into their poetry and prose.
- **Nature in Indigenous and Resistance Literature:** Adivasi literature offers a unique view of nature—not as a passive backdrop but as an entity with equal rights to existence.

### Adivasi Literature: A Philosophy of Equality and Resistance

- Writers such as **Mahasweta Devi, Ram Dayal Munda, and Jacinta Kerketta** emphasize indigenous perspectives, highlighting how land, forests, and rivers are sacred and must be protected from exploitation.

### Nature as a Call to Action in Contemporary Literature

- **Environmental Advocacy Through Literature:** Modern literature does not merely describe nature—it fights for it.
  - Contemporary poets, novelists, and essayists expose ecological destruction, calling for urgent conservation efforts.
  - Works on climate change, species extinction, and environmental justice have become

crucial contributions to today's literary discourse.

- **Literature as a Medium for Ecological Reflection:** With global awareness of environmental crises at an all-time high, literature serves as a reminder of humanity's deep bond with nature.
  - Writers urge readers to rethink their relationship with the environment, inspiring activism and sustainable practices.

## Uniqueness of Indian Culture and Nature: Contribution of Telugu Poets

### Context

- The contribution of Telugu poets in writings with environment as the central theme is remarkable.

### Uniqueness of Indian Culture and Nature

- **India's Natural Diversity:** The essence of 'Indianness' lies in the harmony between humans and nature.
- **Ancient Wisdom:** Sages and saints connected spirituality with nature; poets drew inspiration from nature.

### Nature in Classical Telugu Literature

- **Symbolism in Epics:** Animals like snakes and elephants symbolized devotion in works like *Kalahastishwara Mahatmyam* by Dhurjati.
- **Spiritual Practices and Nature:** Ritual bathing in rivers and seas during festivals promoted sacred ties with nature.
- **Preservation through Worship:** Temples were built on mountains and festivals like *Van Mahotsav* were initiated to protect nature.
- **Forest Deities:** Trees, animals, and birds were revered as deities in poetry.

### Evolution of Nature in Telugu Literature

- **Romantic and Emotional Phase (Bhaav Kavita):**
  - **Key Poets:** Vishwanath Satyanarayana, Devulapalli Krishna Shastri, Srirangam Srinivasa Rao, and others.

- **Nature as a Central Theme:** Emotional and aesthetic expressions were deeply intertwined with nature.

### Progressive Poetry (Abhyudaya Kavita):

- **Shift in Themes:** Focus moved from nature to human struggle, pain, and social issues.
- **Decline of Natural Imagery:** Nature became secondary to individual frustrations and collective suffering.

### Impact of Modern Civilization

- **Disconnection from Nature:** Industrialization and urbanization have alienated humans from the natural world.
- **Distorted Human Values:** Compassion and empathy have diminished due to selfishness and competition.
- **Effect on Poetry:** Modern poetry often centers on personal sorrow and ego, neglecting collective and environmental concerns.

### Revival of Environmental Awareness in Literature

- **New Focus:** Contemporary poets are addressing environmental degradation and raising ecological awareness.
- **Examples of Environmental Poetry:**
  - **Bengal Saidachari's 'Mera Gaon (Na Palli)'** – Celebrates the beauty and contentment of nature-rich villages.
  - **Jandhyala Papayya Sastry:** Describes trees as selfless teachers and moral guides.
  - **Papineni Sivasankar's 'Aakupachchani Lokam':** Forests as shelters and symbols of guidance.
  - **Mohammad Sharif:** Warns against water pollution and urges conservation.

### Conclusion

- **Need for Reconnection:** There is a growing necessity to revive sensitivity, humanity, and respect for nature through literature.
- **Role of Poetry:** Telugu literature is gradually reclaiming its bond with nature to inspire ecological consciousness.

## Dying of Languages: Impact on Society

### Context

- There is very little chance that natural languages created by humans in past eras will continue to exist in their current form.
- When a language dies, the entire society withers away. All kinds of knowledge about the environment is lost.

### About

- India, with its immense linguistic diversity, faces a silent crisis—**197 mature languages are on the verge of extinction**.
- It is not just about lost words, but about **erasing cultural identity, emotional depth, and centuries of knowledge**.

