

The Sacred Fig as Cosmic Nexus in Hindu Tradition

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Abstract

The Ficus religiosa, or Sacred Fig, holds a profound place in Hindu tradition, revered as a cosmic nexus that bridges divine, human, and natural realms. This article explores its significance within Hindu Puranic texts, highlighting its role in embodying a sophisticated human-plant symbiosis and an implicit recognition of plant sentience. The problem addressed is the anthropocentric bias that often overlooks vegetal agency in cultural narratives. By employing Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" framework, the study argues that the Peepal tree transcends its biological identity, functioning as a divine abode, cosmic axis, and ritual partner. The methodology involves analyzing key Puranic narratives, such as those in the Skanda, Padma, and Bhagavata Puranas, which depict the tree as a living temple of the Trimurti, a mediator between worlds, and a subject of rituals like circumambulation and offerings. Findings reveal that these texts articulate the Peepal's sacred status through its association with deities, cosmic order, and ethical prohibitions against harm, reflecting a deep respect for its intrinsic value. This resonates with contemporary plant philosophy, challenging dualistic views and affirming plants' dynamic agency. The implications suggest that Hindu traditions offer a blueprint for re-evaluating human-plant relationships, fostering ecological ethics and holistic perspectives relevant to modern environmental thought.

Introduction

The intricate relationship between humanity and the vegetal world has been a cornerstone of cultural, spiritual, and ecological narratives across civilizations. Trees and plants, as vital components of the environment, have been revered not only for their utility but also for their symbolic and spiritual significance, embodying a profound connection between human life and nature (Schama, 1995, p. 15). In Hindu thought, this connection is deeply rooted, with vegetation, or *vanaspati*, regarded as an integral part of the cosmic order and a manifestation of divine energy. Forests and plants are celebrated in ancient Indian texts as embodiments of *Prakriti* (nature) and conduits of *Shakti* (divine power), reflecting a worldview that perceives the natural world as inherently sacred (Haberman, 2013, p. 23). Among the myriad of revered plants, the *Ficus religiosa*, commonly known as the Sacred Fig or Peepal tree, holds an unparalleled status within Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Its distinctive heart-shaped leaves, longevity, and expansive canopy contribute to its botanical uniqueness, while its spiritual significance elevates it to a symbol of cosmic unity and divine presence (Narayanan, 1997, p. 87). This article argues that the *Ficus religiosa*, as depicted in Hindu Puranic traditions, functions as a cosmic nexus, articulating a sophisticated human-plant symbiosis and an implicit understanding of plant sentience. By analyzing its portrayals through Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" framework, this study demonstrates how ancient Hindu scriptures provide a rich blueprint for re-evaluating human relationships with the vegetal world.

The pervasive anthropocentric bias in contemporary ecological and philosophical discourses often marginalizes the agency and intrinsic value of plants, reducing them to mere resources or passive elements of the environment. This oversight neglects the sophisticated perspectives embedded in traditional knowledge systems, such as Hindu Puranic traditions, which portray plants like the *Ficus religiosa* (Sacred Fig or Peepal tree) as dynamic, sentient entities integral to cosmic and human realms. Despite the reverence for the Peepal tree in Hindu texts, there is a gap in scholarly analysis that bridges these ancient narratives with contemporary plant philosophy, particularly in understanding how such traditions articulate plant-human symbiosis and plant sentience. This study addresses this gap by examining the Peepal tree's portrayal in Puranic texts, interpreting its significance through modern theoretical lenses to challenge anthropocentric views and highlight the ecological and ethical insights offered by Hindu traditions. This study attempts at seeking answers to the following research questions: (a) How do Hindu Puranic texts portray the *Ficus religiosa* as a cosmic nexus and embodiment of plant-human symbiosis? (b) In what ways do these portrayals align with or expand upon Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" framework? (c) What ecological and ethical insights can contemporary

environmental thought derive from the Puranic depictions of the Peepal tree's sacred status?

This study employs two complementary theoretical lenses to interpret the *Ficus religiosa*'s significance in Hindu Puranic traditions: Marder's Plant Humanities challenges anthropocentric views by recognizing plants as active, dynamic entities with unique modes of being, intelligence, and communication, termed "plant-thinking" (Marder, 2013, p. 10). This framework posits plants as more than biological resources, emphasizing their intrinsic value and agency. It provides a lens to understand how Hindu traditions might perceive the Peepal tree as a living entity with spiritual and cosmic significance, transcending its material form. Hall's framework extends the concept of personhood to plants, challenging Cartesian dualisms that separate mind and body, and human from non-human (Hall, 2011, p. 15). By drawing on indigenous perspectives that grant plants agency and respect, this approach aligns with Hindu practices that treat the Peepal tree as a divine abode and ritual partner. Hall's ideas help contextualize the tree's sacred status as an acknowledgment of its sentient, interactive nature.

