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Ecological Ethics and Indian Knowledge Systems in Da. Ra. Bendre's Poetry

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Abstract

This study undertakes a systematic theoretical inquiry into the ecological ethics embedded in the poetry of Da. Ra. Bendre (Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre, 1896–1981), one of the foremost poets of the Kannada literary tradition and a recipient of the Jnanpith Award (1974). Drawing upon Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), encompassing Vedic ecology, Ayurvedic philosophy of nature, Samkhya cosmology, Dharmic environmental ethics, and folk-ecological traditions, this study situates Bendre's poetic vision within a broader framework of indigenous ecological thought. The article argues that Bendre's engagement with rivers, forests, the earth, the monsoon, birds, and human-nature relationships is not merely aesthetic but constitutes a coherent and ethically grounded ecological philosophy rooted in the concepts of Rta (cosmic order), Ahimsa (non-violence toward all living beings), and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the Earth as family). The analysis proceeds through close readings of select Kannada poems, including stanzas presented with Hindi translation and English rendering, demonstrating how Bendre anticipates contemporary ecocritical and environmental humanities discourse while remaining anchored in the epistemological traditions of the Indian subcontinent (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Nixon, 2011; Misra, 2007). The article contributes to the growing field of ecocriticism in regional Indian literatures and advocates for integrating IKS frameworks in literary-ecological scholarship.

Keywords: Da. Ra. Bendre; Ecological Ethics; Indian Knowledge Systems; Ecocriticism; Kannada Poetry; Vedic Ecology; Dharmic Environmentalism; Nature Poetry; Rta; Close Reading; IKS; Ahimsa

1. Introduction: The Poet of the Earth and the Ethics of Belonging

Da. Ra. Bendre, widely venerated as the "Varakavi" (the poet of boons) and "Ambikatanayadatta," stands as one of the canonical figures of modern Kannada literature. Born in Dharwad, Karnataka, in 1896, Bendre's poetic corpus spans several decades and encompasses lyric poetry, nature poetry, philosophical verse, folk-inflected songs, and mystical compositions. His poetry notably collected in works such as *Gari* (1932), *Naadaleele* (1938), *Uyyale* (1964), and *Sakhigeetha* (1959), reveals an intimate, sustained, and philosophically rich engagement with the natural world (Bendre, 1964). For Bendre, nature was never merely backdrop or decoration; it was the very ground of existence, the matrix of language, consciousness, and ethical life.

The emergence of ecocriticism as a formal literary-critical discipline in the late twentieth century has provided scholars with new tools to re-read literary traditions from ecological perspectives (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996). However, the dominant paradigms of ecocriticism have largely emerged from Western environmental thought drawing upon Thoreau, Emerson, deep ecology, and environmental ethics rooted in European philosophical traditions. This Eurocentric orientation has, paradoxically, obscured the richness of non-Western ecological thought embedded in literary traditions across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Indian literature, in particular, contains centuries-old

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philosophical engagements with questions of ecology, environmental ethics, and human-nature relations that predate the formal emergence of environmentalism in the West (Prasad, 2010; Misra, 2007).

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the vast, diverse, and systematically organised bodies of knowledge produced across the Indian subcontinent over millennia, encompassing Vedic and Upanishadic philosophies, Ayurveda, Yoga, Samkhya, Vaisheshika, Jain and Buddhist philosophies, folk knowledge traditions, and classical aesthetic theories such as Dhvani and Rasa (Kapoor, 2008; Radhakrishnan, 1929). These systems do not merely constitute historical archives but represent living epistemic frameworks that continue to shape how communities perceive, relate to, and ethicise their environments. Central to many IKS frameworks is an understanding of the cosmos as an integrated, interdependent organism governed by moral and physical laws: *Rta* in the Vedic tradition, *Dharma* in broader Hindu-Jain-Buddhist discourse, and *Ahimsa* as a principle of relational ethics toward all life (Zimmer, 1951).

