The importance of the position of the Purāṇas in the religious history of India has been recognized by most scholars from the beginning of studies on Hinduism. General descriptions of them, together with probable chronologies, can be found in most handbooks on the literature of India. Though the Purāṇas have usually been classified as Hindu, the continuing persistence of the influence of Brahmanism in terms of its myths and rituals has often been overlooked in attempts at understanding the Purāṇas themselves. It is this persistence as exemplified in the cosmogony of the Vishnu Purāṇa that is the concern of this essay.

The Vishnu Purāṇa presents us with a very complex interrelated cosmogony. It is a synthesis of a diversified tradition into a unified structure. The cosmogony, which is to be found in Book I of the Vishnu Purāṇa, is divided into four linked creation stories. The first is the apparent evolution of Vishnu in terms of pradhāna (prakṛiti). The second myth is that of Vishnu as varāha (the boar), who dives into the waters for prithivi (earth). The third myth is a creation through meditation or austerity. The fourth is the creation through the churning of the ocean. The Purāṇa links these together as orders of creation, proceeding from what can be called a primordial creation down to the pratisarga, or secondary creation of this age (kalpa).
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A complete description and investigation of the structure, symbols, and continuity of this complex totality within the religious history of India is far beyond the scope of this essay. We shall concern ourselves here only with the first part of the total cosmogony mentioned above.

What has short-circuited many studies of the Purāṇas within Hinduism and the ancient tradition of India involves what has been said concerning this section of the cosmogony. The basic approach which will be found in most handbooks and articles on the Purāṇas is that what we have here is either a philosophy gone mythological or a mythological tradition becoming philosophical. The philosophy, of course, is Sāṃkhya, and, depending upon the viewpoint involved, this process has been seen as either a degeneration (into myth) or progress toward systematic thought (philosophy). Thus, in either case, the Purāṇas are manifestations of an unsteady age, to say the least.

In the Vishnu Purāṇa, the decidedly Sāṃkhyan description of the creation is to be found in Book I, chapter ii. It is this section that has produced conclusions that the Purāṇa is in “general conformity with Sāṃkhya.” Depending upon the particular view as to the nature of Sāṃkhya, the Purāṇa is then discussed as “de-mythologized” or “remythologized” Sāṃkhya. What is left is a “general conformity” with Sāṃkhya which, we believe, does not help us understand the actual content of the Purāṇa itself. The schematism of evolution in this section of the Vishnu Purāṇa is, in the first place, remarkably different from most of the systematic Sāṃkhya cosmogonies that have been studied in the history of philosophy in India. The beginning of chapter ii is a concatenation of Vishnu’s characteristics among which he is described as eternal (nitya), the supreme self (paramātmā), the support, root, and container (jagannātman) of the world.1 He is smaller than the small, his own nature is knowledge (jñānasvarūpam), he is Vasudeva, in whom all things dwell, and he is Brahmā.

Vishnu, who is Vasudeva-Brahmā, exists as purusha, avyakta, vyakta, and kāla, or as redefined, he is pradhāna, purusha, vyakta, and kāla in his highest point (param padam) (I.2.16; Wilson, p. 8). The text defines pradhāna for us as the unmanifest cause, called prakṛti by the rsis. It is eternal, the womb of the world (jagadyoni) (I.2.19–21; Wilson, p. 9).

1 References to the Vishnu Purāṇa will be made in double entries. The first will cite the Sanskrit text itself; the second will cite the problematic translation into English by H. H. Wilson, The Vishnu Purana, (1 vol.; Calcutta, 1961).
It is only when the “knower of the body” (kṣetrajña—either as the spirit or as sexual symbol) governs or dwells within pradhāna that creation evolves. The first production is mahat, which is enveloped by pradhāna as a seed is by its skin. Mahat evolves into the threefold ahamkāra, which is called vaikārika, taijasa, and bhūtadi. From this point, taijasa and vaikārika are dropped out, and we have a series of productions of the five elements (tanmātras): (1) sound (śabda), (2) touch (sparśa), (3) color or form (rūpa), (4) flavor (rasa), (5) smell (gandha), together with their correlated objects: ether, wind, light (fire), water and earth, manas and the ten sense organs. These combine to form the vast cosmic egg (I.2.33–55; Wilson, pp. 13–18).

