

CREATION IN THE MARKANDEYA PURANA

The Brahmanical tradition encompasses a vast body of literature commonly referred to as the Puranas (Pintchman 261). The Puranas are categorized as *smṛti* (i.e., literature that has been passed on by human beings to the next generation through oral tradition), but often claimed as *śruti*-like or “divinely heard” (Coburn 343-344). For instance, the *Markandeya Purana* states that “as soon as Brahma, whose origin is inscrutable, came into being, this Purana and the Vedas issued from his mouths” (Mark. P. 219). The Puranas are classified according to sectarian perspectives; a majority of the eighteen Mahapuranas, or major Puranas, are Vaisnava or Saiva in orientation as the gods Visnu and Siva are deemed to be Brahman, the Absolute reality (Pintchman 261). Four of the eighteen Upapuranas, or minor Puranas, celebrate the goddess Sakti, and are thus Sakta in orientation (Pintchman 261). Other Puranas, however, such as the *Kurma Purana* and the *Markandeya Purana* do not appear to have any clear sectarian orientations (Rodrigues 290).

The Puranas mainly comprise several myths on “creation, renewal, genealogies, *manvantara* periods of time, and tales of genealogical figures” (Rodrigues 290). According to Pintchman (262), the Puranas distinguish between the two significant phases of universal creation. The *sarga*, or primary, creation phase occurs after a major dissolution, while the *pratisarga*, or secondary, creation phase refers to the renewal of the universe after a minor dissolution. These two stages illustrate the Hindu notion of eternal repeating cycles whereby the universe is constantly being created, dissolved, and renewed (Miller 63-66). In the *Markandeya Purana*, both the *sarga* and *pratisarga* creation phases are explained through a dialogue between

three *rsis* (sages): Jaimini (the first inquirer), Kraushtuki (the second inquirer), and Markandeya (the informer).

Markandeya begins the creation myth by claiming that Brahma is the cause and effect of everything in the universe (Mark. P. 220). Within Brahma, the three *gunas*, or qualities, exist in equilibrium: Brahma is one-third *sattva* (pure/luminous), one-third *rajas* (active/passionate), and one-third *tamas* (passive/dark). In accordance with Sankhya philosophy, Markandeya states that the disruption of Brahma's *gunas* lead to the creation of the Mahatattvas, or great categories (Pintchman 263; Mark. P. 220). First the Pradhana, or the Imperceptible, came into existence; from this, came the Mahat, or Intellectual principle, which can be identified by goodness, passion, and ignorance. Mahat in turn led to the creation of the Ahankara, or principle of Individuality. Ahankara, much like Mahat, has three characters: the Modifying, the Energizing, and the Evolving. The Evolving Ahankara then creates the subtle elements; from each element, a complementary element was created: From sound came ether, from touch came air, from form came light, from taste came water, and from smell came earth (Mark. P. 220-221). Following these creations, the Modifying Ahankara generated the eleven human organs. Of the eleven, five were organs of the *buddhi*, or intellect, and five were organs of the *taijasa*, or action (Mark. P. 221). These ten organs constitute the ten Vaikarika deities, while the *manas*, or mind, is the eleventh organ. Markandeya then continues by stating that Mahat, along with the other *tattvas*, give rise to a *hiranya-garbha*, or cosmic egg, which floats on a cosmic ocean (Mark. P. 222). [The notion of a cosmic egg that holds the universe in its incipient form is consistent with *Rg Vedic* accounts on creation, for an example, see Bhattacharyya 2-5]. This *hiranya-garbha* contains the Absolute and the universe in its embryonic form.

At this point, Markandeya is interrupted by Kraushtuki, a third *rsi*, who wishes to know what happens “when things are not created, and nothing exists, everything has been destroyed by time at the end of the dissolution of the universe” (Mark. P. 224). In response to this question, Markandeya commences by declaring that Brahma possesses three qualities that are manifested as Brahma the creator, Visnu the maintainer, or nurturer, and Rudra the destroyer. He continues by stating that Brahma, who is the first of all gods, lives for a hundred years. These years, however, are different from the years of human beings and deities (Mark. P. 226). Markandeya explains that the fundamental unit of time is an age, or *yuga*. There are four *yugas* that make up a *mahayuga*: the *krta yuga*, the *treta yuga*, the *dvapara yuga*, and the *kali yuga*. A thousand *mahayugas* constitute one *kalpa*, while seventy-one cycles of a *mahayuga* form a single *manvantara*. Thus, one *kalpa* can be divided into 14 *manvantaras*; *manvantaras* are presided by divine beings known as Manus (Mark. P. 226-227). A single day of Brahma comprises two *kalpas* (For a thorough explanation of the computation of Brahma’s life, see Appendix A).

