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## The Radiant Dawn and The Eternal Mother: Depictions of Usha and Aditi in The Rig Veda

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the significant roles of Aditi and Usha as depicted in the Rig Veda, providing a comprehensive analysis of their mentions across the ten Mandalas. Aditi, frequently described as the eternal mother and the embodiment of the cosmos, is invoked over 100 times, emphasizing her role as the mother of gods and a source of protection, prosperity, and guidance. Her association with nature, light, and creation underscores her importance in Vedic hymns. Usha, the goddess of dawn, is revered for dispelling darkness and heralding the arrival of light. With nearly thirty verses dedicated to her, Usha's portrayal as the bringer of wealth, inspiration, and protection highlights her vital role in the daily lives of Vedic people. This study delves into specific verses and Suktas, illustrating the diverse attributes and functions of these goddesses. By examining the significance of Aditi and Usha, this research offers insights into the Vedic worldview and the enduring legacy of these divine feminine figures in ancient Indian society. Through an in-depth examination of ten Mandalas, numerous Suktas and verses, the paper aims to contribute to the understanding of Vedic religion and the pivotal role of goddesses in these sacred texts.

**Keywords:** Aditi, Mandals, Legacy, Suktas, Sacred texts, Usha, Vedic hymns etc.

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### Introduction

Aditi and Usha, though distinct in their domains, are central matriach figures in Vedic hymns, each embodying essential aspects of the cosmos and human experience. Aditi, frequently

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invoked as the eternal mother, is mentioned over 100 times in the Rig Veda. She is depicted as the daughter of Daksha and the wife of Rishi Kashyapa, and her extensive presence in the text underscores her profound importance. Aditi is often likened to Mother Earth and is considered the infinite and indivisible essence of the cosmos. As the mother of the Adityas and other divine entities, she embodies creation, protection, and sustenance. Her role extends beyond the physical realm, representing the boundless and nurturing aspects of nature and divinity.

Usha, on the other hand, is celebrated as the goddess of dawn. Her presence in the Rig Veda, with nearly thirty verses dedicated to her, highlights her significance as the harbinger of light and dispeller of darkness. Usha's depiction as the radiant morning light and the daughter of heaven is rich with symbolism. She is invoked to ward off malevolent forces and to bring prosperity, inspiration, and protection. Usha's arrival signifies the transition from night to day, metaphorically representing the triumph of knowledge over ignorance and the renewal of life and vitality.

## Research Methodology

This research adopts a comprehensive methodology to interpret selected hymns from the Rig Veda by engaging directly with the primary Sanskrit text and analyzing various translations. Initially, hymns are strategically chosen based on their cultural significance, thematic relevance, and representation across different Mandalas. The primary source analysis involves a detailed linguistic study of Vedic Sanskrit. Comparative analysis includes translations by scholars such as Max Müller, Ralph T.H. Griffith, and contemporary translators like Stephanie W. Jamison, examining literal versus interpretative approaches, contextual influences, and potential biases. Hymns are thematically categorized and compared to highlight discrepancies and convergences between the original text and its translations, supplemented by Vedic commentaries for deeper insights.

## Aditi

Aditi, mother of the Adityas<sup>1</sup>, is a prominent goddess mentioned in the Rig Veda. She is the daughter of Daksha and the wife of Rishi Kashyapa. She has been mentioned more than 100 times in the Rig Veda. She is one of the few to have been mentioned in all 10 Mandalas of

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the Rig Veda. She is often compared with Mother Earth and is considered an embodiment of this infinite and vast cosmos. She is the mother of the 33 gods mentioned in the Rig Veda. The verses dedicated to Aditi in each mandala are as follows: -

## Mandala I

Aditi has been mentioned several times in this book. In Sukta *I.24*, Aditi has been compared with Mother Earth, on which we live, prosper, and interact with others. In verse *I.43.02*, Aditi is compared to a mother who looks after the well-being of her children and takes care of them. *I.89.03* considers Aditi the mother of light, and *I.89.10* mentions that she is the mother of gods and describes her might. It also mentions that Aditi is the eternal mother who is independent and indivisible and is also known as the Mother of Creation. She is considered the mother of five different groups of entities. They are the Gandharvas<sup>2</sup>, the Pitr<sup>3</sup>, the Gods, the Asuras<sup>4</sup>, and the Rakshasas<sup>5</sup>. Besides these instances, she has been mentioned in multiple verses, at least 20 in number, asking her for various things in exchange for oblations. The verses such as *I.94.16*, *I.95.11*, *I.96.09*, *I.98.03*, *I.100.19*, *I.114.11*, *I.115.06*, etc. end with salutations to the Goddess Aditi. Humans pray and offer oblations to the Goddess, asking for safe sea travel, good health, wealth and prosperity, glory, success, freedom, protection, shelter, good horses, and many other things. Similarly, *I.185.03* is a verse praising Aditi for saving mortals from impending dangers.