The nomenclature of Śāmkhya in this elaboration of creation seems obvious. It is not our intention to investigate the problem and meaning of Śāmkhya in the tradition of India and in this particular Purāṇa. Before discussing this cosmogony, however, a few brief points upon this subject seem necessary. First, the Vishnu Purāṇa is not a Śāmkhya Kārikā, and caution must be used in the use of classical Śāmkhyan philosophy as a comparison or code for an interpretation of the text. The second point that must be emphasized is that this particular section manifests at least three traditions. Very briefly, the first is to be found in the general description given above, where it will be noticed that ahamkāra, though divided into three, continues the evolution through the bhūtadi. The second tradition (I.2.43–44; Wilson, p. 16), brings taijasa back into the structure of evolution. The text reads as follows: “From tāmasa ahamkāra the bhūtatanmātra are created. The deities and manas as the eleventh are known as vaikārika.”

The translation by Wilson is most problematic, since he erroneously presses sāttva, rajas and tāmas (the three guṇas of classical Śāmkhya) into his interpretation. His translation reads, “This is the elemental creation, proceeding from the principle of egotism affected by the property of darkness. The organs of sense are said to be the passionate creations of the same principle, affected by foulness; and the ten divinities proceed from egotism affected by the principle of goodness; as does mind, which is the eleventh” (p. 16). It must be pointed out that the indreyani are nowhere in the text spoken of as rajas but, rather, as vaikārika (sāttvic?). Wilson’s translation makes vaikārika both sāttva and rajas, while manas in this text is clearly related to the senses. Furthermore, taijasa cannot be explained by rajas. We believe this to be a good
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eexample of what happens when this cosmogony is pressed into a philosophical mold that does not fit.

In one of a series of articles that focuses upon Sāmkhya in the epic, J. A. B. van Buitenen, commenting upon part of this text, believes that what we have here is an attempt to restore or synthesize what he calls a “vertical” cosmic creation from a tripartite ahamkāra.2 The argument for or against Sāmkhya at this point must be decided upon the basis of a cosmogony that begins with a creator god and the significance of the secondary role placed upon the guṇas as found in the text. A second tradition in the text explicitly restores a threefold creation in terms of a “vertical” structure. Parasa says, “Thus I have related six creations (sarga—evolutions?), excellent muni. The first is that of mahat, it is known as the creation (evolution) of Brahma. The second is that of the tanmātras, it is known as the creation (evolution) of the elements (bhūta). The third is that of the senses (aindrīya) and is known as vaikārika. These are the creation proceeding from prakriti beginning with buddhī (that is, mahat)” (I.5.18–20; Wilson, p. 32). What is of interest here is that we have no mention of the creative threefold ahamkāra. Van Buitenen believes this order to be “certainly an ancient order of evolution.”3

The text we have just cited is manifestly ambiguous because of a synthesis. It began, as we have indicated, by speaking of “six creations” (I.5.18). But in the same context it continues to elaborate on nine creations. After the three we have quoted above, there are: fourth, the mukhya creation; fifth, the tairyaaggona creation (of animals); sixth, the ārdhvasrotas creation (of the deities and/or heavens); seventh is the arvāksrotas creation, that is, of men (literally, “those whose channels flow downward”); eighth is the anugraha creation, of sāttvikas and ātmas, of which five are the creation of vaikṛta, and three are of prakriti; ninth is the kaumāra creation which is a creation from prakriti and vaikṛta (I.5.20–23; Wilson, pp. 32–33).

The last two creations (the eighth and ninth) are clearly additions from a tradition that attempted to synthesize the three

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2 J. A. B. van Buitenen, “Studies In Sāmkhya (II),” Journal of the American Oriental Society, LXXVII (1957), p. 25. The entire series of three studies should be referred to in relation to the problem of Sāmkhya in the Purāṇas. Van Buitenen believes that the “vertical” cosmic evolution is more ancient than the “horizontal” classification of Sāmkhya and convincingly argues that there never was a proto-non-evolutionary Sāmkhya. We are indebted to his researches on this subject and its relation to the cosmogony in the Purāṇa. The series will be found in JAOS, LXXVI (1956), 153–57; LXXVII (1957), 15–25; LXXVII (1957), 88–107.

3 Ibid. Van Buitenen cites part of this text in his study, but the reference is to I.15.19–20.

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prakriti creations (mahat, ahamkāra, manas, or the tripartite ahamkāra) and the five "products of vaikṛta," that is, the bhūtas, with the guṇas. The clash between this description and the first three, as well as the description beginning with I.2.19, seems obvious. The senses, or five products of vaikṛta, would now become tāmas, while the first three partake of sātvika.