### Role of Language in Social and Cultural Structures

- Language has historically shaped India's social hierarchies and cultural practices. A speech community sustains its language through daily use, traditions, and literature.
- However, when a language ceases to provide livelihood opportunities, speakers often migrate toward more **'economically useful' languages**.
  - It causes linguistic erosion, threatening the diversity of India's rich linguistic tapestry.

### Language and Environmental Knowledge

- Language encodes **ecological understanding**. The **Great Andamanese** had specific terms for smells, birds, and shoreline features—now lost with the decline of the language.
- Similarly, **Koraput once grew 1,800 rice varieties**, each with a unique name and taste. Today, only a few remain, along with the loss of vocabulary and flavours.

### Language and Emotion

- Language shapes how one feels and perceives.
- The **Mayan language** once had **nine words for blue butterflies**—reduced to three under Spanish

influence, limiting emotional and sensory expression.

- The same is happening in India with forced linguistic uniformity.

### Impact of Education Policy

- **Marginalisation of Languages:** By prioritising only one or two languages in the education system, many other Indian languages have been sidelined. This shift has led to a steady decline in their usage.
- **Official Neglect and Misclassification:** The government has classified **57 distinct languages as Hindi dialects**, denying them official recognition.
  - Furthermore, languages spoken by fewer than **10,000 people are not counted**, accelerating their erasure.

### Oral Literature: A Cultural Treasure

- India's **oral languages** are rich, expressive, and deeply tied to community life. They combine prose, poetry, song, and dance into **living social documents** that capture every human experience—from birth to death, from joy to sorrow.
  - These traditions **evolve through generations**, unlike static written texts, and must be preserved to maintain cultural continuity.
- **Mother Tongue in Education:** A child's **mother tongue reflects their worldview**. Early education in native languages enhances expression and identity. With **1,369 mother tongues—800 oral-only**—India must embrace this linguistic richness in its schools.

### Global Standards vs. Indian Reality

- International indices (like UNESCO and Ethnologue) often rate languages based on written form. But in India, **800 mature languages have never been written** and have survived through oral transmission.
- We must develop **India-specific standards** that respect and recognise oral traditions instead of mimicking Western models.

### Conclusion: Preserve Diversity, Preserve Identity

- Languages are not just tools—they are vessels of **emotion, knowledge, and culture**. Losing them

means losing entire ways of life. India must act now to protect its linguistic heritage through **inclusive education, fair recognition, and renewed respect for oral traditions.**

- Preserving languages is **preserving ourselves.**

## Farm Folklore and Agricultural Wisdom

### Context

- Agriculture has stemmed from folk science or traditions of environmental conservation, documented orally.

### What is Folk Literature?

- Folk literature—also known as people's or village literature—is rooted in rural, agricultural life.
- With 60–70% of the population still engaged in farming, it remains a powerful expression of collective knowledge and community values.

### Historical Origins

- **Early Settlements:** Agriculture began 10,000 years ago along rivers.
- **Iron Discovery:** Expanded farming and village industries.
- **Barter and Oral Traditions:** A self-sufficient, farming-based society developed its knowledge through oral folk literature.

### Urban vs Rural Perspective

- **Urban Transaction:** A city dweller buys grains using just a few words—bargain, weigh, pay.
- **Rural Cultivation:** A farmer uses over 250 words from field preparation to storage, capturing local knowledge in dialects.

### Traditional Crop Practices

- **Crop Rotation and Mixed Farming:** Chickpeas enrich nitrogen; millet or sorghum follow to preserve soil fertility.
  - Rotation promotes biodiversity and long-term sustainability.

### Spiritual Ecology in Daily Life

- Tree climbing began with touching the trunk in respect.
- Herbs were often harvested at night to minimize impact.
- These customs reflect a deep connection between humans and nature—an environmental ethic embedded in daily life.

### Environmental Values in Folk Practices

- **Sustainable Agriculture Before Modern Methods:** Traditional farming was environment-friendly and aimed at community sustenance, not profit.
  - Conservation, not exploitation, was the norm.
- **Knowledge Through Proverbs and Sayings:**
  - **Water Conservation Wisdom:**
    - 'Without water, there is no farming'.
    - Building ponds was a community act for raising groundwater.

