

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE LITERATURE OF RASHTRASANT TUKDOJI MAHARAJ**

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### **Abstract**

Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj (1909–1968) was a saint, poet, social reformer, and nationalist from Maharashtra. He devoted his life to uplifting society through spirituality, rural development, and moral teachings. His literature, primarily composed in the form of bhajans (devotional songs), ovis (poetic verses), and discourses, reflects his deep concern for environmental conservation. His magnum opus, "Gramgeeta," serves as a guide for sustainable rural living, advocating for harmony between humans and nature. His environmental consciousness was rooted in the belief that nature is divine and that its preservation is a spiritual duty. His teachings emphasize the importance of forests, rivers, cleanliness, sustainable living, and community-driven environmental initiatives. His works serve as a precursor to modern environmental movements, promoting a lifestyle that respects and nurtures nature. He had a deep reverence for nature and emphasized the importance of environmental conservation. He believed that humans should live in harmony with nature and preserve the natural resources for future generations. He encouraged practices such as tree plantation, water conservation, and sustainable living interwoven with themes of spirituality, self-reliance, and social upliftment. His teachings on eco-spirituality resonate strongly in today's world grappling with ecological challenges. Tukdoji Maharaj's literature is deeply rooted in environmental ethics. His teachings remain relevant today, serving as a guide for eco-conscious living, sustainable development, and environmental conservation. His message continues to inspire communities to protect nature while maintaining a harmonious and self-sufficient rural lifestyle. This paper highlights his messages on ecological balance, sustainable rural development, cleanliness, and the sacredness of nature.

**Key Words:** Gramgeeta, environmental consciousness, eco-spirituality, ecological balance.

### **Reverence for Nature**

Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj's literature is deeply rooted in reverence for nature, emphasizing its divinity, beauty, and essential role in human life. His bhajans urge people to live in harmony with their environment, advocating for sustainability, compassion, and ethical responsibility. In today's world, where environmental concerns are more pressing than ever, his teachings provide valuable guidance on how to respect, nurture, and coexist with nature. He encouraged villagers to live in harmony with nature, highlighting its role in sustaining life. He perceived nature as an embodiment of divinity. His poems and bhajans frequently describe the sun, rivers, trees, mountains, and animals as manifestations of the divine force that sustains life. This spiritual perspective encourages people to respect, protect, and live in harmony with nature rather than exploit it for selfish gains.

In his compositions, he compares Mother Earth to a mother figure, emphasizing the importance of treating her with gratitude and reverence. This perspective is deeply rooted in Indian philosophical traditions, where nature is considered sacred and integral to human well-being. Through his Gramgeeta (a poetic discourse on rural development), he motivated people to take collective action for village welfare, including afforestation and watershed management. In his opinion a beautiful garden should be created in the village. There the villagers can seek healthy serenity of mind, for their tranquility and delight there should be colorful flower plants, creeping plants and bowers should be developed in the garden.

“Ek asaava sundar bag I Tyaat manaswaasthyaachehee anga I

Prasannata waadhaaya nana rang I vruksha, veli, lata kunja II” (Shri Tukdoji, 271)

### **Forest Conservation and Afforestation**

Forests were an essential part of Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj’s vision for a sustainable environment. His literature repeatedly emphasizes: The importance of trees in maintaining ecological balance, the dangers of deforestation and its impact on climate, the need for villagers to participate in tree-planting drives. He promoted community-based afforestation programs where people could plant and protect trees to ensure long-term ecological health. His messages encourage each individual to plant trees as a duty towards nature. In his opinion beautiful trees should be planted along both the skirts of the streets by the people. Trees along side the road give shade to the passerby as well as save environment. At the same time, we should not forget about the cleanliness for that dustbins should be placed in between along the roadsides and near the houses to deposit the rubbish and garbage from the houses. He urged people to keep their homes, streets, and public spaces free from dirt and filth. His influence on community cleanliness programs was significant, as he actively mobilized people to participate in village sanitation drives, cleaning campaigns, and awareness programs. His teachings on cleanliness align closely with Gandhian philosophy and modern environmental awareness movements. Through the next ovis he clearly messages to plant the trees alongside the road.

