

## The Rigvedic Deities associated with Creation of the Universe: A Study

PARIMAL SARDAR

Assistant Professor, Rishi Bankim Chandra College,

Naihati, West Bengal

Email- psardar1234@gmail.com

### Introduction-

The *Rgveda*, the most ancient text of Indian civilization and the earliest known literary work of humankind, stands as the foundation of Vedic thought and philosophy. It is not merely a collection of hymns dedicated to various deities, but a profound reflection of the human quest to understand the origin, order, and mystery of the universe. Among its many themes, the concept of *sr̥ṣṭi* (creation) occupies a central place, offering multiple philosophical and poetic interpretations of how the cosmos came into being and which divine powers presided over it. The hymns of the *Rgveda* present a wide spectrum of ideas from mythological to metaphysical revealing the gradual evolution of human thought about creation and existence.

Unlike later systematic philosophies, the Vedic seers did not present a single unified doctrine of creation. Rather, the hymns express diverse insights, each reflecting a different aspect of cosmic manifestation. The deities associated with creation- such as Prajāpati, Viśvakarman, Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, and Savitr̥ are not rigidly defined entities but dynamic principles symbolizing various creative forces of nature and consciousness. These deities represent the universal energies that brought order (*ṛta*) out of chaos, form out of the formless, and life out of the inert.

The famous hymn the *Rgveda* 10.121, known as the Hiranyagarbha Sūkta, portrays the “Golden Germ” or cosmic embryo as the source of all existence, floating in the primordial waters before the creation of heaven and earth. Similarly, the *Rgveda* 10.82, dedicated to Viśvakarman, depicts the divine architect who fashioned the universe with wisdom and sacrifice. The Nāsadiya Sūkta (10.129), one of the most philosophical hymns of the *Rgveda*, goes beyond mythology and enters the realm of speculative thought, suggesting that even the gods may not fully know the mystery of creation. These hymns demonstrate the depth of Vedic contemplation on the origins of the cosmos where poetic imagination and philosophical reasoning coexist harmoniously.

Therefore, a study of the Rigvedic deities associated with creation is not merely a theological exploration but a journey into the earliest human efforts to comprehend existence itself. It reveals how the Vedic mind perceived divinity not as separate from the cosmos but as its very essence creative, sustaining and eternal. Through these hymns, the *Rgveda* offers a timeless reflection on the unity of the cosmic and the divine, making it a cornerstone of both Indian philosophy and world thought on creation.

### Agni-

In the Vedic literature, Agni holds a central place among the deities connected with the creation of the universe. As one of the most frequently invoked gods in the *Rgveda*, Agni is not merely the physical fire but the cosmic principle of energy, transformation, and regeneration. He acts as a vital link between the divine and the human, between the unseen cosmic order (*ṛta*) and the manifest world. Through his fiery presence, creation becomes active, dynamic and self-sustaining.

The *Rgveda* begins with the invocation-

अग्निमीळे पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देवम् ऋत्विजम् ॥ होतारं रत्नधातमम् ॥<sup>1</sup>

(I praise Agni, the household priest, the divine ministrant of the sacrifice, the Hotr, bestower of treasures).

This very first mantra of the *Rgveda* establishes Agni as the primordial force that initiates and sustains all sacrificial and cosmic activity. The concept of creation through sacrifice (yajña) the key cosmological act in Vedic thought has Agni as its central agent. Without Agni, the *yajña* cannot begin, and hence, creation itself would remain incomplete.

In the *Rgveda* (10.5.7), Agni is described as “the first-born of ṛta” (ṛtasya jyotiḥ) the light or energy that emerges from the eternal order. This suggests that before the structured cosmos appeared, Agni existed as the primordial fire, the first manifestation of order within chaos. The hymns (*Rgveda* 6.9.1) further describe him as the “navel of the world” (nābhir bhuvanasya), symbolizing his position as the central energy source of the universe.

Agni’s creative role is also metaphysical- he transforms the invisible into the visible, the potential into the actual. The fire of Agni converts offerings into smoke and light, symbolizing the transformation of the material into the spiritual. Thus, Agni becomes the mediator of creation, transferring the energy of the gods to the earth and of humans to the heavens.

