

Nature in the Vedas: Sources of Life and Psychic Healing

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Abstract

This study explores the Vedas' portrayal of nature as a primal force that rejuvenates humanity, fostering a harmonious world characterized by ecological equilibrium and bestowing a pantheistic quality upon natural beings and objects. The hymns of the Vedic Samhitas advocate for nature as a powerful agent capable of alleviating the grief and anguish of modern society. Divinity, as invoked in the Vedas, reflects a sense of equality among gods, humans, animals, and natural objects. This paper employs an eco-critical lens to analyze select hymns from the Rig Veda, arguing for the interconnectedness of all earthly beings and objects. By intertwining divinity with nature, the Vedas highlight the inherent significance of the natural world. The study draws on eco-critical theory as analyzed by Helgeson (2012), Vakoch and Mickey (2018), Horton (2020), Filipova (2022), and Misiaszek (2023) to rationalize the interrelation of the Earth's constituent parts. Nature theory posits that nature fosters peace and sustainability—a concept already envisioned in the hymns of the Rig Veda. Therefore, this study concludes that the Vedas emphasize a symbiotic bond between nature and humanity, creating a synergistic world. A peaceful mind, as suggested by the Vedic mantras, can be achieved by valuing and integrating natural beings and objects into everyday life. Although Vedic scriptures have traditionally been revered as religious texts, they gain greater significance when applied practically for the betterment of humanity.

Keywords: *Co-existence, Eco-criticism, Healing, Soma, Vedas*

Introduction

The Vedas advocate for a nature-friendly biosphere—featuring pristine rivers, mountains, herbs, plants, and fresh air—to free modern society from despair and

anguish caused by economic crises, family separations, and business failures. Wolfelt (2021) elaborates on the sources of trauma: "The extra stress and tension come from concurrent stresses in our lives—jobs, financial obligations, and family responsibilities" (p. 22). This overwhelming chaos leads to psychological trauma in vulnerable individuals, who need support. The Vedas, as the earliest scriptural texts, offer such support. Radhakrishnan (2008) observes, "The Vedas are the earliest documents of the human mind that we possess" (p. 39) and acknowledges their vision of rescuing humanity from incoherence and disenchantment. He further explains, "There are four Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva" (p. 39). The sages of the Vedic period foresaw that people in the modern world would face despair and anguish brought on by technological advancements. This study argues that the hymns of the Vedas, when viewed through an eco-critical lens, soothe troubled minds by highlighting the interconnectedness of fire, earth, rivers, birds, plants, air, and animals.

Psychological trauma disrupts society's ability to function in a way that promotes the well-being of humanity. Scientific and technological progress has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction and disenchantment. Consequently, happiness eludes many people. Helgeson (2012) links trauma to "stressful life events" (p. 508). The fast pace of modern life, coupled with a lack of trust among individuals and increasing ecological degradation, exacerbates the problem. Filipova (2022) argues that "global warming, air, water, and soil pollution" (p. 7) challenge the creation of a healthy and pristine world. These challenges must be addressed through nature-friendly activities that rejuvenate both the physical and psychological well-being of people.

Natural landscapes and objects—such as fresh air, rivers, herbs, trees, and fire—alleviate stress and create vibrancy in the human mind. Filipova (2022) asserts that "nature is a remedy to escape the vicissitudes of modernity" (p. 1). Disintegrating relationships, social fragmentation, and individual alienation continue to traumatize the human psyche. These challenges are often beyond individual control. Ultimately, long-term sustainability depends on preserving nature and natural objects. Misiaszek (2023) advocates for efforts toward "planetary sustainability" and a holistic understanding of the Earth to achieve "socio-environmental justice" (pp. 24-35). Justice for the Earth ensures a healthy life for all living beings.

Strolling through a forest and listening to the sounds of insects, birds, animals, and rustling leaves can cleanse the human mind. This reflects humanity's profound love for the Earth. Wolfelt (2021) identifies various sources of modern grief, including "shock,

disbelief, confusion, yearning, anxiety, anger, guilt, numbness, and more." These feelings can traumatize the human psyche. Wolfelt also emphasizes that exposure to natural settings relieves mental stress: "Sitting or resting in a natural setting charges us positively because human beings are genetically and evolutionarily programmed to connect with nature" (pp. 13-16). Modern individuals, whose psychology often fails to serve the welfare of society, require the solace of nature. These complexities were anticipated in the Vedic hymns, which endowed nature with divine significance.