## Mandala II

Aditi is popularly known as someone who bestows gifts upon those who pray and offer oblations. In verse *II.01.11*, Lord Agni has been compared with her. While offering oblations to Lord Agni, humans pray to him to be kind and bestow upon them gifts just like Aditi. Verse *II.27.07* mentions a prayer to Aditi and various other deities for safe transportation, while verse *II.27.14* is a prayer to Aditi, asking forgiveness for the sin that the narrator has committed and to grant them a safe night so that they can see the bright light the next day. Verse *II.28.03* is a prayer offered to the sons of Aditi, and *II.29.03* is a prayer offered to Aditi and various other deities for the well-being and happiness of the mortals. Similarly, *II.40.06* is a prayer summoning Aditi for aid and other deities for riches.

## Mandala III

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In this Mandala, Aditi has been considered the goddess of fertility and is often prayed to during Yajnas to grant children to childless couples. She has been mentioned in verse *III.04.11* to grace the earth to bear strong and noble children filled with virtues. Verse *III.54.18* mentions that Aditi, Varuna<sup>6</sup>, and Aryaman<sup>7</sup> are worshipped together to ward off childlessness and sterility and to bless the couples with noble children. In verse *III.54.20*, prayers are offered to Aditi to grant the mortals a safe shelter from the rain while they offer their gratitude to Maruts<sup>8</sup> for the pleasant rain.

## Mandala IV

The first verse that mentions Aditi in this Mandala is *IV.12.04*. This verse is dedicated to Lord Agni<sup>9</sup>, stating him as the ever-youthful God, and is asked to forgive the sins committed by the sinners. The Goddess Aditi is asked to bear witness to the purification process, where the sinners will be absolved of all their sins by Lord Agni. Verse *IV.39.03* states that if one offers prayers and oblations to Dadhikra<sup>10</sup>, they are protected from evil and harm by Aditi. The next verse, *IV.42.04*, reflects the reverence for Aditi and acknowledges her role in sustaining and guiding the universe. The next verse, *IV.54.06*, dedicated to Aditi in this Mandala mentions offering regular prayers and oblations to multiple deities, who in turn would grant them protection, blessings, and boons. The Sukta *IV.55* has three verses that mention Aditi. The first verse, *IV.55.01*, is a prayer to multiple deities for various things but is addressed to Aditi for protection. The next verse, *IV.55.03*, is a prayer offered to Aditi seeking welfare and happiness. This verse also addresses Aditi as the eternal mother of nature and seeks her protection both during the day and at night. The last verse, *IV.55.07*, is quite similar to the previous one and is a prayer to Aditi for sustenance and protection.

## Mandala V

The first instance of Aditi in this Mandala is in Sukta *V.42*. The first two verses are dedicated to Aditi, asking her to receive the prayers of humans, just like a mother receives her child and grant them blessings. Similarly, in the next Sukta, i.e., *V.46*, verses *V.46.03* and *V.46.06* are invocations to Aditi to grant blessings, sustenance, protection, and prosperity. Another instance can be found in verse *V.51.14*, where Aditi is invoked for blessings and prosperity.

## Mandala VI

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In this Mandala, Aditi is mentioned for the first time in verse *VI.50.01*, where she is referred to as the mother of nature with indestructible force. The verse seeks her blessings to bestow excellence upon humans. The last reference to Aditi in this Mandala is in Sukta *VI.51*, where verses *VI.51.03* and *VI.51.04* describe Aditi as the indestructible mother of nature who destroys evil, protects good, blesses peaceful homes, and constructs social orders in society.

## Mandala VII

In this Mandala, Aditi is mentioned in several verses. In verse *VII.02.11*, she is considered Mother Earth and is offered prayers and oblations for the blessings of joy and peace. In verse *VII.10.04*, Aditi is compared to infinite and eternal time, which never perishes. In verse *VII.39.05*, Aditi is described as nature's constancy that never ages. In verses *VII.40.02* and *VII.40.04*, Aditi is described as the imperishable, generous mother nature, to whom people pray and offer oblations to guide them, protect them, and keep them safe from the perils of this world. In verse *VII.60.01*, people surrender themselves completely to Aditi and ask for her blessings to keep them safe from any harm. Verse *VII.60.08* mentions that if Aditi grants someone a peaceful home filled with prosperity and good fortune, then the younger descendants of that home should not commit any atrocities and violate the sanctity of the divinities. Verses *VII.82.10* and *VII.83.10* are salutations offered to multiple deities, including Aditi, to grant blessings, prosperity, peace, and excellence. Finally, in verse *VII.93.07*, Aditi is described as mother nature and is prayed to get rid of negative energy and malicious snares.