### Conclusion: Relevance Today

- Folk literature is not just a cultural relic—it is a storehouse of ecological intelligence.
  - As modern agriculture faces environmental challenges, this traditional wisdom offers practical, sustainable alternatives.
- Reviving and respecting folk traditions can help realign agriculture with environmental harmony—preserving both culture and nature for future generations.

## Language of Hunger, Eco-Colonisation

### Context

- Devastation of nature and plight of humans have been dominant discourses in poetry and fiction.

### About the Evolution of Odia Literature

- **A Disconnected Beginning: Poetry of the 1980s:** In the late 1980s, a young poet from Odisha found himself alienated by the prevailing literary scene.



- **Odisha, plagued by hunger deaths and child trafficking**, was not mirrored in its contemporary literature.
- Writers like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, overlooked the deeply rooted Odia realities.
- **Colonial Hangover and Rootless Modernism:** Post-independence Odia literature influenced more by Western ideals than indigenous experiences.
  - The language seemed hollow, separated from Odisha's cultural, social, and ecological landscape.
  - It appeared to serve the aspirations of a rising middle class rather than voicing the struggles of the common people.
- **Forgotten Foundations:** Historically, Odia literature was grounded in nature, spirituality, and human struggle. Literary giants like:
  - **Radhanath Roy** praised Chilka Lake in lyrical odes.
  - **Gangadhar Meher** humanized nature.
  - **Fakir Mohan Senapati** chronicled famine, land struggles, and colonial exploitation.
  - **Bhima Bhoi** voiced tribal spiritualism.
  - **Gopabandhu Das**, **Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi**, and **Gopinath Mohanty** highlighted themes of justice, freedom, tribal existence, and resistance.
- This people-centered tradition was sidelined by post-independence writers aiming to emulate foreign literary trends.

### A Turning Point: Resistance in the 1980s

- **Mass movements** erupted in **Kalahandi**, **Balangir**, **Sambalpur**, and **Baliapal**, opposing mining and defense projects.
- **People fought** to protect **Chilika Lake** from corporate threats.
- This social and ecological activism sowed the seeds for a literary renaissance rooted in local struggles.

### 1990s: Rise of Activist Literature

- **Writers from mass movements** began voicing real issues—hunger, displacement, and resistance.

- **Dalit writers, women, and marginalized voices** broke into the elite literary circles.
- Literature became a tool of resistance, no longer a reflection of elitist alienation.

### 21st Century: Climate and Displacement in Focus

- As the new millennium dawned, Odia literature became increasingly aligned with environmental and social justice themes:
- **Key Developments:**
  - **Bhima Prusty's novels**, *Samudra Manisha* and *Jambudweep*, narrated the devastating impact of climate change on Odisha's coastal villages like **Satabhaya**.
  - Movements in **Niyamgiri**, **Kalinganagar**, and **Jagatsinghpur** against corporate encroachment inspired a wave of protest poetry.
- **Notable Voices:**
  - Poets like **Saroj**, **Bhabani Bhuyan**, **Samarendra Nayak**, **Lenin Kumar**, and **Sujata Sahni** wrote fearlessly about displacement, environmental degradation, and resistance.

### Contemporary Divide: Political vs. Apolitical Literature

- **One side** aligns with state and corporate patronage, preferring to remain apolitical.
- **The other side** is bold, political, and grounded in activism—championing human rights and environmental justice.
- Encouragingly, this latter group of writers is growing stronger and garnering widespread attention.

## Poetry and Political Ecology in Palestine

### Context

- For centuries, Palestinian poets have woven the olive tree into their verses, using it to express their deep connection to the land and their struggle against displacement.

### Olive Tree in Mahmoud Darwish's Poetry

- **Mahmoud Darwish**, Palestine's national poet, uses the **olive tree as a metaphor for Palestinian heritage** and suffering.
- In his poem "*The Second Olive Tree*":
  - **Israeli soldiers uproot an olive tree**, symbolizing both **ecological and human displacement**.
  - He calls the tree "**our grandmother**," expressing ancestral ties and generational continuity.
  - The uprooting is both a literal and symbolic **act of violence and erasure**.

