

Creation described in the Tenth Mandala of Rig Veda

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According to the Vishnu-Purana, the original Vedas was revealed by gods to sages. However, in the beginning of Dwapara age, Krishna Dvaipayana (later known as Veda Vyasa i.e. classifier of Vedas) resuscitated the Vedic study and divided into: 1) Rig Veda, 2) Sama Veda, 3) Yajur Veda, and 4) Atharva Veda

Each Veda is a collection of hymns by a number of priest-families. Rig Veda consists of 1017 hymns and also divided into 10 books called 'Mandalas'. The 1st and the 10th Mandalas are the longest books. Second to Seventh Mandalas are the oldest parts of Rig-Veda but the shortest books. The 10th Mandala of the Rig Veda contains Purusha sukta which explains that the four varnas - Brahmana, Kshyatriya, Vaishya, Shudra were born respectively from the mouth, the arm, the thigh and the feet of the God. The tenth mandala of Rigveda has 191 hymns. Together with Mandala 1, it forms the latest part of the Rig Veda, containing much mythological material, including the Purusha sukta (10.90) and the dialogue of Sarama with the Panis (10.108) and notably containing several dialogue hymns.

The subjects of the hymns in 10th Mandala of Rig Veda cover a wider spectrum than in other books, dedicated not only to deities or natural phenomena, including deities that are not prominent enough to receive their own hymns in the other books (Nirrti 10.59, Asamati 10.60, Ratri 10.127, Aranyani 10.146, Indrani 10.159) but also to the objects like dice (10.34), herbs (10.97), press-stones (for soma,10.94,175) and abstract concepts like liberality (towards the rishi, 10.117), creation (10.129),the Nasadiya Sukta (130,190), knowledge (10.71), speech, spirit (10.58), faith (10.151), a charm against evil dreams (10.164).

10.15 dedicated to the forefathers, contains a reference to the emerging rite of the cremation in verse 14, where ancestors "both cremated (agnidagdha) and uncremated (anagnidagdha)" are invoked.

10.47 to 50 are to Indra Vaikuntha, "Indra son of Vikuntha was an Asuri whom Indra had allowed to become his second mother. The rishi of 10.47 is called Saptagu, while that of 10.48-50 is likewise called Indra Vaikuntha.

10.85 is a marriage hymn. Evoking the marriage of Surva daughter of Surya (the Sun), another form of Ushas, the prototypical bride

RV 10.121 (the Hiranyagarbha sukta) is another hymn dealing with creation, containing elements of monotheism. It has a recurring pada “what God shall we adore with our oblation?”, in verse 1 named Hiranyagarbha “the golden egg”, later a name of Brahma in verse 10 addressed as Prajapati.

10.129 (the Nasadiya sukta) and 130 are creation-hymns, probably the best known Rig vedic hymns in the west, especially 10.129.7 :

He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it,/ Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it , or perhaps he knows not. (Griffith)

These hymns exhibit a level of philosophical speculation, a typical part of Rig Veda, which for the most part is occupied with ritualistic invocation.

10.145 is attributed to Indrani. It is a spell for a jealous wife to get rid of more favoured rival. A typical form of the Rig Veda, similar spells are found in the Atharvaveda.

10.154 is a funeral hymn, asking for that the departed may join those who attained heaven through tapas. Padas 1 cd is reminiscent of the Norse concept of Valhalla.

To those for whom the myth flows forth, even to those let him depart. (Griffith)

10.155 is against the “one-eyed limping hag” Arayi.

10.166, attributed to Anila, is a spell for the destruction of rivals, similar to 10.145, but this time to be uttered by men who want to get rid of the male rivals.

10.173 and 174 are benedictions of a newly elected king.

The rishis of the 10th Mandala are divided into Shudrasuktas and Mahasuktas, that is, sages who have composed “small” vs “great” hymns. These hymns have attracted a large body of literature of commentaries both in Indian darsanas (philosophy) and in Western philology. The hymns in 10th Mandala of Rig Veda,

in general, is late within the Rig Veda Samhita, and expresses thought more typical of later Vedantic philosophy. Even though untypical of the content of the Vedic hymns, it is one of the most widely received portions of the Rig Veda. An atheist interpretation sees the Creation Hymn as one of the earliest accounts of sceptical inquiry and agnosticism. Astronomer Carl Sagan quoted it in discussing India's tradition of sceptical questioning and unselfconscious humility before the great cosmic mysteries.

