
Churning the Ocean: A Material Ecocritical Reading

Aanchal AhujaResearch scholar, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University
Chandigarh

Article Received: 07/02/2026**Article Accepted:** 08/03/2026**Published Online:** 08/03/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.03.124

Abstract

This work reads the Samudra Manthan tale through an environmental lens, suggesting it reflects early ideas about matter's role, human-driven change, and bonds between species. Not seen as mere symbol or spiritual metaphor, the sea emerges here, a force shaping events when stirred. Using mainly the Bhagavata Purana, the argument shows churning as a story pattern where taking from nature sparks unforeseen physical results. Key to this view stands the poison halāhala, arriving before nectar does, a revealing damage tied to interference and control.

Starting differently each time, agency moves through varied elements - ocean, mountain, serpent, tortoise, poison, nectar, gods without any single force holding full power. Rather than human intention or divine decree, physical realities shape what unfolds. Because material dynamics drive events, dominance centered on humans or deities appears flawed. Reading Samudra Manthan reveals emergence shaped by tangible forces, not preordained design. Ancient narratives thus reflect awareness of harm tied to taking from nature. Through this lens, the myth holds insight about danger present when active materials are disturbed. Ecological thinking appears embedded in old stories, where uncertainty and consequence remain central. Such interpretations align with current work linking mythology and environmental concerns.

Keywords: Material Ecocriticism, Posthuman Ecology, Samudra Manthan, Environmental Extraction, Storied Matter, Nonhuman Agency.

Theoretical Framework

One reason this research needs a clear conceptual base lies in how Samudra Manthan has often been seen as mainly through symbolic lenses where nature plays only a passive role, framed around gods' actions instead of influencing events itself. What shifts here is the view of matter: it acts, moves, participates, while agency spreads across beings and things, not locked within humans or deities alone. Rather than seeing ecological involvement as something managed or owned, this work frames it as uncertain, unfolding, entangled. Drawing on material ecocriticism alongside ideas of posthumanism and shared agency, the approach lets the story emerge from physical exchanges, not from meanings handed down from above.

This research builds on material ecocriticism as its main guiding idea. Rather than seeing nature as something only represented through symbols, this approach challenges the view that physical stuff sits idle or lacks agency. On the contrary, it treats matter as dynamic, communicative, capable of shaping stories. Central to this perspective is the notion of storied matter where things like seas, rocks, chemicals, and living forms contribute to unfolding events, produce significance, impose limits via engagement. Far from being blank substance waiting for human sensemaking, matter plays a role in how meaning emerges. What matters here is participation, not passivity. Material ecocriticism rests on the idea that matter itself can act. Not just humans or gods steer events; rivers, poisons, and oceans do too. Such force appears clearly in the Samudra Manthan tale. Though devas and asuras churn the sea for immortality, something else emerges alongside it. Poison spreads, uninvited yet powerful. Their aim was gain, but destruction flows out anyway. Outcomes slip beyond control. The ocean does not obey plans. Its movements carry weight apart from any will guiding the rope. Action brings surprise. Unplanned effects take hold.

Material ecocriticism highlights the liveliness of physical stuff, yet stops short when tracing how power moves among varied beings. Because of this gap, scholars pull in ideas from posthuman thought and theories about shared agency. Far from centering humans, posthuman views stress existence as woven through connections, where effect and identity arise within webs, not isolated individuals. From such a stance comes the idea that influence spreads widely, so no one entity of that if person, god, or thing owns action completely. Outcomes take shape not through single causes but within networks where people, objects, and environments interact. Action, according to distributed agency theory, depends on context unfolding differently each time as living beings, physical structures, natural elements, and social patterns come into contact. What happens stems less from intention than from these shifting connections.

What shapes this framework begins with assemblage a fleeting gathering of active elements in motion. Not static structures, but shifting alignments define how things come together here. Relational ontology enters by dissolving rigid lines drawn between observer and observed. Instead of dominance, it proposes entanglement mutual shaping across beings. Nonhuman roles gain weight when creatures, materials, or landscapes act alongside people, not just serve them. Think of the Samudra Manthan: deities and demons pull on a serpent, mountains churn oceans, poisons emerge, nectars rise. Cooperation stumbles into force, then gives way to adjustment. Stability never settles long. Breakdowns happen often. Each attempt unravels until someone adapts. Control slips through divine fingers repeatedly. Power spreads unevenly, yet widely and agency circulates around it.