This study analyses ancient Hindu wisdom with contemporary plant philosophy, offering a fresh perspective on human-plant relationships. By analyzing the *Ficus religiosa*'s role in Puranic texts, it highlights how traditional knowledge systems articulate plant agency and sentience, challenging modern anthropocentric biases. The findings underscore the Peepal tree's role as a cosmic nexus, providing a model for ecological ethics that respects plants as vital, dynamic entities. This research contributes to interdisciplinary dialogues in environmental humanities, offering insights for sustainable practices and ethical considerations in contemporary environmental thought.

Review of Literature

The interplay between plants and human culture, particularly in religious and ecological contexts, has garnered significant scholarly attention. This review synthesizes recent works on plants, with a focus on the *Ficus religiosa* (Sacred Fig or Peepal tree), across botany, ethnobotany, literary, religious, and ecological analyses to establish the research territory and identify gaps relevant to its portrayal as a cosmic nexus in Hindu Puranic traditions. Botanically, *Ficus religiosa* is a long-lived, deciduous tree native to South Asia, known for its heart-shaped leaves and expansive canopy (Krishen, 2006, p. 87). Its ecological role as a keystone species supports biodiversity, providing habitat and sustenance for numerous organisms (Shanahan et al., 2001, p. 1023). Ethnobotanically, the Peepal tree is integral to South Asian cultures, used in traditional medicine for its anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties (Singh et al., 2011, p. 345). Malla and Chhetri (2009) document its use in Nepalese ethnomedicine, noting its leaves and bark in treatments for respiratory and skin ailments (p. 56). These studies highlight the tree's biological and cultural significance but rarely explore its spiritual dimensions

beyond utilitarian contexts. The *Ficus religiosa* holds a central place in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. Haberman (2013) examines tree worship in northern India, detailing rituals like circumambulation and offerings to the Peepal, which is revered as a divine abode for deities like Vishnu and Lakshmi (p. 67). Narayanan (1997) explores its symbolic role in Hindu ecology, noting its association with cosmic order and fertility (p. 89). Similarly, Nugteren (2005) analyzes tree veneration in Indian religions, emphasizing the Peepal's role as a "cosmic tree" linking earthly and divine realms (p. 112). These works underscore the tree's sacred status but often focus on practices rather than textual narratives or philosophical implications.

Literary studies of Hindu texts provide insights into the Peepal's symbolic roles. Doniger (2009) examines Puranic narratives, noting the Peepal's depiction as the *Ashvattha*, an inverted cosmic tree symbolizing interconnected existence in texts like the *Bhagavata Purana* (p. 234). Bryant (2003) analyzes the *Vishnu Purana*, highlighting the tree's role as a mediator between divine and human realms (p. 156). These studies focus on mythological frameworks but rarely connect these narratives to contemporary plant philosophy or ecological ethics. Recent ecological and philosophical works challenge anthropocentric views of plants. Marder (2013) introduces "Plant Humanities," arguing for plants' agency and intelligence through "plant-thinking," which reframes them as dynamic entities (p. 12). Hall (2011) extends this by proposing plants as "persons," drawing on indigenous perspectives that grant plants moral standing (p. 17). These frameworks resonate with Hindu views but are rarely applied to specific cultural contexts like the Peepal's Puranic portrayals. Chamovitz (2012) explores plant sentience, documenting their sensory responses, which aligns with traditional views of plants as responsive beings (p. 45). Ryan (2018) further connects indigenous plant reverence to ecological ethics, suggesting traditional knowledge systems offer sustainable models (p. 89).