NASADIYA SUKTA

The **Nasadiya Sukta** (130,190) or “not the non-existent” – also known as the Hymn of Creation, is the 129th hymn of the 10th mandala of the Rig Veda (10:129). It is concerned with cosmology and the origin of the universe. Nasadiya Sukta begins with the statement : “Then, there was neither existence, or non-existence”. It ponders over the when, why and by whom of creation in a very sincere contemplative tone, and provides no definite answers. Rather, it concludes that the gods too may not know, as they came after creation, and that even the supervisor of creation in the highest heaven may or may not know. Nasadiya Sukta consists of seven trishtubhs, although para 7b is defective, being two syllables short: ‘Yadi va dadhe yadi va na’ – “If he has created it: or if not [...]”. Brereton (1999) argues that the defect is a conscious device employed by the rishi to express puzzlement at the possibility that the world may not be created, parallel to the syntactic defect of pada 7d, which ends in a subordinate clause without a governing clause – ‘so anga veda yadi van a veda’ which means “he verily knows: or if he does not know”. Verse 2 described “ten not death existed, nor the immortal”. But already in verse 2 it is mentioned that there was “breathing without breath, of its own nature that one”. Verse 3 mentions being unfolds, “from heat (tapas) was born that one”- ‘Tapasah tat mahina ajayata ekam’. Verse 4 mentions that desire (karma) is the primal seed, and the first poet-seers (kavyas) who “found the bond of being within non-being with their heart’s thought”. Philosopher Karel Werner describes that the author’s source for the material as one not derived from reasoning, but a “visionary, mystical or yogic experience put into the words”. Werner writes that prior to creation, the Creation hymn does not describe a state of “nothingness” but rather “that one (tad ekam)” which is, “Spaceless, timeless, yet in its own way dynamic and the sole Force, this Absolute..”

Brereton (1999) argues that the reference to the sages searching for being in their spirit is central, and that the gradual procession of the hymns from non-being to being in fact re-enacts the creation within the listener, equating poetic utterance and creation.

PURUSHA SUKTA

Purusha Sukta is hymn (10.90) of the Rig Veda, dedicated to the Purusha, the “Cosmic Being”. Author Steven Rosen says, “The Bhagavata Purana and the Mahabharata boldly proclaim Lord Vishnu as the ultimate Purusha described in Purusha Sukta prayer”. According to Indologist W.Norman Brown, “The verses of Purusha Sukta are definitely a reference to Lord Vishnu, who, through His three steps, is all pervading (i.e. He spreads in all directions)”. The first two verses of Purusha Sukta started with Sayana’s commentary. It is also found in Shukla Yajurveda Samhita 30.1-16 and Atharva Veda Samhita 19.6. Slightly different versions appear in different Vedas. One version of the Suktam has 16 verses – 15 in the Anustubh meter and the final one in the Trisubh meter. Another version of the Sukta consists of 24 verses with the first 18 mantras, designated as the Purvanarayan and the later portion termed as the Uttaranarayana, probably in honour of Rishi Narayana. Some scholars state that certain verses of Purusha Sukta are later interpolations to the Rig Veda. One of the reasons given is that it is the only hymn in the Vedas that mentions the four Varnas by name – although the word ‘varna’ itself is not mentioned in the hymn.

Content of Purusha Sukta: The Purusha Sukta gives a description of the spiritual unity of the Universe. It presents the nature of ‘Purusha’, or the cosmic being, as both immanent in the manifested world and yet transcendent to it. From this being, the Sukta holds, the original creative will (identified with Viswakarma, Hiranyagarbha or Prajapati) proceeds which causes the projection of the universe in the space and time. The Purusha Sukta, in the seventh verse, hints at the organic connectedness of the various classes of society. The Purusha is defined in verses 2 to 5 of the Sukta. He is described as a being who pervades everything conscious and unconscious universally. He is poetically depicted as a being with thousand heads, eyes and legs, enveloping not just the earth, but the entire Universe from all sides and transcending it by ten-

