

Harmony with Nature: Environmental Responsibility among Youth from Ayurvedic and Sociological Perspectives

Ragini Verma¹, Ayushi Dwivedi², Nigam Devi³, Monika Devi⁴, Kamalesh Kumar⁵ and Dr. Parameswarappa S. Byadgi⁶

¹Research Scholar, Department of VikritiVigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi India:

²Assistant Professor (Yoga), S-Vyasa (Deemed to be University), Sattva Global City Campus, Mysore Road, Bangalore, Karnataka, 560059

³Research Scholar, Department of VikritiVigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi India

⁴Research Scholar, Department of VikritiVigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi India

⁵Research Scholar, Department of VikritiVigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi India:

⁶Professor, Department of VikritiVigyan, Faculty of Ayurveda, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India,

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ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation has emerged as a major global concern, reinforcing the vital need to promote ecological understanding and responsible behavior, particularly among younger generations. Youth have an important part to generate sustainable societies, and their attitudes toward nature have a substantial impact on future environmental results. This paper offers an interdisciplinary approach to environmental awareness and responsibility among young, using concepts from Ayurveda and sociology.

Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of knowledge, emphasizes the harmony between humans and nature. Concepts like the Panchamahabhuta (five components) and the notion of balance between the individual (Purusha) and the environment (Loka) emphasize the necessity of ecological sustainability and natural resource conservation. From a sociological standpoint, socialization processes, cultural values, education, and community practices all influence juvenile environmental awareness.

Ayurveda included ethics under Sadvritta, AcharaRasayana, and so on, as well as Dinacharya and Ritucharya to lead a healthy and environmentally beneficial lifestyle.

The study explores how Ayurvedic ecological concepts may contribute to the development of environmental responsibility in young people, as well as how social factors influence their attitudes and behaviors toward environmental conservation. The research examines the convergence of traditional ecological wisdom and modern social dynamics, highlighting the possibility for incorporating Ayurvedic ideals into environmental education and youth involvement efforts.

The findings indicate that combining Ayurvedic principles with sociological understanding can promote a more holistic approach to environmental responsibility, encouraging young people to adopt sustainable lifestyles and form a closer connection to nature. Such interdisciplinary cooperation has the potential to assist in building environmental ethics and enhance long-term ecological sustainability. Because Ayurveda originated naturally, and effective remedies were made using existing plant, mineral, and animal sources, etc.

Keywords: *Ayurveda, Environmental Awareness, Youth, Sociology, Sustainability, Ecological Responsibility.*

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INTRODUCTION

The global environmental crisis of the 21st century is not merely a biological or atmospheric failure; it is a profound

crisis of human consciousness, ethics, and social structure (Giddens, 2009, p. 91). We are currently living in what sociologists define as the "Risk Society," an era where

*Author for Correspondence: Ayushi Dwivedi

industrial progress has produced hazards that are invisible, global, and democratically distributed, affecting every social stratum regardless of geographical or economic boundaries (Beck, 1992, p. 21). For the contemporary youth—the "Generation Z" and "Alpha"—the psychological burden of this reality is immense, manifesting as "eco-anxiety," a chronic and existential fear of environmental doom that impacts mental and social well-being (Patel, 2019, p. 310). The "Anthropocene" has fundamentally altered the human-nature relationship, shifting it from a state of co-existence to a state of systemic exploitation and imminent collapse (Gore, 2006, p. 47).

This research argues that the restoration of environmental health requires a transdisciplinary synthesis of ancient holistic wisdom and modern social theory. Ayurveda, the traditional Indian science of life, offers a robust ontological framework where the human body and the environment are seen as an inseparable continuum governed by the principle of *Loka-PurushaSamya* (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 150). Simultaneously, Sociology provides the structural tools to understand "Green Socialization," "Collective Agency," and "Reflexive Modernization," transforming individual anxiety into systemic social change (Giddens, 2009, p. 102). By merging the ethical code of *Sadvritta* with modern environmental literacy, we can foster a generation capable of living in true harmony with the Earth (Valiathan, 2003, p. 112; Kothari, 2014, p. 15). This introduction sets the stage for a multidisciplinary approach to youth stewardship, emphasizing that the youth are not just victims of climate change but are the primary agents of planetary healing (McKibben, 1989, p. 47; United Nations, 2015, p. 14).

