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THEORIES OF CREATION IN THE RIG VEDA

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THE BEGINNINGS OF SPECULATIVE THOUGHT in India, as in Greece, lie in notions of cosmogony. How did everything begin? The earliest recorded Indian notions are preserved in well known hymns of the Rig Veda and the Atharva Veda, which have been studied by many scholars. The present paper is an attempt to deal with those cosmogonic ideas, especially those appearing in the Rig Veda, in an ordered and, as far as possible, related sequence; if successful, this should add to our understanding of Indian philosophic origins.

The ideas of creation which are to be mentioned here have their bases in various intellectual attitudes or assumptions, namely, myth, theology, ritual, magic, evolution of a self-contained impersonal entity, and the existence of an all-enveloping mechanism or shell. The theories derived from these various bases are not mutually reconciled in the Rig Veda, nor is there any intimation, for the most part, that they are considered or even suspected to be incompatible.

The most conspicuous theories are those expressed in myth, and of these there are several. The oldest, and at the same time the least prominent and shortest-lived in Indo-Aryan speculation, is an Indo-European myth, guaranteed as such by the wider general Indo-European character of the proper names and the ideas which are employed. This is the myth that Father Sky (*dyaus pitṛ*) and Mother Earth (*pr̥thvī mātṛ*) have as their children the gods (*deva*), namely Dawn (*uṣas*) and the two heavenly Horseman (*aśvinau, divo napātā*).

With this bit of mythology about Sky and Earth come to be associated other bits of mythology. One concerns Tvaṣṭṛ, the artificer of the gods, who is called the one born at the beginning (*agriya*) or the first-going (*puroyāvan*). At the beginning he was the counterpart of the cosmic waters (AV 9.4.2) or, as is stated elsewhere, combined in himself both male and female qualities (AV 9.4.3-6). He it was who created Sky and Earth and all creatures (RV 3.55.19; 10.110.9; 1.160.4), though how he did so and out of what material is not made clear. The myth of Tvaṣṭṛ is not Indo-European in origin but seems to have been acquired

by the Aryans after leaving their Indo-European homeland. Another bit of mythology concerns the twins Yama and Yamī (RV 10.10),¹ who are the progenitors of the human race. This myth is at least Indo-Iranian, possibly Indo-European.

None of these myths, whether separately or in combination, is the prevailing creation myth of the Rig Veda. That place belongs to the myth of the god Indra and the demon Vṛtra. This I have discussed elsewhere² and I shall only summarize it here.

The Indra myth opens with the state of precreation. The material constituents of the universe seem already to have been in existence then, but there was no warmth in the universe, no moisture, nor any organization of the material elements, that is, no order or system. There was only chaos, without the principles of cosmic truth or order or ordered movement (*ṛta*) to regulate all. There existed, however, powerful beings with life who were called Asura,³ apparently living in a house consisting of Sky and Earth, which at that time were not separated but were joined together. Presumably Sky and Earth had been fashioned by Tvaṣṭṛ. The Asuras were of two kinds, the Ādityas, led by Varuṇa, and the Dānavas or the Dānava, led by Vṛtra, who in some passages appears alone, while in others he seems to have allies or supporters. The Ādityas and the Dānavas were in a state of mortal enmity, engaged in a struggle with each other; we might call it war. The Asuras have mothers but no fathers, because the mothers are personifications of feminine abstractions.⁴ The Ādityas are the sons of Aditi (*adīteḥ putrāḥ*), whose name means "non-restraint" (*a-dīti*, derived with the suffix *-ti* from the root *dā* "bind") or "expansion, release, progressivism, development,

¹ The most recent discussion I have seen of this well known myth is in a paper by Stella Kramrisch, "Two: Its Significance in the R̥gveda," in *Indological Studies in Honor of W. Norman Brown*, edited by Ernest Bender, American Oriental Series, vol. 47, see pp. 118-123.

² *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 62, 1942, pp. 85-98.

³ *JAOS* 62. 88-89; cf. Neisser, *Zum Wörterbuch des R̥gveda*, *AKM* 16. 139-146; 18. 29-32.

⁴ *JAOS* 62. 90.