One reason these frameworks align lies in their common refusal to see nature as something to be dominated. Matter gains voice through narrative, according to material ecocriticism, shaping stories from its own presence. Posthuman thought, meanwhile, offers ways to describe how action spreads among living and nonliving things alike. When combined, such perspectives avoid reducing myths to either sacred symbols or ancient green morals. Instead, meaning emerges where actions meet responses, within tangled webs of influence and reaction.

What drives this work lies in three linked goals looking at how physical actions shape cause and effect within the Samudra Manthan tale tracking where power flows among people, gods, animals, and objects; interpreting poison not as cosmic retribution but as fallout from forced taking. Because matter plays an active role, the approach leans on careful reading that follows change over time, paying attention to order and impact. Moments when materials push back, results go astray, or damage lingers become central to meaning-making. So the myth opens up to less a clean victory, more a tangled account of living amid disruption.

Introduction

Churning the sea for endless life begins with violence. Out comes poison first, not elixir. That moment in Samudra Manthan, where deadly *halāhala* appears before *amṛta*, lingers oddly today. Especially now, amid collapsing ecosystems. What happens when taking things apart releases harm ahead of gain? Centuries before talk of pollution or drained resources, this story from Indian traditions shows craving clashing with nature's response. It is more than gods teaming up for victory. Instead, disruption leads. Resistance follows. Benefit waits. Here, physical reality steers the outcome. Matter refuses to be ignored.

Ecocriticism lately looks into ancient writings, myths, stories about creation, and sacred worldviews to find early forms of thinking about ecology. Not every idea about nature began with factories or machines some go much further back, shaped by older understandings of life, action, and matter. In Hindu tales especially, people, creatures, spirits,

landforms, and forces appear woven together across vast cosmic patterns. Still, even though green themes show up frequently there, interpreters usually treat them as symbols for inner growth or ethical codes or stress godly power above all else. Because of this habit, physical dynamics get buried beneath metaphor, while little attention goes to how plot structure, timing, and cause-effect chains might carry environmental insight.

Beginning deep in ancient texts like the Bhagavata Purana, with help from the Vishnu Purana and the Mahabharata, the tale of Samudra Manthan stands out. Instead of gods working alone, both devas and asuras join yet their cooperation is fragile - to stir the cosmic ocean, aiming for amṛta. They roll Mount Mandara into motion, harnessing it as a giant spindle, while coiling Vasuki, the serpent, around it like thick cordage pulled back and forth. Supporting everything below, Vishnu takes form as Kurma, the tortoise, holding weight without speech or fanfare. Scholars often spotlight symbolic skies, acts of faith, or power struggles hidden beneath ritual words but skip over how things actually move, break, shift, during the churn. That sea behaves unpredictably, shifting moods, refusing ease, vomiting strange beings and poisons before giving up nectar. Events do not follow clean plans made by higher wills. Instead, each new thing surfacing the deadly fumes, Lakshmi's rise, Dhanvantari stepping forward the characters to respond, stumble, adapt. What emerges matters more than what was sought.

A fresh look at older ideas in material ecocriticism opens new paths through ancient stories. Instead of seeing nature as something passive waiting to be described, this approach treats physical stuff as lively, speaking in its own way through form and motion. Posthuman thinking shifts focus away from humans as the only actors, spreading influence across networks where people, objects, and environments shape outcomes together. Even though scholars have used these concepts well when studying recent events or current crises, they rarely apply them to early myths especially those outside Europe. Because of that absence, one key story still lacks deep analysis: the churning of the ocean myth, rooted in South Asian tradition, has not been seen clearly as an account shaped by dynamic materials and shared forces. What emerges is a blind spot not in the tale itself, but in how it's interpreted.

This moment sharpens the urgency, given how extraction shapes today's ecological conditions along with its harmful fallout. Looking again at old stories using lenses that notice physical formation and environmental danger opens paths to rethink nature-related ideas outside Western dualities like balance against control. From chaos churns both plenty and ruin in the tale of Samudra Manthan, a story few carry such weight. Poison appears not as divine penalty or plot surprise rather emerges naturally when systems shift. Now matters most to stretch ecocritical study past recent writings by placing Indigenous cosmologies into worldwide debates on taking, answerability, boundaries.

