



**SYMBOLISM AND PLANT BASED MEDICINAL  
SOURCES IN NAVEEN PATNAIK'S –“THE GARDEN  
OF LIFE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HEALING  
PLANTS OF INDIA”**

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**Abstract**

Naveen Patnaik is an articulated writer, highly successful Chief Minister and his novels are known for their historical and Ayurveda themes. Naveen's 'The Garden of Life': An Introduction to the Healing plants of India' is an excellent text which has used ancient mythology and spirituality for the cure of numerous sickness and diseases. The present paper is an attempt to look into the source of texts for the various references that Patnaik incorporates, in order to analyze the broad range of epistemological discourses that form the basic of his introductory study. The attempt is to trace a genealogy for these references which range from Charaka's treatise on medicine, the Upanishad, the Mahabharata, Literary works to modern 20<sup>th</sup> century research in medicine.

**Keywords:** English Writing, Naveen Patnaik, Ayurveda, Mythology

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### Objectives:

- To analyze the symbolism and plant based medicinal sources in Naveen Patnaik's 'The Garden of Life'
- To explore the importance and beneficial resources of medicinal plants in Indian Literature.
- To assess the significance and need of Ayurveda medicine in contemporary world.

### 1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on the medicinal sources from Ayurveda with symbolism and plant based medicinal sources which are the key concepts in Naveen Patnaik's 'The Garden of Life'. Literature can never be dissociated with mythology and spirituality. It encompasses several myths that have figurative overtones and are open to re-conceptualizations which are found in some of the best and most prolific works of the West have featured myths. The Indian literature tradition have been immensely enriched with contributions from mythology and spirituality. These two features can be termed as the foundation of Indian literature. Myths can be harkened back to the earliest centuries. Indian English writing has also embraced it and Naveen Patnaik's body of work bears testimony to it. His works are rife with the mythification of the past relics. Uninhibited spiritualism is manifest in his works.

Since time immemorial, India's prominent savants found out the Ayurveda or Knowledge of Life, the most important objectives of which was the mitigation and easing of human pain. For medication and remedies, they were dependent on the natural atmosphere around them, to the herbs and shrubs exerted by forest ethnic group ever since the beginning of history. In that way 'The Garden of Life' magnificently demonstrates and has

emerged as a practical handbook to the usage of plants in a variety of applications that include holy, medicinal, cooking, aesthetic and aromatic. The narrative of Patnaik would provide the readers perception in to just astuteness of the world articulates itself through holy and medicinal plants. In a period when western medication is desperately looking outside the laboratory to very old natural techniques of medicine and treatment. The Garden of Life is an extremely appropriate book: helpful, instructive and enlightening. (Patnaik.n.d). The importance and origin of medicines have been emphasized in Indian literatures and Vedas.

Many English writings in India are based on mythology, pantheism. The celebrated author Naveen Patnaik's writings are enriched with appreciation of nature and are full of references from mythology. His book *The Garden of Life, An Introduction to the healing plants of India* contains information concerning the healing properties of various plants native to India. The author candidly writes, '...they did not separate the external world from man's inner world, nor did they isolate man's spiritual anguish from his other sufferings.' [Patnaik, Naveen; *The Garden of Life*, 1993, pg 1]. Here itself, we can see the narrative of nature in the writing of Naveen Patnaik. Then the author goes out in describing the people who founded Ayurveda based on legend. He writes, 'But who were these men? The legend goes that at some time between the second and third millennium before the birth of Christ a conference was held in a Himalayan cave, attended only by the greatest sages of India. Walking thousand miles to reach their remote destination, India's most enlightened scholars, ascetics and teachers were drawn by the monumental purpose of the gathering. Their goal was nothing less than the alleviation of human suffering.' [Patnaik, Naveen; *The Garden of Life*, 1993, pg 1]. The writings