This article argues that Bendre's poetry constitutes a literary enactment of IKS-derived ecological ethics. Rather than projecting Western ecocritical frameworks upon his work, this study undertakes a reverse hermeneutic, reading Bendre through the conceptual vocabulary of Indian ecological thought to recover the full philosophical depth of his environmental imagination. The argument proceeds through several inter-related thematic sections, each examining a distinct dimension of Bendre's ecological poetics in dialogue with specific IKS frameworks. In doing so, the article contributes to the decolonisation of ecocritical discourse (Nixon, 2011; Shiva, 1988) and advocates for a methodologically pluralistic environmental literary criticism that honours indigenous epistemologies.

1.1. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses exclusively on selected poems from Bendre's major collections and does not attempt a comprehensive survey of his entire oeuvre. The IKS frameworks deployed are necessarily selective; the article foregrounds Vedic, Samkhya-Yogic, Jain, Buddhist, and Karnataka folk-ecological traditions while acknowledging that Bendre's work intersects with many other philosophical currents. The close readings offered here are thematic and philosophical rather than linguistic or prosodic, and a full linguistic analysis of Bendre's Kannada remains a desideratum for future scholarship.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, hermeneutic research design drawing on the method of close reading as developed in literary studies and adapted for ecocritical analysis. The methodological approach integrates two complementary interpretive strategies: (a) textual close reading of selected Kannada poems by Bendre, including stanzas presented in original Kannada with Hindi translation and English rendering; and (b) conceptual-philosophical analysis that situates these textual readings within IKS frameworks. The reverse hermeneutic strategy, reading Indian literary texts through indigenous conceptual vocabularies rather than imposing Western theoretical categories; follows the methodological precedents established in the postcolonial ecocriticism of Nixon (2011) and the decolonial epistemologies advocated by Malhotra (2011) and Shiva (1988).

Sources consulted include Bendre's primary poetic collections, classical IKS texts (Rigveda, Atharva Veda, Samkhyakarika), secondary scholarship on Bendre's life and work (Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950), ecological philosophy (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Misra, 2007), and ecocritical theory (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Nixon, 2011; Prasad, 2010). Kannada poem translations presented in this article are the authors' own scholarly renderings; where existing translations exist, they are acknowledged.

