



## International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: [www.ijrpr.com](http://www.ijrpr.com) ISSN 2582-7421

# Vedic Bhūmi Sūkta and International Norms: A Comparative Framework

*Narendra Vijayasimha*

Indology Division, Rezorce Research Foundation, Bangalore 560 003 India  
Orcid ID: 0009-0003-9205-8882; Email: [Narendra.vijayasimha@rezorce.com](mailto:Narendra.vijayasimha@rezorce.com)  
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0825.3081>

### ABSTRACT

The Bhūmi Sūkta (Atharva Veda 12.1), one of the earliest and most comprehensive hymns to Earth in the Vedic corpus, articulates a proto-ecological worldview that integrates cosmology, agriculture, social order, and ethical responsibility. The Bhūmi Sūkta presents Earth as an autonomous life-sustaining power, revered as mother, moral witness, and foundation of human diversity. This study examines the hymn's thematic clusters—cosmic order, fertility and agriculture, forgiveness and non-violence, biodiversity, governance and justice, and peace and stability—and situates them within a comparative framework alongside modern sustainability discourses. Drawing on philological analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, the paper demonstrates how these Vedic categories resonate with contemporary global norms, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Earth Charter (2000), the Stockholm Declaration (1972), and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). The findings highlight significant continuities: the Vedic ethic of restraint and replenishment parallels SDG 12 on sustainable consumption; the hymn's affirmation of human and cultural diversity anticipates SDG 10 and UNESCO's cultural frameworks; and its emphasis on peace and justice mirrors SDG 16 and the UN Charter's call for global order. By foregrounding Earth as both sacred and juridical, the Bhūmi Sūkta offers a civilizational deep resource for ecological ethics, demonstrating that sustainability is not merely a modern construct but a value embedded in some of humanity's oldest sacred texts. The study argues that incorporating such Indic perspectives can enrich international sustainability debates, broaden their cultural legitimacy, and reinforce global commitments to environmental justice.

Keywords: Atharva Veda, Sustainability ethics, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ecological cosmology

### Introduction

#### *The Bhūmi Sūkta in Vedic Literature*

The Bhūmi Sūkta (Atharva Veda 12.1), also known as the Pṛthvī Sūkta, is one of the longest and most profound hymns in the Vedic corpus, consisting of sixty-three verses devoted exclusively to the Earth (Bhūmi or Pṛthvī). While the Rīg Veda frequently invokes the dual divinity of Heaven and Earth (Dyāvā-Pṛthivī) as cosmic parents sustaining creation (Jamison & Brereton, 2014), the Bhūmi Sūkta, however stands apart in its singular focus on Earth as an autonomous, life-sustaining power. The hymn presents Earth as a mother figure, revered as the nourisher of crops, the bearer of mountains and rivers, the source of medicinal plants, and the dwelling place of diverse human communities (Griffith, 1895; Bloomfield, 1897/1973).

More than a liturgical composition, the Bhūmi Sūkta is remarkable for the breadth of its vision. It integrates cosmological, ecological, ethical, and socio-political dimensions within a single narrative of Earth as the foundation of life. Verses call for sustainable agriculture, pray for forgiveness for the harm caused by human activity, and invoke Earth's replenishing capacity. Others emphasize the richness of Earth's minerals, the healing potential of her herbs, and her support for human diversity—different languages, customs, and nations all dwelling on her surface. Still others connect Earth to cosmic truth (ṛta), portraying her as a moral ground for justice and righteous governance (Atharva Veda 12.1.1–63).

Scholars have increasingly recognized that such hymns articulate a form of proto-environmental consciousness (Klostermaier, 2007). By presenting Earth as simultaneously sacred and material, nurturing yet vulnerable, the Bhūmi Sūkta anticipates a holistic ecological ethic that remains strikingly relevant to the twenty-first century.

#### *Conceptual Framework of the Hymn*

The hymn's thematic structure can be organized into several clusters (Bloomfield, 1897/1969):

- Cosmic and Moral Foundations (v. 1–6, 44–46): Earth is upheld by ṛta, truth, and cosmic order. Human flourishing is tied to ethical living.
- Fertility and Agriculture (v. 7–15): The soil is praised as fertile and regenerative, supporting crops, cattle, and human livelihood.

- Human Diversity (v. 16–22): Earth is the common home of peoples with varied languages, laws, and customs.
- Forgiveness and Non-Violence (v. 23–34): The hymn acknowledges the damage caused by cultivation and mining, asking forgiveness and urging restraint.
- Healing and Resources (v. 35–43): Earth yields treasures, minerals, and medicinal herbs for health and wealth.
- Governance and Dharma (v. 44–52): Rulers are enjoined to uphold justice in alignment with Earth's law.
- Peace and Stability (v. 53–63): The hymn closes with benedictions for stability, concord, and protection under Earth, the mother.

This layered structure highlights how early Indic thought integrated environmental, social, and political ethics into a unified worldview. It recognizes Earth not simply as inert matter but as a living, moral entity whose well-being is inseparable from that of human society.

### ***Resonances with Contemporary Sustainability Frameworks***

The relevance of the Bhūmi Sūkta becomes evident when juxtaposed with contemporary international frameworks on sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015) embody a multidimensional approach, linking ecological, economic, and social well-being in a global agenda. Several correspondences may be noted:

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) resonates with the hymn's concern for fertile soil and agricultural abundance (v. 7–15).
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) finds echoes in the hymn's celebration of human diversity across languages and nations (v. 16–22).
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) aligns with the request for forgiveness for ecological harm and the emphasis on replenishment (v. 23–34).
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) parallels the hymn's praise of medicinal herbs and healing powers (v. 35–43).
- SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) is mirrored in the connection between Earth, cosmic truth, and ethical governance (vv. 44–52).
- SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) reflect the hymn's broader ecological ethic of harmony with Earth.

Beyond the SDGs, the Bhūmi Sūkta resonates with the Earth Charter (2000), which calls for respect for Earth as a community of life, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), which affirms the sacred relation between communities and their land. The Harmony with Nature initiative (UN General Assembly, 2010) also institutionalizes the view of Earth as a rights-bearing entity, a perspective that can be traced back to the maternal and moral personification of Earth in the Vedas.

### ***Historical Continuity and Conceptual Evolution***

It is important to situate the Bhūmi Sūkta within the longer arc of Vedic thought. In the R̥g Veda (e.g., 5.84; 10.18), Earth is most often addressed in conjunction with Heaven as part of a dual cosmic principle (Dyāvā-Pṛthivī). These hymns praise Earth's fecundity and protective role, often in the context of ritual or funerary practices (Jamison & Brereton, 2014). The Atharva Veda, however, extends this vision, offering an independent theology of Earth that integrates cosmology with environmental ethics and political responsibility.

This development is not merely theological but anticipatory of modern sustainability discourse. Where the R̥g Veda lays cosmological foundations, the Bhūmi Sūkta elaborates a systematic ecological ethic, foreshadowing the interconnectedness emphasized in the SDGs and the Earth Charter. The conceptual progression from cosmological myth to ethical charter demonstrates a continuity that bridges ancient Indic traditions and contemporary global sustainability frameworks.

### ***Relevance for Contemporary Discourse***

In the present global context of climate change, ecological degradation, and socio-political inequalities, the *Bhūmi Sūkta* provides an alternative lens through which sustainability can be conceptualized. Rather than treating the environment as a resource pool external to human society, the hymn portrays Earth as kin—mother, protector, and moral guide. This relational ontology challenges the extractive models of modernity and supports the more integrative paradigms emerging in global governance, such as the recognition of the rights of nature in the constitutions of Ecuador (Constituent Assembly of Ecuador, 2008, Art. 71) and Bolivia (Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2010, Art. 1), or the incorporation of indigenous ecological knowledge into UN frameworks.

