

The Concept of Creation in Ancient Sanskrit Scriptures and in the Bible- A Study

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Abstract

Bible is the religious document of Christianity. Like for the Hindus the Vedas are at the highest epitome so as the Bible for the Christians. All the creatures of the universe are the creation of the Almighty. That almighty is different in various religions. Actually that difference lies in the name, customs, traditional beliefs and the ways of glorifying them. In reality it is the same Almighty that creates, governs and protects us. Thus the main ideals of all religions and religious scriptures are the same. In the Bible creation is described more or less in the same way as in ancient Indian Sanskrit texts. While some common similarities are there, surely differences also make their own path. The ancient cultures like Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Iranian, etc. possessed different theories on cosmogony or the creation of the universe. They proposed different accounts of cosmogony. These accounts are sometimes mythological and sometimes much more scientific. The cosmogonic myths, almost without exception, seek to explain the creation of the world from the fewest possible elements. But each narrative has a Supreme Reality as the source of creation. As cosmogony is concerned mainly with this extralargic world so it is a very important subject of discussion for the scientists also. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the creation narrative from the perspective of Bible and the ancient Sanskrit texts as many similarities can be drawn from both of them.

Keywords: Bible, God, creation, *Rgveda*, ancient Sanskrit texts

Introduction:

In the Bible everything starts with the divine command of the God. Here it is stated that ‘all scriptures are breathed out by god and profitable for teaching, for re proof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work.’¹ In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* also it is stated that as smoke comes from fire, so from this Great Being emerge the *Rgveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda*.² In the *Rgveda*, the sacred speech is described as originated from the Divine.³ The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* also supports this statement.⁴ The *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* is of the opinion that He who first created Brahmā, delivered the Vedas unto Him.⁵ In the *Gītā* also Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that from him comes memory, knowledge and the Vedas.⁶ That one Supreme Principle or Divine Being is described in the Vedic literature by many names and epithets just as Brahman, Īśvara, Hiranyagarbha, the great Puruṣa, Sat,⁷ Brahma⁸, Ātman⁹ and so on. In the Bible He is the Lord. Here God is thanked for creating this world. Here it is stated that:

Thank you Lord God, for all you have given using the world, for its beauty and for all the good

things we enjoy. But I thank you most of all for loving me and for your promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Please help me to share these blessings with others. Amen.

That means the world is a beautiful creation of God where everybody resides, and He himself is the protector and destroyer of everything of his creation. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* says in the same line that Brahman is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this world.¹⁰

Creation of jīvas:

In the Bible it is stated about the creation of the jīvas of the universe as:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.*¹¹

In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* also it is stated about the creation of the jīvas that the One Supreme Principle at the very outset of creation wants to be many and so he himself manifested as many (jīvas).¹² There are many other passages also in Vedic literature that support this statement. A very clear description about the first stage of creation is found both in Vedic literature and in the *Bible*. In the *Rgveda* it is said that nothing existed in the beginning¹³. At that time there existed only that One (*tad ekam*) as a dark ripple, covered by a shell¹⁴, out of which by *tapas* ‘that one’ manifested itself as *kāma* or *manas*. The Hiraṇyagarbha or Prajāpati is described in the *Rgveda* to come forth as the first-born of creation from the primeval water. In the *Bible* also it is stated that it was void in the beginning, and only darkness was there. The water is the first creation. It is said that:

*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of waters.*¹⁵

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* also supports that there was void in the beginning.¹⁶ The evolution of the world from the cosmic waters which produced the golden egg first appears in the *Rgveda*, and the progressive development of the same idea may be noticed in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and in the *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa*. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* exhibits a similar conception of the creation with that of the *Rgveda*. This *Brāhmaṇa* admits that nothing existed in the beginning, neither heaven nor earth nor the atmosphere, and afterwards the non-existent resolved to come into being¹⁷.