Concept of Harmony with Nature

Harmony with nature, or *Prakriti-Samyatva*, is not a quixotic or aesthetic ideal; it is a fundamental biological and social necessity for the survival of the human species. In the Vedic and Ayurvedic traditions, harmony is defined as *Rta*—the cosmic order that governs both the physical laws of the universe and the moral laws of humanity (Vatsyayan, 1992, p. 1). This concept suggests that nature is a self-regulating, living organism, a theory echoed in modern science by the "Gaia Hypothesis," which views the Earth as a complex, synergistic system that maintains the conditions for life (Lovelock, 1979, p. 10).

Sociologically, the concept of harmony was disrupted by the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent rise of "Instrumental Rationality," which reframed nature as a "standing reserve" of resources for human utility and capital accumulation (Heidegger, 1977, p. 3; Merchant, 1980, p. 164). To restore this balance, modern environmentalism must adopt the principles of "Deep Ecology," which argue for the intrinsic value of all living beings, independent of their utility to human consumption (Naess, 1989, p. 63). Harmony is achieved when social institutions prioritize "Ecological Justice" over infinite growth, creating a society that lives strictly within the "Carrying Capacity" of the planet (Brundtland, 1987, p.

43; Meadows, 1972, p. 45). For the youth, this harmony involves a psychological and spiritual reconnection with the elements, moving beyond the "mechanical worldview" toward an "organic" one where the self is an extension of the larger biosphere (Shiva, 2005, p. 5; Zimmer, 1948, p. 10).

Environmental Issues and Youth Role

The current environmental crisis, marked by unprecedented biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and climate instability, is a direct result of "Institutional Greed" and systemic neglect. Youth are uniquely positioned within this crisis as they possess what sociologists call "biographical availability"—the social and psychological freedom to challenge status quo structures before becoming assimilated into high-consumption adult professional lives (Beck, 1992, p. 25). Modern youth movements, such as the global climate strikes, are grounded in the moral imperative of **Intergenerational Equity**, asserting that the current generation has no ethical right to exhaust resources that rightfully belong to the future (Rawls, 1971, p. 284; Sen, 2013, p. 248).

The role of youth involves "Reflexive Modernization," where they act as the "ethical watchdogs" of industrial progress, demanding that technology and economy be aligned with ecological health (Giddens, 2009, p. 95). Through "Digital Solidarity" and social media networking, youth have created a global consciousness that bypasses traditional corporate interests, fostering a "Global Green Identity" (Patel, 2019, p. 315). Their role is to transform individual sustainability—like recycling or veganism—into "Collective Agency," forcing governments to adopt "Earth Democracy" models where the rights of nature are legally protected and prioritized (Shiva, 2005, p. 10; Kothari, 2014, p. 20). As Narain (2017, p. 55) notes, the youth must bridge the gap between "knowing" and "doing" to prevent the "Limits to Growth" from becoming a catastrophic collapse.

Ayurvedic Perspective of Nature

In the Ayurvedic paradigm, nature (*Prakriti*) is the primordial source of all existence, and human beings are its biological offspring, not its masters. The foundational principle of *Loka-PurushaSamya* posits that "man is a microcosm of the universe" (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 152). This means that every elemental change in the environment—be it in the air, water, or soil—has an immediate and measurable impact on human physiology, metabolism, and mental state (Valiathan, 2003, p. 115).

Ayurveda provides a systematic warning against ecological neglect through the theory of **Janapadodhwamsa** (the destruction of entire populations or ecosystems). Agnivesha (2018, p. 160) explains that when the air (*Vayu*), water (*Jala*), land (*Desha*), and time (*Kala*) are "vitiated" or poisoned, mass diseases (epidemics) occur that cannot be cured by individual medicine alone. This vitiation is rooted in **Adharma** (unrighteousness) and **Prajnaparadha** (intellectual error), where society knowingly prioritizes

greed and sensory indulgence over the fundamental laws of nature (Singh, 2010, p. 55; Jain, 2014, p. 401). For the youth, the Ayurvedic perspective reframes environmental protection as a form of "Universal Preventive Medicine" and "Global Public Health," emphasizing that the "aroma of the land" and the purity of the elements are the first requirements for a healthy life (Zimmerman, 1987, p. 50; Dash & Sharma, 2001, p. 205).