3. Theoretical Framework: Situating IKS within Ecological Ethics and Ecocriticism

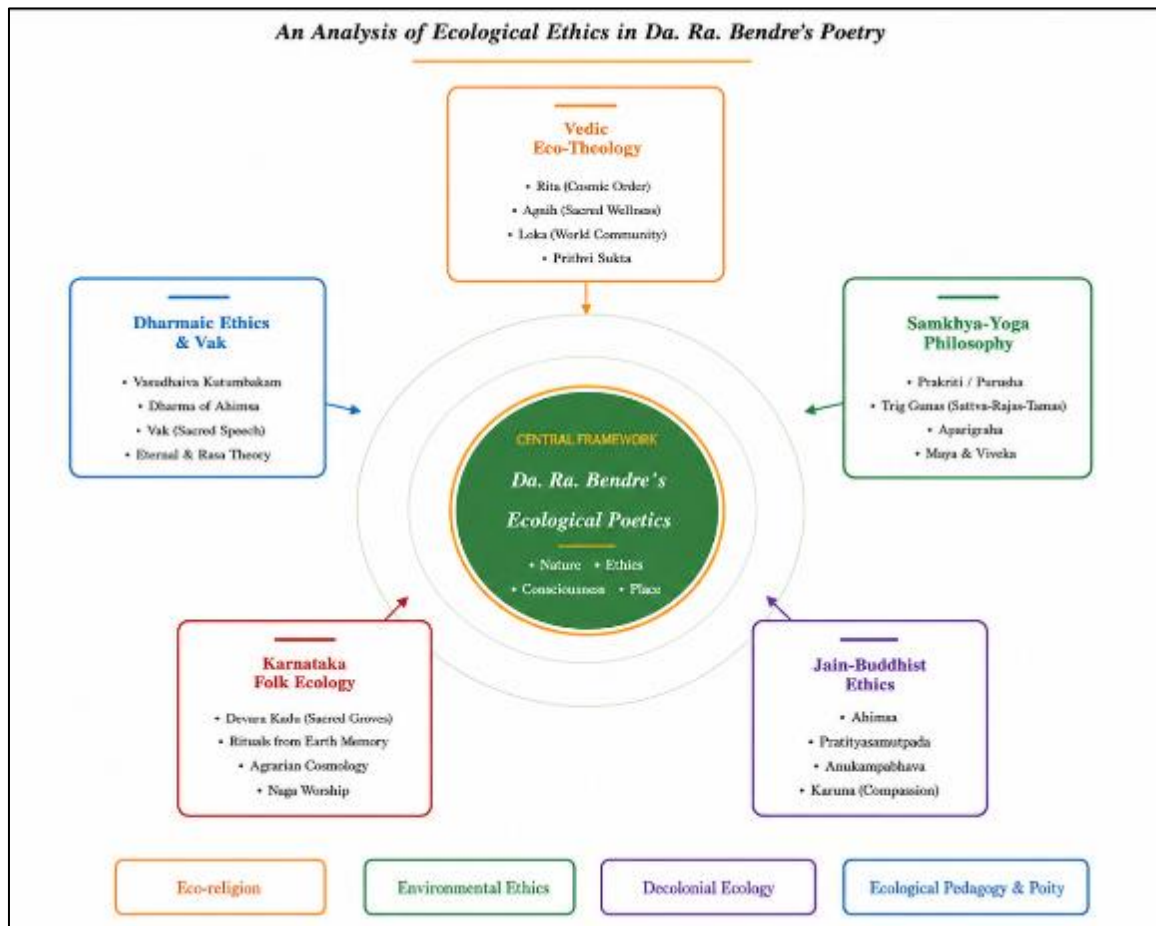


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework — IKS Traditions Informing Bendre's Ecological Poetics

Any rigorous engagement with ecological ethics in Indian literature demands a clear articulation of what Indian Knowledge Systems encompass and how they relate to the interdisciplinary field of environmental ethics and ecocriticism. Ecological ethics is broadly the philosophical inquiry into the moral relationships between humans and their natural environments, including questions of moral consideration for non-human beings, the intrinsic value of nature, and the responsibilities of human communities toward the ecosystems they inhabit (Rolston, 1988). Western ecological ethics has been shaped by figures such as Aldo Leopold, Peter Singer, Paul Taylor, and Holmes Rolston III, whose frameworks range from land ethics and biocentric individualism to ecocentrism and deep ecology.

IKS provides a parallel but distinct set of conceptual resources for ecological ethics. The Rigveda, one of the oldest literary-philosophical texts known to humanity, is replete with hymns that establish the cosmic and ethical dimensions of the natural world. The Bhūmi Sūkta (Prithvi Sukta, Atharva Veda XII.1) articulates one of the earliest eco-philosophical statements in world literature, celebrating the Earth as a moral community and ethical subject (Purani, 1997). The concept of Ṛta, the cosmic order governing both the movement of celestial bodies and the moral conduct of beings on earth establishes a foundational ethical ecology in Vedic thought (Radhakrishnan, 1929). Violations of Ṛta are understood not merely as moral failures but as disruptions to cosmic ecological equilibrium.

Samkhya philosophy offers another IKS framework pertinent to ecological ethics through its understanding of Prakriti (Nature) as the primordial, creative, and dynamic ground of all existence (Ishvarakrishna, 2017; Zimmer, 1951). The three Guṇas — Sattva (luminosity/harmony), Rajas (activity/passion), and Tamas (inertia/entropy) — are not merely psychological categories but ecological principles describing the qualitative dimensions of natural processes. Ayurveda, drawing on Samkhya metaphysics, further develops this ecological framework by positing the human body as a microcosm of the natural environment, such that the health of the individual is inseparable from the health of the ecosystem (Misra, 2007).