“Sadakaanchiya dutarphaa chhana I sarvaanni karaavee vrukshaa ropana I

Dhole thewaave madha madhaatuna I kachara tyaat takaavaya II (Shri Tukdoji, 267)

### **Water Conservation and Pollution Control**

Water is a recurring theme in Tukdoji Maharaj’s literature. He understood the importance of water for survival and urged communities to preserve and use it wisely. he may not have written extensively on water conservation and pollution control in modern scientific terms, his literature reflects a deep respect for nature, including water resources, and promotes sustainable living.

### **Respect for Natural Resources**

His devotional songs (bhajans) and poems emphasize harmony between humans and nature, advocating for the responsible use of water. In his opinion open land around the river of pools should be made clean. The river banks, quay and stone stairs should be constructed on both the sides of the river. The river water should be fully utilized for increasing agricultural production. The streets and roads in the village, the water wells, houses and sties

and pens of the cattle should also be cleaned and decorated beautifully. Urinals should be built here and there and gutters and channels should be created throughout the village.

“Nadi, talyaakaathachi swachchata I tethe poor, ghaat aadinchi vyawastha I

Utpaadan waadhawaaya tatwata I upayog ghyava jalaacha II

Gaavateel maarga, vihiri, gjare I sundar sajawaavi pashunchi kutire I

Thai thai mutrighare I naalya karane mirmaana II (Shri Tukdoji, 266-267)

In his "Gramgeeta," he highlights the importance of self-sufficient villages, which includes proper water management for agriculture and daily use. He encouraged people to adopt indigenous water conservation practices like rainwater harvesting, well maintenance, and pond restoration. At the same time, he stressed the importance of personal and environmental cleanliness, indirectly linking it to pollution control.

### **Environmental Ethics and Spirituality**

Tukdoji Maharaj's writings integrate environmental ethics with spiritual values. He believed that harming nature leads to spiritual and social degradation. His poetry warns against greed, materialism, and excessive consumption, which he saw as major threats to both human happiness and ecological stability. A key theme in his teachings is simplicity and self-discipline—he encouraged people to take only what they need from nature and to give back by preserving and nurturing the environment. This aligns with the principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The world is one family), where all living beings are interconnected and dependent on each other.

### **Relevance of Tukdoji Maharaj's Environmental Teachings Today**

In the modern world, issues like climate change, deforestation, water scarcity, and pollution threaten global sustainability. Tukdoji Maharaj's literature offers timeless wisdom that remains highly relevant today. His teachings: Encourage sustainable rural development as a solution to urbanization and pollution. Promote eco-consciousness by advocating for afforestation, water conservation, and cleanliness. Offer a spiritual approach to environmental ethics, emphasizing that protecting nature is a moral and social responsibility.

His messages align with contemporary global movements like:

- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- India's Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- Afforestation and water conservation projects worldwide.

His Gramgeeta and bhajans serve as guides for environmentally sustainable living, urging individuals to adopt simple, mindful, and nature-friendly lifestyles. Moral & Ethical Responsibility – His teachings advocate for a pollution-free society by promoting simple living, minimal waste generation, and responsible consumption. Spiritual Connection to Nature– Tukdoji Maharaj emphasized that nature, including rivers and forests, should be treated with reverence, discouraging activities that lead to pollution. While his works do not explicitly discuss modern scientific water conservation or pollution control, the values he propagated align with contemporary environmental ethics. His vision of self-sustaining villages, community participation, and responsible resource use remains relevant today

### **Conclusion**

Tukdoji Maharaj's literature embodies a deep sense of environmental responsibility, urging people to respect and protect nature as a spiritual and moral duty. His works on water conservation, afforestation, cleanliness, and sustainable rural living remain relevant in addressing today's environmental challenges. His teachings not only offer solutions for ecological crises but also inspire communities to adopt sustainable practices for a harmonious coexistence with nature. By implementing his principles, we can move toward a greener, cleaner, and more sustainable future, ensuring that nature thrives for generations to come.

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