Furthermore, the hymn's emphasis on forgiveness and replenishment reflects an ethic of responsibility toward future generations, a principle that underlies both the SDGs and earlier milestones such as the Stockholm Declaration (1972) (United Nations, 1972) and Rio+20 (2012) (Pisano et al., 2012). Its pluralistic vision of humanity anticipates contemporary human rights discourses that seek to reconcile cultural diversity with global solidarity.

### ***Conclusion of the Introduction***

The Bhūmi Sūkta thus serves as both an ancient testimony to ecological reverence and a resource for contemporary sustainability thought. By bridging Vedic cosmology with modern international frameworks, the hymn underscores the universality of ecological ethics and the enduring relevance of Indic traditions in addressing global challenges. Recognizing this continuity allows scholars and policymakers to draw upon a deeper civilizational heritage in articulating sustainable futures, thereby reinforcing the global project of environmental justice with voices from the world's earliest sacred literature.

---

### **Methodology:**

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates philological analysis, conceptual hermeneutics, comparative historical study, and normative alignment with contemporary sustainability frameworks. The aim is to demonstrate how the Bhūmi Sūkta of the Atharva Veda may be interpreted not merely as a religious hymn, but as an early articulation of principles that resonate with present-day international norms of sustainable development.

#### ***Textual and Philological Analysis***

The primary source material is the Bhūmi Sūkta (Atharva Veda 12.1), supplemented by related hymns in the Rig Veda (e.g., RV 5.84, RV 10.18). Critical Sanskrit editions and standard translations (Sharma, 2013; Bloomfield, 1897/1969; Griffith, 1895; Jamison & Brereton, 2014) are used, alongside indigenous exegetical traditions where available. The philological method involves the close reading of key terms such as *bhūmi*, *prthivī*, *kṣamā*, and *ṛta*, with attention to their semantic fields, etymological layers, and contextual usage across the Vedic corpus. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how Earth is conceptualized both cosmologically and ethically.

#### ***Hermeneutic and Thematic Analysis***

Building on philology, the study applies a hermeneutic method to cluster the hymn into thematic units—such as Earth as nurturer, agricultural sustainer, guarantor of diversity, and moral witness. These themes are not merely descriptive but are analyzed for their underlying cosmological, ethical, and ecological assumptions. This enables the identification of internal coherence and normative orientation within the hymn.

#### ***Comparative and Cross-Cultural Framing***

The thematic findings are compared with both contemporaneous Vedic hymns and analogous conceptions of Earth in other indigenous and world traditions (e.g., Pachamama in Andean cultures, Mother Earth in Native American traditions). This comparative approach situates the Bhūmi Sūkta within a broader human tradition of sacralizing Earth, while also highlighting its distinctive Indic contributions, such as the emphasis on *ṛta* (cosmic order) as a framework for ecological balance.

#### ***Normative Cross-Referencing with International Frameworks***

The study employs document analysis to cross-reference the hymn's thematic clusters with international sustainability norms, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), the Earth Charter (2000), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007). This cross-referencing is not intended to impose modern categories anachronistically but rather to explore resonances and continuities that reveal the enduring relevance of Vedic ecological wisdom in contemporary sustainability discourses.

#### ***Interdisciplinary Integration***

Finally, the methodology synthesizes textual insights with insights from sustainability studies and environmental ethics (Renugadevi, 2012; Shaw, 2012). This integrative approach allows for the positioning of the Bhūmi Sūkta as both a historical religious text and a normative resource for global sustainability debates.

---

## **Literature Review**

### ***Philological and Textual Studies of the Bhūmi Sūkta***

The Bhūmi Sūkta has been the subject of philological interest since the late 19th century. Early Indological works by Bloomfield (1897/1969) and Griffith (1895) provided translations that made the hymn accessible to Western audiences. While these translations often reflected colonial-era assumptions, they remain indispensable textual bases. More recent philological engagements (Sharma, 2013; Hegde, 2022; Jamison & Brereton, 2014; Witzel, 1997) situate the hymn within broader Vedic cosmology, particularly emphasizing its structural independence from the dualistic Heaven–Earth (*Dyāvā-Prthivī*) hymns of the Rig Veda. This transition — from Earth as cosmic partner to Earth as autonomous ethical agent — has been identified as a significant theological and cultural shift (Hess, 2002).

### ***Interpretations in Hindu Ecological Thought***

The hymn has attracted attention in the growing field of religion and ecology. Narayanan (2001) highlights the Bhūmi Sūkta as one of the earliest articulations of ecological ethics, drawing attention to its themes of non-violence, agricultural sustainability, and cultural diversity. Chapple (2000) frames it as a proto-environmental manifesto, underscoring its insistence that human beings seek forgiveness from Earth for acts of exploitation. Klostermaier (2007) similarly regards the hymn as an Indic articulation of “deep ecology,” in which humans are not superior to but participants in a broader web of life. Such interpretations connect the hymn with contemporary debates on eco-theology, indigenous knowledge systems, and religious environmentalism.

In his translation and commentary, Sharma (2013) emphasizes the universal vision of the Bhūmi Sūkta, presenting Earth (Pṛthivī) not only as a physical foundation but as a cosmic moral order. He identifies the sustaining “pillars” of Earth as truth, constancy, infinity, mutability, commitment, discipline, knowledge, sacrifice (yajña), and participative living. These principles are articulated as universal laws ensuring the balance of life and society, transcending cultural or temporal boundaries. Earth is portrayed as the nurturing mother, embracing all beings and epochs—past, present, and future—thus offering an inclusive ethic of sustainability, creativity, and human contribution. In this framing, the Bhūmi Sūkta stands as one of the earliest articulations of ecological universality, resonating with later ideas of collective responsibility and global environmental ethics.

### ***Comparative Perspectives with Indigenous and Global Traditions***

Scholars have also placed the Bhūmi Sūkta in comparative perspective. Breckenridge and Pollock (1993) argue that the Vedic conception of Earth resonates with indigenous traditions that conceive of land as both sacred and communal. Similarities have been drawn between the Bhūmi Sūkta and the Native American notion of “Mother Earth” or Andean conceptions of Pachamama (Pachamama, 2025). Such comparative work demonstrates that the hymn is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a wider pattern in world religions that sacralize land, thereby making it a useful interlocutor in global sustainability discourses.

### ***Critical Gaps and Opportunities***

Despite this growing interest, several gaps remain. First, much of the scholarship continues to treat the Bhūmi Sūkta descriptively, without sufficiently theorizing its implications for modern international law and policy. Second, there is limited interdisciplinary work connecting philological studies with ecological sciences and sustainability frameworks. Third, the comparative potential of the hymn remains underexplored, especially in terms of its intersections with non-Western legal traditions on land rights and environmental stewardship. Addressing these gaps offers an opportunity to frame the Bhūmi Sūkta not merely as a historical artifact but as a living ethical text capable of contributing to 21st-century sustainability debates.

---

## **Cosmic Order and Global Ethics**

The Bhūmi Sūkta (Atharva Veda 12.1.1–12.1.6) presents one of the earliest spiritual articulations of humanity’s relationship with Earth. These verses portray Earth as cosmic mother, the bearer of moral order, social justice, and ecological abundance. Life flourishes only when human conduct aligns with the cosmic rhythm of truth, discipline, and cooperation. This vision parallels modern international frameworks such as the United Nations Charter (1945), the Earth Charter (2000), and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 (peace, justice, strong institutions). Despite being separated by millennia, both ancient Vedic thought and contemporary charters stress that cosmic or global order is the foundation for peace, justice, and prosperity.