5. He by whom the sky was made strong and the earth made firm, by whom the heaven and the celestial vault were set in place, who measured out the regions in the atmosphere—to what god, etc.?

6. He whom the two roaring [armies], who have sought support with his help, look upon trembling in mind when the risen sun is shining—to what god, etc.?

krāndasī: cf. 6.25.4; 2.12.8. The two roaring (armies?) could conceivably be the armies of the Ādityas and the Dānavas or they might be any pair of armies in array against each other. Or the two Roarers might be Heaven and Earth, since the verb *krand* is used of Dyaus and Parjanya, and in that case the dual would mean the Sky and the Other One (= Earth). The mythic allusion could then be to Indra's forceful separation of Heaven and Earth after he had drunk the soma before going to battle with Vṛtra. But this stanza seems to be a contradiction of 2.12.8, where a translation of *krāndasī* as "Heaven and Earth" seems impossible.

7. When the mighty waters came bearing the embryo (Sun) and giving birth to Agni, then the life spirit of the gods came into existence—to what god, etc.?

8. He who in his might looked upon the waters which bore ritual skill (*dakṣa*) and created the sacrifice, he who was the sole god over the gods—to what god, etc.?

9. May not he harm us, he who is the progenitor of the earth, he who with truth as his function created heaven and caused the bright and mighty waters to be born—to what god, etc.?

10. Prajāpati, other than you no one has encompassed all these creations. Whatever we desire when we invoke you, let that be ours! May we be lords of wealth!

RV 10.125. To Vāc as a hymn of self-praise (*ātmastuti*), a glorification of the Sacred Utterance. For Vāc cf. 10.71.

1. I travel with the Rudras and the Vasus, the Ādityas and the Viśve Devāḥ. Both Varuṇa and Mitra do I support, Indra and Agni, and the Āsvins.

2. I uphold the swelling Soma, Tvaṣṭṛ, Pūṣan, and Bhaga. I bestow wealth on the zealous patron of the sacrifice, who makes the oblation and presses the soma.

3. I am the queen, the confluence of wealth, the one with penetrating perception, the first of those who should be worshipped. Me have the gods distributed manifoldly, me who dwell in many homes, who have caused [the chants] to enter many places. *tām mā devā vy ādadhuḥ purutrā*, cf. 10.71.3c.

bhūry āveśāyantim, cf. 10.81.1. Also note the expression *ā viś giras*, which occurs frequently.

4. Through me that one eats his food who really sees, who breathes, who hears [me as] that which is spoken. Though knowing it not, they dwell with me. Hear, you man of renown, I tell you what you must believe!

yā im śrṇōty uktām, cf. 10.71.6c (note also 10.71.4).

5. Only I myself say this in which gods and men rejoice. Whomever I give my favor to, him I make powerful, a true knower of the mystical power, a ṛṣi, a successful sacrificer.

6. I stretch the bow for Rudra so that his arrow may reach the hater of religion and destroy him. I rouse the battle fury for the people. I have penetrated Heaven and Earth.

aham dyāvāprthivī ā viveśa, cf. 10.81.1.

7. On the brow of this universe I give birth to the father. My birthplace is in the waters, in the ocean. Thence I spread out over the worlds on all sides. I touch yonder sky with the crown of my head.

tāto vi tiṣṭhe bhūvanānu viśvataḥ, cf. 10.90.1.

8. I breathe like the wind supporting all the worlds. Beyond the sky, beyond this earth so great have I become by my might.

paró divá pará ená, cf. 10.82.5; 10.129.6.

etāvati mahinā sám babhūva, cf. 10.90.3a.

RV 10.129. To cosmogony.

1. There was not then either the Non-existent (*asat*) or the Existent (*sat*). There was no atmosphere nor heavenly vault beyond it. What covered all? Where? What was its protection? Was there a fathomless depth of the waters?

What covered all (*kim āvarivaḥ*)? In the old myth it was Vṛtra: . . . *néhá yó vo āvāvarit / ní śim vṛtrāsya mármaṇi vájram indro apīpatat*, "he (Vṛtra) who covered you (waters)—Indra has hurled his vajra into Vṛtra's vitals" (RV 8.100.7).

