

Cosmic Insights: Yog Vasistha's Astronomical Aspects through Modern Science

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Abstract: The Yog Vasistha, an ancient Hindu philosophical text, presents a cosmology that aligns with modern scientific perspectives in intriguing ways. This text posits that the universe is a creation of the mind, akin to a dream, suggesting a non-dualistic view of reality where consciousness is fundamental. Modern science, particularly quantum physics and cognitive science, also explores the role of consciousness in shaping reality, echoing the Yog Vasistha's ideas on the mind's creative power. The Yog Vasistha describes the universe as a vast, interconnected system, with celestial bodies moving in harmony, which parallels modern astronomical observations of planetary motion and the structure of the cosmos. Additionally, ancient Vedic science, as interpreted by Maharishi, discusses the emergence of diversity from a unified field, similar to modern unified field theories in physics. This abstract highlights the convergence of ancient Vedic philosophy with modern scientific understanding, offering a unique perspective on the nature of the universe and consciousness.

Keywords: Yog Vasistha, Cosmology, Consciousness, Vedic Science, Modern Physics.

1. Introduction: Echoes of the Cosmos in Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science-

The Yog Vasistha, a revered Sanskrit scripture estimated to have evolved between the 6th and 14th centuries CE, stands as a monumental work in Indian philosophy. Attributed to Maharishi Valmiki, the sage also credited with authoring the Ramayana, this extensive text presents a profound dialogue between Sage Vasistha and Prince Rama, delving into the nature of reality, the causes of human suffering, and the path to liberation. While its primary focus lies in expounding the principles of Advaita Vedanta, emphasizing the non-dual nature of existence (Brahman) and the illusory nature of the perceived world (Maya), the Yog Vasistha also incorporates cosmological elements within its rich tapestry of stories and philosophical discourses.

Across millennia, humanity has gazed at the cosmos with wonder, seeking to understand its mysteries. From the earliest civilizations, celestial observations have inspired myths, guided navigation, and shaped philosophical frameworks for understanding our place in the universe. Ancient traditions often intertwined their comprehension of the cosmos with spiritual beliefs, using the heavens as a canvas upon which to project their understanding of creation, existence, and the divine. Examining the Yog Vasistha's cosmology provides a unique opportunity to explore a non-Western perspective on these fundamental questions, contrasting it with the predominantly material and mechanistic views prevalent in modern scientific cosmology.

Dikkālakalanākāśaparakāśaniyatikramāḥ

Yatre pratibimbanti parām pariṇatim gatāḥ -(1/18/13) Yog Vasistha

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We analyse the astronomical aspects of the Yog Vasistha through the lens of contemporary astronomy and astrophysics. By identifying verses and stories that contain descriptions of celestial bodies, cosmic phenomena, or the structure of the universe, and by interpreting their meaning within the text's philosophical framework, this study will compare these ancient insights with current scientific understanding. Furthermore, it will explore existing scholarly interpretations that attempt to bridge these two distinct perspectives and investigate potential new insights that modern science might offer into the metaphorical or symbolic meanings embedded within the Yog Vasistha's astronomical allusions. This interdisciplinary approach, drawing from Indology, philosophy, and astrophysics, seeks to provide a comprehensive and insightful exploration of the enduring human quest to understand the cosmos.

2. Unveiling the Celestial Tapestry: Astronomical Descriptions in the Yog Vasistha-

Identifying explicit "astronomical" verses within the Yog Vasistha presents a unique challenge due to the text's primary mode of instruction, which relies heavily on allegories, parables, and philosophical dialogues rather than direct scientific exposition. The intention behind descriptions that allude to celestial bodies, cosmic events, or the universe's structure is often symbolic or metaphorical, serving to elucidate deeper philosophical truths about reality, consciousness, and the path to liberation. Therefore, a nuanced approach is necessary, considering symbolic and metaphorical allusions alongside any literal descriptions that may be present.