### ***Cosmic Foundations in the Bhūmi Sūkta***

The Bhūmi Sūkta opens by naming the pillars of Earth: truth, constancy, law, discipline, sacrifice (yajña), and divine knowledge (AV 12.1.1). These are not merely social virtues; they are expressions of ṛta, the Vedic idea of universal order. Earth is upheld not only by physical forces but also by moral law—a balance of truth, justice, and self-restraint. Subsequent verses expand this vision:

- AV 12.1.2 envisions societies where freedom, balance, and equality prevail.
- AV 12.1.3–12.1.4 highlight ecological abundance—rivers, rains, crops, and food security—sustained by harmonious living.
- AV 12.1.5 recalls ancestors who restrained destructive forces, linking moral courage to social stability.
- AV 12.1.6 praises Earth as the treasure of wealth and shelter, governed by divine justice, sustaining a community of nations and peoples.

These verses combine cosmic vision and ethical practice: peace and prosperity arise when humanity aligns with the Earth’s order.

### ***The UN Charter (1945): Global Order as Peace***

The United Nations Charter (1945) emerged in the aftermath of global war. Its central purpose is to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” and to ground international life in justice, dignity, and cooperation (United Nations, 1945). Just as the Bhūmi Sūkta stresses that truth and commitment uphold the Earth, the Charter insists that international order is sustained by law, equality, and collective security.

- The Vedic vision of balance “between high and low” (AV 12.1.2) echoes the Charter’s principle of sovereign equality of nations.
- The hymn’s memory of ancestors restraining violence (AV 12.1.5) parallels the Charter’s commitment to suppressing aggression and promoting peace.
- The idea that Earth, ruled by divine justice, provides light and leadership (AV 12.1.6) reflects the Charter’s call for institutions of global governance.

Both texts affirm that peace and prosperity rest upon cosmic or global order, underpinned by truth and justice.

### ***The Earth Charter (2000): Ecological Integrity and Moral Order***

The Earth Charter (2000) articulates an ethical framework for a sustainable and peaceful global society, emphasizing respect for Earth, ecological integrity, social justice, and peace (Earth Charter Initiative, 2000). This resonates profoundly with the Bhūmi Sūkta’s depiction of Earth as both sacred and sustaining.

- AV 12.1.3 – AV 12.1.4, which describe rivers, rains, herbs, and crops, anticipate the Earth Charter’s call to “protect and restore the integrity of Earth’s ecological systems.”
- The Sūkta’s insistence on yajña—cooperation and shared responsibility—parallels the Charter’s emphasis on participatory democracy and shared responsibility.
- The image of Earth as the “treasure-hold of wealth, shelter and stability” (AV 12.1.6) reflects the Earth Charter’s view of Earth as a sacred trust for future generations.

Thus, both the ancient hymn and the modern Charter link ecological integrity with moral order, affirming that humanity’s peace and prosperity depend upon reverence for Earth’s life systems.

### ***SDG 16: Institutions as Expressions of Order***

The Sustainable Development Goals (2015) identify SDG 16 as the cornerstone for peace: promoting just, inclusive, and effective institutions (United Nations, 2015). The Bhūmi Sūkta anticipates this framework by grounding social harmony in cosmic law.

- The call for freedom from bondage and balance between high and low (AV 12.1.2) aligns with SDG 16.3, which seeks equal access to justice.
- The restraint of destructive forces by heroes (AV 12.1.5) mirrors SDG 16.6 on accountable institutions that uphold stability.
- Earth “ruled by generous Indra” (AV 12.1.6) represents governance aligned with higher law, comparable to SDG 16.7 on inclusive and participatory decision-making.

In both traditions, institutions are legitimate only when grounded in moral order—whether in the cosmic rhythm of Vedic thought or the legal framework of the SDGs.

### ***Shared Philosophy: Cosmic Order and Global Order***

The comparison demonstrates that the Bhūmi Sūkta and modern charters share a common philosophical core:

- Order as Foundation: Both assert that order—cosmic or global—is the necessary foundation for life, peace, and prosperity.
- Truth and Justice: The Vedic pillars of truth and discipline parallel the Charter’s and SDG’s focus on justice, law, and human rights.
- Restraint of Violence: Ancient heroes controlling destructive forces reflect modern institutions designed to prevent war and uphold peace.
- Ecological Integrity: Reverence for rivers, rains, and crops anticipates modern ecological ethics in the Earth Charter.
- Shared Responsibility: The Sūkta’s yajña and the Earth Charter’s participatory ethic both affirm that peace arises from cooperative responsibility.

Thus, while the Bhūmi Sūkta speaks in mythic and spiritual language and the global charters in legal and ethical terms, both converge in their recognition that harmony with order—cosmic or global—is the key to peace and prosperity.

---

## **Fertility, Nourishment, and Sustainable Agriculture**

The Bhūmi Sūkta of the Atharva Veda (12.1.7–12.1.15) presents one of the earliest spiritual visions of agriculture, fertility, and human dependence on Earth’s bounty. These hymns portray Earth as Mother, the inexhaustible source of food, water, animals, and human community. Fertility is celebrated not only as material abundance but also as moral and spiritual order, linking agriculture to cosmic rhythm and divine protection. In many ways, these ancient agrarian ethics prefigure the modern international discourse on food security, sustainable farming, and ecological responsibility as reflected in

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) guidelines for sustainable agriculture. Both traditions affirm that nourishing humanity requires stewardship of Earth's resources with responsibility, justice, and restraint.

### ***Vedic Vision of Fertility and Nourishment***

Verses 12.1.7–12.1.15 of the Atharva Veda paint a vivid picture of Earth as the mother of crops, cattle, water, and nourishment:

- 12.1.7 prays for Earth to give “honey sweets of life” and consecrate humanity with wealth and splendour, stressing both material and spiritual nourishment.
- 12.1.8 links Earth to cosmic creation, where sages roamed freely, affirming agriculture as part of divine creativity and truth.
- 12.1.9–12.1.10 celebrate rivers, rains, milk, and water as the basis of abundance, associating fertility with celestial order.
- 12.1.11 praises mountains, forests, and fertile soils as foundations of security and sustenance.
- 12.1.12 explicitly calls Earth “mother” and sky “father,” situating agriculture in a cosmic family of nature.
- 12.1.13 emphasizes yajña (sacrifice) as a symbol of communal effort for social development, highlighting shared responsibility for fertility.
- 12.1.14–12.1.15 frame agriculture within justice: Earth resists those who exploit violently, and sustains all living beings, native and foreign alike.

Together, these verses establish an agrarian ethic of reverence, balance, and responsibility. Agriculture is not mere production; it is a sacred act rooted in respect for Earth's fertility and the moral duty to preserve balance.

### ***SDG 2: Zero Hunger***

SDG 2: Zero Hunger aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture (United Nations, 2015). The Atharva Veda anticipates this holistic vision:

- The abundance of crops, cattle, milk, and water (12.1.9–12.1.10) reflects food security as a universal right. The Sūkta prays for nourishment not only for humans but also for animals and birds (12.1.15), aligning with SDG 2.1 (access to safe, nutritious food for all).
- Diversity of fertile landscapes—mountains, forests, fertile plains (12.1.11)—mirrors SDG 2.4, which emphasizes maintaining ecosystems and biodiversity to ensure resilient agricultural systems.
- The Sūkta's emphasis on cooperative yajña (12.1.13) foreshadows SDG 2.3, which calls for strengthening the productivity of small-scale food producers through participatory practices and community-based farming.