The Vedas imbue natural beings and objects with divinity, leading to a long-standing culture of preserving nature and valuing coexistence. However, this culture has declined as the influence of Vedic hymns has waned, resulting in widespread psychological trauma. Reviving the significance of Prithvi, Jal, Tej, Bayu, and Akash [earth, water, fire, air, and sky]—the basic natural elements—can restore balance to the Earth through their interconnectedness. An idyllic world is conceivable through the protection and revival of these essential elements.

This study uses an eco-critical lens to analyze and interpret selected mantras from the Vedic scriptures, particularly the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. The aim is to validate the argument that the Vedas are not only sources of life but also mantras for alleviating psychological trauma in the modern world. Eco-critical theory explores the relationship between nature and literature, emphasizing the interconnectedness of natural objects. A sense of geographical location and ecosystem fosters environmental justice, which in turn heals the human psyche. The selected Vedic hymns are analyzed through this lens to demonstrate their role as sources of life and healing power. Sutras related to the five fundamental elements are the focus of this analysis and interpretation.

Eco-critical Theory: Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism values the interconnectedness of animals, plants, and other beings on Earth as essential for sustaining life. Howarth (1996) traces the etymology of the term "eco-criticism," explaining that "eco" and "critic" both derive from the Greek words *oikos* and *kritis*, respectively, which together mean "house judge" (p. 69). The eco-critic acts as a judge of the relationship between nature and culture. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996) define eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship between the human and the non-human" (p. xvii), emphasizing the interconnectedness of living and non-living beings. They further contextualize the development of eco-critical theory: "In the mid-eighties, as scholars began to collaborate on environmental literary studies, the field

was established, and in the early nineties, it grew" (p. xviii). Glotfelty and Fromm also distinguish between ecology and environment, noting that the term "environment" is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that humans are at the center of everything. In contrast, "eco" implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts (p. xix). Ecology focuses on the exosphere, while the environment centers on human beings. Lindsey Claire Smith underscores the importance of nature as a "sense of place" (p. 5) and suggests that the environment serves as a starting point for addressing issues of cultural or racial authority (p. 5). This prioritization of interconnectedness is particularly prominent in Eastern literature and religious texts.

Both Western and Eastern eco-critical texts emphasize the importance of the underlying connections among the Earth's constituents for the sustainability of the planet. Manes (1996) highlights the primordial concept of wilderness, stating that "many primal groups have no word for wilderness and do not make a clear distinction between wild and domesticated life" (p. 18). White (1996) observes that "Eastern theology has been intellectualism" (p. 11). Similarly, Horton (2020) discusses eco-criticism as a theory that values "mutuality, relatedness, and non-hierarchical thinking" (p. 8). Horton further notes the Indian reverence for certain forces of nature, including the sun, fire, water, rain clouds, the eagle, the rattlesnake, and the buffalo (p. 52). Earth-centric ideology is pervasive in the theological writings of the East.

The idea of co-existence is particularly advocated when a healthy ecosystem is under threat. Vakoch and Mickey (2018) emphasize the importance of the "network of coexistence" in their discussion of the "significance of the Earth" (p. xvii). Garrard (2004) expands on the theoretical foundation of eco-criticism, asserting that it is "essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction" (p. 179). Wolfelt (2021) introduces the concept of "forest bathing" as a means of connecting humans to nature, emphasizing that "nature offers emotional benefits regardless of setting or season" (p. 18). Misiaszek (2023) calls for a holistic understanding of the Earth, arguing that focusing on one dominant aspect of nature can marginalize others; thus, a holistic approach is essential (p. 24). Filippova (2022) similarly asserts that "ideas of nature impact the world around us and thus reproduce the world" (p. 155). Eco-critical theory takes a holistic view of the world, highlighting the interrelations and interconnections among Earth's essential components. The network of co-existence is a central tenet of eco-critical theory.