of Naveen Patnaik reflect the influence of nature. The author writes, ‘the logic of Ayurvedic philosophy, with its insistence on maintaining nature’s equilibrium, continues by observing that if a man’s spiritual health is dependent on his ability to live in harmony with the external universe, his mental health must depend on his ability to live with harmony with himself.’ [Patnaik, Naveen; The Garden of Life, 1993, pg 2] . It must be mentioned here that, the prevalence of Indian legends, myths and religious texts in the writings of Naveen Patnaik has been immense. In his own words, Naveen Patnaik says, ‘India’s oldest known body of wisdom lies in the hymns of the Rig-Veda [Patnaik, Naveen; Garden of Life, 1993, pg 6]. A deeper look into the writing of Naveen Patnaik reveals his continuous reference to ancient Indian texts and the presence of ‘Divine Creator’. The author Naveen Patnaik mentions, ‘Indians believe that the knowledge of medicinal plants is older than history itself. Gifted hundreds of thousands of years ago to the original inhabitants of India by Brahma, the Divine Creator.’ [Patnaik, Naveen; The Garden of Life, 1993, pg 10]. Nature has been a prime ingredient in the discussion on pantheism. This feature is also clearly visible in the writing of Naveen Patnaik. He elaborates ‘Archaeological evidence shows the earliest inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent held plants in great reverence. But nature worship among primitive peoples is not unusual. What makes the Indian reverence for plants unique is its unbroken continuity from prehistory to the present day, when plants have long since ceased to be the major source of human food, clothing, and shelter.’ [Patnaik, Naveen; The Garden of Life, 1993, pg 16]. Naveen further elaborates further about the reverence for nature in the following words, ‘As early as 3000BC the pre-historic worship of the actual plants was already turning into a reverence for nature as a source of

medicine. Seals found in India’s earliest cities of the Indus Valley Civilization show plants were regarded less as body in themselves than as the home of divine spirit with powers beneficial to mankind.’ [Patnaik, Naveen; The Garden of Life, 1993, pg 16]

Naveen Patnaik’s ‘The Garden of Life’ is all about Ayurveda and the way he deals with the book exhibits how his clarity and depth of his immense knowledge on Ayurveda. It is startling to recognize that by the beginning of the first century A.D. the concept and the field Ayurveda science had already established and was divided into eight specialized schools of medication. Even before the origin of European or Western medicine Ayurveda had well researched knowledge on different fields. Such as Psychotherapy, Gynecology, ENT, Surgical treatment, Virility and Fertility treatment. A short and emotive piece on the writer’s connection with the artistry directs the reader into the existing custom of Ayurveda in some families which have been entered of the dictates of chance. Thus the novel exhibits the stability and strength of healing plants of India. (Nath.1993)

Medicinal plants are beneficial for healing a large numbers of human diseases and have a significant role in therapeutic process due to existence of phyto chemical components. India is a vast country known for having medicinal plants for Ayurveda treatment and offered a primary benefit to the native people for poring over diverse plant genus for the purpose of provisions, medication, fragrances and spices. The biological and unique medicinal plants are largely employed for healing a number of syndromes and income generation. Ayurveda and various literature have emphasized the usage of plants and shrubs in medication of several human ailments. Medicinal plants are vital source to content with the serious syndromes in across the world. The existence of various phyto chemical components in plant parts

corroborates their ability as medicinal and therapeutic plants. (Gangola,2017)

It is a recognized truth that traditional methods of medicines always contribute to addressing the worldwide healthcare requirements. The system of medications that are considered to be Indian in sources or the techniques of medicine that have been enriched with contributions from outer side and blended in Indian customs are recognized as Indian structure of medicine. (Prasad,2002)

Most of the conventional technique of India such as Ayurveda has their ancestry in folk medication what differentiates Ayurveda from other method. It has a well defined intangible structure that is a reliable throughout the eras. In intangible base it was may be extremely developed and far along of its time. (Rabishankar and Shukla,2017)

