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A study of environmental ethics among higher education students based on the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"

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Abstract

Indian educational philosophy has long advocated ethical living in harmony with nature, and the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam provides a holistic ethical framework for environmental responsibility. The present study entitled "A study of environmental ethics among higher education students based on the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" is grounded in the Indian philosophical worldview that emphasizes universal brotherhood and ecological harmony. In the context of growing environmental degradation, climate change, and unsustainable human practices, the need to inculcate strong environmental ethics among young learners, particularly higher education students, has become imperative. The main objective of this research is to compare the awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students across Arts, Science and Commerce stream in the principle of "Vasundhaiva kutumbakam". The descriptive research method was used in the present study. A sample of 120 students among undergraduate students of Arts, Science & Commerce stream is selected using stratified sampling technique to ensure representativeness. Here the researcher found that, Science students exhibit a higher level of environmental ethics compared to Commerce students, the overall findings indicate a collective moral consciousness towards nature. This suggests the need for integrating environmental ethics and value-based education across all disciplines to strengthen the spirit of universal responsibility and sustainable coexistence.

Keywords: Ancient Philosophy, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', Higher education students, Awareness, Environmental ethics, Arts, Science, & Commerce streams

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Introduction:

Nature is the mother of all living beings. However, due to the increasing influence of a consumerist lifestyle, nature has been exploited. Development based on Western standards has disrupted the world's ecological balance in just five hundred years. The main objective of this research is to increase student participation in efforts to restore this disrupted balance and to foster environmental awareness and activism. We can all do at least three things in our lives: 1. Save water, 2. Avoid using single-use plastics, and 3. Plant trees to increase greenery. This will instil a sense of humanity in people and also improve the environment. College students' involvement in these efforts and promote the feeling of them regarding 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) in society. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, is an ancient Indian concept derived from the Maha Upanishad, meaning "The whole world is one family." This principle promotes inclusivity, compassion, coexistence, and collective responsibility. When applied to environmental contexts, it extends moral concern beyond human beings to include animals, plants, ecosystems, and the planet as a whole. Radhakrishnan (1951) emphasized that Indian philosophy does not separate human welfare from environmental welfare, advocating a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Recent Indian studies, such as Patil (2019) and Deshpande (2021), indicate that students who internalize indigenous ethical concepts demonstrate higher levels of environmental responsibility and pro-environmental behavior.

Higher education students from Arts, Commerce & Science stream constitute a crucial group for this study, as they are future leaders, policymakers, educators, and professionals. Their ethical orientation toward the environment will significantly influence sustainable development efforts in India. Integrating traditional ethical principles like Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam into higher education may foster a deeper, value-based environmental consciousness rather than a purely knowledge-driven approach.

Environmental ethics refers to the moral principles, values, attitudes, and behaviors that govern human interaction with the natural environment. It includes concern for conservation of natural resources, respect for all forms of life, sustainable use of resources, and responsibility toward future generations. According to Gadgil and Guha (1995), Indian environmental thought is deeply rooted in ethical traditions that view nature as sacred rather than merely utilitarian. Studies conducted by Sharma (2014) and Kumar & Natarajan (2017) have highlighted that higher education students' environmental ethics are shaped by cultural values, educational exposure, and philosophical beliefs. However, despite environmental

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education being part of curricula, ethical sensitivity toward nature often remains superficial unless supported by value-based Higher education students foundations.

Thus, the present study attempts to examine environmental ethics among higher education students through the lens of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, highlighting the relevance of Indian philosophical values in addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Understanding the relationship between these variables may provide valuable insights for curriculum development, value education, and sustainable environmental practices in Indian higher education.

Objectives of the study:

To study the level of environmental ethics among undergraduate students of Arts, Science, and Commerce streams.

To study the awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students of Arts, Science, and Commerce streams.

To compare the awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students of Arts, Science, and Commerce streams, based on gender.

To compare the awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students across Arts, Science and Commerce stream in the principle of "Vasundhaiva kutumbakam".

Hypothesis of the study:

There is no significant difference in the Awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students of Arts, Science and Commerce stream.

There is no significant difference in the Awareness of environmental ethics among undergraduate students of Arts, Science and Commerce stream with respect to gender.