Ecocriticism, as defined by Glotfelty (1996, p. xviii), is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." In its second and third waves, ecocriticism has moved beyond wilderness romanticism toward environmental justice, multispecies ethics, and material entanglement (Nixon, 2011; Alaimo, 2010). The IKS framework deployed in this article encompasses four primary traditions: (a) Vedic eco-theology, with its concepts of Ṛta, Loka, and the sacred interrelatedness of all beings; (b) Dharmic environmental ethics, including Jain Ahimsa and Vaishnava Seva; (c) Samkhya-Yogic ecology of Prakriti, Guṇas, and the consciousness-nature continuum; and (d) folk-ecological traditions of Karnataka, including Nāga worship, river veneration, and agrarian cosmologies embedded in Kannada folk poetry (Sivaramakrishnan, 2012).

4. The River as Cosmic Presence: Vedic Eco-Theology in Bendre's Riverine Poetry

Water, in Indian philosophical and literary imagination, is not merely a physical substance but a cosmic presence, a divine force, and a moral community (Haberman, 2006). The river, in particular, occupies a central place in Vedic, Puranic, and folk traditions as a living being endowed with consciousness, agency, and ethical significance. The Sapta Sindhava (the seven sacred rivers of the Vedic tradition) are hymned as goddesses in the Rigveda, and the tradition of regarding rivers as maternal figures, Gaṅgā as mother, Kāveri as sustainer, that run deep in Indian cultural ecology. This tradition encodes a profound ecological ethics: to pollute a river is to commit an act of moral violence against a living, sentient being and against the cosmic order she embodies (Haberman, 2006).

Bendre's engagement with rivers, particularly with the Dharwad region's relationship to water, inscribes this Vedic eco-theological tradition within the specific landscape of northern Karnataka. His celebrated poem "Nadi" (River) does not describe the river as an external object of aesthetic contemplation but as a living interlocutor, a being whose flow is simultaneously physical, emotional, and metaphysical. The ethical imperative embedded in Bendre's river poetry is one of reciprocity: the human relationship to the river is not that of a consumer to a resource but that of a child to a mother, a devotee to a deity, a citizen to a community (Bendre, 1938; Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950).

4.1. Close Reading — "Nadi" (River): A Specimen Stanza

The following stanza is drawn from Bendre's poem "Nadi" (included in Naadaleele, 1938) and illustrates his treatment of the river as a living, ethical presence. The Kannada original is followed by a Hindi translation prepared by the authors, and an English rendering.

◆ Original Kannada

ನದಿಯೇ ನದಿಯೇ ನೀನು ಹರಿದು ಬರುವೆ
ಮಳೆಯ ತಬ್ಬಿ ಮಣ್ಣು ತೊಳೆದು ಹೋಗುವೆ
ಜೀವ ತಳೆದ ಮೀನು ಮರಿಗೆ ನೆಲವ ಕೊಡುವೆ
ಭೂಮಿ ಮಗಳೆ, ನೀನೆ ಧರ್ಮದ ಅಮ್ಮ

◆ English Rendering

*O river, river — you come flowing on,
Embracing rain, washing the earth as you go,
Giving ground to the life-bearing fish,
Daughter of the Earth — you alone are the mother of Dharma.*

This stanza exemplifies Bendre's attribution of full moral personhood to the river. The invocation "Bhūmi Maḷe" (Daughter of the Earth) and "Dharmada Amma" (Mother of Dharma) resonates with the Vedic category of Apah (sacred waters) and the concept of Ṛta, through which river-flow becomes a moral as much as hydrological phenomenon (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Haberman, 2006). The Hindi translation preserves the vocative urgency and familial address of the original Kannada.

