

Meeting 23: The Creator

Prajápati in the Vedic literature

Nikhil Surya Dwibhashyam

11 September 2022

Meeting agenda

- (Re)introduction to discussion group
- Today's topic præsentation
- Free discussion

Why a Vēda discussion group?

- What is Vedic literature?
 - Sāmhita-s
 - Brāhmaṇa-s
 - Others?
- Vēda-s vs. Vedānta, Upaniṣād-s, Purāṇá-s
 - Later monism (ādvāita) vs. earlier dualism
- Modern (religious, scholarly) fixation upon later literature

What is there to discuss?

- History & linguistics
- Metaphysics of religion
- Exegesis (e.g. countering western narratives)
- Moral principles
- Nuances of Śrāutá ritual

Our plans

- Weekly meetings on Sundays at 1200 EDT
 - Followed by more in-depth literature meeting at 1330 EDT
- Different topic/aspect/angle discussed in depth every week
- Format:
 - Præsentation
 - Free-form discussion
- Eventually something more

WhatsApp group

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/IXCQEkhfrcwHI7CNY8Fgat>

Let's introduce ourselves!

- Name
- School (if student)
- How you found this group
- Briefly: background/interest in Hinduism & Vedic literature

Some questions to consider

- What is Prajāpati's role in the Vedic pantheon?
 - His relationship to other Gods?
- What evidence is there that Prajāpati's role evolved across the Vedic period?
- What does Prajāpati show about the metaphysical nature of the Gods?
 - their equivalence to one another?
- What does Prajāpati show about the morality of the Gods and the laws that govern Them?

An introduction to Prajāpati

- *Prajānām pāti*: lord of the created (beings)
 - Or “lord of creation”
- Clear progenitor to later Brahma
- Creator of everything in the universe (including the Gods and Āsura-s, e.g. ŚB 11.1.6.14)
- Was first being (ŚB 2.2.4.1)
- Creator of new souls of all living things: thus, ongoing role
- One King, supreme God
 - Arguably closest there is in Vedic Hinduism to an Abrahamic conception of God

Prajāpati in the Ṛg-vedā

- Name of Savitṛ (4.53.2)
 - Prajāpati = Savitṛ = Sūrya = Dīv = Índra
- Is purified sóma (pávamāna, 9.5.9)
- Brings forth children (10.85.43)
- Brings auspicious cattle (10.169.4)
- Places the seed in the womb (10.184.1)
- Perhaps the creator mentioned in 10.129.7
- “Evolution” in role?

Prajápati as the primordial germ

- Prajápati = Hiraṇya-garbhá: the golden germ
 - *Bhūtásya jātáḥ páti* (RV 10.121.1)
 - “O Prajápati, thou alone dost understand all these creations, and no one else.” (RV 10.121.10).
- Thought to be the creator of the Púruṣa (RV 10.90)
 - But also the Púruṣa Himself
- The pseudo-epithet Ká (and “Egyptian” associations)
 - Later an actual epithet, e.g. TS 1.7.6.6

Prajápati & the cosmic incest

- *Pitr̥*: RV 10.61.7
 - See earlier equivalence
 - More explicit in MS 4.2.12
 - Daughter = Uṣás
- Punished by Rudrá (ŚB 1.7.4.3, RV 1.71.5, &c.)
- Later healed by the Gods (ŚB 1.7.4.4)
- Story also found in Purāṇá-s
- Meaning of motif?
 - Gods are not always morally perfect.
 - Another aspect: Gods as forces of nature
 - Prajápati as the (pro)creative urge

Prajāpati in ritual

- TS 3.1: supplement to sóma sacrifice
- *Prajāpatir akāmayata prajāḥ srjey' éti.*
 - “Prajāpati desired: may I create offspring.”
- Describes creation of various creatures
- Oblations commonly offered in other sacrifices
- Little effect of “dishonor”

Prajápati in ritual (contd.)

- Shape of altar in agni-cityá: supposedly shape of Prajápati
- “Golden man”
 - Only instance of quasi-idolatry in Vedic religion, but not really idolatry
 - Also represents Agní and the sacrificer (ŚB 7.4.1.15)
 - Same verse: Prajápati = Púruṣa

Prajāpati(-s) in later Hinduism

- Class of beings (as usual)
- Often said to be 21
- MB^h: used to describe Kṛṣṇá
- As Brahma: fallen into dishonor for several reasons in Purāṇá, including incest
- Nonetheless incorporated into the classic trinity of Gods, all derived from the Vēda

References

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