Thus, the Vedic hymn and SDG 2 both affirm that ending hunger requires just access to natural abundance, respect for diversity, and participatory responsibility.

### ***SDG 12: Sustainable Consumption & Production***

SDG 12 stresses sustainable consumption and production patterns, efficient use of resources, and reduction of waste (United Nations, 2015). The Atharva Veda reflects similar values in a spiritual idiom:

- 12.1.7–12.1.8 emphasize Earth's wealth as a gift consecrated by light and truth, not to be exploited wantonly. This resonates with SDG 12.2, which promotes sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.
- 12.1.11's praise of fertile soils, forests, and varied landscapes reflects awareness of the fragility of ecosystems and aligns with SDG 12.8, which calls for education on sustainable lifestyles.
- 12.1.14 warns against those who exploit or harm others unjustly, suggesting an ethic of restraint and accountability, resonating with SDG 12.6, which promotes responsible practices by individuals, businesses, and institutions.

By linking consumption to cosmic order, the Sūkta implies that overexploitation disturbs the balance of life, while sustainable production maintains harmony and prosperity.

### ***FAO's Sustainable Agriculture Guidelines***

The FAO (2014) outlines five principles of sustainable agriculture: (1) improving efficiency in resource use, (2) conserving ecosystems, (3) protecting livelihoods and equity, (4) enhancing resilience, and (5) promoting good governance (FAO, 2014). The Atharva Veda reflects these in striking ways:

- Efficiency in resource use: Verses on rivers, rains, and milk (12.1.9–12.1.10) highlight responsible use of water and livestock, core to efficient and sustainable resource use.

- Conserving ecosystems: The description of diverse soils, forests, and mountains (12.1.11) parallels FAO's principle of ecosystem conservation.
- Livelihoods and equity: By including all beings—humans, animals, birds, “native and foreign” (12.1.15)—the hymn stresses inclusivity and fairness in access to Earth's gifts.
- Resilience: The prayer for protection from enemies and exploiters (12.1.14) suggests resilience of communities and agricultural systems against destructive forces.
- Governance: The invocation of yajña (12.1.13) reflects participatory governance of resources, aligning with FAO's principle of inclusive decision-making.

These parallels show that ancient agrarian ethics provide a moral foundation for the FAO's technical guidelines.

### ***Synthesis: Ancient Agrarian Ethics and Modern Global Goals***

The comparison reveals a continuity of vision:

- Earth as Mother: Both traditions affirm Earth as the source of food, water, and life. While the Veda describes Earth as divine mother, the SDGs and FAO describe her as ecological capital that must be preserved for future generations.
- Food Security as Justice: The Veda's vision of nourishment for all beings parallels SDG 2's insistence that ending hunger is a matter of justice, not charity.
- Sustainability as Balance: The Veda insists that overuse or violence disturbs Earth's balance, just as SDG 12 and FAO guidelines emphasize sustainable use and ecosystem protection.
- Shared Responsibility: The Veda's yajña symbolizes cooperative responsibility, echoing FAO's participatory approaches and SDG calls for global partnerships.

Ultimately, both ancient hymns and modern frameworks proclaim that fertility and nourishment require stewardship, equity, and restraint. Agriculture is not simply economic production but a moral covenant with Earth.

### ***Diversity, Coexistence, and Human Equality***

The Atharva Veda, particularly in the *Bhūmi Sūkta* (AV 12.1.16 – AV 12.1.22), offers profound reflections on the Earth as a common dwelling of diverse peoples, languages, and cultures. These verses portray the Earth as a unifying force that sustains all beings, transcending differences of race, custom, or language. This ancient recognition of pluralism maps closely onto contemporary global frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948, Art. 2), the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), and Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities). Both ancient texts and modern charters emphasize the need to preserve diversity while ensuring equality, justice, and peaceful coexistence. Together, they highlight the cosmic and social ethics of inclusivity as a foundation for sustainable peace.

---

## **Diversity & Human Coexistence**

In AV 12.1.16, the Earth is invoked as the mother who nourishes all her children equally and provides the “Common Word” that enables dialogue and mutual discourse. This vision of Earth as a mediator and sustainer of plurality underscores the ethical principle that no group should be excluded from her gifts. Similarly, AV 12.1.17 urges humanity to live in unity, generosity, and peace, portraying the Earth as the mother of all herbs, trees, and cultures, bound together in Dharma (righteous order).

AV 12.1.18 further conceptualizes Earth as a “great hall of residence for humanity,” sustained in balance by cosmic powers such as Indra, the Divine Ruler and Surya, the Sun. The Earth maintains her motion and peace. Here, the imagery parallels modern notions of global interdependence, where no nation exists in isolation but is bound within planetary systems of ecology, economy, and law. Moreover, verses such as AV 12.1.19–12.1.21 extend diversity beyond human culture into the recognition of elemental and cosmic diversity i.e. fire in rivers, trees, animals, and the sun, suggesting that multiplicity itself is the foundation of vitality and progress. Finally, AV 12.1.22 stresses the shared human practices of ritual, hospitality, and survival, reaffirming that cultural expression and social bonds are integral to Earth's ethical order.

Taken together, these verses assert a vision of pluralism in unity: the Earth is both mother to all and the common ground for diverse human practices, beliefs, and languages. This philosophy resonates strongly with modern commitments to equality and cultural diversity.

### ***Parallels with the UDHR (1948), Article 2***

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrines equality and non-discrimination in Article 2, affirming that:

*“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin...”* (United Nations, 1948).

This declaration of universality directly mirrors AV 12.1.16, which emphasizes that all peoples are equally nourished and sustained by the Earth, and AV 12.1.17, which calls for unity in “universal love.” Both frameworks reject exclusion or hierarchy, grounding equality in a shared foundation—whether divine order (ṛta, dharma) or universal human dignity.

Thus, the Vedic worldview offers a spiritual and ecological grounding for what the UDHR articulates in legal terms: that diversity in language, race, or culture cannot be a basis for discrimination, since all belong equally to a single human family sustained by a shared Earth.

### ***UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001)***

The UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity recognizes cultural diversity as the “common heritage of humanity” and a driver of sustainable development, affirming that safeguarding diversity is essential for peace and democracy (UNESCO, 2001). This emphasis finds a direct echo in AV 12.1.18, where the Earth is depicted as a “great hall of residence for humanity.” Just as the UNESCO declaration stresses the need to protect minority cultures and promote intercultural dialogue, AV 12.1.16 envisions the Earth as enabling a “Common Word,” encouraging communication across differences.

Moreover, AV 12.1.22 acknowledges that cultural practices such as yajna, hospitality, and homage to sages are integral aspects of living on Earth. This aligns with UNESCO’s recognition of cultural practices as sources of identity and resilience. Both frameworks insist that cultural pluralism is not a threat but a source of strength that enriches humanity.

### ***Parallels with SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities***

Sustainable Development Goal 10 calls for reducing inequality within and among countries, ensuring social, economic, and political inclusion regardless of status or identity (United Nations, 2015). The Atharva Veda’s emphasis on Earth as mother of “*all mortals, humans, animals, birds, native as well as foreign*” (AV 12.1.15, 22) anticipates this global ideal of inclusion. Just as SDG 10 recognizes that inequality undermines social cohesion and development, the Vedic hymns present exclusion and hatred as forces that Earth herself seeks to subdue (AV 12.1.14).