Light as the first creation:

In the *Bible*, after darkness God is credited to create light.¹⁸ That means Sun or Agni is glorified here to be the first creation. In the *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa* also it is said that the sun was produced first which was nothing but Brahma itself. In the *Rgveda* also like *Bible* the sun is regarded as an important agent of creation. He (sun) is called the soul of all that move and stands.¹⁹ The sun is once glorified as a great power of the Universe under the name of the ‘golden embryo’ i.e. Hiraṇyagarbha. In the *Rgveda*, Agni is also regarded as the creator of the entire world even including heavens. In the *Bible* it is also stated that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa* also it is said that at first being

was produced from non-being and then the latter changed into an egg, which after a year resolved into heaven and earth. Likewise in the *R̥gveda* Soma is sometimes said to have created the earth along with the other five elements, viz., heaven, day, night, water and herbs.²⁰ It is the very Soma which has created the expansion of this earth and the heavens. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* the sun is itself called as Brahman²¹. It is interesting to note that the gods described in the Vedic literature are basically the distinct personifications of the mighty forces and phenomena of nature such as the sun, the moon, the dawn, the fire etc. Here like Bible Light is not directly stated as the first creation, but it is described as an aspect of sun, fire or dawn. Thus rather than a physical entity the light is associated with emergence of divine consciousness which is purely luminous. In the Vedic literature it is described as a natural force associated with *sūrya* etc. It is often described as spiritual intelligence too. Sāyana has described the speed of light in connection with *R̥gvedic sūkta* 1.50. Here *Sūrya* is said to be the maker of light that illuminates all the radiant realm. The mention of light in this connection is found in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* too.²²

Creation of water, earth and *vanaspati*:

In the Bible it is stated by the God that waters under the heavens should be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear and that dry land became the earth.²³ In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is recorded that there was nothing but Death [death is personified here] in the beginning. Desiring to have a soul he created the mind for himself. He propitiated and out of his propitiation the water was produced. The cream (bubbles) that was on the surface of crust became this earth.²⁴ Thus the similarities in the course of description are found. In Bible it is said that after the creation of earth the Lord wished 'let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruits in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth' and it was so.²⁵ The *Śukla Yajurveda* also has reference that describes that after creation cultivated seeds and grains are created for human sustenance.²⁶ The *R̥gveda* has also similar reference where Soma is requested to consecrate with his streaming ambrosia the green bright golden-hued *vanaspati* with its thousand branches for the sustenance of the living beings.²⁷ The *Gītā* also specifically emphasizes on the *anna* (food) for all *jīvas*.²⁸

Creation of Day and Night and living creatures:

In the Bible it is recorded that the God after creating light separated it from darkness and called the light as day and darkness as night.²⁹ He also separated day from night and started the different measurements of time like seasons, days, years etc.

*And God said, 'let there be light in the expanse of heavens to separate the day from night. And let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years.'*³⁰

In the *R̥gveda* it is said that before creation there was distinction between day and night.³¹ It was only after creation that this division of time happens. In another passage it is said that from the watery cosmic ocean was the year afterwards produced, ordaining nights and days, the ruler of every moment.³² The *Atharvaveda* also states that the cosmos is measured through day and

night together with month and other division of time.³³ The reciprocal division of day and night is found in the same text in another passage too.³⁴ A plenty of discussion is found in the Bible about day and night and the units of time.³⁵ Bible says about the creation of sea creatures first and then other kinds of living creatures. In the ancient Sanskrit scriptures the first creature is said to be *matsya* i.e., fish and then *kurma* i.e., a tortoise. One striking similarity between the Vedic notion of *Daśavatāra* and scientific evolution has been brought to light by JBS Haldane, the British geneticist and evolutionary biologist who observed that the mythological Hindu *Daśavatāras* are a true sequential representation of the great unfolding of evolution. The *avatāras* of Viṣṇu show an uncanny similarity to the biological theory of evolution of life and earth like Bible. First *avatāra* was fish which is a creature living in water. Second *avatāra* was in the form of *kūrma* (tortoise i.e., reptiles). In the Bible it is said that-

*So God created the great sea creatures and every living creatures that moves, with which the waters swarm according to their kinds and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*³⁶

After the creation of these living creatures God wished to create other kinds of living beings such as creeping things, beasts etc.