This study looks at Samudra Manthan through a material-ecological lens, where physical substances help shape what happens. What role do tangible processes play in driving the story's cause-and-effect patterns? Power shifts among gods, creatures, natural forces, and raw materials and how is it shared? The rise of *halāhala* changes things Suddenly, seeking *amṛta* feels less like salvation, more like an act tangled in environmental tension. Outcomes depend not just on intent but on unpredictable interactions with matter itself.

This study places material ecocriticism alongside posthuman ideas about shared agency, weaving them through readings of Sanskrit myths. Through such pairing, fresh paths open in myth-centered environmental criticism, broader humanistic inquiry on nature, and scholarship on South Asian literature. The tale of Samudra Manthan of that of churning the ocean mirrors modern anxieties around resource grabbing, pollution burdens, and unequal environmental harm. Yet it refuses to settle neatly into moral lesson or symbolic code. Instead, old stories emerge as living records of ecological entanglement. Desire drives action; action shifts matter; matter pushes back. Narrative becomes ground where life, power, and substance meet.

Emergence of Toxicity: *Halāhala* as Unintended Material Consequence

The second major theme that emerges from the narrative is the appearance of toxicity as an unintended yet structurally inevitable outcome of extractive intervention. Across textual versions, the first substance produced by the churning is not *amṛta* but *halāhala*, a lethal poison whose fumes threaten all forms of life. This sequence is consistent and emphasized, particularly in the *Bhagavata Purana*, where the poison's emergence halts the process and shifts the narrative from productivity to crisis. The pattern is clear: material disturbance produces danger before benefit.

The descriptions of *halāhala* are vivid and materially grounded. The poison rises from the depths of the ocean as a dark, burning substance that spreads through air and water, scorching beings indiscriminately. The text notes that its fumes afflict gods, demons, animals, and the environment alike. This universality is significant. The poison does not target those responsible for the churning alone; it exceeds intention and responsibility, affecting all participants and bystanders. The data thus presents toxicity as a system-wide consequence rather than a moralized punishment.

Importantly, the emergence of *halāhala* is not framed as a divine error or a deviation from plan. There is no indication that the churning has gone “wrong.” Instead, the poison appears as a natural outcome of disturbing the ocean's depths. This suggests that toxicity is embedded within the material system itself, released through intervention rather than introduced from outside. Analytically, this aligns with the idea that extraction activates not

only desired resources but also latent harmful substances. The myth therefore anticipates a key ecological insight: risk is not accidental but inherent to extractive processes.

The narrative response to *halāhala* further reinforces this interpretation. The churning does not stop permanently. it pauses only long enough to manage the crisis. Shiva's intervention that the drinking the poison and holding it in his throat. The poison remains active, visibly marked on Shiva's body as his blue throat. This containment is provisional rather than curative. The data repeatedly emphasizes that the poison is neither neutralized nor transformed into something beneficial. It is merely displaced.

This moment introduces a critical contradiction. The myth presents containment as heroic and necessary, yet it also acknowledges its limits. Shiva's body becomes the site where ecological harm is absorbed and stored. The poison's persistence suggests that environmental damage cannot simply be undone it must be borne somewhere. This complicates celebratory readings of divine intervention by foregrounding cost and sacrifice rather than resolution. The solution to toxicity does not restore the system to its previous state it allows extraction to continue despite unresolved harm.

A further nuance lies in the temporal ordering of events. Toxicity precedes abundance. Only after the poison is managed does the ocean begin to release valuable substances. This ordering challenges linear narratives of progress in which benefits justify risks retroactively. Instead, the myth insists that harm is encountered first and addressed reactively. The promise of *amṛta* does not prevent the emergence of *halāhala*; it only motivates continued engagement with risk.

Taken together, these findings show that *halāhala* functions as a narrative articulation of environmental externality. Toxicity is not an exception to the extractive process but one of its primary expressions. The myth recognizes that forcing productivity from a complex material system generates dangerous byproducts that demand containment rather than denial. This directly addresses the second research question by demonstrating how material agency reshapes narrative direction and introduces ecological risk as a central structuring force.