India has one of the wealthy ethno botanical cultures across the world. The experience of medicinal plants and their healing values that are presented in folk medicinal practices has facilitated to intensify traditional Indian medicinal systems. This huge folk comprehension was held in admiration by the authors of traditional Indian medicinal structures is obvious from many couplets taking place in the traditional texts. There are a lot of journals and books on the medicinal plants of India. Naveen Patnaik's 'The Garden of Life' is one such example that delivers a lot about medicinal plants of India. Besides, Charaka Samhita –the first well known Ayurvedic article –information regarding plants has been registered in depth in all categories of traditional Ayurvedic texts. Some of the other most important categories of traditional Indian medicinal texts are: Treaties, Compendium and Critical commentaries. (Laganathan,1999)

Medicinal plants have been recognized as valuable resources for the management and healing of a number of

diseases. Many report and reviews have also pointed out the benefits of medicinal plants in the healing progression, for instance accessibility and tolerable risk/benefit proportion. Several research papers have earlier reported the usage of therapeutic plants for the healing of a number of disorders, in which they have specified that the medicinal plants are acted as forerunners for the progression of medications and have the satisfactory pharmacological resources. Complementary and unconventional drugs have the usage of medicinal plants and other nutritional supplements that are considered as options to conventional western medical behavior. A number of medicinal plants have been identified for the healing and control of various diseases. (Selvaraj and Periyasamy, 2016)

The Indian culture is unique. It is deeply rooted in worshipping of nature. Nature manifest itself in various forms in the daily lives of people. The worshipping of flora adds zests, vibrancy and colour to Indian life and civilization. Since the earliest phase of human civilization on the bank of river Sindhu, nature worship has been an inseparable part of the human lives. The worship of tree has also been a part of Indian cultural tradition. It can be observed that, tree have been made part of religious discourses. It is a well known fact that India has a strong sense of spiritual foundation. In present India, still, it can be seen that offerings are made at the base of the trees. From this, It is apparent that plants are still worshipped in India.

- Holy Basil: Holy Basil or Tulasi has been part of Indian mythology and Tulasi is highly revered tree in India. All most every household aspires to keep a Tulasi sapling. It stands for unity, piety and virtue. The root of the plant stands for religious pilgrimage known for its divinity and scriptures. In India, people give more importance to Holy-Basil and hence provide offerings such as rice, flowers and

lamps. (The Garden of Life, 24). In Odisha, Tulasi Chaunra [Plant pedestal in the courtyard of house where in Tulasi sapling is planted] is an essential feature. After taking bath members of household pour water to the Tulasi Chaunra everyday and bow before it. It is pertinent to mention here that, every evening the women members of household light the earthen lamp before the Tulasi plant. The Yogi also put on beads of Tulasi to purify soul, body and mind. After that females pray to the holy basil for husband's long life. Married women worship it for domestic peace and prosperity which are the spiritual aspect of Holy Basil.

- Sacred Fig: Sacred Fig is another tree with spiritual honors. This tree is treated as a tree of life in Indian mythology. The constant whispers of sacred Fig leaves are compared to the hum of one of the oldest musical instrument Veena or Lute (The Garden of Life, 37). Simultaneously, the tree turns out to be the symbol of life and illumination. Also, this tree is closely associated with the enlightenment of Lord Buddha. The following lines state the spiritual aspects of the tree. This tree associated with the both the origin and the symbiosis of life that is thought to induce illumination and countless Indian legends tell of sages meditating in its shade. The greatest of them came to be known as Enlightened one or the Buddha and his tree the Bodhi or Tree of enlightenment. Buddhist often depict the Buddha in the shape of this tree which has become the Buddhist symbol of consciousness (The Garden of Life, 37). Married women worship the Peepal tree on Savitree Amabashya.
- Lotus: Lotus is a beautiful plant and flower from India that is attributed to divinity. According to Hindu mythology, Lotus is considered as the goddess, a symbol of enlightenment. The texts says that as per human philosophy, Lotus stands for the soul and has certain beliefs like having the potential occult energy that lies coiled in a

man like a sleeping serpent can be awakened through yogic, disciplines and meditation. (The Garden of Life,23). This tree is life giving and life preserving as it enhances human survival.