## Mandala VIII

In Mandala *VIII* of the Rigveda, the first mention of Aditi is in verse *VII.12.14*. Here, she is referred to as Mother Nature and praised for singing in the name of Lord Indra to protect and safeguard the world. Another verse, *VIII.18.04*, describes Aditi as an imperishable mother nature with radiant divine force who is loved and revered by all. This verse also includes a prayer for happiness, prosperity, generosity, intelligence, and unwavering righteousness. Aditi is also invoked in verse *VIII.18.06* to preserve, protect, and promote cattle and property day and night with her intelligence, energy, and stability, and to save them from sin. In verse *VIII.18.07*, Aditi is prayed to for guidance, protection, and shielding from errors, obstacles,

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negativity, and false beliefs. Verse *VIII.25.03* mentions that Aditi gave birth to two pioneers of life, Varuna and Mitra<sup>11</sup>, who possess knowledge and authority over the world. They aim to fulfill their innate vision and power. Another prayer for Aditi's protection of humanity is in verse *VIII.25.10*. In verse *VIII.27.05*, Aditi is represented as a motherly figure. The last verse in Mandala *VIII* that concerns Aditi is *VIII.47.09*. This verse is a prayer for Aditi to save people and provide them with a restful home, peace, and happiness.

## Mandala IX

In this particular Mandala, Aditi appears the least number of times. However, Verse *IX.26.01* does mention her as being known as Mother Nature or Mother Earth. Additionally, both Verses *IX.81.05* and *IX.97.58* refer to Aditi as the mother of infinity, who is unperishable and ageless. These verses are also offered as prayers to Aditi for personal achievements and accomplishments.

## Mandala X

In this Mandala, Aditi is first mentioned in verse *X.12.08* as the imperishable mother nature. In verse *X.36.03*, a prayer is made for protection from the sins and sufferings of the world. Aditi's children, the Adityas, are mentioned in verse *X.63.17* as masters of wealth and guiding lights for people. In verse *X.64.05*, Aditi is described as the eternal mother who energizes and illuminates Mitra and Varuna at dawn, representing unity and diversity. Verse *X.64.13* is a prayer to Aditi to guide people to discover their essential nature and identity. Aditi is again described as the imperishable force of nature in verse *X.65.01*, and verse *X.65.09* is an invocation for the acquisition and practical application of knowledge. Aditi gave birth to twelve Adityas, as mentioned in verse *X.66.03*, and verse *X.66.04* is a prayer for the protection and promotion of human life from earthly perils. The last two verses, *72.04* and *72.05*, mention that Aditi is the daughter of Daksha Prajapati<sup>12</sup>.

## Usha

Usha, a Devi, is considered the Goddess of 'Dawn' and has multiple verses dedicated to her in the Rig Veda. Following Aditi, Usha stands as the second most frequently mentioned goddess in this sacred text, with nearly forty verses and hymns devoted to her magnificence. She is considered the one who dispels darkness, brings the coming of light, and is invoked to ward

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off malevolent forces and demons. Usha has also been mentioned as 'Dawn' on multiple occasions in the Rig Veda.

Sukta *I.48* portrays Usha as the radiant morning light and the daughter of heaven. She arrives with splendor, generously bestowing infinite wealth and inspiration. Her abundant light, along with the sun's rays and divine energy, breathes life into the world. People commence their daily journeys guided by Usha's divine presence, finding focus and renewed vigor.

In the Sukta *I.49*, Usha is prayed to bring creative energy through her radiant beams. She is invoked to protect and uplift those dedicated to the Divinity. Her role as the fiery messenger of light and life is highlighted, inspiring humanity and animals to ascend towards celestial realms.

The Sukta *I.92* mentions that the light of Usha in the eastern sky announces the arrival of the day. Usha's red flames rise naturally, awakening people to their daily tasks and the sun's ascent. Her dawn lights illuminate distant regions, providing essential nourishment and rejuvenating energy.

In Sukta *I.113*, the dawn emerges as supreme and enlightening, expanding as it rises. Usha follows an eternal path, bringing joy, prosperity, and blessings of abundance. Her divine powers create brilliance, generosity, and continuous rejuvenation.