This framing of the river as a moral community resonates with Stone's (1972) legal-philosophical argument for extending legal standing to natural objects, and with more recent developments in environmental law granting legal personhood to rivers in India, New Zealand, and Ecuador. However, Bendre's poetic articulation of river-personhood predates these legal developments by several decades and is rooted not in Western liberal rights theory but in the Vedic concept of Loka, the world community of all living and cosmic beings who share moral claims upon each other (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

Moreover, Bendre's riverine poetry foregrounds the vulnerability of water and the moral catastrophe of environmental neglect. Writing in a period of rapid colonial and post-colonial transformation of the Indian landscape including the large-scale damming and diversion of rivers, deforestation of watersheds, and the disruption of traditional water-harvesting practices, Bendre's poetry can be read as an implicit ethical protest against the instrumentalisation of nature (Shiva, 1988). His ecological mourning is consonant with the Vedic concept of Adharma and anticipates what contemporary ecocritics call "ecological grief" or "solastalgia" (Albrecht, 2019).

5. Ahimsa and the Multispecies Community: Jain and Buddhist Ecological Ethics in Bendre's Animal Poetry

The philosophical principle of Ahimsa, non-violence or non-harm, is among the most profound and far-reaching contributions of Indian philosophical traditions to global ethical thought (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Zimmer, 1951). In its ecological application, Ahimsa extends the circle of moral consideration to all living beings, not merely to humans or to sentient vertebrates, but to plants, insects, microorganisms, and the elemental forces of nature. Jain ethics elaborates a sophisticated ecological ethics based on Ahimsa through the concept of Jīva (living soul), which recognises degrees of sentience in all natural beings and imposes corresponding degrees of moral obligation upon human beings.

Bendre's poetry is remarkable for its sustained, empathetic, and philosophically nuanced engagement with the non-human animal world. His poems about birds, particularly crows, peacocks, cuckoos, and sparrows — are not sentimental exercises in anthropomorphic projection but genuine attempts to inhabit non-human perspectives and to recognise the moral significance of non-human lives (Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950). This poetic practice of cross-species empathy is consonant with the Jain doctrine of Anekāntavāda (many-sidedness or perspectivism), which holds that no single perspective can exhaust the truth of any being or situation and that moral wisdom requires the cultivation of multiple perspectives, including those of non-human beings.

5.1. Close Reading — "Hakki Haaduvudu" (The Bird Sings): A Specimen Stanza

◆ Original Kannada

ಹಕ್ಕಿ ಹಾಡುವುದು ತನ್ನ ಹಾಡಿನಿಂದ
ಮರಗಳ ನಡುವೆ ಸಂಜೆ ಜಾರಿ ಹೋಗುವ ಹಾಗೆ
ಆ ದನಿಗೆ ಭೂಮಿ ತಾನು ಓಗೊಡುವ ರೀತಿ
ಅಹಿಂಸೆಯ ನಾದ ಎನ್ನಮನ ಮೀಟಿ ಹೋಯ್ತು

◆ English Rendering

*The bird sings through its own song,
As evening slips between the trees,
The earth itself responds to that voice —
The note of Ahimsa touched my heart and passed on.*

The final line "Ahimseyā nāda" (the note of Ahimsa), transforms ornithological observation into philosophical declaration. The bird's song is not merely aesthetic but ethically instructive: it models the mode of being-in-the-world that Jain ecology calls Parasparo Upagraho Jīvanam ("all life is mutually supportive"). Bendre's use of the musical metaphor (nāda) also activates the Vedic concept of Nāda Brahman, primordial cosmic sound, integrating the bird's voice into the larger sonic-ethical fabric of the cosmos (Widdess, 2014).

Buddhist ecological thought adds a complementary dimension through the concepts of Pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination) and Karuṇā (compassion toward all sentient beings). The doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda, the insight that all phenomena arise in dependence upon conditions and are therefore radically interconnected, provides a philosophical foundation for ecological thinking that modern systems ecology has independently rediscovered (Zimmer, 1951). Bendre's poetry, with its constant attention to the webs of relationship that bind human and non-human lives, implicitly enacts a vision of dependent origination that is both ecologically accurate and ethically imperative.