In later Vedic and Brāhmaṇa texts, Agni is identified with Prajāpati, the Creator himself, who through the fire-sacrifice gives birth to gods, humans and all beings. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (6.1.1.1) declares, “Agni is Prajāpati; through him the universe was generated.”

Therefore, Agni, as both cosmic fire and divine intelligence, symbolizes the creative spark of the universe-the energy that brought existence out of non-existence, sustains it through sacrifice and ultimately leads it back to the eternal order (*ṛta*).

#### VARUNA-

In the Vedic pantheon, Varuṇa occupies a significant and exalted position as one of the Ādityas, often regarded as the upholder of Ṛta, the cosmic and moral order. His role in the creation of the universe is not as direct or anthropomorphic as that of Prajāpati or Viśvakarman, yet his cosmic attributes clearly associate him with the primordial order from which creation unfolds. In the *Rgveda*, Varuṇa is depicted as the divine sovereign who sustains the universe through law, truth and order-principles indispensable to the act of creation and cosmic stability.

Varuṇa’s creative function is symbolically expressed through his governance of Ṛta. The *Rgveda* (1.24.10) declares that “Varuṇa knows the path of the birds that fly through the sky, and the ships that traverse the ocean; he knows the track of the wind and the course of all things.” This universal knowledge implies his omniscient control over the created world, suggesting that creation itself operates according to the eternal order established by him. Thus, Varuṇa’s creative role is that of a cosmic regulator, ensuring that all beings and elements function harmoniously within the ordained structure of the cosmos.

In the *Rgveda* 7.86.1–3, Varuṇa is invoked as the “upholder of heaven and earth,” who has “spread out the sky and fixed it firmly.” These hymns attribute to him the act of setting in place the foundations of the universe, aligning him with the creative deities who shaped the world. Furthermore, the *Rgveda* 8.41.10 speaks of Varuṇa “who made the golden and vast firmament,” directly linking him to the formation of the heavens.

Philosophically, Varuṇa represents the intellectual and ethical dimension of creation. Unlike the creative fire of Agni or the dynamic breath of Vāyu, Varuṇa symbolizes the principle of cosmic

<sup>1</sup> The *Rgveda*, 1.1.1

intelligence and moral consciousness, ensuring that creation proceeds according to divine law. In later Vedic and Brāhmaṇa texts, this association deepens Varuṇa becomes the guardian of the cosmic waters (Apas), from which all creation emerges, reflecting the ancient Indian conception of water as the primordial element of creation.

Thus, Varuṇa's connection with creation lies not in physical formation but in the maintenance of universal order, the metaphysical framework that sustains the cosmos. Through Rta, he ensures the eternal rhythm of creation, preservation and renewal.

#### SOMA-

In the *Rgveda*, Soma occupies a central and complex position among the Vedic deities, being both a divine plant and a cosmic principle associated with life, immortality and creative power. He is not merely a ritual drink but a cosmic force that energizes gods and men alike, deeply connected with the processes of creation, regeneration, and the maintenance of cosmic order (rta).

According to the *Rgveda*, Soma is described as “the creator of heaven and earth” (*dyāvāpṛthivī janitā*), signifying his role as the generative principle of the universe.

एष देवो नृमण्या ह्यतो नृभिः सोमः पुनानः प्रवतोर्न सर्षट् ।  
सप्त स्रवन्त्यृषयो नवन्तं रथं न धीराः परि यन्ति विश्वतः ॥<sup>2</sup>

The hymns of the Ninth Maṇḍala often called the Soma Maṇḍala celebrate him as the divine essence flowing through all creation. The act of extracting and purifying Soma during ritual symbolizes the re-enactment of cosmic creation, where chaos is transformed into ordered existence through sacred sacrifice (yajña).

Soma is intimately linked with Agni (fire) and Indra, forming a triad that represents the dynamic energy of the cosmos. Soma's divine essence empowers Indra to perform his heroic deeds, such as slaying the serpent Vṛtra, which releases the waters and renews life — an event that parallels the primordial act of creation. Thus, Soma acts as the life-giving principle that stimulates and sustains the universe.

