

The Hymn of Creation in the Rgveda

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The *nasadeeyassokta*, the 129th hymn of the tenth *mandala* of the Rgveda is known as the hymn of creation because it contains some important leads on speculations about creation. It will be instructive to try to understand what it says and use it for further thinking on the subject. It runs:-

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।

किमावरीवः? कुह? कस्य शर्मन्? अम्मः किमासीद्गहनं गभीरम्? ।।1

“At that time there was neither being nor not being. There was no particle nor the space which is beyond it. Who covered?Where? For whose benefit? Was it water deep and still?”¹

It is naturally thought that since the universe was not there before creation and the universe comprises everything, there was nothing before creation. This nothing or *asat* is called *shoonya* by the Buddhists and they hold that the universe was created out of the *shoonya* or not being.

The *Advaita* on the other hand thinks that the *shoonya* or not being can not create anything so what existed before creation was also some kind of being. This primary being is *sat*.

Nothing or *asat* is inconceivable without something or *sat*. Nothing is a negation of everything and *asat* is a negation of *sat*. The word nothing carries no meaning without the word everything and the word *asat* carries no meaning without the word *sat*.

It may therefore be thought that Everything and *sat* are primary and nothing and *asat* are derivable from them. But this is not true. Everything is not a matter of direct experience. We directly experience A, B or C but never everything. Everything is a logical construct of A, B, C etc which constitute what is called all and the negation of A, B, C etc constitutes the negation of everything which is called nothing.

Now can we conceive A without conceiving not A. All conceptions of A imply the conception of its difference from not A. A consists of its distinctiveness. So A can not be conceived without not A and *sat* is not more primary than *asat*. To say that *sat* has come out of *asat* or *asat* has come out of *sat* is claiming that either *sat* or *asat* can ride over its own shoulders

Since *sat* and *asat* thus interpenetrate we can not say that *sat* alone or *asat* alone were before creation.

There was no particle and no space which extends beyond it. A particle has length breadth and depth. Length, breadth and depth are dimensions of the particle and they can not exist if the particle does not exist. We can not say length, breadth and depth are dimensions of space because when we measure them we do not measure the length etc of space. The length of space is immeasurable.

It is said that there is vacuum beyond the atmosphere Still we speak of the distance of the Sun from the earth. This distance includes the distance of empty space. So it is wrong to say that empty space has no length.

We are told that there is no absolute vacuum anywhere. This is not relevant for our present problem because our present problem is logical and not Physical. The correct

answer is that the distance between the Sun and the earth is the length of the ray of the sun that reaches the earth. It is not the length of space.

If neither mere *sat* nor mere *asat* was there before creation what could be there? We have seen that *sat* and *asat* interpenetrated. Now if there was creation it could only consist of disentangling this interpenetration. This is manifestation of the *sat* from the *asat*

Manifestation implies something that conceals and something that is concealed. Which was the concealer and which was the concealed.? Where did this occur? Did it result in anybody's benefit?

These last two questions are not meant as questions but as answers like the question who is to bell the cat? The answer is no body. Creation could not have a place and any body for whose benefit it occurred simply because these two are post creation.

It is clear that the disinterpenetration of *sat* and *asat* can not be complete because none of them can exist without the other. *Asat* is featureless and *sat* has features. But nothing can consist only of features and nothing can be completely featureless. The image carved out of the rock has features but the rock is not completely featureless. It can be distinguished from non rocks. Nothing new is created in carving out the image, This carving out does not consist of creating anything new but only in removing those portions of the rock which were concealing the image.

We can not write unless we have something blank to write. This blank is featureless as compared to the letters written on it but it has also features, otherwise the paper could not have been recognized as paper. The letters written on the paper distinguish the portions of the paper on which they are written So the letters were already there but submerged in the blank

So we try to understand the most primary principle in creation as being as featureless as possible. We can use the example of something which in our experience is as featureless as possible. This is the vast and deep ocean as seen by a person who is in the midst of it when there is no breeze.

न मृत्युरासीदमृतं न तर्हि न रात्र्या अह्ना आसीत्प्रकेतः ।
आनीदवातं स्वधया तदेकं तस्माद्दान्यन्न परः किंचनास ।। 2

There was no death, so no deathlessness, there was nothing to distinguish between night and day. That one breathed without breath on its own. Apart from that there was nothing. 2

The concept of immortality requires the concept of mortality. We do not say the sky is immortal or time is immortal. In another sense deathlessness is not possible without death. How do we define being alive? Not getting oxygen for a few seconds is called death So every moment of life can be defined as a postponement of death.

When the Sun and the earth's rotation were not there what distinction could be there between day and night? One cannot say that it was all night and no day. When there is no day there can not be such a word as night. Darkness is described as absence of light and light is described as absence of darkness. All propositions about light can be stated without using the word light and *vice versa* about darkness.