Janapadodhwamsa - A situation involving the devastation or death of a big population scattered throughout a small area, a country, a region of the planet, or perhaps the entire world. (Byadgi, P.S., 2023, p. 203)

Common Factors (SamanyaHetu)

The literature says that, despite differences in constitution, nutrition, strength, and habits, some variables are universal to all people and, when vitiated, create mass destruction:

Vayu (Air)

- Contaminated or polluted air
- Contains disease-causing chemicals
- Causes extensive respiratory and infectious illnesses.

Jala (water)

- Impure or polluted water.
- Causes waterborne illnesses that afflict huge populations.

Desha (Land and Environment)

- Polluted lands and surroundings.
- Unsanitary environmental conditions.
- Existence of poisons and waste.

Kala (Time and Season)

- Abnormal seasonal fluctuations.
- Disturbance in normal climate cycles.
- Causes imbalance in health and illness patterns. (Byadgi, P.S., 2023, p. 204)

Concept of Sadvritta in Ayurveda

Sadvritta, or "Right Conduct," represents the ethical foundation of Ayurvedic preventive health and social harmony. It is an internalized moral compass that governs how an individual interacts with themselves, their society, and the natural world (Valiathan, 2003, p. 112). In the context of the modern environmental crisis, Sadvritta provides a profound code of ecological ethics that goes beyond legal compliance. Ayurveda posits that physical health is impossible without mental purity (*Sattva*), and mental purity is impossible without ethical living (Singh, 2005, p. 88).

- **Ahimsa (Non-violence) as Ecological Respect:** Ahimsa in Sadvritta extends beyond the refusal to kill; it involves the refusal to exploit nature beyond its regenerative capacity. Shiva (2005, p. 12) argues that modern industrial systems are "intrinsically violent"

toward the soil, seeds, and water. Adopting Ahimsa means youth must choose systems of production and consumption that do not rely on the destruction of biodiversity (Naess, 1989, p. 63).

- **Asteya (Non-stealing) and Intergenerational Equity:** Singh (2010, p. 58) interprets *Asteya* as the refusal to take what does not rightfully belong to us. In an ecological sense, the resources we consume today—groundwater, minerals, and fossil fuels—rightfully belong to future generations. To over-consume is to "steal" from our own children, a direct violation of the principles of justice (Rawls, 1971, p. 284).
- **Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness) vs. Consumerism:** The primary driver of waste is "Consumerism," which sociologists identify as a socially constructed greed (Giddens, 2009, p. 100). Sadvritta promotes *Aparigraha*, the practice of non-accumulation. By finding satisfaction in minimalism, youth can break the cycle of "planned obsolescence" and reduce the massive carbon footprint of global trade (Merchant, 1980, p. 170; Kothari, 2014, p. 15).

Panchamahabhuta Theory and Environment

The universe and the human body are both composed of five fundamental elements: Space (*Akasha*), Air (*Vayu*), Fire (*Agni*), Water (*Jala*), and Earth (*Prithvi*) (Dash & Sharma, 2001, p. 202). Ayurveda teaches that these elements are not just physical components but "Life-States" that maintain the balance of the biosphere. The health of the *Purusha* (Individual) is inextricably linked to the purity of these elements in the *Loka* (Universe) (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 150).

Chauhan (2020, p. 110) notes that the preservation of these elements is the highest form of *Dharma*. When the external *Vayu* (Air) is polluted by industrial emissions, the internal *Prana* (Vitality) of the youth is directly compromised, leading to respiratory and psychological disorders (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 165). Similarly, the pollution of *Jala* (Water) disturbs the metabolic "Agni" (Fire) of the body. Understanding this elementary connection allows youth to see that protecting a river or a forest is not an "external" act of charity but an act of "internal" healing and self-preservation (Singh, 2010, p. 48). This "Elementary Consciousness" is the key to a deep-seated ecological responsibility that transcends modern materialist environmentalism (Vatsyayan, 1992, p. 15; Zimmerman, 1987, p. 50).