Philosophically, Soma represents the elixir of immortality (amṛta), the vital fluid of creation that pervades all existence. As expressed in the *Rgveda* 9.96.5, “Soma is the embryo of the cosmic order, born as the first of the gods.” This verse identifies Soma as both the seed (bīja) and sap (rasa) of creation the inner essence that causes the universe to blossom into being.

Moreover, Soma is also seen as the moon in later Vedic thought (as in *Atharvaveda* 14.1.5), symbolizing the cyclical nature of creation waxing and waning, creation and dissolution. Through this lunar symbolism, Soma embodies the eternal rhythm of existence, reflecting the Vedic view that creation is a continuous, self-renewing process rather than a single event.

#### INDRA-

In the *Rgveda*, Indra is one of the most powerful and dynamic deities, often celebrated as the lord of the heavens (Divaspati), the slayer of Vṛtra and the upholder of cosmic order (rta). Although he is not directly described as the *creator* in the same sense as Prajāpati or Viśvakarmā, several hymns attribute to him a crucial role in the cosmic creation and re-creation of the universe.

The most significant aspect of Indra's creative function is seen in his cosmic battle with Vṛtra, the serpent of obstruction. In the *Rgveda* 1.32 and 2.12, Indra, armed with the *vajra* (thunderbolt), smites Vṛtra and releases the pent-up waters that were being held captive. This act is symbolic of the liberation of the cosmic forces and the renewal of creation. The release of waters signifies the restoration of life and

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,9.86.10

fertility to the universe, marking Indra as the restorer and sustainer of creation. “He slew the dragon who lay upon the mountain; for the waters he opened the paths; the torrents flowed down.”

इन्द्रः सोमं पिब वज्रं च गृह्य/ त्वं ह्यसि प्रशिषः सुतानाम् ।  
त्वं शत्रूणां वज्रिहन्नवध्यो/ विश्वाच्यावयः पृथिवीमुत द्याम् ॥  
इन्द्रो यद् वृत्रमवधीदपिन्वद्/ दिवः स्कम्भेन पृथिवीं च धेनाः ।  
अपामनिश्चद् वृषभो न वृष्ण्या/ अस्मै वत्सं न मातरं दुदुहे ॥<sup>3</sup>

Indra’s creative power is not limited to the physical realm; it also extends to cosmic order and light. After his victory, he sets the sun in the sky and establishes day and night, thereby structuring the cosmos.

Furthermore, Indra is invoked as the father of gods and men highlighting his creative and protective paternal aspect. Through his dynamic actions, Indra continually renews the world, making him a cosmic agent of regeneration rather than a static creator.

In the broader Vedic theology, creation is an ongoing process a cycle of obstruction and release, darkness and light. Indra embodies this dynamic energy, transforming chaos into order. His creative acts are thus not of origination ex nihilo but of cosmic reordering and sustenance.

In summary, in the Vedic conception, Indra’s role in creation lies in his cosmic victories that sustain the world, release life-giving forces, and uphold *ṛta* the eternal order. His battle with *Vṛtra* and the liberation of waters and light symbolize the perpetual renewal of the universe, placing him among the great creative forces of Vedic cosmology.

### **Bṛhaspati-**

In the *Rgveda*, Bṛhaspati (also known as Brahmanaspati) occupies an eminent position as the lord of sacred speech (*Vāc*), the priest of the gods (*Deva-guru*) and the embodiment of divine wisdom. His role in creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) is primarily intellectual and spiritual, rather than physical. Through speech, prayer, and knowledge, Bṛhaspati is said to set in motion the creative energies of the cosmos.

In the *Rgveda* 2.23, Bṛhaspati is invoked as the creator of order and the revealer of light. The hymn declares:

बृहस्पते अति यदर्यो अर्यः प्रजाता सो अस्य वर्धमानः।  
यो अस्मिन्धियोऽदधाद्विप्रजूतः प्रजामिषे यजमानाय शं योः॥<sup>4</sup>

This verse symbolizes his cosmic creative act the emergence of light from darkness, an image often used in Vedic literature to represent the birth of the universe from the unmanifest. By invoking and articulating the Vedic word (*mantra*), Bṛhaspati transforms the formless into form, the silent void into sound the very process of cosmic manifestation.