Asti kvacicchidākāśe kvacitsamsāramaṇḍapaḥ

Ākāśakācadalavatsamsthānācchāditākṛtiḥ || -(1/18/30) Yog Vasistha

Several key stories within the Yog Vasistha are known to contain cosmological elements, offering glimpses into the text's understanding of the universe. The story of Lila, for instance, recounts the queen's consciousness traversing different realities, providing insights into the concept of multiple universes. The tale of the sons of Indu explores the creation of parallel universes through mental concentration. King Lavana's experience of living an entire lifetime within a few hours under a magician's spell illustrates the relativity of time and the mind's power to create realities. The narrative of the sage from outer space hints at the existence of diverse life forms on other celestial bodies. These narratives serve as vehicles for exploring the nature of reality, time, and space from perspectives that transcend ordinary human experience.

The Yog Vasistha is a vast scripture, comprising approximately 29,000 verses organized into six books or Prakaranas. These sections, namely Dispassion, Behavior of a Seeker, Creation, Existence, Dissolution, and Liberation, chart a spiritual journey from disillusionment with the world to the attainment of ultimate freedom. The books on Creation (Utpatti Prakarana) and Existence (Sthiti Prakarana) are particularly relevant to discerning the text's cosmology, while the final book on Liberation (Nirvana Prakarana) also contains stories and discourses that touch upon the nature of the ultimate reality and the cosmos. The structure of the Yog Vasistha suggests that its cosmological descriptions are integral to a broader spiritual path, with understanding the nature of the universe contributing to the seeker's journey towards liberation.

A central tenet of the Yog Vasistha is the illusory nature of the perceived world (Maya), which is seen as a mental projection superimposed upon the sole reality of Brahman, the infinite consciousness. Our attachment to this illusion and our sense of separate identity are

identified as the primary causes of suffering. Liberation (Moksha) is achieved through self-knowledge, realizing our fundamental oneness with Brahman and transcending the mind's deceptive projections. Within this philosophical framework, any astronomical references in the Yog Vasistha must be interpreted, where the cosmos itself might be considered a grand illusion manifested by consciousness.

The Yog Vasistha mentions various celestial bodies, often with symbolic undertones. The Sun is described as a source of light and heat, associated with the Moon's rays and used as a measure of time and distance. Notably, the text recounts an instance of multiple suns appearing in all directions during a cosmic event, suggesting extraordinary transformations. The Moon is depicted as cool, linked with nectar, and its orbit is acknowledged, also serving as a marker of time and distance. Stars are portrayed metaphorically as the restless eyes of the universe or as hairs on the cosmic person's body, highlighting their vast number and perhaps their role in the grand cosmic illusion. They are also seen by a dying individual, indicating a shift in perception, and are part of the starry heaven beyond the Sun. Planets are referenced alongside stars, described as colliding during cosmic destruction, and a revolving stellar sphere is also mentioned, indicating an awareness of celestial motion. The firmament is described as the feet of the Lord, ablaze with light, and undergoing transformations during cosmic dissolution, sometimes appearing to fall into waters or even as a red cloth, suggesting symbolic representations of cosmic stages. Realms like Goloka, beyond the pole star and the abodes of sages and gods, hint at higher spiritual dimensions, while Brahmanda, the Cosmic Egg, is described as radiant and once devoid of deities, its breaking symbolizing cosmic dissolution.

Jīvabījaṃ paraṃ brahma sarvatra khamiva sthitam

Tena jīvodarajagatyapi jīvo'styanekadhā -(2/19/1) Yog Vasistha

The Yog Vasistha also elaborates on various cosmic phenomena. Cosmic Dissolution (Pralaya) is depicted as the resolution of creation back into the infinite being, likened to a cosmic night that precedes a new epoch. The text mentions signs that herald this dissolution. Time is portrayed as a powerful, merciless force governing creation, and also as a dancer with nature's law (niyati), bestowing the consequences of actions upon all beings. The text notes that different universes operate on different time scales, emphasizing the relativity of temporal experience. Space is described as an empty, inert void where consciousness manifests, with distinctions made between psychological space, physical space, and the infinite space of consciousness, with the latter being the most subtle. Unusual celestial events, such as multiple suns rising, hot moonlight and cool sunlight in some universes, and stars falling from their orbits, are mentioned, often within the context of cosmic transformations or the mind's illusory perception.

