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This One



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The refrain receives its answer in a tenth stanza (added to the poem at a later time), which proclaims the unknown god to be Prajāpati.

Two other cosmogonic poems explain the origin of the world philosophically as the evolution of the existent (*sat*) from the non-existent (*asat*). In the somewhat confused account given in one of them (x. 72), three stages of creation may be distinguished : first the world is produced, then the gods, and lastly the sun. The theory of evolution is here still combined with that of creation:—

*Even as a smith, the Lord of Prayer,
Together forged this universe :
In earliest ages of the gods
From what was not arose what is.*

A far finer composition than this is the Song of Creation (x. 129):—

*Non-being then existed not, nor being :
There was no air, nor heaven which is beyond it.
What motion was there? Where? By whom directed?
Was water there, and fathomless abysses ?*

*Death then existed not, nor life immortal ;
Of neither night nor day was any semblance.
The One breathed calm and windless by self-impulse :
There was not any other thing beyond it.*

*Darkness at first was covered up by darkness ;
This universe was indistinct and fluid.
The empty space that by the void was hidden,
That One was by the force of heat engendered.*

*Desire then at the first arose within it,
Desire, which was the earliest seed of spirit.
The bond of being in non-being sages
Discovered searching in their hearts with wisdom.*

*Who knows it truly? who can here declare it?
Whence was it born? whence issued this creation?
And did the gods appear with its production?
But then who knows from whence it has arisen?*

*This world-creation, whence it has arisen,
Or whether it has been produced or has not,
He who surveys it in the highest heaven,
He only knows, or ev'n he does not know it.*

Apart from its high literary merit, this poem is most noteworthy for the daring speculations which find utterance in so remote an age. But even here may be traced some of the main defects of Indian philosophy—lack of clearness and consistency, with a tendency to make reasoning depend on mere words. Being the only piece of sustained speculation in the *Rigveda*, it is the starting-point of the natural philosophy which assumed shape in the evolutionary Sāṅkhya system. It will, moreover, always retain a general interest as the earliest specimen of Aryan philosophic thought. With the theory of the Song of Creation, that after the non-existent had developed into the existent, water came first, and then intelligence was evolved from it by heat, the cosmogonic accounts of the Brāhmaṇas substantially agree. Here, too, the non-existent becomes the existent, of which the first form is the waters. On these floats Hiranyagarbha, the cosmic golden egg, whence is produced the spirit that desires and creates the universe. Always requiring the agency of the creator Prajāpati at an earlier or a later stage, the Brāhmaṇas in some of their accounts place him first, in others the waters. This fundamental contradiction, due to mixing up the theory of creation with that of evolution, is removed in the Sāṅkhya system by causing Purusha, or soul, to play the part of a

passive spectator, while *Prakṛiti*, or primordial matter, undergoes successive stages of development. The cosmogonic hymns of the *Rigveda* are not only thus the precursors of Indian philosophy, but also of the Purānas, one of the main objects of which is to describe the origin of the world.

CHAPTER VI

THE RIGVEDIC AGE

THE survey of the poetry of the *Rigveda* presented in the foregoing pages will perhaps suffice to show that this unique monument of a long-vanished age contains, apart from its historical interest, much of æsthetic value, and well deserves to be read, at least in selections, by every lover of literature. The completeness of the picture it supplies of early religious thought has no parallel. Moreover, though its purely secular poems are so few, the incidental references contained in the whole collection are sufficiently numerous to afford material for a tolerably detailed description of the social condition of the earliest Aryans in India. Here, then, we have an additional reason for attaching great importance to the *Rigveda* in the history of civilisation.

In the first place, the home of the Vedic tribes is revealed to us by the geographical data which the hymns yield. From these we may conclude with certainty that the Aryan invaders, after having descended into the plains, in all probability through the western passes of the Hindu Kush, had already occupied the north-western corner of India which is now called by the Persian name of Panjāb, or "Land of Five Rivers."¹ Mention is made in the hymns of some twenty-five

¹ The component parts of this name are in Sanskrit *pancha*, five, and *āp*, water.