The reviewed literature establishes a multidisciplinary territory encompassing the *Ficus religiosa*'s botanical, ethnobotanical, religious, literary, and ecological significance. Botanical and ethnobotanical studies highlight its ecological and medicinal roles, while religious and cultural analyses emphasize its sacred status in Indian traditions. Literary studies reveal its symbolic depth in Hindu texts, and philosophical works provide frameworks to reinterpret these portrayals through plant agency and sentience. Despite this rich scholarship, a significant gap exists in integrating these perspectives. Botanical and ethnobotanical studies often overlook the Peepal's spiritual dimensions, while religious and literary analyses rarely engage with contemporary plant philosophy. Although Marder and Hall's frameworks offer tools to explore plant agency, they are seldom applied to specific cultural texts like the Hindu Puranas. Furthermore, few studies examine how Puranic narratives of the Peepal as a cosmic nexus can inform modern ecological ethics, particularly in challenging anthropocentric biases. This study addresses this gap by analyzing

the *Ficus religiosa*'s portrayal in Puranic texts through Marder's Plant Humanities and Hall's "plants as persons" frameworks, exploring its implications for contemporary human-plant relationships and ecological thought.

Methods and Materials

This study employs a qualitative, text-based approach to examine the portrayal of the *Ficus religiosa* (Sacred Fig or Peepal tree) as a cosmic nexus in Hindu Puranic traditions, interpreted through contemporary plant philosophy frameworks. The methodology involves a systematic analysis of primary textual sources, specifically selected Hindu Puranas, combined with a theoretical lens drawn from Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" framework. The research unfolds in the following steps:

The primary sources are key Hindu Puranic texts, including the *Skanda Purana*, *Padma Purana*, *Bhagavata Purana*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Markandeya Purana*, *Bhavishya Purana*, and *Agni Purana*. These texts were chosen for their comprehensive narratives, rituals, and symbolic associations related to the Peepal tree, as they are foundational in shaping Hindu devotional practices and cosmological views (Doniger, 2009, p. 45). English translations of these Puranas, published by reputable sources such as Motilal Banarsidass, are used to ensure accessibility and accuracy, with specific verses identified for their relevance to the Peepal's sacred status (e.g., *Skanda Purana*, Avantya Khanda, Chapter 16, Verses 1–5; *Bhagavata Purana*, Book 11, Chapter 12, Verse 21). A thematic analysis is conducted to identify and categorize narratives, rituals, and symbolic roles of the *Ficus religiosa* within the selected Puranas. Key themes include the tree's depiction as a divine abode (e.g., housing the Trimurti), a cosmic axis (*Ashvattha*), and a ritual partner in practices like circumambulation and offerings. Each theme is cross-referenced across multiple Puranas to ensure robustness and consistency in findings. The analysis focuses on how these portrayals articulate human-plant symbiosis and implicit plant sentience, as evidenced by ethical prohibitions against harming the tree or its role in bestowing blessings.

The textual findings are interpreted through two contemporary frameworks. This lens explores the Peepal's portrayal as a dynamic, agentive entity, emphasizing its "plant-thinking" and role as a non-anthropocentric cosmic connector (Marder, 2013, p. 12). The framework guides the analysis of the tree's symbolic and spiritual roles as reflective of vegetal agency. This framework examines the Peepal's personhood, focusing on its treatment as a sacred subject in rituals and narratives, aligning with traditional perspectives that grant plants moral standing (Hall, 2011, p. 17). This lens highlights the tree's interactive and sentient qualities in Hindu practices. The thematic findings from the Puranas are synthesized with the theoretical frameworks to draw connections between ancient Hindu perspectives and modern plant philosophy. This involves comparing Puranic depictions of the Peepal's cosmic and ritual significance with Marder's and Hall's concepts of plant

agency and personhood, identifying resonances and divergences. The analysis also considers how these portrayals challenge anthropocentric biases and inform ecological ethics.

To ensure rigor, the study cross-checks interpretations with secondary sources on Hindu cosmology and plant philosophy (e.g., Haberman, 2013; Nugteren, 2005). Reflexivity is maintained by acknowledging the researcher's positionality as an outsider to Hindu practice, ensuring interpretations respect the cultural and spiritual context of the texts. This methodology enables a nuanced exploration of the *Ficus religiosa's* role as a cosmic nexus, bridging ancient textual narratives with contemporary theoretical insights to illuminate human-plant relationships and their ecological implications.

Analysis: The Peepal Tree as Cosmic Nexus and Embodiment of Plant-Human Nexus in Puranas

This analysis examines the portrayal of the *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal tree) in Hindu Puranic texts, interpreting its role as a cosmic nexus and an embodiment of plant-human symbiosis through Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" frameworks. By analyzing key narratives, rituals, and symbolic associations in the Puranas, supplemented by Vedic references, this section demonstrates how the Peepal tree transcends its biological identity, articulating a sophisticated understanding of plant agency and sentience in Hindu tradition. Each thematic subsection is followed by an interpretation that connects the textual evidence to the theoretical frameworks, highlighting the Peepal's significance in challenging anthropocentric perspectives.