### Core Concepts

- **Green colonialism**: Using ecological restoration as a political and colonial tool.
- **Proxy immigrants**: Trees used symbolically to replace indigenous people and vegetation.
- **Ecological resistance**: Maintaining cultural and historical identity through land and nature.
- **Poetry as political resistance**: Using literature to document and protest occupation and displacement.

### Displacement and Ecological Violence

- The **uprooting of olive trees** by Israeli forces represents:
  - The **loss of cultural and historical identity**.
  - An **ecological parallel** to the **forced displacement** of Palestinian people.
  - A **double trauma**—both environmental and personal.

### Tension Between Nature Poetry and Political Reality

- In times of **war, massacre, and genocide**, the act of writing about **nature (birdsong, flowers, moon)** may seem impossible or disconnected from reality.
- **Palestinian poets** like **Marwan Makhoul** and **Noor Hindi** highlight this conflict, expressing a longing for a time when poetry could escape political oppression.

### Nature and Ecology as Political Subjects

- In the **Israel-Palestine conflict**, **land, nature, and ecology** are **central to political claims and narratives**.
- Israeli-Zionist ideology promoted a "**green colonial**" project, presenting itself as restoring the land to a **mythical biblical state**.

### Role of the Jewish National Fund (JNF)

- Established in **1901**, the **Jewish National Fund** played a key role in land transformation.
- It **planted non-native coniferous trees** in areas used by **Palestinian pastoralists and farmers**, displacing traditional land use.
- These trees were described by historian **Simon Schama** as "**proxy immigrants**", symbolizing the Zionist nation-building process.

### Palestinian Ecological and Cultural Resistance

- **Palestinian resistance** is deeply rooted in **their connection to land and ecology**.
- The **olive tree** is a **powerful cultural and economic symbol**:
  - Long-living and slow-growing, it represents **heritage and resilience**.
  - It appears frequently in **Palestinian poetry** as a symbol of identity and belonging.

## Literature: A Tool To Fight Climate Emergency

### Context

- We often overlook the role of the social sciences and humanities, including arts and literature, in addressing climate change and other environmental problems.

### About

- As the climate emergency intensifies, literature has emerged as a powerful tool to raise awareness, inspire action, and challenge destructive environmental practices.
- Writers, poets, and storytellers have long used their craft to shape public consciousness, and



today, eco-literature plays a crucial role in mobilizing communities toward sustainability and climate justice.

### Literature's Role in Environmental Awareness

- A recent doctoral thesis demonstrates how **literary texts and their analysis** can aid in addressing ecological problems, particularly in the **Congo Basin**—a region known as **Earth's 'second lungs'** due to its **vast rainforests and carbon-rich peatlands**.
- The Congo Basin stores an amount of carbon comparable to 20 years' worth of U.S. fossil fuel emissions and is rich in both biodiversity and minerals. Yet, it faces growing threats from:
  - Climate change
  - Logging and mining
  - Agriculture and urbanisation
  - Infrastructure projects
  - Poaching and pollution

### Ecocriticism and Environmental Literary Activism

- Using **postcolonial ecocriticism**, it examines novels, plays, and poems by Congo Basin writers. These works highlight:
  - Deforestation
  - Youth climate activism
  - Wildlife poaching
  - Freshwater pollution
  - Environmental injustice
- These texts not only depict the crisis but **make environmental issues tangible and relatable**, fostering empathy and awareness.

### Literature as a Tool for Climate Action

- Writers such as Inyang, Djombo, Koagne, and Origo have portrayed fictional youth activists long before figures like **Greta Thunberg and Remy Zahiga** rose to prominence.
  - For example, Djombo's *Les Bénévoles* features children fighting climate crimes, echoing real-world youth movements.

- Key Focus on:
  - To serve as **calls to climate action**
  - Highlight the roles of individuals, communities, and institutions
  - To aid **environmental communication** by explaining complex issues in accessible ways
  - To inspire and **amplify the voices of climate activists**

### Reconnecting with Nature

- Literature helps remind us of our **entanglement with the natural world**. Works by Nsahlai, Effa, and Nganang explore human-animal relationships, while plays like *Water Na Life* focus on human-water and human-land connections.
- These stories expose how **bad governance and disconnection from nature** fuel environmental degradation.

