



## ECOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE AVESTA: A LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

Urakova Nargiza Salomovna

(Head of the Department of Social and Humanitarian Sciences,  
International Innovative University,

Candidate of Philosophy)

nargiza69urakova@gmail.com

Tel: (91)322-26-66

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**Abstract.** The Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism, represents one of the earliest systematic articulations of humanity's relationship with the natural world. The article investigates Avestan texts through their ecological components, which demonstrate that the ancient Iranian corpus encompasses a complete proto-ecological framework that defines four sacred elements — earth, water, fire, and air — as objects of veneration that must be kept safe from contamination. The article shows that Avestan ecological thought establishes modern environmental ethics through its primary Avestan sources and current scholarly analyses, which reveal a cosmological system that treats environmental destruction as both physical damage and spiritual violation.

**Keywords:** Avesta, Zoroastrianism, ecological ethics, sacred elements, environmental philosophy, Ahura Mazda, Asha, pollution, nature protection.

**Аннотация.** «Авеста», священное писание зороастризма, является одним из наиболее ранних систематических выражений отношения человечества к миру природы. В статье исследуются авестийские тексты с точки зрения их экологического содержания; показано, что древнеиранский корпус включает целостную протоэкологическую концепцию, определяющую четыре священных элемента — землю, воду, огонь и воздух — как объекты поклонения, которые необходимо оберегать от загрязнения. На основе анализа первоисточников и современных научных интерпретаций в статье обосновывается, что авестийская экологическая мысль предвосхищает современную экологическую этику, предлагая космологическую систему, в которой разрушение природной среды трактуется одновременно как материальный ущерб и как духовное преступление.

**Ключевые слова:** Авеста, зороастризм, экологическая этика, священные элементы, экологическая философия, Ахура Mazda, Аша, загрязнение, охрана природы.

**Annotatsiya.** Zardushtiylikning muqaddas kitobi bo'lmish "Avesto" insoniyatning tabiat bilan munosabatini tizimli tarzda ifodalagan eng qadimgi manbalardan biri hisoblanadi. Ushbu maqolada avesto matnlari ekologik mazmun nuqtai nazaridan o'rganiladi; qadimgi eron korpusi to'rt muqaddas unsur — yer, suv, olov va havoni ifloslanishdan muhofaza qilinishi lozim bo'lgan sajda ob'ektlari sifatida belgilaydigan yaxlit protoekologik konsepsiyani o'z ichiga olishi ko'rsatib beriladi. Birlamchi manbalar va zamonaviy ilmiy talqinlar tahlili asosida maqolada avesto ekologik tafakkuri zamonaviy atrof-muhit etikasini oldindan anglashini asoslab beriladi: ushbu kosmologik tizimda tabiatni yo'q qilish ham moddiy zarar, ham ma'naviy jinoyat sifatida talqin etiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Avesto, zardushtiylik, ekologik etika, muqaddas unsurlar, ekologik falsafa, Ahura Mazda, Asha, ifloslanish, tabiatni muhofaza qilish.

## Introduction

The question of when humanity first articulated a coherent relationship between moral order and the natural environment has long occupied scholars of religion, philosophy, and environmental humanities. Modern ecological thought traces back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but recent research shows that ancient religious and literary traditions contain early ecological awareness. The Avesta serves as a crucial text because it forms the main scripture of Zoroastrianism which developed over multiple centuries until it achieved complete textual form during the first millennium BCE. The Avestan corpus contains hymns and liturgical texts and legal codes which do not function as modern environmental treatises but they establish systematic procedures for environmental conservation through their cosmological and ethical frameworks. The central concept of Asha — often translated as truth, righteousness, or cosmic order — functions simultaneously as a moral principle governing human conduct and as a description of the natural world's intended state of harmony [1]. Asha violations include both social and interpersonal violations and all acts that result in pollution and destruction of earth and water and fire and air.

## Methodology and literature review

The researchers of this article developed their research method through comparative textual analysis and the religious ecology hermeneutics method which has developed significantly since Harvard University Press released its "Religions of the World and Ecology" series during the late 1990s. The authors examined primary sources which include the Yasna the Vendidad and the Yashts and the Videvdat because these texts represent the four principal sections of the Avestan canon which exist in academic translations and explanations [2]. Researchers examined secondary materials from Uzbek Russian and Western European sources to develop an interdisciplinary framework for interpretation. The Russian academic tradition has advanced Avestan philology and Iranian studies through its significant research contributions which include essential linguistic and cultural knowledge that Abaev and Boyce produced as their basic work [3, 4]. Scholars from Uzbek and Central Asian academic institutions have studied the Avesta through the lens of local cultural traditions because they believe that early Avestan texts were created in the ancient areas of Bactria and Sogdiana which now exist as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan [5].