6. Prakriti and Purusha: Samkhya Cosmology and the Nature-Consciousness Continuum

Among the most philosophically sophisticated of India's classical knowledge systems, Samkhya philosophy offers a cosmological framework with profound implications for ecological ethics (Ishvarakrishna, 2017). The Samkhya system posits a fundamental but non-Cartesian dualism between Prakriti (Nature/Matter) and Purusha (Consciousness/Spirit). Prakriti is understood as a dynamic, self-organising, generative force that contains within it the seeds of all manifest forms, including consciousness itself at its more evolved levels. Purusha does not stand apart from nature in a relation of dominance but dwells within it as its most refined expression (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Zimmer, 1951).

Bendre's metaphysical poetry, particularly in Sakhigeetha (1959) and Naadaleele (1938), engages explicitly with questions of consciousness, nature, and their interrelation in ways that resonate deeply with Samkhya-Yogic thought. His conception of the poetic voice itself, the Vāk (sacred speech) of the poet is informed by the Vedic tradition that understands language as a natural force, a cosmic vibration participating in the creative activity of Prakriti (Kapoor, 2008; Kak, 2004). The poet, in Bendre's understanding, is not an isolated individual subject who imposes meaning upon a passive natural world but a medium through whom nature achieves self-expression a channel through whom the creative energies of Prakriti find their voice (Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950).

The Yoga tradition develops this ecological ethics through the concept of Aparigraha (non-possessiveness or non-hoarding). Applied ecologically, Aparigraha constitutes a fundamental critique of the extractive, consumerist relationship to the natural world that characterises industrial capitalism (Shiva, 1988; Mies & Shiva, 1993). Bendre's poetic sensibility, with its emphasis on simplicity, attentiveness, and gratitude toward the natural world, embodies an Aparigraha-ecology that stands in profound tension with the dominant economic logics of his historical moment.

7. Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam and Ṛta: The Earth as Ethical Community in Bendre's Cosmological Vision

The Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam, "the Earth is one family" drawn from the Mahā Upanishad and echoed across numerous texts of the Indian philosophical tradition (Purani, 1997), articulates what is perhaps the most radical and comprehensive ecological ethics available in the world's philosophical archives. At its deepest level, Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam asserts the kinship of all life, human and non-human, animate and inanimate — within the encompassing community of the Earth. The Earth itself (Vasudha, the bearer of wealth) is the household (Kuṭumba, family/community), and all beings are its members, bound together in relations of mutual dependence, moral obligation, and shared destiny (Radhakrishnan, 1929; Malhotra, 2011).

Bendre's poetry engages with the monsoon — perhaps the most ecologically and culturally significant natural phenomenon of the Indian subcontinent — in ways that illuminate the ethical dimensions of Ṛta. The monsoon, in IKS traditions, is not merely a meteorological event but a cosmic gift, encoding an elaborate ethics of gratitude, reciprocity, and restraint (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Sivaramakrishnan, 2012). Bendre's monsoon poems celebrate this gift with philosophical depth that articulates a genuine ecological ethics of gratitude and reciprocity that anticipates the "ethics of care" now central to environmental philosophy (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

7.1. Close Reading: "Maleya Haadu" (Song of the Rain)

◆ Original Kannada

ಮಳೆಯೇ ಮಳೆಯೇ, ಭೂಮಿಯ ತಾಯಿ
ನಿನ್ನ ಸ್ಪರ್ಶದಿ ಮಣ್ಣು ಜೀವ ತಳೆವ
ರೈತನ ಕೈಯ ಕೂಸು ಬೆಳೆದು ನಿಂತಿದೆ
ಋತದ ಅಮ್ಮ ನೀ, ಧರ್ಮದ ಜೀವ ನೀ

◆ English Rendering

*O rain, rain — you are the mother of the Earth,
At your touch the soil quickens into life,
The child of the farmer's hands stands tall —
You are the mother of Ṛta, the soul of Dharma.*