If there was anything at the time of creation it must be something which was breathing alone without air. There was nothing else. Just as there was no distinction between light and darkness there was no distinction between the breather and the breath.

At the time of creation the interpenetration of the *sat* and the *asat* was complete

तम आसीत्तमसा गूढमग्रे अप्रकेतं सलिलं सर्वमा इदम्
तुच्छयेनाभु अपिहितं यदासीत् तपसस्तन्महिना अजायतैकम् ॥ 3

There was darkness concealed by darkness in the beginning. All this was beaconless water. The pervading was concealed by the void. That one was born by the power of heat.³

Darkness, beaconless water and void are all cases of featurelessness. Freezing keeps a thing unchanged, Heat brings about changes. So heat is the principle of change which introduces features in the featureless. No factory can work without an engine and engines burn fuel thus producing heat. What was brought about in the cosmic factory was as follows

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्ताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत् ।

सतो बन्धुमसति निरविन्दन् हृदि प्रतीष्या कवयो मनीषा ॥ 4

The agent of change produced desire which is the first seed of mind. The wise sages searching in the mind found the knot of being in nonbeing.⁴

Desire is a state which drives towards obtaining what is naught yet. Therefore desire is the knot of what is and is not

This knot is the essence of all becoming. The moving arrow is and is not in one place. It never occupies space bigger or smaller than itself but still it covers a distance much larger than itself. The arrow's motion is the knot of being and not being in a place.

This is true of all becoming. A growing tree is in one state at any given time but in the course of time it undergoes many states. Every state of the tree is a knot of its previous and the subsequent state.

So time or becoming is a knot of the *sat* and the *asat*

This brings us to the perennial controversy between the *satkaryavada* of the *samkhyas* and the *aarambhavada* of the *nyaya*. If the knot of the *asat* and the *sat* is the source of all becoming, is becoming only a manifestation of what was unmanifest before as the *samkhyas* have it, does it bring out something new as the *nyaya* insists? We have to say that since both *sat* and *asat* partake in becoming, it retains what was already there but also adds to it something new. The scope of this new *asat* is restricted by the *sat* that precedes and the *asat* that follows is restricted in its scope by the *sat* that precedes it.

तिरश्चीनो विततो रश्मिरेषाम्, अधःस्विदासीदुपरि स्विदासीत् ।

रेतौघा आसन महिमान आसन् स्वधा अवस्तात्प्रयतिः परस्तात् ॥ 5

The ray constituted of these knots spread sideways as well as above and below. Some of these rays were quantities or sizes and some procreators i.e life the principles of which are not describable in terms of quantities. The inertia or the abiding remained behind or below and the dynamic went far.⁵

Reality is a series of knots of being and not being. These series are spread in three dimensions. Some of these are expressible in terms of the quantities: length, time and mass. This is the world of the natural sciences. But life is not expressible in terms of length, time and mass. Life is called "procreators"

Svadhya is the tendency to perpetuate itself and *prayati* is the tendency to change. A stationary thing remains stationary unless it is pushed and the moving remains moving unless outside forces try to stop it. The tendency to change is obvious. It is fast in living beings but even rocks change in course of astronomical time spans.

को अद्धा वेद? क इह प्रवोचत्? कुत आजाता? कुत इयं विसृष्टिः?

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेन अथा को वेद यत आबभूव ॥ 6

Who really knows,? Who will explain from where this world has come? Whence this creation?The deities are posterior to creation. So who knows from where this has come?6

The sage is now admitting that whatever he has said thus far is speculation. So he invokes others. He says with conviction that the deities invoked in the Rgveda can be no wiser than us because they are also posterior to creation. The deities in the Rgveda are heavenly bodies which are obviously parts of creation and not creators.

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत्त आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न ।

यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन् सो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद ।7

Whence this creation?Was it contrived or not ?. One who presides over this in the far heavens perhaps knows but perhaps not even he.7

The first line asks whether the source of creation was a design or was it natural?In our world the dwellings of men and birds are designed, but the caves are supposed to be not designed. The theory of creation holds that the whole universe is a creation of God. It should be noted that the *nasadeeyasookta* allows a presiding deity in the far heavens but not a creator God.

Creation is a process in time. The proposition: God created the world, implies that there was no world before the world was created. The proposition:” before the world was created” implies that there was time before the world was created. But time is a series of events and if a series of events was already there the world was there and so the assertion that God created the world is self contradictory. If we suppose that God created time also we have to suppose that before creation there was no time at which God could have existed. Saying that God is timeless and this involves no contradiction does not help because in a timeless God there can not be periods like before and after creation.