Western environmental humanities scholarship has increasingly recognized the Avesta as a significant precursor to ecological ethics, with scholars such as Foltz arguing that Zoroastrian cosmology offers a genuinely ecocentric rather than merely anthropocentric vision of the natural world [6]. The Vendidad, in particular, has attracted sustained attention for its elaborate legal codes governing the treatment of soil, water, and living creatures, with detailed prohibitions on acts of pollution that, as Skjarvo notes, reflect a sophisticated understanding of the interdependence between human community and natural environment [7]. The methodology adopted here involves close reading of key Avestan passages in translation, followed by interpretive synthesis drawing on the secondary literature, with particular attention to the gap between textual prescription and philosophical implication. The Avesta contains an ecological worldview which this approach assesses through its description of human relations with nature in the text.

## Results and discussion

The primary element of Avestan ecological thought which develops its foundational environmental principles through its core cosmological story. The Avesta does not treat the protection of nature as a peripheral or instrumental concern but as a constitutive element of the struggle between Ahura Mazda the supreme deity of light and order and Angra Mainyu the destructive spirit [1]. The cosmological drama establishes pollution which occurs through corpses and refuse water contamination and soil contamination from inappropriate dead body burial and fire contamination through impure material introduction as a method to support destructive forces. The Vendidad dedicates entire chapters to specifying categories of pollution and the ritual and practical measures required to counter them which shows a legal development of what functions as a theological commitment to protect the natural environment [7]. The Avestan corpus shows special focus on water as their main element of study. The Aban Yasht hymn dedicated to the water goddess Anahita presents rivers and lakes and rain as sacred entities which people must treat with respect and safeguard [8].

The Vendidad contains its most frequently repeated command which prohibits people from polluting water sources with human waste and blood and human corpses. The ancient Iranian communities needed these sacred rituals because they created essential rules which protected public health and controlled water sources. The Avestan belief system treats earth which exists as a living entity through Spenta Armaiti who represents the earth's divine essence. The Avestan belief system treats earth which exists as a living entity through Spenta Armaiti who represents the earth's divine essence. The Avestan belief system treats earth which exists as a living entity through Spenta Armaiti who represents the earth's divine essence. Fire serves as the most apparent representation of Ahura Mazda's divine presence which exists in the physical realm. Fire serves as the most apparent representation of Ahura Mazda's divine presence which exists in the physical realm. Fire serves as the most evident representation of Ahura Mazda's divine presence which exists in the physical realm.

The rules which protect fire from becoming contaminated by waste and smoke from unclean fires and human remains present an ecological challenge. The rules which protect fire from becoming contaminated by waste and smoke from unclean fires and human remains present an ecological challenge. The rules which protect fire from becoming contaminated by waste and smoke from unclean fires and human remains present an ecological challenge. Asha creates a unifying philosophical basis which connects all assigned tasks. Asha describes a state of right order which extends through both moral and natural existence. The person who acts in accordance with Asha simultaneously upholds social justice, personal virtue, and environmental integrity. The person who acts in accordance with Asha simultaneously upholds social justice, personal virtue, and environmental integrity. The person who acts in accordance with Asha simultaneously upholds social justice, personal virtue, and environmental integrity.

The integration has philosophical importance because it challenges the traditional Western belief system that separates human existence from the natural world which has existed since Descartes. The Avesta presents an ecological perspective that differs from modern environmentalism because it exists within a dualistic cosmology and a sacrificial religious economy and social hierarchies that do not match current societal standards. Boyce demonstrates that Zoroastrian rituals function as ecological practices which protect and restore nature according to his research about Zoroastrian customs. The Zoroastrian practice



needs serious examination because it represents an authentic ecological framework which people should study instead of treating it as common religious practice.

The ecological heritage of Central Asia requires special attention because the early Avestan texts originated from specific geographical areas which included the river valleys and steppes of ancient Bactria. The Avestan ecological concern demonstrated its particular focus on water management and soil cultivation because the Avestan people lived in an arid environment which made natural resource misuse result in immediate severe consequences. The Avestan ecological prescriptions functioned as practical responses to environmental conditions which existed in their time because these prescriptions maintained their material basis which supported their philosophical importance. The Avestan ecological prescriptions functioned as practical responses to environmental conditions which existed in their time because these prescriptions maintained their material basis which supported their philosophical importance.

### Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that the Avesta contains a systematic and philosophically coherent ecological vision that cannot be reduced to incidental ritual prescription. By situating environmental protection within the cosmological struggle between order and destruction, and by providing a legal and liturgical framework for the veneration and preservation of earth, water, fire, and air, the Avestan corpus articulates a proto-ecological ethic of considerable sophistication. The concept of Asha, in particular, offers a model of integrated moral and natural order that anticipates contemporary relational approaches to environmental ethics. The Central Asian origins of much Avestan material further enrich this analysis by grounding the text's ecological concerns in the specific environmental realities of the ancient Iranian world. Future scholarship would benefit from a deeper engagement between Avestan studies and contemporary environmental humanities, both as a contribution to the intellectual history of ecological thought and as a source of cultural and philosophical resources for communities, including those in Uzbekistan and Central Asia, whose heritage is intimately connected with this ancient tradition.

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