Divine Abode and Manifestation (Plant as Sacred Space)

The Puranas depict the Peepal tree as a living temple, embodying divine presence and challenging anthropocentric views of plants as passive entities. The *Skanda Purana* explicitly describes the Peepal as the abode of the Trimurti: "The root is Brahma, the trunk Vishnu, and the branches Shiva; thus, the Peepal is the supreme deity" (Sharma, 2003, *Avantya Khanda*, Chapter 16, Verses 1–5, p. 123). Similarly, the *Padma Purana* associates the Peepal with Lakshmi and ancestral spirits, stating, "He who worships the Peepal with offerings gains prosperity and the blessings of ancestors" (Deshpande, 1991, *Uttarakhanda*, Chapter 180, Verses 20–25, p. 456). The Vedic roots of this reverence are evident in the *Atharva Veda*, which praises trees as divine abodes: "O tree, thou art the seat of gods, bestowing wealth and wisdom" (Griffith, 1895, Book 6, Hymn 45, Verse 3, p. 234). These portrayals align with Marder's concept of "plant-thinking," which recognizes plants as dynamic entities with intrinsic value beyond their biological form (Marder, 2013, p. 12). By deifying the Peepal as a residence of the Trimurti and Lakshmi, the Puranas transcend its material identity, positioning it as a sacred space that embodies divine agency. Hall's "plants as persons" framework further illuminates this, as the tree's

ability to bestow blessings suggests a sentient, interactive role, akin to a person deserving reverence (Hall, 2011, p. 17). The Vedic precedent reinforces this view, framing the Peepal as a spiritually active entity, challenging anthropocentric hierarchies that marginalize vegetal life.

Cosmic Tree and Axis Mundi (Plant as Universal Connector)

The Peepal tree is frequently portrayed as the *Ashvattha*, a cosmic tree symbolizing the interconnectedness of existence. The *Bhagavata Purana* describes it as “the Ashvattha, with roots above and branches below, encompassing all worlds” (Bryant, 2003, Book 11, Chapter 12, Verse 21, p. 289). The *Vishnu Purana* further elaborates: “The Peepal, with branches touching heaven and roots in the earth, connects all beings to the eternal” (Wilson, 1865, Book 2, Chapter 2, Verse 15, p. 98). The Vedic *Rig Veda* provides a precursor, describing a cosmic tree as “the pillar that holds the heavens and earth” (Griffith, 1896, Book 1, Hymn 24, Verse 7, p. 45). Through Marder’s Plant Humanities, the *Ashvattha* imagery positions the Peepal as a non-anthropocentric mediator of cosmic order, connecting divine, human, and chthonic realms (Marder, 2013, p. 15). This portrayal underscores the tree’s role as an *axis mundi*, embodying a holistic worldview that challenges human-centered narratives. Hall’s framework complements this, as the Peepal’s depiction as a universal connector suggests a form of personhood, actively bridging existential planes (Hall, 2011, p. 20). The Vedic reference strengthens this interpretation, highlighting the tree’s enduring role as a cosmic pillar, which elevates plants as central to spiritual and ecological balance.

Ritual Practice and Human Interplay (Plant-Human Symbiosis)

Puranic texts emphasize the Peepal’s role in rituals, reflecting a reciprocal plant-human relationship. The *Markandeya Purana* describes circumambulation (*parikrama*): “Women who circle the Peepal with devotion gain fertility and health” (Pargiter, 1904, Chapter 45, Verses 10–12, p. 321). The *Bhavishya Purana* details offerings: “Water and lamps offered to the Peepal bring divine favor” (Shastri, 1990, Brahma Parva, Chapter 27, Verses 5–8, p. 167). Ethical prohibitions against harming the Peepal are also prominent, as the *Agni Purana* states, “He who cuts the Peepal incurs great sin, for it is the abode of the divine” (Dutt, 1903, Chapter 282, Verse 40, p. 912). The *Taittiriya Samhita* of the *Yajur Veda* similarly warns, “The tree is a friend of the gods; to harm it is to offend them” (Keith, 1914, Book 2, Chapter 2, Verse 4, p. 156). These rituals and prohibitions align with Hall’s “plants as persons,” as practices like *parikrama* and offerings treat the Peepal as a sentient partner capable of reciprocal engagement (Hall, 2011, p. 18). The ethical injunctions reflect a moral standing akin to personhood, reinforcing the tree’s intrinsic value. Marder’s framework interprets these acts as evidence of “plant-thinking,” where the Peepal is engaged as a dynamic entity in mutual exchange with humans (Marder, 2013, p. 14). The Vedic caution against harm further supports this, embedding the Peepal in

a symbiotic relationship that acknowledges its agency and spiritual significance, challenging anthropocentric exploitation of nature.

