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From *Mantras* to the Mind: Rigvedic Insights into Modern Theories of the Psyche

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Abstract:

Rigveda, composed between 1500–1200 BCE (Jamison & Brereton, 2014), offers proto-psychological insights that remain underexplored in modern psychology. This paper proposes a comparative framework aligning Rigvedic psychological prototypes and doctrines with contemporary models, including Freud's tripartite theory. The study introduces the Vedic Archetype Psyche (VAP) Model, derived from Rigvedic archetypes: *Rudra*, *Mitra*, and *Deva* - as a therapeutic schema translated into modern psychological language. *Mantras* are examined as early psychological technologies aiding attention, regulation and emotional balance. While parallels are interpretive and proposed as conceptual, this integrative approach highlights the therapeutic potential of Vedic wisdom for psychotherapy and mental health.

Keywords: *Rigveda*, Psychological techniques, *Treya-Śarīra*, *Mantras*, Comparative psychology, Therapeutic applications, Integrative psychotherapy, VAP model, CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

1. INTRODUCTION

Rigveda, composed between 1500–1200 BCE (Jamison & Brereton, 2014), is among the earliest documents exploring human consciousness and behavior. Its hymns reflect a profound curiosity about mind, emotion, and self-regulation. In contrast to western psychology's emphasis on pathology and conflict (Freud, 1923/1961), the Rigvedic tradition stresses harmony, self-realization, and cosmic integration. Indian Knowledge System provides rich symbolic and practical psychological knowledge often absent in mainstream discourse. This manuscript aims to construct a comparative framework uniting Indian Knowledge System and

modern psychological insights, highlighting the foundational place of Rigvedic hymns, doctrines, and mantras in early psychology.

2. FOUNDATIONS OF THE PSYCHE IN THE *RIGVEDA*

Rigveda is more than a collection of ritual hymns; it offers a profound early exploration of human consciousness and personality. Its verses reveal nuanced reflections on inner experience, cognition, and emotional processes, presenting a foundational framework for understanding the human psyche within an ancient cultural-linguistic context.

2.1 Psychological Agency and Selfhood

Rigvedic hymns emphasize the importance of self-awareness and inner agency. The recurring use of the term *Aham* (self or “I”) in the *Devi Sūkta* encapsulates the recognition of a dynamic inner self capable of enacting multiple psychological roles - *Rudra* (instinctual), *Mitra* (mediatory), and *Deva* (aspirational) energies (*Rigveda* 10.125.1) (Griffith, 1896/2003). This depth of self-reference reflects an early proto-concept of selfhood, autonomy, and psychological empowerment.

2.2 Triarchic Composition of the Human Being

The doctrine of *Treya-Śarīra* (three bodies) articulated in later Vedic and Upanishadic literature and rooted in Rigvedic thought, describes the human being as composed of:

- *Sthūla-Śarīra* (Physical Body): The tangible, material component interacting with the external world.
- *Sūkṣma-Śarīra* (Subtle Body): Encompassing mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), and ego-identity (*ahaṁkāra*), this is the psychological substratum underlying cognition, emotion, and decision-making.
- *Kāraṇa-Śarīra* (Causal Body): The fundamental causal principle, often identified with *avidyā* (ignorance) in *Advaita Vedānta* rather than the *Ātman* itself, representing the root of individual existence and latent tendencies (*Śaṅkāra*, *Tattvabodha*, trans. Tejomayananda, 2003).

This layered view anticipates modern distinctions between the physical body, mind/intellect, and the deeper Self, supporting a holistic understanding of personality and consciousness.

2.3 Psychological Processes in Hymnic Symbolism

Several Rigvedic hymns elucidate psychological phenomena through symbolic language:

- Emotion and Desire: The *Nasadiya Sūkta* (Rigveda 10.129) references *kāma* (desire) as the primal impulse arising within the mind, anticipatory of psychoanalytic recognition of primal drives (Griffith, 1896/2003).
- Reflection and Awareness: The sage's contemplation upon desire symbolizes the emergent capacity for metacognitive awareness and self-regulation.
- Moral and Ethical Orientation: *Deva* archetypes represent higher ideals and moral conscience, underpinning the ethical dimension of personality development.

Thus, the *Rigveda* encodes both the inner experiences of instinct, reason, and aspiration, and outlines processes for their harmonization.

3. VEDIC ARCHETYPE PSYCHE (VAP) MODEL: THERAPEUTIC FRAMEWORK

A Vedic Archetype Psyche (VAP) Model can be developed by synthesizing insights from Rigvedic hymns. This model can be used to create the core therapeutic intervention campaigns for preventive mental health initiatives and for substance abuse prevention initiatives.