Distributed Agency: Multispecies and Multi-Material Participation in the Churning

A third major finding of the analysis is the consistent distribution of agency across a heterogeneous network of actors rather than its concentration in any single divine or human-like figure. The *Samudra Manthan* unfolds through the coordinated, and often strained, participation of devas, asuras, animals, geological formations, and elemental substances. No actor alone determines the outcome of the churning, the narrative progression emerges from their interactions. This pattern holds across textual versions, though it is most

fully developed in the *Bhagavata Purana*, which lingers on moments of failure, adjustment, and dependence.

The churning itself requires a carefully assembled network. Devas and asuras supply force, but their labor is mediated through nonhuman bodies. Vasuki's serpent form functions as the rope that transmits energy, while Mount Mandara serves as the rotating axis. The ocean provides the medium of movement, resistance, and emergence. When Mandara sinks, Vishnu's Kurma incarnation becomes necessary as a stabilizing base. Each of these elements contributes a specific capacity, and the absence or failure of any one halts the process. The data therefore shows agency as relational rather than hierarchical.

This distribution becomes particularly visible in moments of breakdown. The sinking of Mount Mandara demonstrates that geological matter exerts agency by refusing to behave as expected. Vasuki's suffering further illustrates nonhuman participation that is not neutral or silent. As the churning intensifies, the serpent emits fire and venom from his mouth, affecting those holding his head and altering the rhythm of the process. These reactions are not symbolic embellishments; they materially change the conditions under which extraction occurs. The serpent's body responds to strain in ways that force adaptation by other actors.

Vishnu's role in this network is also revealing. Although often read as the controlling divine intelligence behind the churning, the narrative shows Vishnu responding to material contingencies rather than orchestrating them flawlessly. His transformation into Kurma is reactive, prompted by the mountain's instability. Later, his appearance as Mohini is similarly responsive, emerging only after conflict over the distribution of *amṛta* threatens to collapse the assemblage. These interventions suggest that even divine agency operates within constraints imposed by material processes and social tensions.

A notable nuance in the data is the unequal distribution of burden within this assemblage. Nonhuman actors, particularly Vasuki and the ocean itself, absorb disproportionate harm. Vasuki endures physical pain and exhaustion, while the ocean becomes polluted and destabilized. In contrast, the devas ultimately benefit from the process, gaining immortality. This asymmetry highlights a contradiction within distributed agency that while action is collective, cost is not evenly shared. The myth thus acknowledges interdependence without implying equity.

The temporary alliance between devas and asuras further complicates the picture. Their cooperation is necessary but fragile, sustained only by the promise of future benefit. This suggests that distributed agency does not eliminate conflict; it merely postpones it. The assemblage functions under tension, with each actor motivated by different stakes. The

eventual exclusion of the asuras from *amṛta* underscores that collective labor does not guarantee shared reward.

Overall, the data shows that agency in the *Samudra Manthan* is emergent and contingent, arising from interactions among diverse actors rather than from centralized command. This finding directly addresses the third research question by demonstrating how narrative causality is produced through multispecies and multi-material participation. The myth presents ecological action as a networked process in which control is partial, outcomes are uncertain, and responsibility is dispersed.

Abundance and Unequal Distribution: Value, Reward, and Ecological Injustice

Halāhala arises as an unintended material outcome. Before anything useful appears, the stirring brings forth halāhala, a deadly toxin; its vapors endanger every living being across retellings. Not *amṛta*, but poison comes first, this order stays fixed, underlined especially in the Bhagavata Purana, where progress stalls once toxic smoke spreads. Action leads to risk prior to reward that much becomes evident early on.

Halāhila appears in sharp detail, rooted firmly in physical form. From deep within the sea it emerges, a dense, fiery mass moving through sky and waves, searing life without preference. Fumes rise, reaching devas, asuras, creatures of land and stream, even the world itself feels their touch. What stands out is how widely it strikes. Not limited to those who stirred the ocean, the harm spills beyond blame or purpose, touching planners and passersby equally. So the story frames contamination not as justice served, but as an outcome woven into the whole process.