The Yog Vasistha presents a model of the universe where countless universes exist within the infinite consciousness, akin to dust motes in a sunbeam or waves in the ocean. The universe is also sometimes described as being enclosed within cosmic layers or skullcaps with space in between, suggesting a structured yet perhaps illusory boundary. Cosmic geography is mentioned, including Mount Meru as the axis of the Earth, Lokaloka mountain at the edge of a particular cosmic region, and various continents (dvipas) like Jambudvipa surrounded by metaphorical oceans representing different states or qualities.

3. The Philosophical Universe of Yog Vasistha: Contextualizing Cosmic References-

The philosophical underpinnings of the Yog Vasistha are crucial for interpreting its astronomical references. The text aligns closely with the Advaita Vedanta school of thought, which posits the non-dual nature of reality. In this view, Brahman, the ultimate, all-pervading consciousness, is the sole reality, while the perceived universe, with its myriad forms and constant changes, is considered an illusion (Maya). This illusion is superimposed upon Brahman due to ignorance, and understanding the nature of Maya is essential to comprehending the text's cosmology, as the astronomical descriptions themselves might be part of this grand illusion rather than reflections of an objective cosmic reality.

Kecid vicitra-sargeśāḥ kecit tiryāṅ-mayāntarāḥ
Kecid ekārṇavā pūrṇā itare janivarjitāḥ
Kecid chilāṅga-niṣpiṇḍāḥ kecit kṛmimayāntarāḥ
Kecid devamayā eva kecin naramayāntarāḥ
Kecin nityāndhakārāḍhyās tathā ślīta-jantavaḥ
Kecin nityaprakāśāḍhyās tathā ślīta-jantavaḥ
Kecin maśaka-sampūrṇā udumbaraphala-śriyaḥ
Nityaṅ śūnyāntarāḥ kecid chūnya-spandātma-jantavaḥ
 -(1/30/26-29) Yog Vasistha

The Yog Vasistha asserts that consciousness, referred to as Chidakasha, is the fundamental reality, the very source and substratum of all existence. The universe, with its celestial bodies and cosmic phenomena, arises within this infinite consciousness, much like images in a mirror or dreams within the mind.⁷ Therefore, celestial bodies and cosmic events are not independent entities existing outside of consciousness but rather manifestations within this all-encompassing and unified field.

According to the Yog Vasistha, the individual mind is not separate from this cosmic mind. The universe, in essence, is a projection of the cosmic mind, and our individual experiences, including our perception of the cosmos, are akin to dreams within this larger cosmic dream. The power of the mind to create and shape our perceived reality is a recurring and significant theme throughout the text. Consequently, astronomical references within the Yog Vasistha might be understood as reflections of the cosmic mind's power to manifest diverse and seemingly real cosmic structures and events.

Yathā Vindhyavanābhoge praspuranti karaṇevaḥ
Tathā tasmin parābhoge brahmāṇḍa-trasareṇavaḥ
Tasmin sarvaṅ tataḥ sarvaṅ tat sarvaṅ sarvataś ca yat
Tacca sarvamayo nityaṅ tathā tadarūkaṅ prati
 -(1/30/15-16) Yog Vasistha

Time and space, as understood in the Yog Vasistha, are not considered independent, objective realities but rather concepts or constructs created by the mind. Our experience of time is highly subjective and can vary significantly depending on our state of consciousness. Vast cosmic epochs, spanning unimaginable durations, can be experienced as mere moments within the mind's perception. Similarly, space is also regarded as a mental

construct, with infinite possibilities and dimensions existing within the realm of consciousness. Therefore, any references to cosmic time scales or distances within the Yog Vasistha should be interpreted as relative and dependent on the observer's mind and consciousness, rather than as literal or absolute measurements of an external, objective reality.