The relevant sections of the Rigvedic hymns that I have used to develop the VAP Model are as follows:

Devi Sūktam (Rigveda 10.125.1):

अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चराम्यहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः ।
अहं मित्रावरुणोभा बिभर्म्यहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनोभा ॥
aham rudrebhir vasubhiś carāmy aham ādityair uta viśvadevaih |
aham mitrāvaruṇobhā bibharmy aham indrāgnī aham aśvinobhā ||

Translation:

“I proceed with the *Rudras*, with the *Vasus*, with the *Ādityas*, and with the *Viśvedevās*; I support both *Mitra* and *Varuṇa*, *Agni* and *Indra*, and the two *Aśvins*”

The use of *Aham* (meaning I or myself) by the Rigvedic sages in *Devi Sūktam* is not mere self-reference or self-praise. When the sage declares “I”, it symbolically expresses multiple facets of personality. Although the hymn invokes many deities, for the VAP model, I have collectively included *Vasus*, *Ādityas*, *Viśvedevās*, *Varuṇa*, *Agni*, *Indra* and the two *Aśvins*, under the *Deva* category. In the VAP model, *Rudra*, *Mitra*, and *Deva* denote the following psychological interpretations - *Rudra* represents instinctual and transformative drives, *Mitra* represents rational mediation and relational harmony, and *Deva* represents aspirational and ethical ideals.

Nasadiya Sūktam (Rigveda 10.129.4):

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत्।
सुतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन् हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो मनीषा॥
kāmas tad agre sam avartatādhi manaso retaḥ prathamam yad āsīt |
sato bandhum asati nir avindan hṛdi pratīṣyā kavayo manīṣā ||

Translation:

“In the beginning, desire descended upon it. That was the primal seed, born of the mind. The sages, in their contemplative inquiry, discerned the subtle relational bond between the manifest (*sat*) and the unmanifest (*asat*).”

It presents a clinically relevant psychological framework rooted in indigenous archetypes.

Puruṣa Sūktam (Rigveda 10.90)

सहस्रशिरः पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात।
स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वात्यतिष्ठदशङ्गुलम्॥
sahasraśīrṣā puruṣaḥ sahasrākṣaḥ sahasrapāt |
sa bhūmiṁ viśvato vṛtvāty atiṣṭhad daśāṅgulam ||

Translation:

“*Puruṣa*, who has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, investing the earth in all directions, exceeds (it by a space) measuring ten fingers.”

It describes the cosmic being, *Puruṣa*, whose sacrifice generates all creation. Psychologically, it can be read as an early Model of the collective personality, where individual traits and social roles emerge from a unified consciousness.

3.1 Archetypal Energies in the Psyche

The VAP Model identifies three Vedic archetypes as foundational psychological energies shaping perception, emotion, and behavior.

- *Rudra*: Embodies turbulence, desire, and transformative energy; corresponds with instinctual drives and emotional intensity.
- *Mitra*: Reflects empathy, relational balance, and emotional connectedness; facilitates prosocial behavior and inner harmony.
- *Deva*: Symbolizes illumination, discernment, and higher awareness; linked to reflective insight and ethical consciousness.

These archetypes operate dynamically, influencing movement toward psychological harmony (*Sattva*) or imbalance (*Rajas–Tamas*) (Jamison & Brereton, 2014).

3.2 Therapeutic Goals and Applications

The VAP Model can be applied in clinical and counselling settings to develop therapeutic frameworks and methodologies aimed at achieving the following psychological objectives:

- Self-reflective exercises to identify dominant archetypal tendencies (*Rudra*, *Mitric*, or *Devic*).
- Empathy and relational skills development to cultivate the *Mitra* aspect.
- Breath-synchronized *japa* and guided meditation practices fostering *Deva* awareness.
- Creative redirection techniques transforming *Rudra* energy into adaptive motivation.

While inspired by Vedic texts and practice, these applications represent interpretive expansions aligned with contemporary psycho-therapeutic methods and warrant empirical exploration (Brown & Gerbarg, 2005).

4. CORRELATING RIGVEDIC CONSTRUCTS WITH MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

Ancient Rigvedic thought contains rich psychological symbolism that resonates strikingly with concepts found in modern psychology, even though the two arose from very different cultural and historical contexts. This section explores these parallels, underscoring both the convergences and the interpretive boundaries.