What stands out is how halāhila arises without implying any mistake by the gods or disruption of intent. Nothing signals that the churning process failed. Rather, the venom surfaces simply because deep layers are disturbed. Toxicity seems woven into the substance of things, uncovered when forces interfere, never imported from beyond. From an analytical view, taking materials often awakens hidden dangers alongside sought-after gains. So the story quietly reveals something modern ecologies recognize: harm lies built-in, part of pulling more than what rests on the surface.

Even so, the story's reply to halāhula strengthens this view. Though the churning slows, it never ends, just waits while danger passes. When Shiva acts by drinking the toxin, he holds it back, yet leaves it alive inside him. His throat turns blue, a sign still seen today. What was swallowed stays present. This measure holds things temporarily no more. Time after time, results show the toxin stays unchanged, not removed or turned harmless. Simply moved elsewhere.

Here lies a deep tension. Though the story frames control as vital and brave, it quietly admits such power has boundaries. Within Shiva's form, pollution finds a resting place, taken

in, held back. Because the toxin remains, harm does not vanish on its own; some being carries the weight. This shift troubles any easy praise of gods stepping in when pain and loss take center stage instead of closure. Healing from poison fails to bring back what was; it simply enables taking to go on amid lingering wounds.

Timing changes how we see cause and effect. Poison appears before anything useful shows up. Recovery begins only once the harmful substance is handled. That sequence disrupts stories where good outcomes excuse earlier dangers. Here, damage comes early response follows after. The hope of gaining something precious does not stop danger from arising. It merely keeps beings involved despite the threat.

These results, when viewed as a whole, suggest *halāhala* serves as a story-like expression of environmental cost. Far from being accidental, toxicity emerges as a core outcome of extraction itself. What happens when pressure is applied to intricate physical systems becomes clear, dangerous residues form, requiring management instead of ignoring them. By showing how matter actively influences plot movement, the tale answers the second inquiry. Ecological danger, it turns out, plays a key role in shaping the narrative's path.

Distributed Agency in the Churning Across Species and Materials

A key result from the study shows agency spread steadily among varied participants, not held by one godlike or individual presence. Through linked yet tense efforts, sometimes faltering, the churning involves gods, demons, creatures, landforms, even raw materials. Outcome rests not with any sole being, but takes shape through how these beings engage each other. Such dynamics appear repeatedly in different tellings, strongest within the *Bhagavata Purana*, where pauses highlight breakdowns, shifts, because reliance defines movement forward.

Spinning demands more than strength, it needs coordination across many parts. Though gods pull, it is creatures beyond them who channel the effort. A snake's long body stretches tight, acting like cordage between two sides. This mountain turns slowly, pivoting around its central shaft. Water fills space below, offering both pushback and possibility. Should that peak start to drop, a turtle-shaped presence rises underneath to hold things level. One by one, these parts add their own role, missing or broken, they stop everything. So the evidence points to interaction, not rank. What matters is how they connect.

When things fall apart, patterns start showing up more clearly. Mount Mandara tilting sideways shows rock itself acting unpredictably, resisting control. Pain moves through Vasuki, making clear that beings beyond humans are involved, and reactive. Fire bursts out, then poison follows, spilling from the serpent's jaws under pressure. Those gripping his head feel it first; their movements shift as a result. What happens here goes beyond mere

appearance, it alters how pulling things out actually works. When pressure builds, the snake shifts in ways that push everyone else to adjust.

What stands out is how Vishnu functions within the system. Not quite the master planner some assume, he shifts shape when pushed by unfolding events. The earth begins to sink, so he becomes Kurma beneath it. When disagreement erupts over the nectar, Mohini appears only once disorder looms. Each move follows disruption, not precedes it. Power here bends under pressure, shaped as much by chaos as by will. Even gods adapt.

What stands out in the figures is how unevenly the strain spreads across this group. Instead, nonliving forces, Vasuki especially, along with the sea - bear far more damage than others. The serpent suffers fatigue and bodily distress; meanwhile, pollution and chaos overwhelm the water. Yet the gods emerge unharmed, even rewarded, receiving eternal life by the end. This imbalance brings out a tension in shared responsibility, actions may be joint, yet burdens fall unevenly. So the idea accepts reliance on others but stops short of fairness.