finger's length – or transcending in all 10 dimensions. All manifestations, in past, present and future, is held to be the Purusha alone. It is also proclaimed that he transcends his creation. The immanence of the Purusha in manifestation and yet his transcendence of it is similar to the view point, held by panentheists. Finally, his glory is held to be even greater than the portrayal in this Sukta. The verses 5-15 hold the creation of the Rig Veda. Creation is described to have started with the origination of Virat, or the cosmic body from the Purusha. In Virat, omnipresent intelligence manifests itself which causes the appearance of diversity. In the verses following, it is held that Purusha through a sacrifice of himself, brings forth the avian, forest-dwelling and domestic animals, the three Vedas, the metres (of the mantras). Then follows a verse which states that from His mouth, arms, thighs, feet the four varnas (categories) are born - This four varna-related verse is controversial and is believed by many scholars, such as Max-Muller, to be a corruption and a medieval or modern era insertion into the text. After the verse, the Sukta states that the moon takes birth from the Purusha's mind and the Sun from His eyes. Indra and Agni descend from His mouth and from His vital breath, air is born. The firmament comes from His navel, the heavens from His head, the earth from His feet and the quarters of space from His ears. Through the creation, underlying the unity of human, cosmic and divine realities is espoused, for all are seen arising out of the same original reality, the Purusha. The Purusha Sukta holds that the world is created by and out of a 'Yajna' or exchange of the Purusha. All forms of existence are held to be grounded in this primordial yajna. In the 17th verse, the concept of yajna itself is held to have arisen out of this original sacrifice. In the final verses, yajna is extolled as the primordial energy ground, for all existence.

The Purusha Sukta gives an expression to immanence of radical unity in diversity and is therefore, thought, Bhedabheda School of philosophy and Bhagavata theology. The concept of the Purusha is from the Samkhya Philosophy which is traced to the Indus Valley period. It seems to be an interpolation into the Rig Veda, since it is out of character with the other hymns, dedicated to nature gods. The Purusha Sukta is repeated with some variations in the Atharva Veda (19.6). Sections of it also occur in the Panchavimsha Brahmana, Vajasaneyi Samhita and the Taittiriya Aranyaka. Among Puranic texts, the Suktas has been elaborated in the Bhagavata Purana

(2.5.35 to 2.6.1-29) and in the Mahabharata (Mokshadharma Parva 351 and 352). The Purusha Sukta is mirrored directly in the ancient Zoroastrian texts, found in the Avesta Yasna and the Pahlavi Denkard. There, it is said that the body of man is in the likeness of the four estates, with priesthood at the head, warriorship in the hands, husbandry in the belly and artisanship at the foot. Nevertheless, it remains to be established that the Indian and Pahlavi texts reflect inherited common beliefs, rather than independent developments, hence making a later insertion unlikely.

Many 19th and early 20th century scholars questioned as to when parts or all of Purusha Sukta were composed, and whether some of these verses were present in the ancient version of Rigveda. They suggest that it was interpolated in the post-Vedic era and is a relatively modern origin of Purusha Sukta. Henry Thomas said – “That remarkable hymn (the Purusha Sukta) is in language, metre and style; very different from the rest of the prayers with which it is associated. It has a decidedly more modern tone, and must have been composed after the Sanskrit language had been refined.”

Informations about the Suktas

Sukta 10.13 –

Deity : Havirdhanas

Incipit : yuje vam brahma purviam namobhir

Sukta 10.75 (Nadistuti Sukta) –

Deity : Rivers

Incipit : pra su va apo mahimanam uttamam

Sukta 10.81 (Viswakarma Sukta) –

Deity : Vishvakarman

Rishi : Adi Rishi Vishwakarma

Incipit : ya ima visva bhuvanani juhvad

Sukta 10.83 (Manyu Sukta) –

Deity : Manyu

Incipit : yas te manyo avidhad vajra sayaka

Sukta 10.90 (Purusha Sukta) –

Deity : Purusha

Incipit : sahasrasirsa purusah

Sukta 10.95 –

Deity : Urvasi and Puruavas

Incipit : haye jaye manasa tistha ghore

Sukta 10.107 –

Deity : Dakshina

Incipit : avir abhun mahi maghonam esam

Sukta 10.108 –

Deity : Sarama and Panis

Incipit : kim ichanti sarama predam anad

Sukta 10.121 (Hiranyagarbha sukta) –

Deity : Hiranyagarbha / Prajapati

Incipit : hiranyagarbhah sam avartatagre

Sukta 10.123 –

Deity : Vena

Incipit : ayam venas codayat prsnigarbha

Sukta 10.129 (Nasadiya Sukta) –

Deity : Creation

Incipit : nasad asin no sad asit tadanim

Sukta 10.136 -

Deity : Kesin

Incipit : kesi agnim kesi visam

Sukta 10.145 –

Deity : Sapatnibadhnam

Rishi : Indrani

Incipit : Imam khanami osadhim

Sukta 10.178 –

Deity : Tarkshya

Incipit : tiyam u suvajinam devajutam

Sukta 10.183 –

Deity : the sacrificer and his wife

Rishi : Prajavan

Incipit : apasyam tva manasa cekitanam