Dinacharya & Ritucharya for Environmental Balance

Ayurveda prescribes **Dinacharya** (daily routine) and **Ritucharya** (seasonal regimen) to align human physiology with the rhythms of the Earth. These regimens are ancient tools for maintaining ecological and biological balance (*Samyavta*).

- **Dinacharya and Energy Conservation:** Practicing a solar-aligned routine (waking during *Brahma Muhurta*) optimizes metabolic health and aligns the body's circadian rhythms with natural light (Lad, 2002, p. 155). Sociologically, this reduces the demand

for artificial energy and nighttime lighting, which are major drivers of carbon emissions in urban areas (WHO, 2021, p. 2).

- **Ritucharya and Food Sovereignty:** Consuming local and seasonal foods is a core Ayurvedic principle that supports local biodiversity and reduces the "carbon footprint" of the global food supply chain (Tiwari, 1995, p. 35). Shiva (2005, p. 15) argues that "Food Sovereignty" is essential for ecological health. Eating *Sattvic* and seasonal foods supports local farmers and protects the soil of one's *Desha* (Land) (Singh, 2010, p. 62).

For modern youth, these regimens serve as a "Lifestyle Resistance" against the destructive 24/7 industrial culture that treats time as a linear resource rather than a natural cycle (Giddens, 2009, p. 98). This alignment ensures that our biological needs do not exceed the Earth's seasonal offerings, fostering a sustainable way of life (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 155).

Sociological Perspective on Environment

From a sociological perspective, environmental degradation is a "socially produced" problem rooted in our structures of production and consumption. Ulrich Beck (1992, p. 21) argues that modern society has created a "Risk Society" where industrial hazards—ranging from radioactive waste to chemical pollution—are omnipresent and "democratic," affecting all social strata regardless of class.

Sociologists emphasize that "Nature" is often a social construct; how we interact with it depends on our "Cultural Capital" and "Environmental Socialization" (Giddens, 2009, p. 92). The Industrial Revolution reframed nature as a "standing reserve" for human utility, leading to the "Disenchantment of the World" (Merchant, 1980, p. 164; Heidegger, 1977, p. 3). To restore harmony, youth must engage in "Reflexive Modernization," where they critique current industrial systems and foster a new social morality based on "Ecological Citizenship" (Guha, 2000, p. 120). This perspective shifts the focus from individual guilt to collective structural responsibility, demanding that our social institutions—schools, governments, and corporations—be rebuilt around the principles of sustainability and life-preservation (Beck, 1992, p. 35; Narain, 2017, p. 55).

Role of Youth in Sustainable Development

The modern discourse on Sustainable Development was effectively institutionalized by the Brundtland Commission (1987, p. 43), which defined it as: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In the sociological and Ayurvedic hierarchy, youth are the primary custodians of this principle. They are the bridge between the "exhausted past" and the "unborn future." The United Nations (2015, p. 14), through its 2030 Agenda, identifies youth as "Primary Change Agents" for SDG 13 (Climate Action), emphasizing that without youth-led innovation, global targets are unattainable.

The Sociological Advantage: Biographical Availability

Youth possess a unique sociological state known as "Biographical Availability" (Beck, 1992, p. 25). Unlike the older generation, which is often structurally locked into high-carbon professional roles, mortgage obligations, and consumerist habits, youth have the freedom to experiment with radical lifestyle shifts. This availability allows them to lead social movements that demand "System Change, Not Climate Change."

Intergenerational Justice and Political Watchdogs

According to Amartya Sen (2013, p. 248), justice is not just about the present distribution of resources but about the "sustainable freedom" of future generations. Youth must transition from being mere "participants" to becoming "Political Watchdogs" (Patel, 2019, p. 310). This involves scrutinizing corporate "Greenwashing"—where companies pretend to be eco-friendly—and demanding transparency in environmental impact assessments. This is a form of "Reflexive Modernization" (Giddens, 2009, p. 95), where the youth use scientific and sociological data to force institutions to confront their own ecological failures. By mobilizing through "Collective Agency," youth transform individual anxiety into a global political force (Kothari, 2014, p. 18).