The Sukta *I.123* states that the great chariot of the glorious dawn stands ready. A noble maiden, radiating health and freedom from disease, emerges from darkness. The generous dawn carries gifts of health, wealth, and beauty, responding promptly to invocation.

The Sukta *I.124* mentions that as dawn breaks, the sun rises, spreading light across heaven and earth. Usha embodies the spirit and beauty of truth and holiness, dispelling hate and inspiring love. Her bright and blessed light rays bring happiness, wealth, and illumination to all.

In Sukta *III.61*, Usha is mentioned as the lady of light, the mighty and spirited Dawn, who overflows with intelligence and revelation. She is adorned with grandeur, accepting celebratory praise with delight. The dawn shines as the queen of splendor and generosity, guiding humanity towards excellence.

The Sukta *IV.51* states that in the east, the radiant light of dawn emerges, illuminating the earth with its glorious presence. The divine lights guide paths of daily action,

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inspiring humanity to embrace enlightenment and opportunities. Dawn's illuminating rays fill the space, blessing it with beauty, excellence, and the eternal cycle of life and creation.

This Sukta *IV.52* mentions Usha as the joyous dawn that emerges each morning, heralding the new day and spreading light. Usha commands the wealth and abundance of the world, dispelling hate, and inspiring love and admiration. Her bright and generous nature blesses the world with vitality and fertility.

The Sukta *V.79* states that the lights of dawn arise, rejuvenating and revealing the paths of life for the day. They bring eternal and infinite blessings, inspiring wealth, honor, and excellence. Dawn's radiance acts as a divine force, eliminating darkness and promoting peace and progress.

The Sukta *V.80* narrates that the saints and sages celebrate the divine dawn, adorned in crimson hues. The dawn enlightens paths, inspires nobility, and blesses with honor and excellence. It commands the wealth and power of the world, guiding humanity towards goodness and fulfillment.

The Sukta *VI.64* acknowledges that the lights of dawn arise like waves of the sea, illuminating the beauty and glory of the earth. They bear treasures of wealth and energy, benefiting all people and blessing them with a happy home and a delightful life.

In Sukta *VI.65*, it is mentioned that Usha and her divine radiations descend like celestial powers, bestowing protection, progress, and wealth. They bring jewel wealth and blessings to servants, sages, and worshippers, fostering divine awareness and knowledge.

In Sukta *VII.75*, the dawn is described as a potent force, illuminating paths, and awakening humanity to self-recognition and gratitude. It brings wealth, honor, and excellence, inspiring noble achievements and divine realizations. The dawn's radiance protects and promotes humanity, ensuring peace, prosperity, and happiness.

The Sukta *VII.76* mentions Savitr<sup>13</sup>, the leading light of the world, who emanates universal and immortal light, guiding paths and revealing celestial order. The dawn's purity and brilliance inspire divine realizations, promoting peace, progress, and well-being. Homage is offered to the dawn, blessing humanity with wealth, brilliance, and divine grace.

In Sukta *VII.77*, the dawn is expected to dispel mists and darkness, illuminate paths, and bring wealth and loveliness. It wards off negativity, bringing wealth, honor, and



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excellence while settling humanity in peace. The dawn is blessed with vitality, food, energy, and all the wealth of life, promoting progress and enlightenment.

In Sukta *VII.78*, it is mentioned that the dawn brings forth the beauty and glory of the world's wealth through its majestic chariot of light. It dispels darkness, evil, sin, and crime, illuminating paths of action and divine realizations. The dawn's radiance ensures peace, prosperity, and happiness for humanity.

The Sukta *VII.79* describes Usha as the 'lights of dawn', revealing the birth of the sun and illuminating heaven and earth. She acts as a divine force, providing light and life, eliminating darkness, and promoting peace and progress. The dawn brings rejuvenation, wealth, competence, and all modes of success for humanity.

In Sukta *VII.80*, it is mentioned that the dawn inspires the light of divinity, enlightening ignorance and displacing darkness with light. It brings vision, wealth, competence, and divine blessings, enriching life with food, energy, and prosperity. The dawn's radiance blesses humanity with peace, progress, and happiness, leading toward divine realizations.

In Sukta *VII.81*, the dawn dispels mists and darkness, illuminating paths and bringing wealth and prosperity. It brings divine blessings, courage, competence, and excellence, ensuring peace and happiness for all. The dawn's radiance blesses us with vitality, food, energy, and all the wealth of life, fostering progress and enlightenment. The dawn emerges eternally, bearing the light of divinity and illuminating the world with its radiance. It dispels darkness, ignorance, evil, and negativity, revealing paths of righteousness and divine realizations. The dawn's radiance ensures peace, prosperity, happiness, and divine grace for humanity.