Prithvi, Jal, Tej, Bayu, and Akash as Sources of Life and Ecstasy

The Vedas, as the earliest scriptural texts, provide a foundational framework for the conservation of natural elements—earth, water, fire, air, space, plants, and animals. The pervasive natural objects of Prithvi, Jal, Tej, Bayu, and Akash (earth, water, fire, air, and sky) are seen as sources of life and divine ecstasy. These natural elements maintain equilibrium in the universe, which helps heal the psychological trauma faced by people in the modern world. As a result, the physical, psychological, and social anguish experienced by humanity is alleviated.

The universe thrives on freshness, food, and fertility, which support the co-existence of all beings on Earth. The Rig Veda declares, "O earth, upon thee, that bearest refreshment, prosperity, food portion, ghee" (xii.1.29, p. 1407). This suggests that the Earth spreads grandeur and aids in nurturing the freshness of all creatures, as stated, "Let her sprinkle us with splendor" (xii.1.7, p. 1397). The all-encompassing nature of the Earth is central to the Vedas, providing shelter for plants, animals, and humans alike.

The *Atharva Veda Samhita* further highlights the power of the Earth in sustaining life through a continuous natural chain: "On whom the ocean and the river (Sindhu), the waters; on whom food, ploughings, came into being; on whom quickens that breathes, that stirs—let that earth (Bhumi) set us in first drinking" (xii.1.3, p. 1397). The Earth's power is portrayed as extending immortality, as described, "The rising sun extends with his rays immortal light" (xii.1.15, p. 1401). Giri (2023) supports the idea that replenishing freshness in the environment has a significant impact: "If our environment is hygienic and cheerful, it has a positive influence on all the other layers of reality" (p. 28). Divinity in nature, as proposed by the Vedas, extends equal treatment to all beings, including humans and animals.

Vedic hymns, which relate to natural sources of energy, are imbued with divine qualities that bestow bliss for the well-being of humanity. This divinity in nature fosters unity and harmony, as expressed in the verse: "What odor of thine is in human beings; in women, in men, portion, pleasure; what in horses, in heroes, what in wild animals and in elephants; what splendor, O earth in a maiden—with what do thou unite us also; let no one soever hate us" (*Rig Veda* xii.1.25, p. 1405). Any disturbance to the natural elements disrupts this harmony, leading to a stressful life—a consequence of the dislocation in the natural chain.

When nature is connected to divine forces, it communicates the divine power inherent in nature. This divine reflection, as conveyed in the Vedic hymns, captivates individuals and allows them to reconnect with the idyllic world of their childhood, thereby alleviating trauma. Engaging in worldly matters often generates stress, while meditation and nature walks offer relief. Giri (2023) suggests that "meditating, praying, or even taking a nature walk helps boost immune system functions" (p. 96). For those seeking an escape from the trauma of daily life, Earth and the ecosphere serve as liberating agents. The Rig Veda offers detailed guidance for those experiencing trauma, emphasizing the therapeutic influence of nature. Aurobindo (1972) highlights the cosmic divisions mentioned by the Rishis: "Earth, the middle region, and heaven, but there is also a greater heaven also called the wide world, the vast and typified sometimes as the great water" (p. 42). Spending time in gardens, forests, or by riverbanks serves as primary treatment for psychological stress, and for healthy individuals, it fosters mental clarity that aids in envisioning sustainable development for the world.

Nature worship is central to the Vedic teachings, as Rishis recognized that nature possesses a divine form. Aurobindo (2021) states, "The Vedic religion was in this account only a worship of nature" (p. 4). He also underscores the symbolic significance of the cow in the Vedas, noting that "the word cow, go, meant also light or a ray of light" (p. 13). Furthermore, Aurobindo (2021) explains, "The symbol of the sun is constantly associated with the higher light and truth" (p. 16). The Vedas intricately intertwine the physical and spiritual worlds, presenting nature as a source of bliss and healing.