An alternative explanation could be given which would reflect a cryptic description reflecting something similar to that of the Śaṅkhya Kārikā. The eighth and ninth creations would then combine sātvika, with vaikṛta producing the senses, and tāmas, with bhūtadi producing the five elements. The number three would then signify the threefold ahamkāra, and the number five would indicate the elements. This attempt not only levels the evolutionary process but, interestingly enough, it also leaves rajas unexplained.

The second tradition that we can identify in this passage has already been given by the commentator on the text. The obvious incongruity of Parasa speaking of "six" creations and then elaborating "seven" is explained away by the commentary through the identification of the sixth creation (the ārdhvasrota) with the third, that is, the creation of the senses (indriyani). This identification, we will recall, is exactly the same interpretive attempt we found in I.2.43–44, where the indriyani are linked with deities in order to bring the second aspect of ahamkāra (taijasa) into the creation. We noted in our discussion of this passage that this solution was patently forced, since it makes the senses the product of taijasa, which of course is not what the text intends. The commentator, noting the combination in I.2.43–44, uses it for the solution to his problem in I.5.18, where the creations are given as six. This explanation, however, is as forced as the attempt to account for taijasa in I.2.43 ff. The conflict between six and seven creations remains a mystery in terms of a solution that might untangle the enumeration.

Whatever the solution to these puzzles, it is clear that the guṇas are not of first importance in this Purānic cosmic evolutionary scheme. Would it be of any assistance to conclude that what is reflected in this apparent synthesis is an ancient proto-Śaṅkhya? And how general must we make Śaṅkhya so that the Vishnu Purāṇa could conform to it?

Given the ambiguities described above, perhaps a different

4 The seventh creation is the last in this series; it is the arvākserotatas sarga. The eighth and ninth creations obviously begin with prakriti all over again.
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approach could assist us in our understanding of the text. With the research done by van Buitenen, there are two aspects of this cosmogony which we believe are very significant in relation to India’s religious tradition. The first is the evolution of pradhāna into mahat and ahaṃkāra. The abstractness of these terms is only apparent in relation to systematic Sāṃkhya. We need not necessarily turn to Sāṃkhya for an explanation of this expression. According to Schrader there is enough evidence in the ancient literature of India to open this structure for us. The evolution of mahat is “cosmic prāṇa”; it is the breath of the world. The connections between mahat and prāṇa seem plausible enough if the literary evidence were there to give us the explicit references. Not all the references that Schrader cites, however, lend themselves to this equation. It is significant that the Upanishads speak of prāṇa as the greatest of the supports dividing itself fivefold (Prāśna Up. II.3). This prāṇa is not to be understood as the prāṇa of systematic Yoga; here prāṇa is primordial or cosmic. The same Upanishad speaks of Prajāpati as desirous of offspring; he performed austerity (tapas) and produced breath and stuff (rayi) (I.4). The Kaushitaki Upanishad (II.1; III.2) identifies prāṇa with Brahmā and Indra; “Life is breath and breath is life.” We should remember that breath and wind (prāṇa-vaya) are in relation from antiquity. The popular Purusha-sūkta (Rg Veda X.90) tells of the “wind being born of his [purusha’s] breath.” The fourth Veda also has a hymn to prāṇa. The hymn, Atharva Veda XI.4.12, 15, and 19, praises prāṇa as the virāj, “the wind,” and states that “the past and the future, the all, verily is supported upon prāṇa,” and, “whoever, O prāṇa, knows this regarding thee, and [knows] on what thou art supported, to him all shall offer tribute in yonder highest world.” This mythology of breath does not necessarily reflect an influence of systematic Yoga. Nor is its problematic origin to be looked for solely in terms of the public or popular conceptions of that time. It is Mircea Eliade who reminds us that the alternatives are more complex and that we should look for a relation between a “scholarly origin” and “a pre-Aryan spiritual tradition, represented by peoples superior to the Indo-Europeans of Vedic times.” He is, of course, speaking about the Mohenjodaro-Harappa culture.