The ultimate aim of the Yog Vasistha is liberation (Moksha) from the cycle of birth and death (Samsara). This liberation is achieved through the realization of the true nature of reality as non-dual consciousness and a deep understanding of the illusory nature of the perceived world, which includes the cosmos. By transcending the mind's inherent delusions and attachments to this illusion, the seeker attains lasting peace and ultimate bliss. Thus, the cosmological descriptions found within the Yog Vasistha ultimately serve this higher spiritual purpose, guiding the individual towards the profound realization of the non-dual self and the fundamental unreality of the cosmos as an independent entity.

4. A Universe of Galaxies and Gravity: Modern Astronomy and Astrophysics: -

1. The concept of a structured universe with interconnected components, where smaller units aggregate to form larger ones, bears a superficial resemblance to some aspects of the Yog Vasistha's descriptions of cosmic geography and multiple realms, although the underlying principles and scale differ vastly.

**Dūrād dūram abhiplutya śanair uccaiḥ padaṁ gate
Hastaṁ haste samālambya yāntyau dadṛśatur nabhaḥ
Ekārṇavam ivocchūnaṁ gambhīraṁ nirmalāntaram
Komalaṁ komalam arud-āsaṅga-sukhabhogadam
Āhlādakamalaṁ saumyaṁ sūnyatāmbho-nimajjanāt
Atyantaśuddhaṁ gambhīraṁ prasannaṁ api sajjanāt ||**

-(1/24/1-3) Yog Vasistha

2. These immense scales of space and time, established through scientific observation and measurement, provide a significant contrast to the potentially mind-dependent and cyclical nature of the cosmos as described in the Yog Vasistha.

**Bhūtauga-mahāśaila-mṛṇālānkura-koṭṣu
Dikṣu babhramatuḥ svairam bhramaryau sarasīsviva**

-(1/24/7) Yog Vasistha

3. While the Yog Vasistha mentions these celestial bodies, the modern scientific understanding is based on detailed physical observations using telescopes and spacecraft, as well as sophisticated theories of stellar and planetary formation and evolution.

**Dhārāgṛha-dhiyā dhīra-gaṅgā-nirjhara-dhāriṇi
Bhrematur vāta-vikṣubdha-megha-maṇḍala-maṇḍape**

-(1/24/8) Yog Vasistha

4. The Yog Vasistha describes the Sun as a source of light and heat, a notion that aligns with modern science. However, the Yog Vasistha often imbues the Sun with symbolic qualities, such as representing knowledge or being an eye of a cosmic being, which are not part of the scientific understanding of a star undergoing nuclear fusion. Similarly, the Moon is associated with coolness and nectar, contrasting with the scientifically

understood airless, rocky satellite reflecting sunlight. Stars in the Yog Vasistha are sometimes seen as eyes or hairs of the universe, metaphorical representations far removed from the modern understanding of massive, luminous plasma spheres.

Tato madhuragāminyau viśrāmyantyaḥ svaśaktiḥ

Śūnye dadṛṣatur vyoma-mahārambhāti-mantharam

-(1/24/9) Yog Vasistha

5. The Yog Vasistha's realms like Goloka and Brahmanda, representing higher spiritual dimensions or the cosmic egg of creation, do not directly correspond to the modern scientific understanding of planets, galaxies, or the large-scale structure of the universe. These realms appear to be more aligned with philosophical or metaphysical concepts rather than physical locations in the cosmos as understood by astronomy.

