A STUDY OF THE CREATION OF UNIVERSE IN THE RIGVEDA

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From time immemorial the question which penetrates human mind is where from this world has come into existence? When was it created? Who created this universe? An urge to know the origin of this universe is found in different Mythologies of the world also. Towards the end of the compilation of the Rigveda Samhita, i.e., in the tenth Book we find that the query has reached its ultimate point. Different seers have assigned the credit of creation to different gods. In other books of the Samhita also, the question is raised in seed form, but the versatile deliberations of the seers reached greater dimension in the Tenth Book.

Let us have an account of the seers' observations regarding the creation of the universe:

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्ततामि भूसो जातः पतितरक्ष आसीत ।
स दाधार दृष्टिवेंद्र द्रामृतेन कस्मे देवाय द्विवेम् ॥

This is a verse from the Xth mandala of the Rigveda (RV. X. 121. 1) where the seer of this hymn is Hiranyagarbha prajapatiya and the deity to be praised here is 'Kah'. The verse states that Hiranyagarbha was present in the beginning; when born he was the sole lord of created beings; he upheld this earth and heaven let us offer worship with an oblation to the divine 'Ka'. The phrase 'कस्मे देवाय हविषा विवेम्' is a burden to each of the verses of this hymn. If the word 'कस्मे' be taken as the dative of the interrogative pronoun, it becomes a question 'To what deity may we sacrifice'? Sayananacharya, the most celebrated commentator of the vedic literature, prefers an equation of 'Ka' with prajapati. Sriyam Swami Brahmanuni Paribrjaka Vidya Martanda, follower of Dayananda Saraswati also prefers to take the term 'कस्मे' as a dative which means to Prajapati. But if 'कस्मे' refers to Prajapati then on grammatical grounds' noun inflection would have been more appropriate instead of pronoun inflection – (काय नयाभिन्न नो कस्मे) Prof. Sukumari Bhattacharya states one reason is that Prajapati as a distinct god had not yet emerged; the tenth mandala sees his shadowy beginnings; it was in the Brahmanas that he really assumes full dimensions? (The Indian Theogory - S. Bhattacharya - 1978).

In the Aitareya Brahmana (AB: VIII 3) we find that Prajapati created gods and demons and the bright gold. (AB. II. 2. 4: 4-5). Prajapati has been credited with the creation of men and animals in the Tandya Maha brahmana. The Satapatha Brahmana (SB: VII. 3.2.15 and 4.1.18) refers him to be made of gold, for gold is light and fire is light; gold is immortality. The same Brahmanas also informs us that he touched the cosmic egg and wished it to exist and multiply. From it the nuter Brahman was first created and the tripole science and this asserts that Prajapati alone existed in the beginning.
Tattiriya Samhita V. 5.1.2 refers to Hiranyakarhba, the Golden embryo or he who had the golden germ i.e., he who was in the golden mundane egg as an embryo. Brahma the creator. (Nirukta X. 23 and Yajurveda XIII. 4).

It is Hiranyakarhba, whose greatness has created the snow clad mountains, the oceans, the rivers, quarters, space and whose two arms are the protection of this world (Mahidhara says - jagadraksnau Vahu जगद्रक्षान। वहुः - Yajurveda XXV. 12). It is he who has made profound the earth solid, by whom heaven and the solar sphere were fixed, who was the measure of the water in the firmament, the heaven and earth was male fixed face to face. When the vast waters overspread the universe containing the germ and giving birth to Agni then was produced one breadth of gods. He with his creative power gave birth to sacrifice of the creation of the universe (सृष्टिका). Finally the seer that Prajapati has given birth to all these beings in this universe. Enveloped in the attractive mist of a nabulous cosmogony he really represents a distinct stage in the creative process. (embryo > Brahma > the universe).

Hiranyakarhba represents the image of the primordia cosmic golden egg out of which Brahma, the creator was born. That the universe has come into existence from the cosmic egg is found in other mythologies of the world also. The cosmic egg is referred to the Egyptian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Iranian, Latvian Esthonian and Phoenician mythologies. All these myths takes into account the golden egg as the first meta physical cause of the cause (जनिक्यपूर्व प्रकृति). The Egyptian mythology, further mention that the 'god referred to as being in the egg is of course a form of Sun-god' (The Egyptian heaven and Hell - F.A.W. Budge, 1906). This solar association of the cosmic egg is common with Hiranyakarhba also.