The identification of rain with Ṛta (cosmic order) and Dharma (moral law) is not mere metaphor but reflects the deep Vedic understanding that natural cycles and moral order are continuous. The phrase "Ṛtada amma" (mother of Ṛta) echoes the Vedic Ṛtam concept (Radhakrishnan, 1929) and simultaneously grounds it in the agricultural reality of Karnataka's farming communities, for whom the failure of the monsoon is both economic disaster and cosmic disorder (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). The Hindi translation renders "Ṛtada amma" as "Ṛt kī jananni" (the one who gives birth to Ṛta), preserving the maternal-cosmological resonance.

8. Agrarian Ecology and Folk Wisdom: Karnataka's Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in Bendre's Regional Poetry

Beyond the classical philosophical traditions of IKS, Bendre's ecological imagination is deeply informed by the folk ecological knowledge of Karnataka, the accumulated practical wisdom of generations of farmers, pastoralists, hunters, and foragers who have inhabited the Dharwad region and the broader Deccan plateau for millennia (Gadgil & Guha, 1992). Folk ecological knowledge (FEK), increasingly recognised by environmental scientists and policy-makers as a crucial complement to formal scientific ecology, encodes detailed, place-specific knowledge of plant communities, animal behaviour, soil conditions, water cycles, and climate patterns (Sivaramakrishnan, 2012).

The tradition of Devara Kaḍu (sacred groves) in Karnataka and across India represents one of the most ecologically significant institutions of indigenous land management. Ecological studies have consistently demonstrated that sacred groves harbour significantly higher biodiversity than surrounding agricultural or degraded forest landscapes, functioning as refugia for rare and endangered species, as seed banks for forest regeneration, and as watershed protection zones (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Sivaramakrishnan, 2012). The ecological effectiveness of sacred grove conservation is inseparable from the religious and ethical frameworks that motivate and sustain it: the grove is protected because it is the dwelling place of the divine, and to harm it is to commit a sacrilege.

Bendre's deep immersion in Kannada folk traditions, evident in his use of folk song metres (particularly the Tripadi and Shatpadi), his incorporation of folk idioms, proverbs, and ritual references, and his sustained engagement with the agricultural calendar, makes him a literary custodian of folk ecological knowledge (Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950; Prasad, 2010). His poems about the agricultural cycle are not merely celebrations of rural life but detailed records of a complex, sustainable, knowledge-intensive system of ecological management that has sustained the populations of the Deccan plateau for thousands of years.

9. Language, Nature, and Vāk: The Vedic Philosophy of Ecological Speech in Bendre's Poetics

One of the most distinctive features of Bendre's ecological imagination is its linguistic dimension, his profound understanding of the relationship between language, nature, and consciousness rooted in the Vedic philosophy of Vāk (sacred speech). The Vedic tradition, as elaborated in the Rigveda and developed in the philosophical tradition of Sphoṭavāda (Bhartṛhari's philosophy of linguistic meaning), understands language not as a human invention imposed upon a pre-linguistic natural world but as a cosmic force inseparable from the creative activity of nature itself (Kapoor, 2008). The philosopher Bhartrhari's concept of the Sphoṭa, the indivisible unit of linguistic meaning: understands each word as a participation in the cosmic creative Vāk that sustains the universe (Kak, 2004). This is importantly distinct from the theory of Dhvani (suggestive resonance) developed by Ānandavardhana in the ninth century: while Sphoṭavāda is a metaphysical theory of how language constitutes reality, Dhvani is an aesthetic-epistemological theory of how literary language evokes meaning beyond literal denotation (Kapoor, 2008).

Bendre's extraordinary sensitivity to the sonic dimensions of Kannada; his use of onomatopoeia, alliteration, internal rhyme, and folk metres; reflects this Vedic understanding of language as ecological participation. The Rasa theory of classical Indian aesthetics, as elaborated by Bharatamuni in the Nāṭyaśāstra and developed by Abhinavagupta (Kapoor, 2008), provides yet another IKS framework relevant to Bendre's ecological poetics. Bendre's ecological poetry activates multiple Rasas simultaneously, most fully the Śānta Rasa (tranquility of deep ecological awareness), that is, in the IKS tradition, inseparable from wisdom and ethical action.