6 Ibid., p. 73.
We cannot do more than point to *prāṇa* as a possible variant of *mahat*. Its importance in the early literature and relationship with what we may call proto-Yoga is undeniable. The fact that *mahat* contains or is all that is potential both universally and in particular could very well reflect breath as the "support of all." If we remember that the *prāṇa* spoken of in the texts given above is not the personification or explicit reference to the breath of inhalation, the cosmic reflection of its greatness will be recognized more fully.\(^8\)

The conjectures that are involved in the above construction are not as vague when we approach the third great evolution of *ahāmkarā*.\(^9\) The relation of this term and its mythological association with antiquity are on more solid ground. Once more we are indebted to the investigations of van Buitenen in relation to Śāmkhya.\(^10\) Van Buitenen is convinced that the mythological associations adhering to *ahāmkarā* are not secondary developments.\(^11\) The significant point van Buitenen makes is that *ahāmkarā* is associated with "I am," "I do"; it is "the cry, uttering or ejaculation: AHAM!"\(^12\) He relates this meaning to the Brhad-āraṇyaka Upanishad I.4.1, 2, 3, and 5, where we find the following cosmogony: "In the beginning the self was here alone in the form of a person. Looking around he saw nothing but himself. He said first: 'I am.' Thus I came into being . . . He had no delight [sport, or sexual pleasure]. He desired a second. He was as big as a man and woman closely embraced. He caused that self to fall into two parts . . . He knew I am creation, for I created [emitted] it all from myself." The female partner created by the desires of this cosmic person is related, by van Buitenen, to the creation of Vac.\(^13\) The cosmogonies in which Vac is involved can be found in the Brhad-āraṇyaka Upanishad and its parallel, the Śatapatha

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\(^8\) Both Eliade and Filliozat reject the view that even the *prāṇa* of the five breaths (*prāṇa, apāṇa, samāṇa, vedāṇa, and vyāṇa*) has anything to do with inhalation or exhalation. Both scholars point to the cosmic value and structure of *prāṇa*; see *ibid.*, "Note III, 2: The Five Breaths," pp. 384–85; see also the reference and quotations by Eliade of Jean Filliozat, *La Doctrine Classique de la médecine indienne* (Paris, 1949), pp. 142–48. Our reference to Prāṇa Up. II.3 clearly indicates that *prāṇa* divides itself into the fivefold breaths mentioned above. It is their support, the greatest, and it conditions all.

\(^9\) The relation of *mahān/mahat* to the cosmogony has been confirmed from a different point of view by J. A. B. van Buitenen in a recent article entitled "The Large Atman" (*History of Religions*, IV, No. 1 [1964], pp. 103–14). The relation of *mahat, ātman*, and the association with *prāṇa* in cosmogony can be seen much more explicitly from this study.

\(^10\) Van Buitenen, "Studies In Śāmkhya (II)," *op. cit.*, LXXVII, esp. 17–21.


\(^12\) *Ibid*.

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Brāhmaṇa. In both cases, creation is produced by the copulation of the cosmic self with Vāc. More significantly, however, is the fact that this is preceded by a self-formulation. According to the conjecture of van Buiten, this process of creation continues to develop until the “function of Vāc, who is contained within the creator . . . reaches its climax in the sadvidyā of Ch. Up. 6” (VI.2 where sat creates alone).15

In the light of this pattern it seems that the Vishnu Purāṇa can be understood as more than an at-random collection of mythical traditions. The cosmogony in its completeness is also a creation involving self-formulation, creation through copulation, tripartition, and the separating of names and forms. Pradhāna is the “womb of the world without beginning” (I.2.21). Vishnu as manifest and unmanifest, and as purusha and kāla, is described as also sporting (I.2.28). Brahmā not only creates man and woman but is male and female (I.7). And Śrī, Vishnu’s consort, is the “world mother”; she is also “speech” (I.8.26). The complexity of the creative matrix and its formation is certainly much more developed in the Purāṇa. The pattern and epithets are nevertheless more than just a striking similarity. References to the guṇa quality of the creation may signify an attempt at synthesis with the Sāmkhya evolutionary system. However, we must not forget that the Chāndogya Upanishad VI.3.1–4 also speaks of a creation that is light, white, and darkness qualified by the forms of heat (or fire [tejas]), water (āpāni), and food (or earth [anna]).

We do not want to turn this first cosmogony of the Purāṇa into an ancient myth of creation as found in the early Upanishads and Brāhmaṇas. As we have already indicated, if Sāmkhya influence is to be seen at all in this Purāṇa, it is exactly this section that will be selected. Its continuity with the cosmogonies, however, remains explicit. In searching for the mythic in any culture we must be sensitive to the multivalent significance of any term or symbol. We have attempted to indicate that ahaṃkāra and its threefold tripartition bear a multivalence which must not be overlooked in terms of the depth of meaning that it carries.