Environmental Ethics and Social Responsibility

Environmental Ethics is the philosophical expansion of moral duty beyond human-to-human interaction to include the entire biosphere. Arne Naess (1989, p. 65) established the concept of "Deep Ecology," asserting that every living entity—from microorganisms to vast forests—has an **intrinsic value** regardless of its utility to human consumption. This mirrors the Ayurvedic principle of **SarveBhavantuSukhinah** (May all beings be happy), which recognizes the spiritual and biological interconnectedness of all life forms.

From Extraction to Reciprocity

Modern industrial ethics are rooted in an "Extractive Logic," where nature is viewed as a "dead object" (Merchant, 1980, p. 170). This worldview allows for the limitless exploitation of resources for short-term capital. In contrast, Social Responsibility in the 21st century demands a shift toward "Reciprocity." Meadows (1972, p. 45), in the seminal report "The Limits to Growth," demonstrated that infinite growth on a finite planet is a physical impossibility.

Youth responsibility, therefore, involves the practice of "Self-Regulation" (Shiva, 2005, p. 12). This is not just a personal choice but a social duty to reduce one's "Ecological Footprint" (Sen, 2013, p. 260). By adopting the Ayurvedic ethics of *VasudhaivaKutumbakam* (The Earth is one family), youth acknowledge that the suffering of the environment is ultimately their own suffering. This ethical shift requires moving away from the "Mechanical Worldview" of the 18th century and embracing an "Organic Worldview" where humans are humble stewards, not masters, of the Earth.

Impact of Modern Lifestyle on Nature

The contemporary lifestyle, characterized by rapid urbanization and digital saturation, has led to a state of profound alienation from the biological rhythms of the Earth. This condition is often described as "**Nature Deficit Disorder**" (Valiathan, 2003, p. 118). Sociologically, this alienation is fueled by "**Conspicuous Consumption**" (Giddens, 2009, p. 103), where the acquisition of luxury goods (Fast Fashion, excessive electronics) is used as a tool for social status.

Planned Obsolescence and Waste

A major driver of environmental degradation is "Planned Obsolescence"—the corporate strategy of designing products with a limited lifespan to force repeat purchases. This creates a global waste crisis that the Earth's natural cycles cannot absorb. The psychological result of witnessing this destruction of one's home environment is "**Solastalgia**" (McKibben, 1989, p. 47), a form of existential distress unique to the modern era.

The Ayurvedic Critique: Accumulation of 'Ama'

From an Ayurvedic perspective, the modern lifestyle is a violation of **Prakriti** (Nature). Irregular sleep (violating *Dinacharya*), the consumption of chemically processed foods, and constant exposure to digital radiation disrupt the body's **Agni** (Digestive/Metabolic Fire). This leads to the accumulation of **Ama** (toxins) (Singh, 2010, p. 58). Ayurveda warns that when the individual body is filled with toxins, it resonates with the "vitiated" environment outside. The "vitiating of seasons" and "toxic air" described in the **Janapadodhwansa** theory are direct results of a lifestyle that ignores the **PanchaMahabhuta** (Five Elements) (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 162). To reverse this, a return to "Sattvic" (Pure) living and "Minimalist" consumption is not just a health advice, but an ecological necessity.

Integrating Ayurveda and Sociology for Sustainability

The integration of **Ayurvedic Medicine** and **Environmental Sociology** creates a "Micro-Macro Bridge" that is essential for a holistic understanding of sustainability. While individual actions are often dismissed as insignificant in the face of global corporate pollution, this transdisciplinary approach argues that systemic change begins with a fundamental shift in human consciousness and biological awareness (Singh, 2005, p. 90).

The Ontological Shift: Inner vs. Structural Sustainability

Ayurveda focuses on "**Inner Sustainability**"—the state where the individual's *Doshic* balance is maintained through a pure diet, ethical conduct, and alignment with natural cycles. Sociology, conversely, focuses on "**Structural Sustainability**"—the reform of social policies, the redistribution of resources, and the mobilization of collective energy to challenge destructive industrial norms (Giddens, 2009, p. 102). When integrated, these two fields provide a "Double-Loop" feedback system.