A shaky partnership forms between devas and asuras, adding another layer of confusion. Though they work together, their bond holds only because both expect gains later on. Such reliance on mutual interest shows that spreading power around fails to stop clashes, it just delays them. Functioning under strain, the group moves forward while each member cares about separate outcomes. When the asuras get left out of receiving amṛta, it becomes clear: joint effort rarely means equal payoff.

Abundance and Unequal Distribution of Value Reward and Ecological Impact

What stands out next is how plenty comes into being through chaotic effort yet spreads unevenly. Once the poison is controlled, the sea gives up one treasure after another, sacred creatures, trees that grant desires, heavenly bodies, female deities, lastly the nectar of immortality. Many interpret this part as healing, even justice taking form. Still, looking deeper uncovers an ongoing imbalance, one group works together, yet rewards go mainly to a few. Evidence repeatedly points to the same conclusion: gathering happens in common, distribution does not.

Out of the churning sea rise more than was asked for. Lakshmi steps forward, then Airavata, Uchchaisravas, the Parijata tree, heavenly jewels, finally the moon each before the amṛta shows itself. Such overflow hints at a source too full to be controlled. Not one of these gifts ties directly to immortality, still they come. Taking from the depths brings forth extras, things never planned. What appears does not match the aim. So the tale quietly breaks the belief that effort yields just what we want.

Still, such plenty flows unevenly across realms. Data reveals prized beings vanish fast into strong hands. When the waters yield, one figure takes Airavata, Indra grasps her without delay. From that same surge, Lakshmi rises, Vishnu draws her close, along with the

Kaustubha jewel. Other deities also seize what matches their rank. Though creation emerges from shared depth, taking follows chains of power. The story shifts once the ocean is stirred, though both sides pulled with equal strength. Still, rewards begin slipping away from the asuras. When the nectar appears, exclusion sharpens, visible without question.

Out of nowhere, the fight for amṛta reveals how deep the imbalance runs. Once the nectar surfaces, cooperation between devas and asuras crumbles without warning. Instead of justice, it is trickery, Vishnu in disguise as Mohini, that settles things. Immortality goes to the devas; those who worked just as hard, the asuras, walk away empty-handed. Though the numbers stay neutral, the pattern points toward imbalance. Profits move into few hands while costs spread widely across communities.

What stands out is how the story keeps the asuras' role visible. Even though they churn, strain, carry loads their effort noted start to finish exclusion still follows. Not because they failed to act, but because control shapes outcome. Those above gain most, even when others do the work. Seen another way, this mirrors wider findings: privilege gathers rewards, while burdens roll downhill, spreading beyond center.

Immortality emerges, oddly enough, through poison rather than purity. Though devotion praises the gods' win, the story shows it built on trickery and banishment. What looks like plenty carries a hidden cost. Gains won from taking come hand in hand with unfairness. Harmony painted as natural suddenly appears laced with struggle. Outcomes depend less on balance than who gets left out.

This idea connects straight to the study's core concern about results and effects. Far from showing plenty as an unquestioned benefit, the Samudra Manthan frames worth in terms of deepening social gaps. Success rooted in taking tends to strengthen power imbalances already present. Here, overflowing gain brings separation rather than healing. Division emerges where one might expect renewal.

Irreversible Damage and Ongoing Imbalance Remain After Removal

What lingers after the churning completes its purpose forms the last theme. Once amṛta is obtained and shared, balance in nature fails to reappear. Unresolved traces persist, pointing to changes that stick. Halāhula stands out held in check yet still active. Its continued existence shows imbalance kept under control instead of healing. Effects from disrupting nature endure; reversal is not an option.

Shiva stands as the strongest example of this recurring theme. When he drinks the poison, disaster is avoided at once though the toxin stays fixed in his throat, altering his physical presence forever. That blue tint shows no sign of fading; instead, it settles into who he is. Evidence consistently highlights how lasting this change truly is. Removal never happens. Transformation does not occur. Destruction is absent. He keeps it suspended, rather

than releasing it. Stored within the body, this buildup acts like a physical record of environmental damage retaining traces of disruption long after removal occurs.