4.1 *Rudra*, *Mitra* and *Deva* as Psychological Archetypes

Rigveda personifies fundamental psychological tendencies through the deities *Rudra*, *Mitra*, and *Deva*. These archetypes symbolize diverse interior forces.

- *Rudra* represents the primal, instinctual drives and transformative energy underlying human behavior. It parallels the modern concept of the Id, which Freud (1923/1961) characterized as the repository of unconscious impulses and desires.
- *Mitra* symbolizes rational mediation, balance, and social harmony, akin to the Ego in psychoanalysis, which manages impulses by negotiating with reality.
- *Deva* stands for ethical ideals, higher consciousness, and aspirational morality, comparable to the Superego, the locus of conscience and societal norms.

While these analogies are not explicitly articulated in Rigvedic texts, they offer a speculative interpretive Model for understanding how ancient sages conceptualized psychological complexity (Jamison & Brereton, 2014).

4.2 The *Treya-Śarīra* Doctrine and Layers of Mind

The *Treya-Śarīra* (three bodies) doctrine describes human existence as comprising:

- *Sthūla-Śarīra* (Gross/Physical Body): The physical organism interacting with the external environment.
- *Sūkṣma-Śarīra* (Subtle Body): Encompassing *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), and *ahaṁkāra* (ego or self-identification), this layer corresponds closely to cognitive and emotional processes central to modern psychological functioning.
- *Kāraṇa-Śarīra* (Causal Body): The deep causal source, often identified in *Advaita Vedānta* as *avidyā* (ignorance) rather than the true *ātman*, representing latent dispositions and fundamental consciousness (*Śaṅkāra*, Tattvabodha, trans. Tejomayananda, 2003).

This layered framework anticipates current distinctions in psychology among physical, mental, and self-reflective aspects of experience, offering a holistic integration.

4.3 *Tri-Guna* Theory and Personality Traits

The *Tri-Guna* concept outlines three fundamental qualities shaping personality and behavior:

- *Sattva*: Clarity, harmony, and stability.
- *Rajas*: Activity, passion, and restlessness.
- *Tamas*: Inertia, ignorance, and lethargy.

These *gunas* condition temperament and emotional disposition in ways comparable to contemporary personality traits models such as the Big Five or temperament frameworks (Schmitt et al., 2007). Understanding this dynamic interplay offers valuable insight into motivation, behavior regulation, and psychological balance.

4.4 *Ātman* and the Concept of Self

The *ātman*, or innermost essence, aligns with Jung's notion of the Self - the archetype of wholeness and true identity (Jung, 1966). It represents the unchanging core of consciousness and ethical alignment, forming the psychological anchor for self-realization and spiritual transcendence. The Vedic focus on *ātman* informs modern understandings of identity formation and existential meaning.

4.5 Summary of Correlations Between Rigvedic Constructs and Modern Psychology

- *Rudra* represents primal drives, instincts, and transformative energy. Comparable to Freud's Id as the source of unconscious impulses and passions. (Speculative analogy based on thematic resonance.)
- *Mitra* symbolizes rationality, balance, and mediation between impulses and ideals. Corresponds to Freud's Ego, the rational component that negotiates reality and controls impulses.
- *Deva* embodies moral ideals, higher consciousness, and ethical aspirations. Analogous to Freud's Superego, representing conscience and social norms.
- *Treya-Śarīra* (Three Bodies) describes human existence as physical (*Sthūla*), subtle mind-intellect-ego (*Sūkṣma*), and causal essence (*Kāraṇa*). Parallels modern concepts of body–mind–self layers.
- *Tri-Guna* (*Sattva*, *Rajas*, *Tamas*) explains behavioral temperament and motivation as qualities of clarity, activity, and inertia. Related to personality theory dimensions like temperament and traits.
- *Ātman*, the innermost Self, representing pure consciousness and true identity. Comparable to Jung's Self archetype, the source of wholeness and individuation.

These correlations highlight conceptual continuities suggesting that *Rigveda* holds profound, if symbolic, psychological wisdom that anticipates modern ideas. Yet, these parallels remain interpretive and hypothesis-generating, and should not be conflated with direct scientific equivalence (Shamasundar, C. 2008).

5. MANTRAS AS PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOLS

Mantras are not just religious chants; they are powerful vibrational tools that influence both the mind and body. When practiced regularly, chanting mantras can:

- **Reduce Stress and Anxiety:** Scientific studies have shown that chanting *mantras* like "Om" or the *Gayatri Mantra* activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and calmness. It lowers stress hormones like cortisol and reduces anxiety (Padam, 2017; Streeter et al., 2012).