RV. X. 72.1-9 is another important hymn where we find the process of creation of the gods and some glimpses of the expansion process of the universe. In this hymn the seer is Brihaspati Loukya or Angirasa Brihaspati or Adini Daksayani. RV. X. 72.2 refers to that existent was born of the non-existence. (अस्तित्वः सदाचार्यकृता।). The gods, as the verse refers, originated from 'Asat'. Asatah refers to that which at the primary creation of the gods was without name or form: Chandogya Upanisad. VI.2 says 'asad va idam agre asit tato vai sad ajayata'.

In the first age of the gods the existence was born of the non-existant, after that the quarters were born and after that the upward growing trees (उत्तान्यायः). The universe was born from the upward growing tree. Then Daksa was born from Aditi and afterwards Aditi from Daksa. Sayana in the commentary has pointed to this contradiction that a self produced effect cannot be the cause of itself. In Nirukta XI. 23. Yaskacharya has raised ad refuted this inconsistency thus - It may be objected. How can it be that Daksa was born from Aditi and after ward, Aditi from Yaks ? The answer is, either they were born together or by a divine law they reciprocally, gave birth to each other and shared each other's nature. Aditi gave birth to eight Adityas. Among then, with seven she approached the gods (Mitra, Varuna, Dhata, Aryaman, Amsa, Bhaga, Vivasvat) and sent forth Martanda (the eighth) on high.
Verse No. 5 refers to the waters and states that a pungent dust went forth (तीत्र रेणुशारयत), it formed the clouds which filled the earth with water and therefrom the sun was brought forth from the ocean.

Visvakarman, is another important vedic god, credited with the cosmocromatic function of this universe. In RV. X. 81-82, the seer Visvakarman expresses his wonder regarding the creation of this universe in a very charming way. The creative principle is extolled in most glowing terms in these hymns.

Visvakarman as appears from the text is the maker of all, the creator also. RV. X. 81.2 states –
कि सिद्धान्तविविधानामार्थमण कतमत सिद्धान्तधारीति ।
यतो भूमि जनयन बिविधकर्मि बि ज्ञामीनार्नं महिना बिष्म्यश्च ॥

i.e., what was the station? What was the material? How was it done? So that Visvakarman the beholder of all, generated the earth and heaven by his might. In the previous verse of the same hymn it is said that after 'Pralaya' the creator made all the things a new. Again in V. 81.4, we find - which was the forest? Which was the tree, from which they fabricated heaven and earth? In quire, sages, in your minds what places he was stationed in when holding the worlds. The eternal quiry regarding the creation of the universe which still bewilders us even today. In the absence of the material cause the effect, the earth, is before us. H.G. Narahari states - Visvakarman is 'not merely the material cause but also the efficient cause of the world'.

In RV. X. 82, the epithet of Visvakarman as creator is repeatedly mentioned. RV. X. 82-1 states that he is the maker of senses, engendered the water and then heaven and earth were generated and their boundaries were fixed and they were exanded. It may be mentioned here that in the formation or creation process. The priority of water is affirmed repeatedly in various texts. Taittiriya Samhita V. 1.5.1 mentions 'आप जा इत्यः' Manusamhita 1.8 says - 'आप एव सरस्वती' ॥ The same hymn again surmises - Visvakarman of comprehensive mind and manifold greatness is all pervading, the creator and arranger (‘चातु रिकादित्व प्रमोद समूख’ RV. X. 82-2, X. X. 82.3 यो विवशता) of the universe. The seer raises the question what was that embryo which was beyond heaven, earth, gods, Asuras - the seer himself asserts the water verily first contained the embryo in which all the goods were aggregated, singly deposited on the navel of the unborn creator in which all being abode (RV. X. 82.6 - गर्भ प्रसवं द्वारा आप:). Sayana says this 'garbha' or embryo is 'andam'. Mahidhara says it is 'Vijam'. Both the notions are at par with Manu.

. The last verse is an assertion that 'You know not him who has generated these beings. His life is different from yours; wrapped in fog and foolish speech do they wander (who are) glutinous and engaged in devotion.' This verse says that the essence of Visvakarman Parameswara is not endowed with conscious individual existence rather he is different.

Visvakarman is referred in the RV only five times and in the tenth book.
RV. X. 120 imports the concept of arduous penance (तपस्या अवश्यायत्ता) that is truth of thought (अन्ततं) and truthfulness of speech were born of arduous penance which generated night and thereafter the watering ocean. And from that water night, days. The creator first created Sun and move the heaven, the earth, the firmament and the sky. The seer Aghamarshana Madhucchadas in brief has mentioned the process of creation in different stages: Truth and laws of cosmos - fervour - night - waters - day and night - sun and moon - heaven and earth.