After computing Brahma’s lifespan, Markandeya continues with the creation myth. Markandeya explains that at the end of each *kalpa*, Brahma sleeps and a minor dissolution, which is referred to as a causal dissolution or *naimittik pralay*, takes place (Mark. P. 227). During the *naimittik pralay*, residents of the triple-world, which includes the *bhurloka* (earth), *bhuvvarloka* (atmosphere or mid-region), and *svarloka* (heaven), temporarily relocate to the *maharloka*, while the residents of the *maharloka* travel to the *janaloka* (Mark. P. 227-228). [For a more detailed explanation of the triple-world system, see Prakash 55-61 and Miller 83-86]. The entire universe is also submerged in the cosmic ocean at the time of the *naimittik pralay*. When Brahma awakens, he starts to create the universe.

First, Brahma creates Narayana, or ‘the one who dwells in water’, who assumes the body of a boar, to dive into the cosmic waters to bring up the previously submerged world (Mark. P. 229). Markandeya continues by claiming that “the earth floated like an immense boat on that ocean, but [did] not sink by reason of the amplitude of its size” (Mark. P. 229). Narayana then began creating the triple-worlds, as well as the *maharloka*. Brahma is extremely satisfied with Narayana’s creations, but desires to create other superior beings to inhabit the worlds. He begins to meditate, and through this process, he creates nine classes of creations. As Brahma had already created *mahat* (intellect) and the subtle elements, he began meditating to create the *vikaras*. The *vikaras* comprised of sense capabilities (i.e., seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling) as well as action capabilities, such as grasping, speaking, walking, procreating, and excreting (Pintchman 270). These three creations (i.e, the *mahat*, subtle elements, and *vikaras*) are thought to evolve from Prakrti, and are thus deemed to be *prakrta*, or primary, creations (Mark. P. 232).

The fourth class comprised the vegetables, which are described as the “creation incapable of causation” (Mark. P. 230). The fifth class comprised the four-legged animals, such as cattle, that can be characterized by ignorance. Brahma realized that even these creations were incapable of causation, and thus, he continued to meditate and created the sixth class of beings known as the *urdhva-srotas*, or the gods. According to Markandeya, Brahma was exceptionally pleased with this creation because the gods are primarily characterized by goodness, pleasure, and affection. Brahma prolonged his meditation to create the seventh class that was capable of causation, and characterized by ignorance and passion; these were the human beings. Since “the streams of life in them moved downwards”, human beings were deemed the *arvak-srotas*. The eighth class of beings was the *anugraha*, characterized by goodness and ignorance. These latter

five creations are thought to derive from the Vikaras, and are thus known as the *vaikrta* creations. The ninth and final creation was the *kaumara* creation; *kaumara* consisted of both *prakrta* and *vaikrta* (Mark. P. 232).

Markandeya continues reciting the creation myth to Kraushtuki by explaining the details of Brahma's four created beings: the *asuras*, or demons, the *suras*, or gods, the *pitrs*, or ancestors, and the humans. Brahma created each being from a different and separate body (Mark. P. 233-234). After using each body to create a specific being, Brahma discards the body to form different periods of the day. Night came from the body that created the *asuras*, while day emerged from the body that created the *suras*. Twilight, or dawn, derived from the body that created the *pitrs*, and moonlight came from the body that created the humans. According to Pintchman (270), Brahma "then creates all other existing entities from his own bodily form." One such notable category of entities include Brahma's *manasa*, or mind-born, sons (Mark. P. 247-248).

Brahma created nine sages from his mind alone (Mark. P. 247). These sages were named Bhrigu, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Angiras, Marici, Daksha, Atri, and Vasishtha. These mind-born sons were supposed to continue Brahma's work of creation. However, the sages disregarded Brahma's work and, instead, pursued a renouncer-like life typified by contemplation, meditation, and asceticism (Pintchman 271). Realizing that his creations were at great risk of meeting an abrupt end, Brahma grew angry (Mark. P. 248). Amidst his anger, Markandeya explains, Brahma creates a divine being that is half male and half female (Mark. P. 248). In order to sustain his creations, Brahma orders the being to "divide thysself" to create several other females and males (Mark. P. 248). With several other beings created from the half male and half female divine being, Brahma generates Manu Svayambhuva to guard these numerous beings.

Markandeya's account of how the world came to be is one of several in the Hindu tradition. Although many Hindu texts bear close resemblance to the account in the *Markandeya Purana* (e.g., *Brahmada Purana*, *Garuda Purana*, and *Padma Purana*), several other texts describe differential versions of creationism. For instance, the *Purusa Sukta* hymn, in the *Rg Veda*, depicts the universe as an enormous cosmic being, known as Purusa, that is three quarters transcendent and one quarter manifest (*Rg Veda* 10.90). From Purusa, a feminine principle named Viraj, or the widespread, is generated. Together, Viraj and Purusa beget a son, also named Purusa; this son is sacrificed by the gods, and from this sacrifice Purusa creates the cosmos (Rodrigues 89). As this account of creationism is vastly different from Markandeya's account, it is worth noting that many creationist accounts in the Hindu literature may be contradictory. Although most Puranic creationist accounts are valued by Hindus worldwide, the Puranas have not been granted a *sruti* status, and thus, Vedic accounts of creationism, such as the *Purusa Sukta* hymn, may be deemed more significant.

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Article written by: Sara Kafashan (April 2009) who is solely responsible for its content.