Further, AV 12.1.17 explicitly calls for humanity to live “*in accord with universal love, unity, and generosity*,” embodying the spirit of SDG 10’s target of empowering all people, irrespective of origin. Both visions are concerned not merely with material distribution but with creating the conditions for mutual respect, trust, and dignity, recognizing that peace requires inclusion.

### ***Ancient and Modern Convergences***

The Bhūmi Sūkta’s reflections on diversity and coexistence provide a philosophical precursor to modern global norms of equality and cultural pluralism. By affirming Earth as the common sustainer of all languages, races, customs, and beings, these verses anticipate the UDHR’s insistence on universality of rights, UNESCO’s recognition of cultural diversity as a common heritage, and the SDG commitment to reducing inequality.

Both ancient and modern frameworks articulate a shared truth: that global peace and prosperity rest upon the recognition of diversity as integral to unity. While the Atharva Veda grounds this in the cosmic order of dharma and elemental balance, contemporary frameworks ground it in law, human rights, and sustainable development. Together, they reveal that the ethics of coexistence is not a recent invention but a timeless principle woven into both spiritual and political visions of human flourishing.

---

## **Sacred Ecology in the Atharvaveda**

The hymns of the Atharvaveda (AV 12.1.23–34) offer some of the earliest articulations of ecological ethics in human history. Through prayers to the Earth Mother, they call for forgiveness, non-violence, and minimal injury to her “vital organs.” These hymns not only reflect Vedic cosmology and agrarian consciousness but also anticipate principles of environmental responsibility found in modern international frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), the Stockholm Declaration of 1972, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007). By connecting ecological reverence with human morality, these texts demonstrate how ancient cultures embedded sustainability, restraint, and reciprocity into daily life—a legacy that resonates strongly with present-day climate ethics and indigenous land rights.

### ***Non-violence and Ecological Responsibility***

Several hymns (AV 12.1.23–25) emphasize that the fragrance of Earth, present in herbs, waters, trees, animals, and humans, should foster harmony: “*Let none of us hate any one, let no one hate us.*” This ethic anticipates the precautionary principle articulated in the Stockholm Declaration (1972, Principle 6), which urges states to avoid activities that cause harm to the environment or to other peoples. The hymns portray non-violence not only in interpersonal relations but also toward the Earth herself, suggesting that damaging soils, rivers, and forests is tantamount to violating the body of a mother. This resonates with SDG 13.3, which calls for improving awareness and human capacity for climate adaptation and mitigation through knowledge systems that encourage restraint and responsibility.

The hymn at AV 12.1.29, describing Earth as “*pure, unhurt, forbearing, growing by divine power,*” reflects an ethic of sustainability. The use of the term “unhurt” prefigures modern notions of minimizing ecological harm, echoed in SDG 15.1, which calls for ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. Just as the Sage Atharva, the compiler of Atharva Veda, pleads that human activity should not injure the Earth, contemporary frameworks emphasize biodiversity conservation and the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

### ***Forgiveness and Regenerative Ethics***

In AV 12.1.30–31, prayers seek forgiveness for harm already done: “*Whatever negative, bad or evil be ours, we assign to our dislike and rejection.*” This reflects a profound awareness that human activity inevitably impacts natural systems. Instead of asserting dominion, the texts emphasize repentance, purification, and regenerative ethics. This approach anticipates modern ideas of environmental remediation and restoration embedded in SDG 15.3, which sets targets to combat desertification, restore degraded land, and strive toward a land degradation–neutral world.

The Stockholm Declaration (Principle 7) recognizes states’ responsibility to ensure activities within their jurisdiction do not cause damage beyond their borders. Similarly, the Atharvaveda calls for redirecting harmful actions away from Earth, symbolically assigning them to rejection rather than persistence. This early ethic of acknowledgment, repentance, and correction aligns with restorative ecological approaches advocated today in climate adaptation and reforestation projects.

### **Sacred Space, Security, and Climate Stability**

Hymns such as AV 12.1.26–28 and 12.1.31–34 emphasize stability, safety, and protection from both natural and human threats: “*Let us never fall, never waver, nor fail ever... Let there be no thieves, robbers, and highway men among us. Throw off all weapons of destruction far away from us.*” The Earth is invoked as a seat of balance, ensuring survival and protection. This anticipates the human security dimension of climate change articulated in SDG 13.1, which emphasizes strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards.

Moreover, the plea for weapons to be cast away reflects the ecological dimension of peace. Resource wars and environmental destruction are mutually reinforcing; hence, the hymn’s rejection of violence mirrors the Stockholm Declaration’s linkage of peace, development, and environmental protection (Principle 24). By situating ecological stability alongside social justice and peace, the Vedic vision harmonizes with the integrative approach of modern sustainable development frameworks.

### ***Earth as a Living Entity and Indigenous Ethics***

The hymns consistently portray Earth as a sentient mother, with “*fragrance, bosom, and vital organs*” (AV 12.1.23–27). This anthropomorphic imagery reflects a relational worldview in which humans are children of Earth rather than external exploiters. Such a conception resonates strongly with indigenous worldviews, many of which are enshrined in UNDRIP (2007). Article 25 of UNDRIP recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to maintain their spiritual relationship with traditionally owned lands, waters, and resources. Similarly, Article 29 stresses conservation responsibilities.

By pleading with Earth not to “*push us from behind or from above*” (AV 12.1.32) and recognizing her power to nurture or punish, the hymns acknowledge Earth’s agency—an idea deeply embedded in indigenous cosmologies worldwide. In contemporary terms, this reflects the shift from anthropocentric environmentalism to eco-centric and rights-of-nature approaches, seen in legal innovations such as Ecuador’s recognition of Pachamama (Mother Earth) as a legal subject. The Atharvaveda’s framing of Earth as both sacred and juridical agent anticipates this turn toward indigenous and ecological jurisprudence.

### ***Ecological Ethics as Shared Human Duty***

The hymn at AV 12.1.33–34 ties environmental ethics to human moral faculties: “*Let my eye and discriminative judgment never fail over time passing on with the passage of years.*” By linking ecological care with discernment, the Vedic seers highlight that sustainability is not merely technical but ethical. This aligns with Stockholm Principle 19, which stresses education in environmental matters to broaden the basis for responsible conduct by individuals and communities.

In modern terms, this recognition of discernment anticipates SDG 13.3 (capacity building for climate action) and SDG 15.9 (integration of ecosystem values into planning). The emphasis on collective participation—sitting with Earth “*together at peace*” (AV 12.1.29)—mirrors today’s calls for inclusive governance and the involvement of indigenous peoples, women, and marginalized communities in climate policy.

### **Ancient Ecological Wisdom and Modern Health Frameworks**

The Atharva Veda’s Prithvi Sukta hymns articulate an early ecological ethic that recognizes Earth as a living, nourishing, and healing entity. Verses such as AV 12.1.35–43 highlight Earth as the source of medicinal herbs, seasonal cycles, fertility, and regenerative energies. This ancient framework resonates with modern health and biodiversity governance systems, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (2010), and the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy (2014–2023). Together, these texts reflect a

continuity in human thought: the recognition of Earth as a source of life, healing, and shared resources, and the ethical responsibility to safeguard this heritage for all (Atharva Veda, trans. in Sharma, 1984).