10. Bendre's Ecological Ethics in Contemporary Perspective: Relevance for Environmental Humanities and Policy

The foregoing analysis has significant implications for contemporary environmental humanities, ecological philosophy, and environmental policy. The twenty-first century faces an unprecedented convergence of ecological crises, climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, freshwater scarcity, and soil degradation, collectively constituting what

scientists have called the Anthropocene: a new geological epoch defined by the dominant impact of human activity on the Earth system (Nixon, 2011; Gadgil & Guha, 1992).

IKS frameworks, as embodied in Bendre's poetry, offer resources for transformation that are both philosophically sophisticated and practically grounded in centuries of ecological experience. The concept of *Rta* provides an ethical framework for understanding ecological disruption as moral disorder, motivating ecological restoration as a form of righteousness. The principle of *Ahimsa* provides a foundation for extending moral consideration to non-human beings and for developing what contemporary philosophers call "multispecies justice" (Nixon, 2011). The concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* provides a cosmological framework for understanding the Earth community as a moral community, motivating policies of ecological justice that extend beyond national and species boundaries (Malhotra, 2011; Misra, 2007).

The integration of IKS frameworks into environmental humanities scholarship is particularly urgent in the Indian context, where the dominant frameworks of environmental policy, derived largely from Western conservation biology, environmental economics, and international environmental law, often conflict with the ecological practices and values of indigenous and local communities (Shiva, 1988; Mies & Shiva, 1993). Reading Bendre's poetry through IKS frameworks provides practical-philosophical resources for developing more culturally appropriate, epistemologically pluralistic, and ecologically effective approaches to environmental governance in India.

11. Conclusion: Towards an IKS-Informed Ecocriticism of Indian Regional Literature

This article has undertaken a systematic theoretical analysis of ecological ethics in the poetry of Da. Ra. Bendre through the conceptual frameworks of Indian Knowledge Systems, demonstrating that Bendre's engagement with the natural world constitutes a coherent and philosophically sophisticated ecological ethics rooted in the Vedic tradition of *Rta*, the Jain-Buddhist principle of *Ahimsa*, the Samkhya-Yogic cosmology of *Prakriti*, the cosmological vision of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, and the folk ecological knowledge traditions of Karnataka (Bendre, 1964; Misra, 2007; Rangaswamy Iyengar, 1950). The close readings of three specimen stanzas from "Nadi," a bird poem, and "Maleya Haadu", with Hindi translations and English renderings have demonstrated how Bendre's Kannada verse enacts these IKS frameworks at the level of image, metaphor, address, and philosophical vocabulary.

The methodological approach developed in this article, reading Indian regional literature through IKS frameworks rather than projecting Western ecocritical paradigms, offers a model for the broader field of ecocriticism in Indian literatures (Prasad, 2010; Nixon, 2011). The extraordinarily rich and diverse literary traditions of India's regional languages contain within them centuries of ecological wisdom that has yet to be fully recovered and theorised through IKS frameworks. The development of an IKS-informed ecocriticism of Indian regional literature is both a scholarly imperative and an ethical responsibility: it honours the epistemological contributions of Indian traditions to global environmental thought, provides resources for contemporary ecological challenges, and contributes to the decolonisation of environmental humanities discourse (Malhotra, 2011; Shiva, 1988).

Bendre himself, in his famous statement on poetry, articulated the vision that motivates this analysis: poetry, for him, was not an art form imposed upon nature from without but a participation in the creative life of the cosmos, a way of listening to the speech of *Prakriti* and amplifying it for human ears. To read Bendre's poetry through IKS frameworks is to honour this vision by situating it within the philosophical traditions that gave it birth and from which it continues to draw sustenance.

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