RV. I. 164 is a long hymn, popularly known as the Asyavamiya hymn from its opening words (अत्र वामायत्व .......). It is a multi facet hymn - with reference to different gods invoked in different contexts. The esoteric contexts expressed in different verses essentially characteristics it to be a cosmological hymn. The innocent query of the seer in RV. I. 164.5 - Immature in understanding undiscerning in mind I inquire of those things which are hidden from the gods: what are the seven threads which the sages have spread to envelop the sun, in whom all abide or RV. I. 164.4 - who has seen the priveval (being) at the time of his being born. What is that endowed with substance which the unsubstantial sustains: from earth are the breath and blood, but where is the soul: who may repair to the sage to ask this? (को दसौर श्रवण जायमान मस्तेनित्स यदनस्त्था विभृत्ति | भूमि अरुरु चुरालो क विस्तरणे भविष्यतुस्क गात्रप्रभृति ॥)

In Avestan hymn (Yasha 44.3-7) Zarathustra also, quirs:

I question the, Lord: answer me!

Who was at its birth the first father of Justice?

Who assigned their paths to sun and stars?

Who established heaven and earth so that they fall not?

(ref. Sukumari Bhattacharjee - Literature in the Vedic Age P.P. 49).

The seer is perplexed and, therefore, raises a the most fundamental etiological question about the material cause and the manner of the creation.

RV. X. 90, the Purusa hymn is significantly important as it 'records a transition from ritual to philosophy'. The mythological account of the origin of the universe, as the hymn describes, is from the body of the Purusa whom the gods offered in a sacrifice. From his sacrificed self issued forth first the entities, then the elements and from these again the rest of the creation.

The Purusa hymn is the symbolic account of the creation of the cosmos through sacrifice. It is stated in verse no. 5 that from him (Purusa) was born Virat and from Virat the individual Purusa was born. Here we get the pseudo vedantic fragrance of creative process of Jivatna and Paramatma perhaps. We may recollect that Mithra in Mithraic cult billed the ox from which vegetation imanated. In Skandinavian gynth of cosmogony also we find Odin's self immolation of Yamir, A.A. Macdonell remarks 'the main idea is very primitive.' This cardinal magnitude of the creation process is extended
upto the regime of Aranyakas and upnisads. In Atharvaveda (X. 17) and Mundaka Upanisad II. I. we find Purusa is interpreted as identical with the universe. The Satapatha Brahmaṇa II.1.6 he is mentioned as Prajapati, the creator.

RV. X. 125, the seer Vak Ambhrini, proclaims herself to be identified in all gods. She is the sovereign queen, abiding in numerous forms. She herself declares that her birth place is in the midst of waters and from there she spread through all beings and touch the heaven and exist transcendentally beyond all creation. The cosmic elements described in the hymn attaches some cosmocratic importance to it.

In RV. X. 129 the seer Prajapati Paramestin affirms that nothing existed in the beginning.

आसानार्थ सदसीत्वदानी नासीप्रद्रोहो नो ध्यानपरोऽवतः

किमासीप्रेम क्रृष्टाः सङ्गमः किमासीदग्रहो गनीर्म्

i.e., The non-existent was not; the existent was not; then the world was not, not the firmament; nor that which is above. How could there be any investing envelope and where ? Of what could there be felicity ? How could there be the unfathomable water ?

The contradictory statement of the first phrase that non-existent was not there; existent was also not there, which attempts to assume a state which was the prime stage of the creation. Death was not nor was there immortality, no indication of day and night and there was nothing else whatever. That state of existence was absolute darkness (darkness overpowered with darkness) and all this was undistinguishable water and then by the greatness of austerity the 'One' came into being in that time-spaceless state. Thereafter the hymn describes the primordial substance (Kama) was produced. Then the 'seed' of mind (manas) arose. And 'this is the bond between the non-existent and existent'. But the poet overcome by his doubts submits – who really knows ? Who is this world may declare it ? When was this creation engendered ? The gods were subsequent to the world's creation ? So who knows when it arose ? On the Supreme God might be knowing or even the himself knows not.

The account of cosmological observations of different seers, as available in different hymns of the Rigveda (mainly in the Xth Mandala) regarding the origin of this universe is that numerous gods are credited with their cosmocratic super power, and they directly acted as the direct agent of the creation of this universe. Prajapati, Hiranyagarbha, Brihaspati, Vak, Visvakarman, are in the line. The hymns of acknowledge the power of supreme Being. The Purusa hymn attaches more importance to Purusa as the agency of a creator. The Nasadiya hymn and Asayavamiya and RV. X. 190 the cosmogony is ascribed to abstract principles rather than to gods.
Einstein, the stalwart scientist once remarked that 'the most incomprehensible thing in this universe is that it is comprehensible.' The unending search of human talent on the origin or creation of the universe is going on but comprehensibility on the subject concerned has not yet been achieved.