### ***Earth as Healer and the Foundation of Human Well-being***

The hymns invoke Earth as the foundation of healing powers, where plants and minerals are imbued with curative and regenerative properties (AV 12.1.35–36). This directly parallels SDG 3, which emphasizes ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages (United Nations, 2015). The Atharva Veda's recognition of herbs and their healing powers underscores a proto-concept of public health where the environment is central to human vitality. This aligns with contemporary health frameworks that integrate environmental determinants of health into global development goals. In both traditions, health is not confined to the body but is entwined with ecological balance, resource availability, and communal prosperity (Gupta, 2019).

### ***Biodiversity, Healing Knowledge, and the Nagoya Protocol***

The Vedic recognition of Earth as the origin of medicinal plants also anticipates modern frameworks that regulate the fair and equitable use of genetic resources. The Nagoya Protocol (2010) under the Convention on Biological Diversity stresses equitable sharing of benefits derived from biological resources, especially medicinal plants, ensuring that indigenous knowledge and custodianship are respected (CBD, 2011). Verses such as AV 12.1.37–38, which describe Earth as both regenerative and sacred, parallel this principle by suggesting that human use of Earth's resources must avoid harm and uphold reciprocity.

In the Vedic worldview, the earth is not a commodity to be exploited but a living entity to be revered. This outlook mirrors the ethical underpinnings of the Nagoya Protocol, where indigenous and local communities' knowledge systems are not only recognized but must also be protected against exploitation (Miller, 2021). Thus, Atharva Vedic prayers for careful tilling, reverence for fertility, and cautious use of resources reflect the ancient acknowledgment of what today we call access and benefit-sharing (ABS) principles.

### ***Traditional Medicine and Global Health Governance***

The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy (2014–2023) emphasizes integrating traditional knowledge and medicinal plants into modern health systems while safeguarding biodiversity (WHO, 2013). The Atharva Veda's depiction of Earth as the seat of medicinal vitality (AV 12.1.35–36, 42) anticipates this integration, acknowledging that herbs, grains, and natural cycles are indispensable for human survival and healing.

Moreover, the Vedic verses situate medicine not only in physical cures but also in the moral-ecological order, emphasizing balance, restraint, and reverence. Such an approach resonates with contemporary global health strategies that recognize holistic well-being as linked to cultural knowledge, ecological sustainability, and community practices (Gupta, 2019). The hymns also remind us that health is embedded in social and ecological harmony, where prosperity arises not from overexploitation but from sustainable coexistence.

### ***Wealth, Diversity, and Social Cohesion***

Beyond herbs and medicines, the verses acknowledge Earth as the foundation of wealth, honor, and communal life (AV 12.1.40–43). The imagery of diverse peoples, classes, and communities coexisting on Earth mirrors contemporary global frameworks that connect health with social inclusion, equity, and cultural respect. This vision resonates with the Nagoya Protocol's insistence on inclusivity and benefit-sharing, as well as SDG 3's emphasis on universal health equity (United Nations, 2015).

Furthermore, the Vedic emphasis on reverence for diversity parallels global discourses on biocultural heritage, which argue that human diversity and biodiversity are mutually sustaining (Miller, 2021). This anticipates the modern idea that preserving cultural traditions of medicine and land ethics is critical for sustaining both human health and ecological resilience.

---

## **Ethical Leadership, Governance, and Environmental Stewardship**

Verses 12.1.44–52 of the Atharva Veda presents a series of hymns that situate Earth as a moral foundation for governance, prosperity, and justice. These verses envision rulers and communities living in harmony with nature, guided by ethical principles that ensure collective well-being. Remarkably, these ancient insights resonate with modern global governance frameworks, including Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), the Rio+20 outcome document "The Future We Want" (2012), and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2011 edition, updated 2023). Together, these texts emphasize the importance of ethical leadership, institutional integrity, and environmental stewardship as foundations of sustainable societies.

### ***Wealth, Justice, and Ethical Leadership***

AV 12.1.44–45 invokes Earth as the source of wealth, jewels, and sustenance for people of diverse cultures and traditions. The prayer emphasizes that prosperity must flow inclusively and continuously, much like a mother nourishing her children with milk. In the context of SDG 16, which calls for

transparent, accountable, and inclusive institutions, these verses imply that rulers and leaders must treat resources not as personal wealth but as shared heritage for equitable distribution (United Nations, 2015).

The Vedic prayer for rulers to uphold Dharma (justice and righteousness) in managing wealth anticipates the modern principle that governance must balance resource extraction with equitable benefit-sharing. Similarly, the OECD Guidelines for MNEs highlight responsible business conduct, urging companies to avoid corruption, promote transparency, and contribute to sustainable development (OECD, 2011/2023). Both frameworks recognize that wealth divorced from ethics leads to exploitation and instability, while just distribution fosters social harmony and institutional legitimacy.

### ***Governance, Rule of Law, and Protection from Harm***

AV 12.1.46–47 addresses the threats posed by disease, poisonous creatures, and social disorder (like robbers, smugglers, and disruptive forces). The hymns pray for the removal of such harms so that people may live securely and peacefully. This vision reflects the foundations of SDG 16, which emphasizes reducing violence, promoting rule of law, and ensuring access to justice for all.

Moreover, the Atharva Veda places responsibility on both rulers and communities to protect public spaces, maintain order, and secure health. This anticipates the Rio+20 principle that sustainable development requires strong governance structures capable of addressing environmental and social risks (United Nations, 2012). Just as the hymns connect governance to protection from hidden dangers (whether natural or social), Rio+20 stresses resilience and precaution in governance to safeguard future generations.

### ***Earth's Natural Order and Ethical Responsibility***

AV 12.1.48 poetically depicts Earth sustaining both virtuous and sinful beings while moving in orbit in cooperation with clouds and the sun. This image underscores a worldview where natural systems sustain all forms of life impartially, leaving humans to align their moral order with cosmic balance. Ethical leadership, therefore, must reflect this impartiality by ensuring fairness, justice, and stewardship beyond narrow interests.

The Rio+20 outcome document emphasizes the integration of environmental protection into governance and decision-making, affirming that human prosperity depends on planetary stability (United Nations, 2012). Similarly, the OECD Guidelines urge businesses to act responsibly in their environmental impact assessments, resource use, and reporting practices. The Atharva Veda's portrayal of Earth's impartial balance resonates with these frameworks by reminding leaders that justice and governance must mirror the stability and restraint of natural systems.

### ***Protecting Biodiversity and Preventing Exploitation***

AV 12.1.49–50 highlights Earth's responsibility to sustain both benign and dangerous creatures, while also invoking prayers to ward off wolves, demons, and destructive forces. These hymns can be read as metaphors for ethical governance: leaders must safeguard biodiversity and protect communities from destructive forces—whether ecological degradation, corruption, or exploitative practices.

This principle aligns with the OECD's environmental chapter, which requires enterprises to respect ecological limits and prevent harm from their operations (OECD, 2011/2023). It also resonates with Rio+20's "green economy" approach, which links economic development to biodiversity protection and environmental sustainability. The Vedic worldview, which honors Earth's biodiversity while seeking to restrain destructive tendencies, offers a spiritual and ethical foundation for contemporary environmental governance.

---

## **Peace, Social Cohesion, and Resilient Institutions**

AV 12.1.51–52 describes Earth as the stage for natural rhythms like winds, storms, light, darkness, day, and night. Mother Earth sustains life in its diversity. These verses conclude with a prayer for peace, prosperity, and noble fortune in every place and situation. Such imagery conveys a vision of resilience where social order reflects ecological harmony.

SDG 16 emphasizes building peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice, and ensuring effective institutions. Similarly, Rio+20 underscores the importance of participatory governance, transparency, and citizen engagement for sustainable development (United Nations, 2012). The Atharva Veda echoes these principles by linking human prosperity not only to material wealth but also to peace, cooperation, and harmony with nature. Ethical leadership, therefore, is not only about wealth distribution but also about fostering trust, stability, and inclusion.