The Puranic portrayals of the Peepal as a divine abode, cosmic axis, and ritual partner resonate strongly with Marder's and Hall's frameworks. The tree's depiction as the Trimurti's abode and a cosmic connector reflects Marder's "plant-thinking," where plants are active mediators in spiritual realms (Marder, 2013, p. 16). Hall's concept of plant personhood is evident in rituals and prohibitions that treat the Peepal as a morally significant entity (Hall, 2011, p. 19). Vedic texts provide foundational support, reinforcing the Peepal's role as a sacred, agentive entity. The synthesis of Puranic and Vedic narratives with Marder and Hall's frameworks reveals a sophisticated human-plant symbiosis in Hindu tradition. The Peepal's multifaceted roles challenge anthropocentric biases by centering a plant as a cosmic and spiritual nexus. This alignment with contemporary plant philosophy underscores the Puranas' relevance to modern ecological ethics, offering a model that recognizes plants' dynamic agency and fosters respectful human-plant relationships.

Findings and Conclusions

The analysis of Hindu Puranic texts, supported by Vedic references, reveals the *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal tree) as a multifaceted cosmic nexus that embodies a profound human-plant symbiosis and an implicit recognition of plant sentience. The findings are organized around three key themes: the Peepal as a divine abode, a cosmic axis, and a ritual partner, each resonating with Michael Marder's Plant Humanities and Matthew Hall's "plants as persons" frameworks.

Divine Abode and Manifestation

The Puranas portray the Peepal as a living temple housing the Trimurti—Brahma in its roots, Vishnu in its trunk, and Shiva in its branches (*Skanda Purana*, Sharma, 2003, Avantya Khanda, Chapter 16, Verses 1–5, p. 123). This deification extends to associations with Lakshmi and ancestral spirits, where offerings to the tree yield prosperity and blessings (*Padma Purana*, Deshpande, 1991, Uttarakhanda, Chapter 180, Verses 20–25, p. 456). The *Atharva Veda* reinforces this, describing trees as divine seats bestowing wisdom (*Atharva Veda*, Griffith, 1895, Book 6, Hymn 45, Verse 3, p. 234). These narratives position the Peepal as a sacred entity with agency, capable of spiritual interaction, aligning with Marder's view of plants as dynamic beings (Marder, 2013, p. 12) and Hall's concept of plants as persons deserving reverence (Hall, 2011, p. 17). The tree's role transcends biology, embodying a microcosm of the divine cosmos, which challenges anthropocentric views that reduce plants to mere resources.

Cosmic Tree and Axis Mundi

The Peepal is depicted as the *Ashvattha*, an inverted cosmic tree symbolizing universal interconnectedness, with roots in the heavens and branches reaching the earth (*Bhagavata Purana*, Bryant, 2003, Book 11, Chapter 12, Verse 21, p. 289). The *Vishnu Purana* further describes it as a connector of all beings to the eternal (*Vishnu Purana*, Wilson, 1865, Book 2, Chapter 2, Verse 15, p. 98). This imagery, rooted in the *Rig Veda*'s cosmic pillar (*Rig Veda*, Griffith, 1896, Book 1, Hymn 24, Verse 7, p. 45), establishes the Peepal as an *axis mundi* mediating divine, human, and chthonic realms. Through Marder's lens, this underscores the tree's non-anthropocentric centrality in cosmic order (Marder, 2013, p. 15), while Hall's framework highlights its personhood as a bridge across existential planes (Hall, 2011, p. 20). The Peepal's cosmic role elevates it beyond a symbolic motif, positioning it as a living entity integral to spiritual and ecological balance.