Research Methodology:

Research Method & Design:

The present study adopts a descriptive survey method, as it aims to study the existing level of environmental ethics among UG students in relation to the principle of Vasundhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family). A quantitative research design is used to collect numerical data regarding students' awareness, attitudes, and ethical practices toward the environment based on universal human values.

Population & sample of the Study:

The population of the study consists of students studying in higher education institutions (Arts, Science, Commerce stream). A sample of 120 students among UG students of Arts, Science & Commerce stream is selected using stratified sampling technique to ensure

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representativeness. Respective colleges were chosen by random sampling technique. 40 undergraduate students were selected from each stream.

Variables of the Study:

Independent Variable: Principle of Vasundhaiva Kutumbakam

Dependent Variable: Environmental Ethics among UG Students of Arts, Science, Commerce stream.

Tools for Data Collection:

A self-constructed closed ended questionnaire consisting of 30 items was prepared to study Environmental Ethics Awareness based on the values of Vasundhaiva Kutumbakam among UG students from Arts, Commerce & Science stream is used. The tool includes dimensions such:

Environmental awareness

Sense of universal responsibility

Conservation attitude

Sustainable lifestyle practices

Validity and Reliability of the Tool:

Content **validity** is ensured through expert review. **Reliability** of the tool is established using the test-retest method.

Procedure of Data Collection:

After obtaining permission from concerned authorities, the tool is administered personally to the selected UG students. Clear instructions are given, and responses are collected ethically.

Statistical Techniques:

The collected data is analyzed through Mean, Standard Deviation & 't' value.

Analysis & Interpretation:

Analysis and interpretation constitute a crucial phase of educational research, as they provide meaning to the data collected in relation to the stated objectives and hypotheses of the study. Appropriate statistical techniques were employed to analyze the data collected through constructed tools, and the results were organized in tabular form for clarity. Interpretation of the findings was carried out in the light of the objectives of the study, existing literature, and theoretical framework related to environmental ethics. The analysis aims to draw meaningful conclusions regarding students' environmental awareness, ethical responsibility, and the influence of traditional Indian philosophical principles on their environmental outlook.

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Table No. 1

A level of awareness of environmental ethics among UG students of Arts, Commerce & Science Stream.

Sr. No.	Stream/ (Total-N)	No. of Students / %		
		L	M	H
1	Arts (40)	05 (12.50%)	33(82.50%)	02(05.00%)
2	Commerce (40)	04 (10.00%)	33(82.50%)	03(07.50%)
3	Science (40)	02(05.00%)	31(77.50%)	07(**17.50%**)

Analysis:

This table presents a study of the level of environmental ethical awareness. It shows that 12.50% of arts students exhibited a low level of environmental ethical awareness, 82.50% showed an average level, and only 05% demonstrated a high level of environmental ethical awareness. Commerce students exhibited a 10% low level of environmental ethical awareness, 82.50% showed an average level, and only 07.50% demonstrated a high level of environmental ethical awareness. Science students exhibited a 05.00% low level of environmental ethical awareness, 77.50% showed an average level, and 17.50% demonstrated a high level of environmental ethical awareness.

Interpretation:

The predominance of an average level of environmental ethical awareness among Arts students indicates a partial internalization of the principle of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, suggesting that while students recognize the idea of the world as one family, this value has not yet fully translated into a strong and consistent commitment towards environmental ethical responsibility.

Table No 2

Gender-wise comparison of Environmental Ethics among UG students with respect to Mean, S.D.& 't' value

Sr. No	Stream	(N)	Mean	S.D.	't' Value	Significant Level 0.05
1	Arts	20 Boys	14.40	3.80	1.07	No Significant
		20 Girls	15.65	3.55		

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2	Commerce	20 Boys	14.60	3.29	0.69	No Significant
		20 Girls	13.85	3.62		
3	Science	20 Boys	15.20	2.56	1.99	No Significant
		20 Girls	17.30	3.96		

Analysis:

The obtained t value (1.07) is less than the table value at 0.05 level, indicating no significant difference between boys and girls in environmental ethics in the **Arts stream.** This suggests that both genders exhibit a similar level of ethical awareness, reflecting a shared sense of responsibility towards nature, which aligns with the inclusive spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

The t value (0.69) is not significant at 0.05 level, showing no meaningful gender-based difference in environmental ethics. This indicates that **Commerce students**, irrespective of gender, equally internalize ethical values related to environmental stewardship, supporting the philosophy that all members of the global family share equal ecological duties.