In the *Rgveda* 10.68.8, he is further described as the opener of paths and breaker of obstacles, who “found the dawn and spread the light.” This action is not merely physical but metaphysical: it represents the awakening of consciousness and the ordering of chaos into cosmos. Through his intellectual and linguistic power, Bṛhaspati becomes the architect of universal harmony.

Later Vedic and Brāhmaṇa texts expand this concept. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (6.1.1) associates Bṛhaspati with Brahman, the supreme creative principle. He is identified as the first to perform *yajña* (sacrifice) the archetypal act of creation. Through this sacrificial symbolism, creation itself is seen as a

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1.32.1–2

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2.23.18

cosmic ritual, where speech (Vāc) and knowledge (Vidya), both governed by Bṛhaspati, generate the universe.

Philosophically, Bṛhaspati represents the creative power of thought and word. Just as the Ṛṣi creates through mantra, Bṛhaspati, the cosmic priest, creates through sacred sound. Thus, his role in creation is the initiation of manifestation through intelligence, order, and sacred speech.

• **Vedic Philosophical Hymns Associated with the Creation of the Universe**

The question of the origin of the universe how existence arose from non-existence has been a profound concern of human thought since the dawn of civilization. In ancient India, the earliest reflections on cosmic creation are found in the Vedas, particularly in the *R̥gveda*, the oldest extant Indo-European text. The Vedic seers (ṛṣis) did not merely speculate about the physical formation of the cosmos; rather, their hymns express deep philosophical and spiritual inquiries about the mystery of creation, being, and consciousness. Unlike later systematic philosophical schools, the Vedic hymns are poetic, symbolic, and intuitive expressions of metaphysical truth, revealing a worldview in which creation is both divine manifestation and cosmic order (ṛta).

Among the ten books of the *R̥gveda*, several hymns are associated with cosmology and creation. The most notable among them include:

Nāsadīya Sūkta (*R̥gveda* 10.129), Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta (*R̥gveda* 10.121) and Puruṣa Sūkta (*R̥gveda* 10.90).

Each of these hymns presents a unique philosophical perspective ranging from speculative inquiry and metaphysical abstraction to mythological symbolism.

• **The Nāsadīya Sūkta (R̥gveda 10.129): The Hymn of Cosmic Mystery**

The Nāsadīya Sūkta is perhaps the most celebrated philosophical hymn concerning creation. It begins with a paradox:

नासदासीन्नो सदासीत्तदानीं नासीद्रजो नो व्योमा परो यत् ।  
किमावरीवः कुह कस्य शर्मन्नम्भः किमासीद्बहनं गभीरम् ॥<sup>5</sup>

(Then was neither non-existence nor existence. There was no realm of air, no sky beyond it. What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping? Was there the deep, unfathomable water?)

This statement negates all dualities-being and non-being, light and darkness-suggesting that the origin transcends all conceptual categories. The hymn does not assert dogmatic knowledge but rather reflects agnostic humility before the mystery of creation.

The seer speculates whether creation arose from “svadhā” (intrinsic power) or “kāma” (desire):

कामस्तदग्रे समवर्तताधि मनसो रेतः प्रथमं यदासीत् ॥<sup>6</sup>

Here, kāma symbolizes the primal urge or will that give rise to manifestation, a concept akin to cosmic consciousness or the creative impulse found in later Upaniṣadic and Vedāntic thought. The hymn concludes with profound scepticism:

यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्सो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद ॥<sup>7</sup>

This final verse reveals the intellectual honesty and philosophical depth of the Vedic mind accepting that even divine knowledge may not fully grasp the beginning. It reflects an early form of cosmic agnosticism, emphasizing the mystery rather than the mechanics of creation.

• **The Hiraṇyagarbha Sūkta (R̥gveda 10.121): The Cosmic Germ**

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10.129.1

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 10.129.4

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 10.129.7

In contrast to the speculative tone of the Nāsadīya hymn, the Hiranyagarbha Sūkta presents a theistic and metaphysical vision of creation. It speaks of a “Hiranyagarbha” the Golden Embryo or Cosmic Egg as the first principle that existed before creation:

हिरण्यगर्भः समवर्तताग्रे भूतस्य जातः पतिरेक आसीत् ।

स दाधार पृथिवीं द्यामुतैमां कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम ॥<sup>8</sup>

(In the beginning arose the Golden Embryo; He was the one Lord of all that is born).