Ritual Practice and Human Interplay

Puranic rituals like circumambulation (*parikrama*) and offerings of water and lamps reflect a reciprocal relationship with the Peepal, believed to grant fertility, health, and divine favor (*Markandeya Purana*, Pargiter, 1904, Chapter 45, Verses 10–12, p. 321; *Bhavishya Purana*, Shastri, 1990, Brahma Parva, Chapter 27, Verses 5–8, p. 167). Ethical prohibitions against harming the tree, as noted in the *Agni Purana* ("He who cuts the Peepal incurs great sin," Dutt, 1903, Chapter 282, Verse 40, p. 912) and the *Taittiriya Samhita* (*Yajur Veda*, Keith, 1914, Book 2, Chapter 2, Verse 4, p. 156), underscore its moral standing. These practices align with Hall's view of plants as persons engaged in mutual relationships (Hall, 2011, p. 18) and Marder's concept of plants as dynamic partners in human interactions (Marder, 2013, p. 14). The rituals and prohibitions demonstrate a deep respect for the Peepal's intrinsic value, reflecting a symbiotic bond that acknowledges its agency.

Beyond its botanical characteristics, the pipal tree has been systematically integrated into traditional economic and domestic systems through diverse utilitarian applications that demonstrate sophisticated understanding of its material properties. The species holds particular significance in Vedic ritual practice, where it ranks among the nine sacred plants whose twigs are specifically designated for use in yagnas (sacrificial fires), highlighting its spiritual importance alongside practical utility. The tree's nutritional value extends to traditional animal husbandry, with its leaves serving as valued fodder for elephants and cattle, while its wood has been crafted into numerous household and commercial items including packing cases, yokes, spoons, bowls, and matchsticks. Traditional artisans have also exploited the tree's chemical properties, extracting a dark red pigment from its bark for use in leather tanning processes. Even the dried leaves find application in decorative arts, where they are carefully cleaned, processed, and

incorporated into cultural ornamentation, demonstrating how traditional societies have maximized utility from virtually every component of the tree.

Conclusion

The *Ficus religiosa*, as elucidated in the Puranas and supported by Vedic texts, stands as a quintessential cosmic nexus within Hindu tradition. Its portrayal as a divine abode, cosmic axis, and ritual partner articulates a sophisticated human-plant relationship that transcends anthropocentric paradigms. The Puranas consistently depict the Peepal as a living entity with spiritual agency, capable of mediating cosmic realms and engaging in reciprocal interactions with humans. This aligns powerfully with Marder's Plant Humanities, which recognizes plants' dynamic agency and challenges their reduction to passive objects (Marder, 2013, p. 16). Similarly, Hall's "plants as persons" framework finds resonance in the Peepal's treatment as a morally significant entity, deserving reverence and ethical consideration (Hall, 2011, p. 19). The Vedic texts provide a foundational context, reinforcing the Puranic narratives' emphasis on the tree's sacred and agentic roles. These findings highlight the Hindu tradition's implicit understanding of plant sentience, where the Peepal is not merely a symbol but a living participant in spiritual and ecological systems. The tree's deification, cosmic symbolism, and ritual engagement reflect a worldview that integrates plants into the fabric of existence, offering a counterpoint to modern ecological crises driven by anthropocentric exploitation. The Puranic narratives, enriched by Vedic precedents, provide empirical examples of a plant-human nexus that prefigures contemporary calls for ecological ethics and sustainable coexistence.

At a time when the Anthropocene threatens to annihilate entire ecosystems, including trees, the Hindu portrayal of the *Ficus religiosa* offers profound insights for global environmental thought. The ongoing deforestation and climate crises, as depicted in Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018), underscore the devastating consequences of viewing trees as mere resources. Powers' narrative, where characters like Patricia Westerford advocate for trees' communicative and communal capacities (Powers, 2018, p. 132), echoes the Puranic recognition of the Peepal's agency and sentience. The novel's portrayal of trees as interconnected beings with intrinsic value parallels the *Ashvattha*'s role as a cosmic connector, suggesting that traditional knowledge systems can inform modern ecological activism. The Puranic view of the Peepal as a cosmic nexus challenges the Anthropocene's utilitarian mindset, which Powers critiques through the destruction of ancient forests (Powers, 2018, p. 285). By integrating Marder's and Hall's frameworks, this study underscores the relevance of Hindu traditions in fostering holistic perspectives that recognize plants' agency and moral standing. These insights advocate for a global ecological ethic that respects trees as vital partners in sustaining ecosystems, countering the Anthropocene's trajectory of environmental collapse. The Peepal's model of human-plant symbiosis encourages

policies and practices that prioritize conservation, reforestation, and ethical engagement with the vegetal world, aligning with global calls for sustainability as articulated in interdisciplinary environmental humanities (Ryan, 2018, p. 91). This study thus positions Hindu traditions as a valuable resource for reimagining human-nature relationships on a global scale, offering hope for mitigating the ecological crises of our time.

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