- Jamun: Jamun is the tree associated with cosmic 'The Mahabharata'. In other words, the Jamun tree is a cosmic tree standing for the whole universe. Moreover, this tree stands for immortality and hence invoked amid Indian rituals. The following lines clearly state the spiritual concerns of the Jamun tree: 'When the ripen fruit of this gigantic tree burst, its juice fell in waterfalls, making river which becomes the boundaries of land known as Jambu-Dvipa or the continent of Jamun trees, populated by epic heroes who gained immortality by drinking the juice. (The Garden of Life,39)
- Bel: The description provided by author Naveen Patnaik in his book 'The Garden of Life' on another revered tree Bel is certainly praiseworthy. Bel leaves are offered to lord Shiva. The twig containing tree and five leaves are specially procured by the devotees to offer at the temples of lord Shiva. The trifoliate leaves symbolize the tree eyes of lord Shiva. The leaves of Bel are used to heal constipation along with its fruit. A concoction prepared with Bel fruit along with jiggery, coconut is known as 'panaa' is offered to everyone on the occasion of Visuba Sankranti which happens to be the Odia new year.
- Banyan: In India a tree whose property it is to plant itself. It spreads out might arms to the earth, where in the shape of a single year the arms take root and put forth anew. (Pliny A.D.70,.....The Garden of Life,). The tree was examined for its medicinal value over the century and discovered that an infusion of Banyan seeds did indeed make a tonic sufficiently invigorating to be widely regarded as an aphrodisiac while the banyan latex applied externally accelerated the healing of wounds and open sores. Ayurvedic doctors also noted that medicines derived from the banyan

assisted in blood clotting, contained major antiseptic and astringent properties and an infusion from banyan barb alleviated diabetes.

Pliny said, of planting itself, should have been revered by the earliest philosopher- sages of India? Or that they should have enjoined mankind to contemplate the banyan secret sacredness ? He,

The Powerful  
and the Holy  
holds straight this tree  
in unsupported space.

Its rays,  
whose roots  
are high above,  
stream downward.

Deep  
may they sink  
within us,  
and be

Hidden      Invocation from the Rig-Veda  
( circa 2500B.C.)

**Turmeric:** The Indian way of life attaches significance to the healthy life. Indian cosmetics pay a great attention to preserving the skin's suppleness. The root of the Turmeric plant is known to be antiseptic and aromatic. Turmeric is an important ingredient in an Ayurvedic prescription for infections. It's hindi name is Haldee. Haldee happens to be the most important ingredient in both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes in India. It has got medicinal value and quick healing properties also. There is a festival dedicated to the first born child in Odisha. Prathamastami is a traditional festival celebrated in the Indian state of Odisha, primarily by the women of the household. It is observed on the eight day after Kartik Purnima, which falls in the month of November or December. The festival is mainly celebrated to mark the first-born child's transition into childhood. It is believed that on this day, Lord Shiva and Parvati blessed their first-born child,

Kartikeya. Therefore, parents offer prayers seeking the blessings of the deities for the well-being of their children.

On Prathamastami, the child is dressed up in new clothes and offered a special feast. The festival is also significant for girls who have younger brothers. They perform special rituals and offer prayers for their brothers' well-being and long life. In many households, a family member draws the child's first letters, numbers or auspicious symbols on the floor with rice paste, signifying the start of a new learning journey.