Here, the Hiranyagarbha represents the cosmic seed, containing within itself the potentiality of all existence. This symbol parallels later Upaniṣadic and Purāṇic notions of Brahmā emerging from the golden egg (Brahmāṇḍa). The hymn describes the Hiranyagarbha as the source of life, mind, and heaven, and as the one Lord (ekah) who supports the cosmos through his power (tapas).

The refrain “कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम” (To which god shall we offer our oblation?) repeated throughout the hymn, gradually reveals the idea of monotheism emerging from within polytheism the realization of a single cosmic deity behind all gods.

• **The Puruṣa Sūkta (R̥gveda 10.90): The Cosmic Person**

The Puruṣa Sūkta presents a highly symbolic and ritualistic vision of creation. It describes the universe as the cosmic body (Puruṣa) of the Supreme Being, who is simultaneously immanent and transcendent:

सहस्रशीर्षा पुरुषः सहस्राक्षः सहस्रपात् ।

स भूमिं विश्वतो वृत्वा अत्यतिष्ठद्दशङ्गुलम् ॥<sup>9</sup>

(The Puruṣa has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet).

The hymn narrates that the world was created through the cosmic sacrifice (yajña) of this Puruṣa. From his various limbs arose the elements of the universe, the social classes, and the natural world. This vision establishes a philosophical foundation for the concept of unity-in-diversity the idea that all beings and phenomena are manifestations of one infinite consciousness.

Philosophically, this hymn reveals a movement from mythic ritual to metaphysical symbolism, portraying the entire cosmos as a living organism pervaded by the divine. The yajña symbolizes the continuous process of creation and transformation, where the Absolute becomes the world through self-offering.

**Conclusion-**

The Rigvedic hymns associated with the creation of the universe reflect the profound depth of early Indian philosophical thought. The seers of the Veda did not merely describe a physical act of creation but sought to understand the metaphysical principles behind existence itself. Deities such as Indra, Agni, Varuṇa, Soma and Bṛhaspati symbolize different aspects of cosmic order, intelligence, and creativity, representing both divine power and universal consciousness. Hymns like the Hiranyagarbha Sūkta, Nāsadīya Sūkta and Puruṣa Sūkta illustrate the transition from chaos to cosmic harmony, from the unmanifest to the manifest world. The Rigvedic vision perceives creation as an eternal, cyclical process governed by *rta* the universal order that sustains life and truth. These hymns blend theology, cosmology, and philosophy, questioning the origin of being while acknowledging the mystery beyond human comprehension. Thus, the Rigvedic conception of creation transcends myth and enters the realm of spiritual inquiry, revealing an early awareness of the unity underlying all existence. The philosophical hymns of the Rigveda stand as timeless testimonies to the Indian quest for truth, the nature of the cosmos, and the ultimate source of all creation.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 10.121.1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 10.90.1



• **Selected Bibliography-**

1. Radhakrishnan, S. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I. Oxford University Press, 1951.
2. Macdonell, A. A. *Vedic Mythology*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997 (Reprint).
3. Keith, A. B. *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. Harvard University Press, 1925.
4. Zaehner, R. C. *Hinduism*. Oxford University Press, 1962.
5. Jamison, S. & Brereton, J. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
6. R.L. Kashyap. *Rig Veda Samhita: Mandala 10 Translation and Notes*. SAKSI Trust, Bangalore, 2007.
7. Max Muller, F. *The Upanishads*. Vol. I, Part. II. Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1962.
8. Mukhopadhaya, Govinda Gopal, *Studies in the Upanishads*. Sanskrit Collge, Culcatta, 1960.
9. Muller, F. Max. *Rigveda Samhita*. Vol. II. Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, Varanasi, 1999.
10. Muller, F. Max. *Hymns of the Rigveda in the Samhitā and Pada Texts*. Vol. I. Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series office, Varanasi, 1965.