

“Madhu Vata Ritayate....” **Nature in the Vedic literatures**



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Indian philosophy posits that the universe emerges from the amalgamation of sub-atomic particles, influencing five fundamental elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. All living beings, whether animate or inanimate, are encompassed within this framework, indicating a profound connection between the macro and microcosms. This connection is reinforced by the inherent relationship between the five gross elements and the five human cognitive organs. The nose corresponds to earth, the tongue to water, the eyes to fire, touch to air, and the ear to space. Thus, ancient Indian philosophical thought suggests a symbiotic relationship between the macro and micro environments.

The concept of the "Five Mahabhutas" elucidates these cosmic elements as creators, nurturers, and sustainers of all life forms. Even after death or decay, they absorb what was once created, thus playing a pivotal role in preserving and sustaining the environment. The Upanishads, revered as Vedanta, underscore the indispensable role

of earth and water in both the environment and human life. Chandogyopanishad articulates this interconnectedness by asserting that earth constitutes the essence of all beings, water the essence of earth, herbs the essence of water, and humans the essence of herbs. This concept, known as Loka-Purusha-Saamyain Ayurveda, highlights the perpetual interplay between the macrocosm and microcosm.

According to this philosophy, the body, soul, and mind form a tripod sustaining all life forms, with humans intricately interwoven into the fabric of the universe. This interdependence fosters a natural equilibrium wherein humans lawfully utilize natural resources such as water, food, and fresh air.

Indian philosophy also espouses the concept of 'pure consciousness' or 'ultimate reality,' believed to be responsible for all life forms. Vedic wisdom, believed to be bestowed upon humanity by pure consciousness,



reflects a deep concern for the natural environment and its preservation.

The Rigveda, considered the most ancient text in Indian context, emphasizes the unity of mankind and the importance of collective harmony, love, and shared goals. Moreover, the Vedas extend their relevance to all biotic and abiotic entities on Earth, transcending geographical boundaries.

In essence, Indian philosophy portrays a holistic worldview wherein the universe and all its constituents are intricately interconnected. This interconnectedness is not merely physical but extends to the realms of consciousness and spirituality. It underscores the importance of living in harmony with nature, recognizing our inherent connection with the cosmos, and striving for collective well-being. This profound philosophy offers timeless wisdom that resonates with contemporary environmental concerns, emphasizing the need for sustainable living and reverence for the natural world.

The Vedic Aryans revered nature as divine, observing its intricate dramas with awe and reverence. From sandstorms to cyclones, thunderous storms to torrential rains, each natural phenomenon spoke of a power beyond human comprehension. They

appreciated these forces, worshipping them out of respect, wonder, and a hint of fear. Recognizing that nature's actions were beyond human control, they instinctively attributed divinity to its manifestations. In the swirling dance of creation, movement, and destruction, the Vedic sages found a sacred connection to the cosmos, acknowledging nature as the ultimate expression of divine power.

In the Atharvaveda, a hymn of 63 verses titled Bhumisukta or Prithivisukta reveals the profound environmental consciousness of Vedic seers. This hymn portrays the earth as Vasudha, symbolizing abundance, Hiranyavaksha, possessing a golden bosom, and Jagato Niveshani, serving as the abode of the entire world. It emphasizes that the earth isn't exclusive to human races but encompasses all creatures. Referred to as Visvambhara, she embodies the universe, offering a direct platform for understanding the cosmic truth.

****Prithvi***

The earth, depicted as a vast expanse, hosts diverse flora, oceans, rivers, mountains, and hills. With varying colors and elevations, she sustains life and prosperity, praised for her resilience and nourishing power. Rivers



serve her day and night, while the sky provides protection. Her immortal heart, symbolized by the sun, resides in the highest firmament (Vyoma), enveloped by space and exerting gravitational force. She holds Agni, representing the geothermal field, and Indra, symbolizing the geomagnetic field.