Agni and Vayu: Sources of Life, Energy, and Healing in the Rig Veda

The *Rig Veda* places great emphasis on Agni as a generator of life and a source of psychic healing, embodying both physical and spiritual qualities. The first verse of the *Rig Veda* and the final mandala (Mandala 10) symbolize Agni's divine significance as the essence of life and power. The *Rig Veda* begins with the invocation of Agni and concludes with similar themes, underscoring the vital role of this elemental force.

AgnimilepurohitamyajnasyadevamirtvijamHotaramratnadhatamam

Translation: "Agni, I adore, who stands before the Lord, the god who seeth Truth, the warrior, strong disposer of delight" (Aurobindo, 1972, p. 439).

Agni represents the source of life and energy in Vedic scripture. Aurobindo (1972) articulates the importance of Agni, noting that "The Rig Veda begins with an invocation to Agni" (p. 439). Agni symbolizes purity through "The divine light" and embodies truth, war, and the origin of delight for humankind. As the source of life and purity, Agni bestows divine bliss. Life thrives through the co-existence of natural elements, a theme woven throughout the Vedas.

In Mandala 10, the hymn praises Agni's omnipotence:

Samsamidyuvasevrsanagnevisvanyaryallaspadesamishyasesa no asunyabhara

Translation: "Agni, self-refulgent, omnipotent master, giver of all the showers of infinity, you bring together and integrate all the elements of the universe of existence and shine in the earth—Vedic fire and the eloquence of the voice divine of Veda. Pray bless us with the wealth, honor, and excellence of life in the world" (Sharma, 2013, p. 1192).

Agni is not only a source of life but also a divine force capable of dispelling negative energies. As a crucial element, Agni connects earthly matters to divine forces, facilitating cosmic balance and connectivity.

Similarly, Vayu, the god of wind, is revered as the source of life, providing universal breath to all beings. Aurobindo (1972) asserts, "Vayu is the Lord of life" (p. 297), highlighting the wind's vital role in sustaining life. Vayu infuses life with breath and is associated with energy and healing. As described in Mandala 8: "Do thou manifest the sacrificial energies that are unmanifested, even as a revealer of felicity and doer of the work; O Vayu, come in thy car of happy delight to the drinking of the soma-wine" (Aurobindo, 1972, p. 294).

Vayu's energy is seen as a healing force, reducing the stress of life and bringing delight to the people of space. The Rishis recognized Vayu's vivacity and life-giving energy, celebrating its essential role in the cosmos.

The elemental powers of nature permeate the Vedic Samhitas, advocating for the co-existence of all living and non-living beings. Aurobindo (1972) highlights the "personified powers of nature" (p. 1), which carry psychological and spiritual significance. He refers to the "Pantheistic nature worship" (p. 6) present in the Vedas, where reverence for multiple gods reflects an acceptance of all forms of existence.

The *Rig Veda* acknowledges the cosmic power of nature through hymns that emphasize the pantheistic value of life. Radhakrishnan (2015) reasons that ancient seers expressed their awe of nature's beauty through hymns: "There were poetic souls who simply contemplated the beauties of the sky and the wonders of the earth, and eased the musical souls of their burden by composing hymns" (p. 46). The Vedas attribute divine qualities to celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and sky, recognizing their role in giving light to all creation (Radhakrishnan, 2015, pp. 47-48). These cosmic elements are regarded as divine and integral to the balance of the universe.

Giri (2023) underscores the importance of plants in sustaining life: "Plants that inhabit our forests, mountains, plains, farmlands, and deserts matter not just because of their inherent beauty but because no form of life can exist without them" (p. 69). This ecological awareness aligns with the Vedic view that natural elements are imbued with divine qualities, fostering balance in human behavior and creating a healthier world.

The elemental forces—earth, water, fire, air, sky, jungles, and animals—are revered in the Vedas for their divine qualities. This transcendence fosters unity and coherence in human society. Agni symbolizes knowledge, inner fire, and the power to dispel ignorance, while Vayu serves as the breath of life. Prithvi (earth) supports creation, the moon brings life, water energizes, and the jungle is a source of vitality. As Garrard (2004) observes, "The poetics of responsibility recognizes that every inflection of earth is our inflection" (p. 179). The divine transcendence present in all beings and elements ensures unity and coherence in the cosmos. Ultimately, the Vedas occupy a profound psychological space in society, emphasizing nature as an ultimate divine force.