Adṛṣṭapūrvam anyonyam sarva-saṅkaṭa-koṭaram

Apūryamāṇam āśūnyam jagat-koṭi-śatair api

-(1/24/10) Yog Vasistha

6. The Yog Vasistha presents a cyclical view of creation and dissolution, with the universe repeatedly emerging from and returning to the infinite being. This contrasts sharply with the Big Bang theory in modern cosmology, which describes a universe originating from a singular event and evolving linearly over approximately 13.8 billion years. While some interpretations of Hindu cosmology include cyclical time, the specific mechanisms and the scientific evidence supporting the Big Bang (like the cosmic microwave background radiation) are not part of the Yog Vasistha's framework.
7. The Yog Vasistha views time and space as mental constructs, subjective experiences dependent on consciousness. This perspective differs significantly from Einstein's theory of relativity, which posits the relativity of time and space based on the observer's frame of reference and the influence of gravity. While both acknowledge the non-absolute nature of time and space, relativity is grounded in the physical laws governing the universe, whereas the Yog Vasistha emphasizes their dependence on consciousness.

Iti te varavarṇinyau tato brahmāṇḍa-maṇḍalāt

Nirgatya anyad anuprāpte yatra tad brāhmaṇā-aspadam

-(1/26/1) Yog Vasistha

8. Modern cosmology identifies dark matter and dark energy as the dominant components of the universe. These concepts, crucial for explaining the universe's expansion and the formation of large-scale structures, are absent in the Yog Vasistha, indicating a fundamental difference in how the universe's composition and dynamics are understood.
9. The Yog Vasistha describes multiple universes existing within the infinite consciousness. While modern physics explores multiverse theories, these theories generally propose multiple universes arising from different physical mechanisms, such as eternal inflation or quantum mechanics. The Yog Vasistha's concept of universes as mental constructs within consciousness is distinct from these physics-based models. The Yog Vasistha's cosmic geography, with features like Mount Meru and Lokaloka mountain, while perhaps symbolic, does not align with the modern mapping of galaxies, clusters, and the cosmic web, which is based on observational astronomy.

5. Illuminating Ancient Metaphors: Modern Scientific Insights into Yog Vasistha's Astronomical References

1. Modern scientific findings, particularly in the realms of quantum physics and cosmology, can offer intriguing new perspectives on the metaphorical or symbolic meanings embedded within the Yog Vasistha's astronomical references.
2. The concept of the holographic universe, explored in modern physics, posits that our three-dimensional reality might be encoded on a two-dimensional boundary. This idea bears a potential resonance with the Yog Vasistha's assertion that the universe is a manifestation of consciousness, an appearance that might not be fundamentally real in the way we perceive it. The holographic principle offers a contemporary lens through which to understand the ancient text's view of reality as an intricate and perhaps ultimately illusory projection.
3. Quantum entanglement, a phenomenon in quantum physics where two particles become linked in such a way that they share the same fate regardless of the distance separating them, along with the concept of non-locality, might provide a modern analogy for the Yog Vasistha's description of the interconnectedness of all things through consciousness. The "spooky action at a distance" inherent in entanglement could be seen as a parallel to the Yog Vasistha's idea of a pervasive consciousness that underlies and connects all aspects of existence, transcending the limitations of space and time as we conventionally understand them.
4. The concept of quantum foam in quantum mechanics describes the fabric of spacetime at the smallest scales as being filled with virtual particles constantly appearing and disappearing. This dynamic and insubstantial nature of the quantum vacuum could be interpreted as a modern metaphor for the Yog Vasistha's descriptions of the universe as being ultimately unreal or having a fleeting appearance, constantly changing yet grounded in a deeper, unchanging reality.
5. Einstein's theory of relativity revolutionized our understanding of time and space, demonstrating their subjective nature, dependent on the observer's frame of reference. This aligns with the Yog Vasistha's similar assertions about the mind-dependent nature of time and space, although the frameworks for these ideas differ significantly (physics based on empirical observation versus philosophy based on introspective wisdom). The modern scientific understanding of the relativity of time and space can offer a contemporary perspective on the ancient text's claims about their non-absolute nature.