### Challenging Harmful Myths

- The **colonial "Edenic Africa"** narrative, which misrepresents Africa as untouched wilderness.
- The **fortress conservation** model that displaces indigenous communities under the guise of preservation.
- These narratives often justify **green colonialism** and disregard the rights of local populations.

### A Crisis of Culture, Not Just Capital

- The environmental crisis is also a **cultural crisis**. Long-standing philosophical ideas that separate humans from nature have legitimised exploitation. Literature challenges this by:
  - Celebrating human-nature relationships
  - Drawing from indigenous wisdom
  - Offering **cultural metaphors** that reconnect people with the planet

### Conclusion: A Call for Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- While science and policy remain critical, **literature complements them** by offering insight, motivation, and communication tools. The Congo Basin's survival depends on **collaborative efforts across**

**disciplines**, and literature must be recognised as a powerful force in this fight.

## Role of Literature in a Changing Society

### Context

- The world is transforming rapidly, yet our literary focus remains tethered to familiar grounds.
  - In the context of Indian literature, this potential has not been fully realized in recent decades.

### Dominance of Realism

- Over the past forty years, Indian literature has been largely dominated by a form of 'realism' rooted in recurring themes:
  - Women's issues
  - Rural life and poverty
  - Dalits and marginalized communities
  - Tribal societies and backward classes
  - Social movements, love, and religion
  - Historical and mythological narratives
- These subjects are significant and necessary. However, the issue arises when literature remains confined to them without innovation or expansion.

### Stagnation in Literary Focus

- Despite rapid changes in the world, much of Indian literature has remained static:
  - Themes are often revisited without fresh perspectives.
  - New global realities and issues are largely ignored.
  - The lack of evolution has led to a decline in readership.
- Writers have failed to adapt to a world where science, technology, and global awareness shape modern consciousness—especially among the youth.

### Disengaged Youth

- Today's younger generation thinks critically and scientifically. Yet, Literature often lacks the language and sensibility to engage them.
- Stories don't reflect the issues that matter to them—climate change, technology, identity, and global justice.
- As a result, they find little reason to turn to contemporary literature.

### Literature as a Force of Transformation

- Contrary to the belief that literature should only reflect society, it also has the power to guide and influence:
  - Storytelling in religious and spiritual texts has shaped thought for centuries.
  - Fiction can awaken, educate, and inspire change.
  - Literature should not just observe the world—it must interact with it.

### Environmental Imperative

- One of the most pressing omissions in recent literature is the climate crisis:
  - Humanity has exploited nature without accountability.
  - Literature has remained largely silent on environmental collapse.
  - Future generations may judge us harshly—not just for our actions, but for our failure to speak out.
- **A Call for Renewal:** Literature must evolve. It should:
  - Embrace scientific and global awareness.
  - Speak to the new generation with clarity and urgency.
  - Tackle emerging crises with courage and imagination.
- Writers must recognize their role not just as observers, but as contributors to humanity's future. The time for change is now—and literature must rise to meet it.

## Revisiting Munshi Premchand: Literature as a Tool for Empathetic Policymaking

### Context

- Literature is more relevant now than ever, as the world gets alienated and isolated because of machinated realities.

### About

- Munshi Premchand** is renowned for his vivid portrayal of rural India and the social realities of colonial times.
- His prolific body of work—comprising over 300 short stories and 14 novels—offers timeless insights into issues **still relevant today: poverty, caste discrimination, gender inequality, and agricultural distress.**

### Social Realism in Premchand's Work

- Premchand's narratives are rooted in the harsh socio-economic conditions of pre-independent India.
- Stories like '*Sawa Ser Gehu*', '*Poos Ki Raat*', and his novel '*Godan*' address themes such as **debt bondage, exploitative land systems, and the daily struggles of rural communities.**
- His writing exposes the challenges of subsistence farming, caste barriers, and the vulnerability of the agrarian class.

### Compassion and Empathy at the Core

- His stories reflect kinship in adversity, such as the depiction of widowed women in '*Boodhi Kaaki*' and '*Jyoti*', or caste oppression in '*Sadgati*' and '*Thakur ka Kuan*'.
- These tales explore emotional resilience and interpersonal compassion, inviting readers to reflect on societal norms and values.