Soma as the Source of Life

Soma holds multilayered significance in Vedic scripture due to its medicinal and ceremonial importance. The Rishis used the nectar of Soma in rituals and ceremonies, recognizing the plant's life-affirming properties. In the *Rig Veda*, Soma is celebrated for providing joy and purity, especially before Vedic rituals. The plant's enduring importance symbolizes the vitality of nature and its impact on human life.

Svaadisthayamadisthayaapavasva soma dhaarayaaIndraayapaatavesutah

Translation: "O Soma. Spirit of divinity, peace, and glory of existence distilled in essence for the soul's being, flow in the sweetest and most exhilarating streams of ecstasy, and initiate us into the state of Ananda, divine glory" (Sharma, 2013, p. 1).

Soma maximizes bliss and minimizes negative thoughts, functioning as a destroyer of adverse judgments and a bestower of peace and joy. The plant is praised for its power to cleanse anxiety and create delight.

PunatiteparisrutamsomamsuryasyadudhitaVarenasasvata tana

Translation: "Soma of your eternal peace and joy flowing universally, the dawn, daughter of the sun, glorify with the sanctity of her exquisite over of beauty" (Sharma, 2013, p. 3).

The Rig Veda recognizes Soma's higher power, which purifies the mind and body. Soma operates on three levels—physical, spiritual, and divine—each contributing to human well-being.

Tamim hinvantyagrurvodhamantibaakuramdritmTridhaatuvaaranammadhu

Translation: "The thrice energized honey sweet and sanctified Soma for the good of the body, mind, and soul, the ten prime senses and pranas receive and then stimulate the light of the soul within, which dispels the darkness of ignorance and eliminates the junk of negative fluctuations" (Sharma, 2013, p. 4).

The combination of Soma's physical, spiritual, and divine qualities underscores the importance of natural elements in alleviating human restlessness and anxiety. Physically, Soma provides energy through its juice; spiritually, it evokes emotion and feeling; and divinely, it represents the moon. Soma's purity and divinity cleanse both the body and the mind, making it a crucial element in human life. Reviving Vedic awareness of nature can help modern society recover from the disconnection between humans and the natural world.

Conclusion

Modern humans must re-engage with global social and ecological issues, as destructive activities continue to harm nature. Physical challenges, household burdens, and the desensitizing effects of media exacerbate the psychological suffering of modern life. Against this backdrop of incoherence, nature can serve as a powerful force for resilience and regeneration. One pressing issue is the management of trauma, which can be alleviated through nature-centric activities.

A happy mind fosters creative thoughts and actions that benefit society, and nature plays a vital role in generating this sense of well-being. The elements of nature—*Prithvi* (earth), *Jal* (water), *Tej* (fire), *Vayu* (air), and *Akash* (sky)—create an emotional

alliance with humans due to their inherent divinity, as described in the Vedas. Rivers, wildlife, and forests, glorified in the Vedic hymns, represent an idyllic life. The Rishis envisioned this divinity in natural objects, emphasizing the connection between humanity and nature.

Pantheistic qualities in natural elements such as fire, water, air, earth, and sky endow them with divine values. The Vedic scriptures emphasize the equality of gods, humans, and natural beings, recognizing the divinity in all forms. This understanding helps relieve psychological ailments, as these natural forms are seen as expressions of divinity. The Vedas imparted divine qualities to nature to emphasize the value of co-existence among all things.

To address the distress of modern life, people must internalize the wisdom of the Vedic hymns. Social harmony is achievable through ecological connectivity, which the Vedas consistently advocate. The hymns blend natural reality with imagination to promote the well-being of humanity. By disseminating the importance of Vedic teachings, people can reconnect with nature and experience the healing power of this ancient wisdom. Actions that promote nature preservation and reduce global warming contribute to a cleaner mindset, helping humanity achieve a harmonious and fulfilling life. The life-affirming Vedic Shlokas remind us of the deep connection between God, nature, and human beings.

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