We shall mention one more term in this cosmogony which remains enigmatic. The cosmogony not only describes the evolu-

14 BĀ. Up. I.2.4 and Šat. Br. X.6.5.1; van Buiten also quotes “a form . . . of Tandyā Mbr. 20.14.2 which reads: ‘Prajāpati was here alone. He became Vāc. Vāc became his partner. He wished: I will send out this Vāc and it will go and unfold this world: So he sent out Vāc and it went and unfolded all this.’” Ibid., P. 18.

15 Ibid., p. 19.
tion from Vishnu of mahat and ahamkāra. It adds a fourth (including pradhāna [prakṛiti]), which is time (kāla). The inclusion of this fourth “form” (rūpa) certainly complicates the cosmogony. The commentator interprets this form as māyā (illusion). This interpretation is forced, since it implies that kāla is “false notion” or ignorance. In verse 24 the two forms “besides” Vishnu’s supreme form are pradhāna and purusha. They (purusha and pradhāna) are united and split apart (divided) by the other (that is, the fourth) which is called kāla (time). Kāla is called eternal; it is without beginning, nor is its end known. The importance of kāla in this passage must be seen as the energizing or activating factor in creation—it reminds us of Śakti.

This “form” of Vishnu is foreign to classical Sāmkhya. In that systematic explanation of the elements of creation, the union and disunion (equilibrium and disequilibrium) “is due to the transcendental (non-mechanical) influence of the puruṣa.” In describing the doctrines of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Dasgupta adds as a contrast the fact that “Sāmkhya did not admit the existence of any real time; to them the unit of kāla is regarded as the time taken by an atom to traverse its own unit of space... The appearance of kāla as a separate entity is a creation of our buddhi.” We may now understand the commentator’s explanation of kāla in the text as “illusion.”

Whether the inclusion of time in this section of the Vishnu Purāṇa’s cosmogony reflects one more synthesis of another tradition can only be a conjecture. It is important to note that the Ahirbudhnya Śamhita of the Pañcaratras speaks of a transcendent time, a time that conditions empirical or historical becoming. It is apparently a time without beginning or end and a form not belonging to nature (aprakṛita). Vishnu sports, being vyakta and avyakta (manifest and unmanifest) purusha and time. The Lakshmi Tantra, VI.9–14, also speaks of the forms of Vasudeva as the “playing of Vasudeva.”

It is kāla that abides with Vishnu when all is dissolved. This form of Vishnu must not be confused with either time as a category or as the reality of becomingness. It is the condition of both. It would not seem too great a hypothesis to relate this notion with the mysterious māyā of the Bhagavad-Gītā. In that most important

16 Vishnu Purāṇa I.2.14–17, 23–28; the commentator refers specifically to verses 14 and 15 and 24 and 25 (Wilson, op. cit., pp. 9 and 11).
18 Ibid., 311.
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and well-known text of Hinduism, Vishnu through Krishna reveals his creativity as due to “his mysterious power” (ātmamāyā); his transcendence is “hidden by magical power” (VII.14 and 25). It is clear from the context that the Bhagavad-Gītā does not identify prakriti (matter) with māyā. It is through māyā that prakriti (Vishnu’s material nature) is produced or emitted (IV.6). This factor in the cosmogony must not be restricted to the more philosophical use of māyā as “appearance” over against reality. This is indeed one of its Advaita-Vedāntic meanings. Its wider implication must, we believe, be more directly related to virāj. The etymology of this word has been thoroughly discussed by Gonda in relation to Vishnuism.20 It is related to the power and expanse of the deities’ creativity. Even in Vedic times, virāj has no single or specific position. It is important to remember, however, that virāj is the creative power of purusha in the Purusha-sūkta. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, virāj is a creation of Prajāpati and is, furthermore, called the earth (Śat. Br. XIII.2.5.3; XII.6.1.40). More significantly, virāj is also identical with vāc in the Chāndogya Upanishad, I.13.2. As we have already noted, Vāc is the creative power of the “cosmic giant,” but also, and at the same time, this is expressed as his female partner from which creation proceeds.

The ancient mythology of androgyny as found in the hymns to Purusha and Prajāpati are undoubtedly transformed in the religious history of Hinduism, but their expressions of unity and perfection remain deeply imbedded in the Purāṇa. This can be seen more explicitly in the Purāṇa by reading the “Śrī-sūkta” and the myth related to prithivi (earth). The integrity of this symbolism, however, is not insignificant in the supposedly abstract character of the section of the Vishnu Purāṇa with which we are presently concerned. We are convinced that the descriptions of “the womb of the world” found in this section clearly reflect a structure that is in essence related to the expressions given above. It does not seem to be necessary to describe them as mythological embellishments of a philosophical cosmogony.