*And God said. 'let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds-livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.' And it was so.*³⁷

Striking similarities are found between the description of the Bible and ancient Indian scriptures as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also describes that Prajāpati, who was one at the beginning of the creation, created different types of living beings such as birds, small crawling creatures, reptiles, snakes etc.³⁸ It also describes the creation of five forms of *paśus*. After the creation of these living beings the God created man and made the division of male and female.³⁹ The *puruṣasūkta* of the *Rgveda* mentions that *puruṣa* (man) was created from Virāj.⁴⁰ In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* a sequence of evolution of things is mentioned which starts from Brahman or Ātman and in that sequence comes space, air, fire, water, earth, plants, food respectively and lastly man is said to be evolved from food.⁴¹ According to the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* Prajāpati, after creating *pitṛs* creates man. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also says so.⁴² In the later Vedic and post-Vedic tradition Manu is stated as the first man and the progenitor of mankind who saved mankind from a great deluge and restarted the human race. Manu is himself called Prajāpati (*prajāpatir vai manuḥ*).

Genealogy:

In the Bible as well as in ancient Sanskrit literature genealogy is an important subject of description. In the Purāṇas, genealogy is one of the five characteristic features. In the Bible from Noah it starts and in ancient Indian scriptures it starts with Manu known as *manvantara*. Noah was a righteous man in his generation who was blameless. Here it is described that after creating man, Lord felt sorry as they were wicked and so he bolted out man and everything (man, animals, birds, creeping things, etc.).⁴³ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. So

Noah walked with God. He had three sons, Sem, Ham and Japheth. As earth was corrupt in God's sight, and filled with violence, so God said to Noah that he had determined to make an end of all flesh with the earth for the earth had been filled with violence through them and therefore He instructed to Noah to make an ark of gopherwood and to make rooms there.⁴⁴ It was because God would bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh on earth.⁴⁵ Further, Noah was instructed by the Lord to be there in the ark with his sons, wife and son's wife along with two sorts of every living being and food to store up for sustenance during the great flood. Noah did it all. Rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of 150 days the water had abated. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out and Noah and his sons were blessed by God to be fruitful and instructed to multiply and fill the earth.⁴⁶ This story of earth with flood and Manu as the single person to be there in a boat with some seeds is found in ancient Sanskrit scriptures also. *R̥gveda*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Manusmṛti*, *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, *Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa* etc. have apt description about Manu and *Manvantara*. The *R̥gveda* describes Manu as the beginner of sacrifice and all human religious practices. Manu is the progenitor of humankind. Like the Bible, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also the flood episode and Manu as the only survivor is described. According to it, Manu Vaivasvata is requested by a fish to save his life and in return that fish also promised him to save his life during great flood. After the flood, the narrative describes the restoration of life through Manu. *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes it as: when Manu was washing his hands in the morning a fish comes into his hands and requests him as 'rear me, I will save you'. The fish further says, a flood is going to carry away all these creatures from the earth but that the fish will save Manu.⁴⁷ Then the fish instructs Manu to keep him at first in a jar and then in a pit and afterwards in the ocean; then and then only the fish will become indestructible.⁴⁸ Then the fish says that in such and such year a great flood will come, at that time Manu has to make a ship and when the flood has risen, Manu should enter into the ship, the fish then saves him from the great flood.⁴⁹ When the flood water gradually subsided Manu gradually descended. The flood swept away all the creatures and Manu alone remained there as the primordial ancestor and representative of humankind.⁵⁰ Thus this story of Manu is quite similar to that of the story of Noah.