The earth's presence extends to the depths of oceans, depicted through sedimentary rocks, and her movements are described as magical. This comprehensive portrayal of the earth in the Atharvaveda reflects an advanced understanding of her significance and role in the cosmos, emphasizing her interconnectedness with all living beings and natural phenomena.

****Apah***

Water, as depicted in the Rigveda, manifests in five essential forms within the human environment: rainwater (Divyah), natural springs (Sravanti), wells and canals (Khanitrimah), lakes (Svayamjah), and rivers (Samudrarthah). Additional classifications in texts like the Taittiriya Aranyaka, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda delineate drinking water, medicinal water, and stable water. Chandogya Upanishad extols the virtues of water, highlighting its role in fostering joy and sustaining life's

vitality. It serves as the source of all organic beings, including vegetation, insects, animals, and humans, while also concretizing mountains, earth, atmosphere, and heavenly bodies. The cyclical nature of water is elucidated, wherein oceanic waters ascend to the sky and return to earth as rain. Rain-clouds are revered as manifestations of the Parjanya god, symbolizing the benevolence of nature's cycles.

****Vayu***

The term "Vayu" in Vedic understanding primarily denotes air, acknowledging its vital role in sustaining life. Vedic seers comprehended the significance of both atmospheric air and the air within the body. The Taittiriya Upanishad delineates five types of internal winds: Prana, Vrana, Apana, Udana, and Samano, elucidating air's presence as synonymous with life itself. Vedic verses extol air's medicinal properties, invoking blessings for its beneficial effects on health and happiness. Medicated air is revered as a universal healer, purifying the environment and invigorating humanity with vitality and joy. Mountainous regions are esteemed for their rich reserves of herbal elements in the air. Descriptions of air highlight its transcendental essence, as the soul of all deities, ubiquitous life-breath, and



invisible yet omnipresent force. Worship of the air god underscores the ancient Indian belief that unpolluted, pure air is the cornerstone of good health, happiness, and longevity, calling upon Vayu to bestow its medicinal virtues upon humanity.

****Vanaspati***

The Vedic literature provides detailed insights into the origin and significance of plants. In the Rigveda, the Aranyani sukta venerates Aranyani, the forest deity, praising her for the gifts she bestows upon humanity and her captivating allure. Forests, depicted as lush and green with trees and plants, are celebrated as essential habitats. The Oshadhi Sukta addresses plants and vegetables as mothers, acknowledging their abundant proliferation across the earth. According to Chandogya Upanishad, water gave rise to plants, which, in turn, yielded food, underscoring the interconnectedness of life forms. The Atharvaveda enumerates the names and values of various Oshadhis, later serving as a crucial source for Ayurveda. Rigvedic injunctions advocate for the preservation of forests, recognizing their vital role in maintaining ecological balance. The Atharvaveda highlights the intimate relationship between plants and the earth, portraying the earth as the custodian of

creation, housing forests, trees, and herbs, thus affirming the vitality of plant life.

****Pranin***

Animals and birds hold a significant place in the Vedic understanding of nature and the environment. The Rigveda categorizes them into three groups: sky animals such as birds, forest animals, and those dwelling in human habitation. Each living creature inhabits its own environment, yet from a human perspective, they collectively form the environment. Vedic texts express a general sentiment that animals should be safeguarded, protected, and kept in good health. Both domestic and wild animals, alongside humans, are envisioned to coexist peacefully under the guardianship of deities like Rudra and Pushan. Vedic society exhibits a deep concern for the well-being of their livestock, including cattle and horses. The cow, revered as a symbol of wealth and prosperity, holds a prominent position in Vedic life and culture.

The World Commission on Environment and Development underscores the necessity of harmonizing human endeavors with natural principles. It stresses that our cultural and spiritual heritage can synergize with our economic pursuits and imperative for



survival. This perspective emphasizes integrating traditional wisdom and spiritual values into our sustainability efforts, acknowledging the profound interconnectedness between human well-being and the ecological health of the planet.

By recognizing and honoring this interdependence, we can cultivate a more holistic approach to environmental stewardship, fostering a sustainable future for generations to come.