### Literature and Policy: Bridging the Gap

- During the launch of the **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana**, the story '*Eidgah*' was invoked to highlight

empathy-driven policy by illustrating a child's thoughtful gift to his grandmother.

- Similarly, '*Boodhi Kaaki*' raises issues of elderly neglect and hunger, making a case for more inclusive geriatric care policies.

### Lessons for Modern Governance

- Empathy:** Understanding the lived experiences of marginalised groups.
- Sensitivity:** Recognising invisible populations, such as widowed women and the elderly.
- Contextual Understanding:** Moving beyond numbers through ethnographic and qualitative research.
- His stories become essential teaching tools in public policy, helping address issues of rural distress, urban poverty, and social alienation with greater sensitivity.

### Literature in Education and Research

- The integration of literature in social sciences promotes observational skills, critical thinking, and ethical grounding—traits often missing in tech-dominated education. Courses on **design thinking, innovation, and public administration** can benefit from narratives like '*Kafan*', '*Jyoti*', and '*Panch Parmeshwar*' to develop more humane and responsive frameworks.

## Reviving Ancient Wisdom: Lessons from Tamil Eco-Traditions

### Context

- Classical Tamil literature is an example of language's 'umbilical cord' relationship with nature.

### About the Eco-Literature

- It serves as a crucial tool today, highlighting the damage inflicted on the environment and warning society of future ecological disasters if current trends continue.

- Ancient Tamil literature, in particular, offers rich insights into a time when nature and culture were inseparably intertwined.

### Tamil Tradition: Nature at the Core of Culture

- **Nature as a Cultural Construct:** Ancient Tamil society did not see nature as separate from human life. Language itself, the foundation of culture, had an ‘umbilical cord’ relationship with nature.
  - Literature, as an extension of language and thought, naturally reflected this bond.
- **Sangam Literature and the Five Eco-Zones:** Classical Tamil texts such as *Tholkappiyam*, *Silappadhikaram*, *Manimekhalai*, and *Pattupattu* categorize land into five eco-zones or **Thinai**:
  - **Kurinji** – Mountainous region
  - **Mullai** – Pastoral lands
  - **Marutham** – Riverine agricultural plains
  - **Neidhal** – Coastal areas
  - **Palai** – Arid or desert-like zones
- Each zone had its unique flora, fauna, deity, and cultural practices, indicating a deep awareness of environmental influences on society.

### Sacred Trees and Biodiversity Conservation

- The Tamil reverence for trees—*sthalavrikshas* or sacred trees—reflected an early understanding of biodiversity.
- Trees were believed to be the abodes of deities and were preserved during temple construction.
- These practices contributed to long-term ecological preservation and genetic plant diversity.

### Eco-Conscious Rulers and Poets

- **Vēl Pāri: The Generous Patron of Nature:** Vēl Pāri, one of the celebrated *Kadai Ezhu Vallalgal*, is remembered for his eco-conscious generosity—famously giving away his chariot to a struggling creeper.
- **Thiruvalluvar on the Power of Rain:** In *Thirukkural*, the philosopher Thiruvalluvar underlines nature’s

central role, asserting: ‘**Neer Indri Amaiyathu Ulagu**’ – *There is no world without water.*

- He stresses that rainfall is not only vital for life but also for moral and social stability.

### Water Management in Ancient Tamil Society

- Texts like *Akananuru*, *Puranaanuru*, and *Silappadhikaram* emphasize water conservation.
- Poets likened dam construction to heroic acts and saw lake maintenance as noble.
- Kings who built waterbodies were celebrated, and water management was a symbol of responsible governance.

### Tamil Literature: A Model for Sustainable Living

- Through their literature and practices, the ancient Tamils displayed a profound commitment to preserving nature.
- Sacred groves, rainwater harvesting, and tree worship were more than rituals—they were strategies for sustainability.

### Modern Challenge: Reorienting Science and Technology

- While ancient societies revered and feared nature, trusting its rhythms and consequences, modern society places its faith in science and technology.
  - However, the very tools meant to solve our problems often exacerbate them.
- **The critical challenge today is to reorient our scientific progress to align with nature, rather than exploit it.**

### Conclusion: Bridging Past and Future

- Ancient Tamil culture teaches that prosperity and environmental balance are not mutually exclusive.
- The time-tested values of eco-sensitivity, reverence for nature, and integrated development are more relevant now than ever before.
- To secure our future, we must reconnect with the wisdom of our past.