This festival is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm in Odisha. Families come together, and children receive blessings and gifts from their elders. It is a celebration of family bonds and the love between siblings. A special dish is prepared known as 'Enduree Pitha' on that day. It is boiled pancake prepared with rice powder stuffed with sweet elements and most importantly wrapped with Haldee leafs. This is a superb example of mingling of religious ideas, celebration of life and healthy cuisine. The other notable tradition attached to Haldee has been marriage festival. Before the marriage, both groom and bride groom get immersed with Haldee over their entire body as a healthy tradition of disinfecting them before marriage and safe life after marriage .The close relationship between nature and cultural activities can be seen in various festivals.

- **Amla:** The other tree which is worshipped is Emblic Myrobalan or Amla. There is a specific socio-cultural-religious significance attached to Amla tree. This tree is worshipped on Amla Navamee. The Day which is considered to be one of the most auspicious day. Married women put bangles on the branches of Amla tree and invoke blessings for a long and happy life.

Credit goes to author Naveen Patnaik as he captures the patterns of worship of flora infolklore also. Naveen Patnaik as a celebrated author who has

keenly observed that both culture and worship of nature and specially flora are intrinsically related to each other. Their intrinsic relationship has enriched the Indian cultural fabric since time immemorial. The book ‘The Garden of Life’ is enriched with saga of culture heritage of India.

Naveen Patnaik’s writing has also highlighted the softer aspect of humanity. He has highlighted the ultimate aim of Ayurveda to make individuals free from diseases and sufferings. He writes “..... because the originators of the Ayurveda saw every illness and every form of health as part of an interlocking whole, a man’s mental condition was seen as having both a physical and social impact.... The Ayurvedic doctor tries to make his patient understand that in order to avoid suffering; the patient must control his self destructive instincts. He further elaborates that the benefits humanity has been incurring from the collective wisdom of Indian society over the years. In the words of the author ‘The sages of Ayurveda were aware of the medicinal plants known and used by the so-called aboriginals Indian tribes who had inhabited India’s forests from the beginning of history. Humanity and nature are two themes which has been highlighted in the writing of Naveen Patnaik. In ‘The Garden of Life’ he elaborately discusses the close relationship existing between nature and humanity. He specially mentions about the ancient medicine science based on bounty of nature. This book was articulated on social development, art and culture. As the present generation has been deviating from the culture. The author attempts to identify to close connection with the nature which can bring us back to wholeness once again to the world of the life.(Deepak Chopra MD, author of Quantum Healing and Ageless body, Timeless Mind.(The Garden of Life,1)

## 2. Conclusions

The present paper is an attempt to understand the various aspects of literature of the book ‘The Garden of Life’. It presents a usual survey of the medicinal and herbal plants, fruits, herbs and essence prevalent in India to produce balm out of it for the ill. The novel gives a brief and precise description of all the especially illuminating plants. In the modern age whole people are in a competitive world that runs behind the west, the novel The Garden of Life highlights the natural methods of healing; Ayurveda. The main aim of Ayurveda is the salvation or alleviation of human suffering, as Ayurveda is treated as the knowledge of life. Thus, the novel is useful, informative and enlightening. This novel provides the readers perspective into how to intellect of the world conveys itself through generation of medicinal plants. The narrative style of Patnaik makes the readers to know how the perspicacity of the world communicates itself through medicinal plants.

According to Patnaik, the goal or this science which calls itself the knowledge of life is rejuvenation. Not the pursuit of the lost youth, but the maintaining of the man in his prime whatever his age, both his mental and in his physical capacity, because only then can a human being aspire to the greatest human goals-the consciousness of his connection with the principle or life, the awareness or Brahman. (The Garden of Life,4)

Thus, by analyzing the work of Naveen Patnaik “The Garden of Life” medicinal sources, symbolism and plant based medicinal sources marks its strong presence in the literary arena. And the author Naveen Patnaik’s creative writing ‘The Garden of Life’ is certainly a classic on Indian mythology, culture and symbolism gives indication to the natural responses of nature given to human being.

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