The obtained t value (1.99) is marginal but still not significant at 0.05 level, suggesting that although girls show a slightly higher mean score, both **Science stream** genders demonstrate comparable environmental ethical awareness. This reflects scientific understanding combined with ethical concern, resonating with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which emphasizes harmony between humans and nature.

Interpretation:

The findings reveal that gender does not play a significant role in determining environmental ethics across Arts, Commerce, and Science streams. This uniformity of ethical awareness reflects the core philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which advocates collective responsibility, universal kinship, and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

Overall, undergraduate students across streams and genders perceive environmental protection as a shared moral duty, reinforcing the idea that the Earth is one family and its preservation is a collective obligation.

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Table No. 3

Stream-wise comparison of Environmental Ethics among UG students with respect to Mean, Standard Deviation and 't' value

Sr. No	Stream	(N)	Mean	S.D.	't' Value	Significant Level 0.05
1	Arts	40	15.03	3.73	0.99	No Significant
	Commerce	40	14.23	3.29		
2	Arts	40	15.03	3.73	1.51	No Significant
	Science	40	16.25	3.50		
3	Commerce	40	14.23	3.29	**2.59**	Significant
	Science	40	16.25	3.50		

Analysis:

Comparison between Arts and Commerce Students:

The calculated t value (0.99) is less than the table value at 0.05 level of significance, indicating no significant difference in environmental ethics between Arts and Commerce students.

Comparison between Arts and Science Students:

The obtained t value (1.51) is not significant at 0.05 level, indicating that Arts and Science students possess a comparable level of environmental ethical awareness.

Comparison between Commerce and Science Students:

The calculated t value (2.59) is greater than the critical value at 0.05 level, indicating a significant difference between Commerce and Science students. Science students show higher environmental ethical awareness than Commerce students.

Interpretation:

The philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam emphasizes the idea that the entire world is one family, advocating shared responsibility, mutual respect, and ethical coexistence with nature. The findings reveal that while students across all streams exhibit a moderate and positive orientation towards environmental ethics, Science students demonstrate significantly higher ethical sensitivity, possibly due to greater exposure to ecological concepts, sustainability education, and scientific understanding of environmental interdependence.

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Nevertheless, the absence of significant differences between Arts–Commerce and Arts–Science streams reflect a common moral foundation across disciplines, reinforcing the universal ethical values inherent in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

6. Major Findings:

There is no significant difference in environmental ethics between Arts and Commerce students.

There is no significant difference in environmental ethics between Arts and Science students.

A significant difference exists between Commerce and Science students, with science students showing higher environmental ethical awareness.

Overall, undergraduate students display a shared ethical concern for the environment, supporting the principle of global kinship.

There is no statistically significant difference in environmental ethics between boys and girls in the Arts stream. This indicates that both genders possess a comparable level of environmental ethical awareness.

In the Commerce stream, no significant gender difference in environmental ethics. Boys and girls demonstrate nearly similar mean scores, suggesting uniformity in ethical understanding related to the environment.

Although in the Science stream, girls show a higher mean score in environmental ethics compared to boys, the obtained t value (1.99) is still not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the difference is not statistically meaningful.

Overall, gender does not play a significant role in influencing environmental ethics among undergraduate students across Arts, Commerce, and Science streams.

Conclusion:

The study concludes that undergraduate students, irrespective of their academic streams, largely uphold environmental ethical values aligned with the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. While Science students exhibit a higher level of environmental ethics compared to Commerce students, the overall findings indicate a collective moral consciousness towards nature. This suggests the need for integrating environmental ethics and value-based education across all disciplines to strengthen the spirit of universal responsibility and sustainable coexistence.

Suggestions:

Environmental ethics education should be implemented uniformly for all students irrespective of gender.

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Value-based environmental education grounded in Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam should be strengthened in the curriculum.

Practical and experiential activities must be promoted to convert awareness into ethical action.

Colleges should organize regular environmental awareness programmes and community activities.

Interdisciplinary teaching approaches should be adopted to reinforce collective environmental responsibility.

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