The Sukta *X.172* states that the dawn arises with brilliance, dispelling darkness and ignorance, and bringing wealth and prosperity. It enlightens paths, reveals divine truths, and promotes peace, progress, and well-being. The dawn's radiance blesses with vitality, food, energy, and all the wealth of life, fostering enlightenment and divine realization.

These are the various Suktas where Usha is portrayed as a radiant force bringing light, prosperity, divine blessings to humanity and emphasizes her role as a source of inspiration, protection, and abundance, ensuring the well-being and progress of all life forms.

## Conclusion

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The interpretation of the verses of Aditi and Usha within the Rig Veda reveals their profound and multifaceted significance in Vedic culture and religious thought. Aditi, revered as the eternal mother, encapsulates the infinite and nurturing aspects of the cosmos. Her role as the mother of the Adityas and other divine beings underscores her central position in the Vedic pantheon. Through numerous verses across all ten Mandalas, Aditi is depicted as a protector, sustainer, and a source of divine blessings. Her association with nature, light, and creation highlights her integral role in the Vedic conception of the universe.

Similarly, Usha, the goddess of dawn, embodies the transition from darkness to light, symbolizing renewal, hope, and enlightenment. Her frequent invocation in nearly thirty hymns underscores her importance in daily Vedic rituals and life. Usha's depiction as the radiant morning light, driving away malevolent forces and heralding the new day, reflects her essential role in maintaining cosmic order and promoting prosperity and well-being. She stands as a powerful symbol of inspiration and vitality, essential for the sustenance of life and the progression of time.

This research has demonstrated that Aditi and Usha are not merely mythological figures but are deeply embedded in the spiritual and cultural ethos of Vedic society. Their attributes and the prayers offered to them reflect the values, norms, fears, and aspirations of the ancient Vedic people. The detailed analysis of their mentions in the Rig Veda highlights the theological understanding of the Vedic Goddesses.

In conclusion, the divine feminine represented by Aditi and Usha plays a pivotal role in the Rig Veda, offering insights into the Vedic worldview that emphasized balance, protection, and the cyclical nature of existence. The enduring legacy of these goddesses in the spiritual heritage of India underscores the timeless relevance of their attributes and the universal themes they embody. This study contributes to a deeper appreciation of Vedic religion and the integral role of divine feminine figures in its sacred narratives, enriching our understanding of ancient Indian culture and spirituality.

## Notes & References

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<sup>1</sup> Dalal, Roshen, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*, Penguin Books, 2010. Adityas are the off-springs of Aditi and Sage Kashyapa. They are total twelve in number according to Rig Veda.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Gandharvas are a group of celestial beings who perform for the Devas, the male Gandharvas are usually musicians and singers while the female Gandharvas are dancers.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Pitrs are ancient spirits who have departed this mortal world. They are treated and worshipped as our ancestors in the Rig Veda.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Asuras are a group of superhuman beings with virtues and vices in them. The virtuous ones are led by Lord Indra and the malevolent ones are led by Vritra. This was the case during Early Vedic period, the Devas and Demons both fell under the category of Asuras. But in the Later Vedic period the virtuous ones were identified as 'Devas' and the malevolent ones were known as 'Danavas'.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Rakshasas are supernatural flesh eating malevolent beings who usually disrupt Yajnas.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Varuna is a Rig Vedic deity associated with sky, water and ocean. He is also a member of the Adityas.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Aryaman is a Rig Vedic deity associated with rules, norms and customs. Ancient Vedic marriages were solemnized with an invocation to Aryaman to bear witness to the marriage.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Maruts are a group of young storm deities who carry sharp weapons and accompany Lord Indra.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Agni is the God of Fire, who is summoned during Yajnas. He is one of the most prominent deities after Lord Indra in the Rig Veda.

<sup>10</sup> Brereton & Jamison, *The Rigveda: A Guide*, Oxford University Press, 2020. p.60. A king mentioned in Rig Veda who achieved divinity.

<sup>11</sup> Dalal, Roshen, *Hinduism: An Alphabetical Guide*, Penguin Books, 2010. Mitra is a Rig Vedic deity associated with the protection of treaties, law and order of society and friendship. He is also a member of the Adityas. In the Rig Veda he is mostly invoked along with Varuna.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Daksha is a divine king who is also considered as a 'Prajapati'. In Vedic scriptures 'Prajapatis' are the beings associated with creation of life and matter. Daksha is also the father of Aditi. Just like Daksha, Lord Brahma is also a 'Prajapati'.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Savitr, just like Lord Surya, is also a Sun God.