Conclusion: Towards a Holistic Understanding of Cosmic Insights

In comparing the astronomical descriptions found within the Yog Vasistha with the understanding provided by modern astronomy and astrophysics, significant differences emerge, primarily stemming from their distinct foundational frameworks. The Yog Vasistha's cosmology is deeply embedded within its Advaita Vedanta philosophy, emphasizing the illusory nature of the material world and the primacy of consciousness. Its references to celestial bodies, cosmic phenomena, and the universe's structure often serve symbolic and metaphorical purposes, illustrating philosophical principles about reality, time, and space as mental constructs.

In contrast, modern astronomy offers a physics-based understanding of the cosmos, relying on observation, experimentation, and mathematical models. It describes a vast,

expanding universe with a hierarchical structure of galaxies, evolving celestial bodies governed by fundamental forces, originating from the Big Bang and influenced by phenomena like dark matter and dark energy.

While direct scientific concordance between the two perspectives is unlikely, exploring the metaphorical and symbolic connections can be valuable. Modern scientific concepts, particularly in quantum physics and cosmology, might provide new lenses through which to interpret the Yog Vasistha's astronomical references, highlighting potential resonances in the understanding of reality's nature at a fundamental level.

Further interdisciplinary research is encouraged, fostering a dialogue between Indology, philosophy of science, and astrophysics. This could involve a deeper textual analysis of the Yog Vasistha to identify all astronomical references, coupled with a more thorough exploration of scholarly interpretations that attempt to bridge these ancient and modern worldviews. Ultimately, both the Yog Vasistha and modern science reflect humanity's enduring quest to comprehend the cosmos and our place within its vast expanse, albeit through different paths of inquiry and understanding.

Concept	Yogvasistha Description/Meaning	Modern Astronomy/Astrophysics Understanding	Potential Correlations/Differences
Origin of the Universe	Cyclical, arising from and dissolving back into infinite consciousness (Brahman)	Big Bang theory: singular origin about 13.8 billion years ago, followed by expansion and cooling	Cyclical vs. linear progression; consciousness-based vs. physics-based origin
Nature of Reality	Illusory (Maya), mind-dependent; Brahman is the sole reality	Governed by physical laws, observable and measurable universe	Consciousness as fundamental vs. matter and energy as fundamental; illusory vs. objective reality
Time	Mental construct, subjective, relative to consciousness; cosmic epochs can be moments	Relative based on observer's frame and gravity (Relativity); absolute flow in quantum mechanics	Subjective vs. relative based on physical laws; different treatment in quantum mechanics
Space	Mental construct, infinite within consciousness; psychological,	Three spatial dimensions, expanding	Mind-dependent vs. physically defined and dynamic; different

	physical, and cosmic spaces	universe; spacetime in relativity	dimensionality concepts
Celestial Bodies (Sun/Moon)	Symbolic; Sun as light/knowledge, Moon as coolness/nectar; also used for timekeeping	Physical objects undergoing nuclear fusion (Sun) or reflecting sunlight (Moon); detailed physical properties	Superficial correlations (e.g., Sun as light source); fundamentally different nature and origin
Multiple Universes	Countless universes exist within infinite consciousness	Multiverse theories exist but propose different physical mechanisms for their origin	Concept of multiple universes present in both, but with different underlying principles (consciousness vs. physics)
Dark Matter/Dark Energy	Absent	Dominant components of the universe, influencing expansion and structure	Fundamental difference in understanding the universe's composition and dynamics

While modern science and the Yog Vasistha operate within distinct frameworks, exploring these metaphorical connections can enrich our understanding of both traditions, highlighting potential parallels in their exploration of the fundamental nature of reality at different levels of analysis.

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