### ***Ethical Leadership as Stewardship***

The combined message of AV 12.1.44–52 is that governance must be grounded in Dharma, read as ethical responsibility and stewardship of Earth. Leaders are reminded that prosperity, justice, and peace are inseparable from ecological balance. Modern governance frameworks affirm this same principle:

- SDG 16 calls for institutions that are just, inclusive, and accountable.
- Rio+20 calls for a sustainable development model that integrates environmental stewardship into policy and governance.

- OECD Guidelines call for responsible business conduct, transparency, and accountability in relation to society and the environment.

Atharva Veda thus provides a philosophical and ethical bridge between ancient ecological wisdom and contemporary global governance. It teaches that strong institutions and ethical leadership arise not from domination or exploitation, but from stewardship, fairness, and harmony with the natural order.

### ***Earth as Universal Mother***

The hymns of the Atharva Veda's verses 12.1.53–63 articulate a profound cosmological vision of Earth as the universal mother. It refers to her as the source of nourishment, stability, moral order, and peace. These verses express prayers for peace, resilience, ecological harmony, and human cooperation, emphasizing Earth's sustaining and protective functions. When examined considering modern frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 16 and 17, the Earth Charter (2000), and the United Nations Harmony with Nature (2010) initiative, these ancient insights mirror contemporary calls for peaceful, inclusive institutions, global cooperation, and ecological partnerships. Together, they affirm a transhistorical recognition of Earth as a shared moral and ecological ground for human civilization.

### ***Vedic Vision of Earth as Stabilizer and Arbiter of Peace***

The Atharva Veda verses highlight the Earth as a foundation of stability and peace. For example, AV 12.1.53 invokes blessings from heaven, sun, waters, and divinities for "holy intelligence and goodwill," linking cosmic order with human ethical conduct. AV 12.1.56 explicitly mentions parliaments, assemblies, committees, and congregations, underscoring the need for responsible governance rooted in reverence for Earth. AV 12.1.57 portrays Earth as rejecting those who exploit or dominate her, reflecting an early warning against unsustainable practices.

Such imagery aligns closely with SDG 16, which calls for peace, justice, and strong institutions (United Nations, 2015). Just as the hymns demand governance aligned with Earth's moral and ecological balance, SDG 16 emphasizes transparent, accountable, and inclusive decision-making to safeguard peace. The notion that Earth expels exploitative forces (AV 12.1.57) mirrors the modern understanding that unsustainable and unjust governance undermines stability and must be corrected by institutional resilience and ecological justice (Kotzé, 2019).

### ***Earth as Mother and the Call for Cooperation***

Several verses explicitly frame Earth as a nurturing mother whose resources sustain life and whose order protects peace. AV 12.1.59 describes her as "peaceable, kind and beneficent, overflowing with milk, food and water," underscoring her abundance and generosity. AV 12.1.61 identifies her with Aditi, the indivisible mother, providing a "field of production, growth and development" for humanity, while Prajapati replenishes her resources through cosmic law. This imagery extends beyond ecology to human partnership and cooperation, resonating with SDG 17, which stresses global partnerships for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

In modern terms, this expresses the principle of shared stewardship: no nation or community can claim unilateral ownership of Earth, but must instead cooperate across borders. The Earth Charter (2000) codifies this ethical mandate, calling for "democracy, nonviolence, and peace" while fostering a global partnership to protect Earth as "our home" (Earth Charter Commission, 2000). The Bhumi Suktam's call for universal reverence and mutual respect toward Earth prefigures this ethos of solidarity and interdependence.

---

## **Harmony with Nature: Ancient Cosmology and Modern Jurisprudence**

AV 12.1.60 narrates the cosmological evolution of Earth as formed from the cosmic waters by Vishvakarma, endowed with materials necessary for life. This mythic vision parallels the UN Harmony with Nature initiative (2010), which advocates for recognizing the rights of nature and redefining development in line with Earth's ecological laws (United Nations, 2010). By declaring Earth as "*Aditi, unbreakable and indivisible*" (AV 12.1.61), the text anticipates modern legal frameworks that describe Earth as a living system deserving intrinsic respect (Cullinan, 2011).

The Harmony with Nature resolutions urges states to integrate ecological ethics into governance, echoing the Vedic plea that human governance— assemblies, parliaments, and committees (AV 12.1.56)—must align with Earth's order rather than dominate it. This convergence demonstrates the enduring ethical imagination linking cosmology with law: both ancient and modern traditions insist that peace and justice depend on ecological partnership.

### ***Peace as the Fruit of Ethical Partnership***

The closing verses (AV 12.1.62–63) offer a final benediction for health, fertility, and long life, envisioning humanity as "children awakened and enlightened" who express gratitude to Earth. Such imagery reflects the final goal of SDG 16 and 17—not merely institutional structures or international agreements, but a lived culture of peace, gratitude, and cooperation rooted in ecological awareness.

In contemporary frameworks, this vision finds resonance in the Earth Charter's principle of gratitude and reverence for the Earth community and in the UN Harmony with Nature reports, which highlight the importance of cultural, spiritual, and legal traditions that honor Earth as a mother (United Nations, 2020). The Bhumi Suktam thus offers not only a cosmological basis for ecological ethics but also a practical orientation toward peaceful coexistence through gratitude and reverence.

### ***Toward a Global Ecological Partnership***

Bringing the Bhumi Suktam into dialogue with modern frameworks illuminates a continuity across millennia: the recognition that peace, justice, and partnership cannot be sustained apart from ecological harmony. The Vedic seers who envisioned Earth as mother (AV 12.1.59–63) provide a spiritual grounding for what the Earth Charter calls “a shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger living world” (Earth Charter Commission, 2000). Similarly, SDG 16’s emphasis on strong, inclusive institutions, and SDG 17’s focus on global partnerships, echo the call in AV 12.1.56 for assemblies and committees to uphold truth and peace in reverence to Earth.

The UN Harmony with Nature initiative represents the most direct modern echo of this worldview, recognizing Earth as a subject of rights and urging states to integrate indigenous cosmologies and ethical traditions into governance (United Nations, 2010). When viewed through this lens, the Bhumi Suktam offers more than a historical text: it becomes a philosophical bridge between ancient cosmologies and modern international law, urging humanity to reimagine peace and partnership in ecological terms.

---

## **Results / Findings**

The analysis of the *Bhūmi Sūkta* (*Atharva Veda* 12.1) yielded seven major thematic clusters that encapsulate its ecological and ethical vision. When cross-referenced with contemporary international frameworks for sustainability, these clusters demonstrate both continuity and normative convergence across time.

### **Cosmic Order & Stability**

The *Bhūmi Sūkta* begins with the Earth’s grounding in *ṛta* (cosmic order) and the sustaining forces of truth, greatness, strength, and sacred hymnody. Earth is depicted as the cosmic foundation upon which the rhythms of existence—day and night, seasons, and human life—are balanced. The invocation stresses that stability of the world is not merely physical but moral and spiritual, maintained through alignment with eternal order. In this sense, Earth is both a cosmic body and a metaphysical principle of stability.

### **Fertility & Nourishment**

A recurrent theme is the Earth’s role as a nurturing mother, who produces crops, sustains cattle, and yields the food and water essential for life. The hymns highlight agricultural fertility, rain, and vegetation as her gifts, depicting her as an inexhaustible source of nourishment. This imagery situates Earth within an ecological cycle where human prosperity is rooted in reverence for her fecundity. The maternal metaphor emphasizes interdependence and gratitude.