## Additional Information

Ancient Literature on Nature and the Environment	
Titles	Relevances
<b>Rigveda (Ancient India)</b>	Contains hymns praising natural elements (fire, wind, rivers, dawn); offers spiritual reverence for ecological forces.
<b>Bhagavad Gita (Ancient India)</b>	Emphasizes dharma and balance—ideas relevant to ecological duty and restraint.
<b>Works and Days Hesiod (Greece)</b>	Early didactic poems about agriculture, seasons, and ethical farming—presages ecological stewardship.
<b>Genesis (Hebrew Bible)</b>	The creation story shapes Western views of human-nature dominion vs. stewardship.
<b>Enuma Elish (Mesopotamia)</b>	Depicts the cosmos and elemental forces; reflects early mytho-ecological consciousness.
<b>The Epic of Gilgamesh (Mesopotamia)</b>	Theme of deforestation (cutting down the Cedar Forest); warns against disrupting divine nature.
<b>Shan Hai Jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas) (Ancient China)</b>	Mythical geography and fauna catalog; early Chinese eco-cosmology.
<b>Tao Te Ching Laozi (China)</b>	Advocates for harmony with nature through wu wei (non-action), foundational for Daoist ecological philosophy.

Medieval Literature with Environmental Themes	
Titles	Relevances
<b>Beowulf (Anglo-Saxon)</b>	Nature as both majestic and monstrous—reflections on the power and terror of the wild.
<b>The Quran</b>	Numerous verses on environmental stewardship (e.g., Khilafah — human

	trusteeship of the earth)
<b>The Conference of the Birds</b>	Allegorical journey through landscapes with birds symbolizing the soul and ecological order.
<b>Divine Comedy</b>	Vivid natural imagery; Inferno as an allegory of environmental/spiritual decay.
<b>The Book of the City of Ladies</b>	Uses nature metaphorically; indirectly comments on how society should value balance and order.
<b>Japanese Waka and Haiku poetry</b>	Focused on seasons, impermanence, and deep attentiveness to the natural world.
<b>Finnish Kalevala</b>	Nature spirits, forests, and water as central to mythology; reflects pre-modern ecological ethics.

Modern & Contemporary Literature on Environment and Nature	
Title & Author	Relevance
<b>Walden Henry David Thoreau</b>	Foundational in American nature writing; promotes simplicity, solitude, and respect for nature.
<b>Silent Spring Rachel Carson</b>	Sparked the environmental movement; exposed pesticide harms; deeply poetic and scientific.
<b>Desert Solitaire Edward Abbey</b>	Love letter to the wilderness of the American West; critiques industrial tourism.
<b>The Overstory Richard Powers</b>	Interconnected stories of humans and trees; dramatizes ecological interdependence.
<b>Braiding Sweetgrass Robin Wall Kimmerer</b>	Indigenous wisdom + scientific botany; calls for reciprocity with nature.
<b>The Sea Around Us Rachel Carson</b>	Explores marine ecosystems; praised for lyrical environmental science.
<b>Pilgrim at</b>	Spiritual and ecological meditation;

<b>Tinker Creek</b> <b>Annie Dillard</b>	sharp eye on biological life.
<b>Ishmael</b> <b>Daniel Quinn</b>	Challenges modern culture's unsustainable narratives about nature.
<b>The Road</b> <b>Cormac McCarthy</b>	Post-apocalyptic vision—ecological collapse serves as a cautionary tale.
<b>A Sand County</b> <b>Almanac</b> <b>Aldo Leopold</b>	Advocates 'Land Ethic'—ethical responsibility to nature.

## Subjective Questions

1. How has the role of nature in literature evolved over time, and to what extent does contemporary literature engage with environmental concerns compared to classical literary traditions?
2. How can literature serve as a catalyst for climate action, and in what ways does storytelling shape public awareness and inspire real-world environmental change?
3. How does literature adapt to and reflect societal changes, and in what ways does it influence cultural, political, and environmental transformations over time?

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