This idea carries clear weight in analysis. It shows, above all, that handling a crisis isn't the same as solving it. Though movement of the toxin stops, the threat remains alive. Another effect shifts environmental danger onto one particular entity. Growth across the broader network continues, simply because damage gets confined to another place. Stability emerges here not through removal, but via accumulation -placing harm into tight orbits instead of dissolving it. Echoes appear today where pollution gets boxed in, shifted away, or passed off, just out of sight.

The sea still carries marks that cannot be undone. Even as stories shift toward new treasures, nothing suggests the water ever goes back to how it was before. Into its lowest parts people have gone, reshaping what lies beneath while revealing risks once hidden. That return does not happen speaks volumes. Repairing ecosystems never enters the picture, taken as neither feasible nor required. Seen through this lens, disruption moves only forward.

Later on, time shifts inside the story take an odd turn. After amṛta appears, the churning stops yet effects stretch beyond that point. Devas gain endless life; at the same time, poison stays locked away, never gone. Outcomes linger, one feeding another, showing how taking something out creates lasting imbalances instead of short fixes. Progress happens, though repair does not follow.

Shiva's role isn't just about saving or healing another layer hides beneath. Devotion often highlights kindness, even giving without limit; yet what follows tells a different story. Harm reshapes the land, but stays contained because one being bears its weight forever. That burden doesn't vanish it shifts. A quiet logic forms: suffering lands on certain forms so life can flow elsewhere. Not balance, but distribution.

Conclusion

Though rich in ecological imagery, interpretations of the Samudra Manthan story often favor symbolic, spiritual, or metaphorical angles - leaving physical realities and environmental impacts on the margins. These views tend to downplay how deeply entwined the tale is with acts of taking, disruption, and unforeseen damage - not as side effects, but as core mechanics. Through lenses like material ecocriticism and posthuman ideas of shared agency across beings and substances, this analysis fills that void. It shows the myth functioning as an intricate environmental account, where material forces directly influence cause, danger, and resolution.

Beginning with tension, the study reveals churning operates through extraction, relying on pushing back against stubborn surroundings. Not leading straight to gain, it instead brings forth poison halāhila as an early result, placing injury at the center of disruption.

Poison appearing before plenty disrupts linear ideas of advancement, questioning whether ecological cost may ever be offset by later payoff. Throughout the story, power shifts among varied beings: deities, demons, creatures, landforms, materials, even the sea takes part. Power shifts unevenly, shaped by context, challenging human-centered and god-centered ideals of control. Still, the unfair sharing of nectar and the endless holding back of poison show how taking resources deepens social gaps leaving nature off balance long after.

Throughout the thematic review, one trend becomes clear. Extraction appears violent pulling stubborn elements into motion against their nature. Unplanned poisons surface, spreading quietly through networks of human and non-human forces. Outcomes tilt unevenly; some gain much, others lose everything. Consequences lock in place, impossible to undo. Cause unfolds not from deliberate design, but from physical reactions piling up. What moves matters more than who decides. From depths stirred beyond consent, resources flow and so do threats. Power moves across species entanglements, yet burdens and benefits rarely match. These insights cast the story not just as folklore but as a primal account of ecology one where taking from nature carries danger, power struggles, and real-world effects thus meeting the inquiry's main aims while opening paths for wider reflection.

What emerges here adds subtle layers to core ideas in material ecocriticism and posthuman thinking. Far from just symbolizing stories, materials themselves shape events this ancient tale shows that clearly. Instead of central power resting solely with gods, influence spreads unevenly across beings, opening space for non-secular worlds within posthumanism. Notably, the churned ocean cannot return to stillness, disturbance leaves lasting traces. Because consequences endure, models based on clean solutions or controlled loss fall short. Toxicity, displaced costs, and inherited damage gain depth when irreversible change takes center stages

Works Cited

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke UP, 2010.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.

Hinduism. *The Bhagavata Purana*. Translated by C. L. Goswami, Gita Press, 2003.

Hinduism. *The Mahabharata*. Translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen, vols. 1–5, U of Chicago P, 1973–1978.

Hinduism. *The Vishnu Purana*. Translated by H. H. Wilson, Motilal Banarsidass, 2003.

Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. *Material Ecocriticism*. Indiana UP, 2014.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford UP, 2005.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard UP, 2011.