Materialistic overview on the origin of the world or coming into existence process is based on two notions: (i) the universe is existent from infinite time and (ii) Everything in this universe is merely the result of chance and not the product of any intellectual design or plan or vision.

But the above mentioned two notions were shattered with the advent of the Big Bang Theory advocated by Edwin Hubble.

In 1922 the Russian Physicist Alexandra Friedmann produced computations showing that the structure of the universe was not static but even a tiny impulse might be sufficient to cause the whole structure to expand or contract according to Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, George Lemaitre was the first to recognise Friedmann’s work. He declared that the universe had a beginning and that it was expanding as a result of something that had pointed it.

The theoretical musings of these two scientists did not attract much attraction. In the year 1929, the American astronomer Edwin Hubble, working at the California Mount Wilson observatory made the most important observations in the History of Astronomy. Observing a number of stars through his telescope, he discovered that their light was shifted towards the red end of spectrum and crucially that this shift was directly related to the distance of the stars from earth. This discovery shook the very basis of materialistic universe model.

According to the recognised rules of Physics, the spectra of light beams traveling towards the point of observation tend towards violet while the spectra of light beams moving away from the point of observation tend towards red. (Just like fading of a train’s whistle as it moves from the observer). Hubble’s observation showed that according to this law, the heavenly bodies were moving away from us. Hubble, long before made another discovery – that the stars were not just racing away from earth; they were racing away from each other as well. The only conclusion that could be derived is that in the universe where everything moves away from everything else is that the universe constantly ‘expands’.

What George Lamaitre stated earlier was made sound by the observational evidences of Hubble. In 1916, Albert Einstein had concluded that the universe could not be static because of calculations based on his recently discovered theory of relativity (thus anticipating the conclusions of Friedmann and Lemaitre). But Einstien himself believed that the universe is constant. So he added a cosmological constant to his equations so that the staticness of the universe, as he believes be retained. But years later he himself admitted that this cosmological constant is the biggest blunder of his career.

Hubble’s discovery that the universe was expanding led to the emergence of another model that needed – If the universe was getting bigger as time advanced, going back in time meant that it was getting smaller; and it one went back far enough everything would shrink and converge at a single
point. The conclusion to be derived from this model was that at some time all the matter in the universe was compacted in a single point mass that had zero volume because of its immense gravitational force. Lemaitre referred to this state of the universe as the primeval atom and assumed that it was instantaneously created. George Gamow, showed that the primeval atom would have been extremely hot - hot enough to explode in a 'Big Bang'. The term 'Big Bang' was casually named by the British Scientist Fred Hoyle. And that name became the apt name afterwards. The Big Bang would have expelled the material of primeval atom out ward. The expansion we see today is the residual motion of this violent event which took place at the beginning of the time.

There was another truth that the Big Bang has pointed to. The whole universe was created from this 'nothing'. And, furthermore, this universe had a beginning, contrary to the view of materialist. Which holds the view that 'the universe has existed for eternity'. Our age and texts of the Rigveda has no evidence of this eternal existence. The cosmocratic hymns, as discussed earlier, always asserts creative agent regarding the coming into existence of the universe. Hiranyagarbha the cosmic golden egg, out of which the universe came into existence is not very far a concept from Hubble's single point mass. Our poet seers has described the creation process in subline words while Hubble sounds Big-Bang. Time as the scientists think, started after Big-Bang. This notion is also not very different from the vedic seers' observations. In Nasadiya Sukta, we find 'there was no indication of Day and Night (न रात्रि अरति: आसीत् प्रकेतः’ - X. 129.2). The creation of Sun and moon is repeatedly mentioned in different Suktas. According to Indian tradition, the Sun and Moon are the determiners of Day Night, i.e., Time.

Vedic seers are implicit on their approach to the problem while the scientists are explicit. Our submission is that the coming into existence process of the universe awaits more and more researches both from the scientist end and on our vedic texts. Inter disciplinary exchange will enrich both. As the seer proclaims:

इय विस्तिरितं आत्ममुं
यदि वा देहे यदि वा न

यो अस्सायकः परमेव्योमन्तः
सो अस्ते वेद यदि वा न वेदे

(RV. X. 129.7)
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