Conclusion:

After a careful study it can be concluded that both the Bible and the ancient Sanskrit literature, although different in approaches, yet both present the creation narratives as a profound and meaningful process rather than merely a physical event. It is to be mentioned here that in the Bible a single creation theory is portrayed while in ancient Indian scriptures several perspectives on creation have been dealt with. The Bible emphasizes the sacred command and the ancient Sanskrit literature combines cosmological symbolism and metaphysical reflection with the grace from the Ultimate Reality. Thus both stand firmly with their uniqueness.

References:

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2. 2 *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad*, 2.4.10
3. 3 *Ṛgveda*, 10.71.3
4. 4 brahmā devānām prathamah...jyeṣṭhaputrāya prāha, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1
5. 5 *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad*, 6.18
6. 6 *Gītā*, 15.15
7. 7 ekaṁ sad viprā bahūdā vadanti, *Ṛgveda*, I. 164.46
8. 8 *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, III, 1, 1
9. 9 *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VI 11, 1
10. 10 *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, *Bhṛguvallī*, 1.1
11. 11 *Bible*, Genesis, 1:27, p. 2
12. 12 so'kāmayata bahusyām prajāyeyeti..., *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, brahmānandavallī, 6.1
13. 13 nāsad āsīn no asad āsīt tadānīm, *Ṛgveda*, X.129.1
14. 14 tama āsīt tasmā guḥam agre... Ibid, X.129.3
15. 15 *Bible*, Genesis, 1:2, p. 1
16. 16 asadvā idamagra āsīt, tato vai sadajāyata, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, brahmānandavallī, 7.1
17. 17 *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, II.2.9
18. 18 And God said, 'let there be light and there was light', *Bible*, Genesis, 1:3, p. 1
19. 19 *Ṛgveda*, I.115
20. 20 Ibid, VI.42.3
21. 21 ādityo brahma, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 3.1.9
22. 22 athādhiyotiṣam agniḥ pūrvarūpam āditya uttararūpa, ... *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, śikṣāvallī, 3.4
23. 23 *Bible*, Genesis, 1:9-10, p. 1
24. 24 tad yadapām śara āsīt tat samahanyata sa prthivī abhavat, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, X.6.5.2
25. 25 *Bible*, Genesis, 1:11-12, p. 1
26. 26 *Śukla Yajurveda*, 18.12
27. 27 vanaspatim pavaman madhvā...bhrājamānam hiranyayam// *Ṛgveda*, 9.5.10
28. 28 annādbhavanti bhūtāni...samudbhavaḥ// *Gītā*, 3.14
29. 29 And God saw the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day and the darkness called night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. *Bible*, Genesis, 1:4-5, p. 1
30. 30 And God said, 'let there be light in the expanse of heavens to separate the day from night. And let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years. Ibid, Genesis, 1:14, p. 1

31. 31 na mr̥tyurāsīdamṛtam na tarhi na rātyā ahna āsīt praketaḥ, *R̥gveda*, 10.129.2
32. 32 samudrād ar̥ṇavavādadhīm samvatsaro ajāyata...miṣato vaśī// Ibid, 10.190.2
33. 33 *Atharvaveda*, 13.3.8
34. 34 ahorātre anyonyasya rūpayoḥ prajāyete, Ibid, 10.8.23
35. 35 Bible, Genesis, 1:14-18, p. 1
36. 36 Ibid, 1:21, p. 1
37. 37 Ibid, 1:24, p. 1
38. 38 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.5.1.1-3
39. 39 Bible, Genesis, 1.26-28, p. 2
40. 40 *R̥gveda*, 10.90.5
41. 41 *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1
42. 42 prajāpatirha vā idamagra eka...puruṣastasmāddvipādo vayan̥si// *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 2.5.1
43. 43 Bible, 6:9, p. 6
44. 44 Ibid, 6:11-14, p. 6
45. 45 Ibid, 6:17, p. 6
46. 46 Ibid, 9:1, p. 8
47. 47 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.8.1.2
48. 48 Ibid, 1.8.1.3
49. 49 Ibid, 1.8.1.4-5
50. 50 Ibid, 1.8.1.6