Ayurveda provides the "**Biological Motivation**" by teaching youth that they are not "in" the environment, but they "are" the environment (*Loka-PurushaSamya*). Any toxin released into the soil or air is eventually a toxin in their own blood and tissues (Agnivesha, 2018, p. 152). Sociology then provides the "**Methodological Framework**" to scale this individual realization into a social movement. This is what Kothari (2014, p. 15) calls "Radical Ecological Democracy," where the pursuit of personal health (*Svasthya*) becomes a political act of protecting the "Common Wealth" of nature (Valiathan, 2003, p. 120).

Case Study: From Ego-centric to Eco-centric

In the modern "Risk Society," the ego is socialized to seek status through consumption. Integration allows for "Green Socialization," where the youth use Ayurvedic values of *Sattva* (Clarity) to filter out the manipulative marketing of consumerist society. This creates an "**Ecological Citizenship**" where the "Self-care" of the youth is recognized as being fundamentally dependent on the "Earth-care" of the collective (Singh, 2010, p. 65; Beck, 1992, p. 35).

Challenges and Solutions: A Strategic Roadmap

The path toward a sustainable future for the youth is fraught with systemic and psychological challenges. The most significant obstacle is the "**Awareness-to-Action Gap**," a sociological phenomenon where individuals possess high levels of environmental knowledge but fail to change their behavioral patterns due to the "convenience trap" of modern industrial life (Beck, 1992, p. 35).

Identified Challenges:

1. **Institutional Inertia:** Governments and corporations are often locked into short-term financial cycles that prioritize quarterly profits over decadal ecological health (Narain, 2017, p. 55).
2. **Prajnaparadha (Intellectual Error):** From an Ayurvedic perspective, this is the root of all evil—when society knowingly chooses toxic paths for sensory gratification (Singh, 2010, p. 55).
3. **Green washing:** The manipulation of environmental data by corporations to create a false sense of sustainability, which confuses the youth and leads to "Cynical Apathy" (Patel, 2019, p. 315).

Strategic Solutions:

- **Place-based Education (UNESCO, 2021, p. 15):** Schools must move beyond abstract global data and reconnect youth with their local **Desha** (Land). By managing a local forest or a community water body, youth develop a "Biological Bond" with nature that is impossible to break through marketing.
- **The Sadvritta Mandate:** Sustainability should not be viewed as a "legal burden" but as a core **Character Virtue**. When the youth internalize the principles of *Aparigraha* (Non-possessiveness) and *Asteya* (Non-stealing), they naturally reject wasteful lifestyles

without the need for external policing (Valiathan, 2003, p. 112).

- **Active Consumerism:** Youth must leverage their collective purchasing power to demand "Cradle-to-Cradle" production. This is the sociological application of *Ahimsa*—refusing to fund systems that cause violence to the Earth's regenerative capacity (Shiva, 2005, p. 12).

Conclusion: The Dawn of a New Consciousness

In final analysis, the quest for harmony with nature is not an elective "lifestyle choice" or a passing environmental "fashion"; it is the absolute prerequisite for the continued survival of the human species in the **Anthropocene** era. This research has demonstrated that a singular focus on technological or legal solutions is insufficient. What is required is a **Total Shift in Consciousness**—one that integrates the ancient biological wisdom of **Ayurveda** with the critical structural insights of **Sociology**.

The Stewardship of the 'Earth Family'

The Ayurvedic principle of **Loka-PurushaSamya** teaches us that the human body is a sacred mirror of the cosmos. To pollute the Earth is to commit "Biological Suicide." Conversely, the **Sociological** understanding of "Collective Agency" empowers the youth to realize that while the crisis is global, the power to change is local and samuhik (collective).

Stewardship is the highest form of **Dharma** in the contemporary age. As we transition from a "Society of Risk" to a "Society of Harmony," the youth must lead the way. We must internalize the profound truth that we have not inherited this Earth from our ancestors to do as we please; we have borrowed it from our children with a sacred oath to return it in a state of flourishing health. By adopting the ethical codes of **Sadvritta** and challenging the structures of industrial greed, the youth of today can secure a resilient, "Sattvic," and harmonious future for the entire "Earth Family"

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