2. There was neither death nor immortality

then. There was the sheen neither of day nor night. That One breathed (came to life), though uninspired by breath, by its own potentiality. Besides it nothing existed.

"neither death nor immortality"; cf. RV 10.72.9; AV 10.7.15.

"by its own potentiality"; cf. RV 10.72.1.

3. There was darkness hidden by darkness at the beginning. This all was an unilluminated flood. The force (with power of evolution) which was enclosed in emptiness (a shell), That One, was born through the power of its own (creative incubating) heat.

cf. RV 10.190.1.

tuchyéna . . . ápihitam. Possibly there is implied here the idea of a universe contained in an egg-shaped container or shell (cf. ChU 3.19, Maitri U 6.36, and the later expression *brahmānda*). The developing power (*ābhú*) is to put in it the *sat* and the *asat*, and in the *sat* will put the *rájas* and the *vyóman* (st. 1).

4. In the beginning desire came over That [One], which became the first seed of mind. The

sages by their pious insight in their heart (i. e., by introspection) found the relation of the Existent with the Non-existent.

In RV 10.72.1 the ṛṣis mystically perceive the cosmogonic process.

5. A line of demarcation was extended horizontally for them (the sages). What was below it, what above it? There were seed-depositors, there were powers; there was potentiality here below; there was emanation above.

6. Who is there who knows, who here (*ihá*) can tell whence was the origin, and whence this creation? The gods are this side of the creation. Who knows, then, whence it came into being?

In RV 10.72.6 the gods, as secondary creators, stir up the dust, as though in dancing; cf. Indra in RV 1.56.4 and 10.124.9, perhaps also RV 4.17.13 and 4.42.5.

7. This creation, whence it came into being, whether spontaneously or not—he who is its highest overseer in heaven, he surely knows, or perhaps he knows not.

A MORPHOPHONEMIC PROBLEM IN THE SPOKEN TIBETAN OF LHASA

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THERE ARE IN THE SPOKEN TIBETAN of Lhasa compounds in which the first member ends in a nasal vowel, *ŋ*, or *m*.¹ Other alternants of these

¹ We gathered the data we cite during the course of our work on the N. D. E. A. Spoken Tibetan project at the University of Washington, 1960-63. Our informants, Mr. Nawang Norngang and Mrs. Lhadon Karsip, were both from Lhasa.

The phonemes and phoneme sequences we use in our transcription are: *q, qh, ŋ, ŋh, h; k, kh; c, ch, ñ, ñh, š; ʃ, ʃh, r, rh; t, th, n, l, lh, s; ts, tsh; p, ph, m, mh; y, w; i, e, é, ε; A, a; ü, ö; u, o, ó, and ɔ*. Vowels are either oral or nasal, single or geminate. Syllables with single vowels not followed by *ŋ* or *m* have either high or low tone; syllables with geminate vowels or single vowels followed by *ŋ* or *m* have high, high-falling, low, or low-falling tones. In our *Manual of Spoken Tibetan* (University of Washington Press, 1964) we indicated nasalized vowels by a tilde over the vowel sign, and tones by an overline for high tone, an underline for low tone, and a grave accent for falling tone. The exigencies of printing make it necessary for us to adopt a new system here.

components regularly end in an oral vowel, *q*, or *p*. The second member of such compounds, when it occurs independently or as the first member of other compounds, has no nasal initial. In every compound in which it is the second member, however, it is preceded by a nasal vowel, *ŋ*, or *m*, depending on the phonological makeup of the first member. We analyze these occurrences of nasal vowels, *ŋ*, or *m* as belonging to two morphs, the oral features to the prior morph, the nasal feature to the latter. This latter morph is thus made up of a sequence of phonemes preceded by a phonemic feature, nasality.

Whenever *ŋ* occurs in these compounds, we have

In this article we indicate nasalized vowels by *N* following the vowel sign. We indicate the tones for a whole form by raised capitals following the form, with a hyphen separating the tone of one syllable from that of the following one. Abbreviations for the tones are: H, high; L, low; F, falling; 0, zero (minimal stress).