### **Diversity of Peoples & Cultures**

The verses celebrate Earth as the common dwelling of peoples of many languages, races, and customs, all coexisting like members of one household. This inclusive vision portrays Earth as unifying while sustaining multiplicity. It recognizes cultural diversity as part of the natural order she upholds. Such imagery not only sanctifies pluralism but also anticipates modern ideals of multicultural coexistence, harmony, and respect among peoples.

### **Protection, Forgiveness & Non-violence**

The *Bhūmi Sūkta* includes petitions for forgiveness of harm caused to the Earth—whether through digging, tilling, or other disruptions of her body. It exhorts non-injury to her “vital organs,” a striking metaphor that portrays ecological integrity in anthropomorphic terms. This ethical framework advances restraint, humility, and repentance in human use of resources. It reflects a proto-environmental ethic of non-violence (*ahimsā*), where respect for the Earth’s sacred body is integral to righteousness.

### **Riches, Herbs & Healing Powers**

The Earth is also praised as the source of wealth, minerals, and healing herbs, all of which are to be accessed responsibly. Gemstones, gold, and fertile soils are depicted not only as material riches but also as divine endowments. Similarly, herbs and plants embody curative powers that sustain human and animal health. This theme integrates economic prosperity with medicinal and ecological dimensions, suggesting that material wealth and well-being are sacred trusts rather than possessions.

### **Moral Order & Governance**

The hymns link the legitimacy of rulers to Dharma, with Earth herself as witness and sustainer. The good ruler must uphold justice, protect the land, and maintain harmony among diverse peoples under their care. Governance is envisioned not as domination but as stewardship aligned with Earth’s moral order. This political theology suggests that prosperity flows when rulers and citizens alike respect the land, restrain violence, and sustain social harmony in accordance with Dharma.

### **Stability, Peace & Final Benediction**

The *Sūkta* concludes with prayers for peace, stability, and enduring protection by Earth as universal mother. It invokes harmony among heaven, waters, nature, and humanity, calling for goodwill, prosperity, and mutual flourishing. Earth is portrayed as patient, beneficent, and resilient, yet also capable of

shaking off those who exploit or presume to dominate her. The final benedictions affirm Earth as indivisible, fertile, and eternal—a cosmic mother who sustains peace and inspires humanity toward gratitude, reverence, and ethical living.

### Integrative Perspective

Taken together, these seven thematic clusters present the Earth not merely as a physical habitat but as a sacred, moral, and cosmic reality. The Bhūmi Sūkta articulates a holistic vision where stability, nourishment, cultural diversity, ecological responsibility, prosperity, governance, and peace are deeply interwoven. Its enduring significance lies in its capacity to frame environmental stewardship and ethical governance as inseparable from cosmic and spiritual order.

### Reference

1. Bloomfield, M. (1969). The Hymns of the Atharvaveda (Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 42). pp. 199, 639, 75- 77 Motilal Banarsidass. (Original work published 1897)
2. Breckenridge, C., & Pollock, S. (1993). Cosmopolitanism in India. pp. 72 - 73 Public Culture, 5(1), pp.1-18
3. Chapple, C. K. (2000). *Hinduism and ecology: The intersection of earth, sky, and water*. pp. 3 - 23 Harvard University Press.
4. Constituent Assembly of Ecuador. (2008). *Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador* (English trans.).
5. Convention on Biological Diversity. (2011). *Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity: Text and annex*. Pp. 2 – 4 United Nations
6. Cullinan, C. (2011). *Wild law: A manifesto for Earth justice (2nd ed.)*. p. 55 White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.
7. Food and Agriculture Organization. (2014). *Building a common vision for sustainable food and agriculture: Principles and approaches*. Pp. 10, 21 – 33 FAO.
8. Griffith, R. T. H. (1895). *The Hymns of the Atharva Veda*. Pp. 95 - 102 Benares: E.J. Lazarus & Co
9. Gupta, R. (2019). *Ayurveda, medicinal plants, and biocultural heritage: A comparative perspective*. Journal of Ethnopharmacology, 241, 111967
10. Hegde, L. (Trans.). (2022). *Atharva Veda Samhitā (Vols. 1–6) [Kannada translation]*. Vol. 3 pp. 12 - 240 Sri Aurobindo Kapali Sastry Institute of Vedic Culture
11. Hess, L. (2002). *The Earth as a mother in India*. In L. Nelson (Ed.), *Purifying the Earthly Body of God* pp. 49–70. SUNY Press
12. Jamison, S. W., & Brereton, J. P. (2014). *The Rigveda: The earliest religious poetry of India (Vols. 1–3)*. pp. 50, 766 - 767, 1399 - 1401 Oxford University Press.
13. Julia Shaw (2016) *Religion, 'nature' and environmental ethics in ancient India: archaeologies of human:non-human suffering and well-being in early Buddhist and Hindu contexts*, World Archaeology, 48:4, 517-543, DOI: 10.1080/00438243.2016.1250671
14. Klostermaier, K. K. (2007). *A Survey of Hinduism (3rd ed.)*. P. 146 State University of New York Press.
15. Kotzé, L. J. (2019). *Earth system law for the Anthropocene*. Sustainability, 11(23), 6796. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236796>
16. Miller, J. (2021). *Ecospirituality and the global ethics of sustainability: Ancient wisdom in dialogue with modern frameworks*. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 25(3), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-bja10037>
17. Narayanan, V. (2001). *Water, wood, and wisdom: Ecological perspectives from the Hindu traditions*. Daedalus, 130(4), 179–206.
18. OECD. (2011/2023). *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* (updated edition). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
19. Pachamama. (2025) In \*Wikipedia\*. Retrieved August 18, 2025, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachamama>
20. Pisano, U., Endl, A., & Berger, G. (2012, June). *The Rio+20 conference 2012: Objectives, processes and outcomes (ESDN Quarterly Report No. 25)*. pp. 27 - 28 European Sustainable Development Network.
21. Plurinational State of Bolivia. (2010). *Law of the Rights of Mother Earth* (Ley de Derechos de la Madre Tierra, Law No. 071).
22. Renugadevi, R. (2012). *Environmental ethics in the Hindu Vedas and Puranas in India*. \*African Journal of History and Culture\*, 4\*(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJHC11.042>
23. Sharma, T. R. (2013). *Atharvaveda: English (Vols. 1 & 2, combined ed.)*. pp.1393 - 1418 Agniveer
24. UNESCO. (2001). *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. Pp. 61 – 65 UNESCO.
25. United Nations. (1945). *Charter of the United Nations*. San Francisco: United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

- 
26. United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations <https://www.humanrights.com/what-are-human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights/preamble.html>
  27. United Nations. (1972). *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration)*. P. 1 United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972>
  28. United Nations. (2000). *The Earth Charter*. P. 6 Earth Charter Commission.
  29. United Nations. (2007). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. PP. 2 - 29 United Nations.
  30. United Nations. (2010). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on Harmony with Nature (A/RES/64/196)*. Pp. 4 – 6 United Nations.
  31. United Nations. (2012). *The Future We Want: Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)*. United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20/futurewewant>
  32. United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. pp. 17, 18, 23 - 24 United Nations.
  33. Witzel, M. (1997). *Early Sanskritization: Origin and development of the Kuru state*. Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies, 1(4), 1–26. P.7
  34. World Health Organization. (2013). *WHO traditional medicine strategy 2014–2023*. pp. 25 – 40 World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/92455>