- **Improve Focus and Concentration:** The rhythmic repetition of sounds helps calm the mind and enhances mental clarity, supporting better attention span and cognitive control (Voss, S. et al. 2022).
- **Support Emotional Regulation:** Listening to or chanting *mantras* releases happiness hormones such as endorphins and relaxes brain regions associated with anxiety and fear, helping manage emotional upheavals (Hitkari, R. 2025. India Today).
- **Balance the Nervous System:** Vibration from *mantras* stimulates the vagus nerve, stabilizing heart rate and blood pressure, creating a sense of balance and well-being (Voss, S. et al. 2022).
- **Generate Brain Waves:** *Mantras* influence brain activity by increasing alpha and theta waves-states linked with relaxation, introspection, and mental clarity (Travis & Shear, 2010).
- **Create a Sense of Inner Peace:** Regular practice helps clear energetic and mental blockages, leading to improved emotional resilience, better sleep, and overall mental health (Pawar, 2025; Voss, S. et al. 2022).

Mantras act as internal tools for calming the nervous system, reducing stress hormones, improving focus, and fostering emotional balance, all of which contribute to better mental health and resilience. They are a simple yet potent form of mind-body therapy rooted in ancient wisdom and increasingly supported by modern science.

6. DISCUSSION

The VAP Model exemplifies how ancient Vedic archetypes can be reinterpreted into integrative psychological tools, bridging eastern wisdom and western science. While the *Rudra, Mitra, Deva*, to Id-Ego-Superego analogy serves as a speculative heuristic, it enables culturally sensitive dialogue and novel therapeutic approaches. *Mantra* practices, such as those involving the *Gayatri Mantra*, share similarities with CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and mindfulness-based therapies (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Brown & Gerbarg, 2005) for stress reduction and cognitive regulation. Nonetheless, rigorous empirical validation of the VAP framework remains a meaningful direction for future research.

7. CONCLUSION

Rigveda's psychological insights embodied in archetypes, layered self-theories, and *mantra* technologies offer a valuable foundation for developing integrative psychotherapies. The Vedic

Archetype Psyche (VAP) Model translates this heritage into practical tools for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and holistic well-being, underscoring the relevance of ancient texts in contemporary mental health domains. While many of the conceptual correlations and therapeutic applications presented remain interpretive and warrant empirical validation, this work opens promising avenues for culturally sensitive, holistic approaches to mental health.

The author is exploring the potential application of this framework through the “MANSA Ek Sankalp” initiative - a structured, community-focused program designed to prevent substance abuse by empowering families, particularly mothers, to foster resilience, emotional literacy, and supportive environments for youth. Integrating insights from Rigvedic archetypes with preventive interventions, the program exemplifies how ancient psychological principles can inform modern community-based mental health strategies.

Future research exploring the mechanisms, efficacy, and clinical integration of *mantra* practices, archetypal frameworks, and family-centered interventions like “MANSA Ek Sankalp” can enrich both psychological theory and practice. By bridging ancient Vedic wisdom with modern psychological science and community-based preventive programs, this study contributes to a more inclusive, integrative understanding of the mind and healing, expanding the horizons of psychotherapy beyond conventional paradigms.

Brief Profile of the Author:

Bindu Joshi, a Psychotherapist, Social Worker, and Author-Researcher, bridges Indian Knowledge Systems with contemporary psychological science. Her research interests include consciousness studies, cross-cultural psychology, and integrative mental-health models. She is among the early researchers to academically document Misophonia, and her first study on the condition laid foundational insights into its cognitive-emotional impact. She also proposed the Vedic Archetype Psyche (VAP) Model, an interpretive psychological framework rooted in Vedic archetypes such as Deva, Rudra, and Mitra.

Bindu Joshi is the founder of “MANSA Ek Sankalp”, a community-based preventive mental-health initiative promoting emotional literacy, emotional immunity, and substance-abuse prevention among youth and families in rural and semi-urban India. With more than a decade of field experience, she specializes in community psychology and adolescent behavior interventions. Recently, she published “Whispers of Pain, Echoes of Hope” (2025), a book on trauma, resilience, nurturing and healing narrated through clinical and humanistic perspectives.

Statements and Declaration:

I hereby declare that this manuscript is my original work and does not infringe upon any rights of third parties. All sources have been duly acknowledged and cited. This work has not been previously published in whole or in part. I declare that I have no conflict of interest with my place of employment or with any other individual or organisation related to the publication of this article. No financial support was received for the work presented in this article. This study did not require ethical approval, as it is a theoretical and conceptual research paper synthesising classical Vedic texts with contemporary psychological frameworks.

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