The last stage in this particular cosmogony attests to yet another form of an androgy nous creation. After the various forms have been produced, they form a cosmic egg (I.2.46–56; Wilson, pp. 17–18). This egg (anda) is described as a coconut which has an interior seed (or fluid) with outer parts (meat and husk). The outer sections of this egg are prakriti, mahat, the threefold ahāmkāra,

and the elements. The inside, a great womb, contains the waters, the oceans, mountains, gods, demons, and mankind.

The history of religions manifests this structure of cosmogonic myth in many cultures. It is represented in a variety of motifs from Indonesia to Scandinavia. Though its ethnological origins are not our concern, we may note that Eliade believes its origin is “probably to be located in India or Indonesia.”

The antiquity of this mythologem can be found within India’s own tradition. Let us return first to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XI.1.6.1–3. There we read:

Verily, in the beginning this [universe] was water, nothing but a sea of water. The waters desired, “how can we be reproduced?” They toiled and performed fervid devotions [or, and became heated]; when they were becoming heated, a golden egg was produced. The year, indeed, was not then in existence; this golden egg floated about for as long as the space of a year.

In a year’s time a man, this Prajāpati, was produced therefrom. . . . He broke open this golden egg. There was then, indeed, no resting place, only this golden egg.

At the end of a year he tried to speak. He said “bhuh”; this [word] became this earth—bhuvah: this became the air—svaḥ: this became yonder sky.

Prajāpati, according to this text, then continues to create through self-impregnation.

The Chāndogya Upanishad, III.19, has a variation upon the same theme.

In the beginning this world was non-existent. It was existent. It developed. It turned into an egg [andam]. It lay for the period of a year. It was split apart. One of the parts of the eggshell became silver, the other one gold.

That which was silver is this earth. That which was gold is the sky. What was the outer membrane is the mountains. What was the inner membrane is cloud and mist. What were the veins are the rivers. What was fluid within is the ocean.

In Rg Veda X.121.1 we read that

In the beginning, he[Prajāpati] became a golden embryo [the famous hiranyagarbha]. When born, he alone was the lord of creation. He established the earth and this sky. . . . When the mighty waters came, conceiving All as the embryo, . . . then arose out of it the one spirit of life of the gods.

In the famous Purusha-sūkta, already quoted above, we read that purusha, “enveloping the world all around . . . [with] one


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fourth, He extends on all sides into the animate and the inanimate. From that cosmic Egg was born and within it this Supreme Being; having been born, he stretched Himself further, (as gods, man, and so forth); then he created the earth and the bodies.” 22

These texts, to cite only a few, represent a common cosmogony internally related with the Vishnu Purāṇa. The early cosmogonies seem to imply a typical creation story which begins with a primordial chaotic matrix. The waters produce the egg; the egg itself is described as containing waters, fertile fluids for creation. The egg itself is the symbol par excellence for fertility and growth. It is the vast “womb” in the Purāṇa.

The elements of androgyny, world parents, and cosmic egg, though separate myths as found individually in some cultures, are not in themselves antagonistic. From a phenomenological standpoint they can be spoken of as one structure, a matrix or unity that separates and simultaneously creates or becomes creation. This separation is most explicitly found in those texts we have quoted that speak of the shells becoming sky and earth. These divisions are not solely cosmic elements, for they are also referred to as “father” and “mother.” The cosmogonies are charged with symbols of sexuality: emission, self-fertilization, intercourse, semen, and the like. The short ritual sutra that is found in Bhadāranyaka Upanishad, VI.4.20–21 inextricably binds the ritual for procreation with this cosmogony. The text says, “Then he comes to her [having performed a certain ritual] and says: ‘This man am I; that woman, thou! . . . I am the Saman, thou the Rg! I am the heaven, thou the earth!’ Then he spreads her thighs, saying: ‘Spread yourselves apart, heaven and earth!’” The sutra continues with a hymn from Rg Veda X.184.1, which says that “Vishnu

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22 Rg Veda X.90.1 and 4–5, trans. by V. Raghavan, *The Indian Heritage* (Bangalore, 1958), p. 10. It must be noted that the above translation is not the usual one for this hymn. Raghavan has translated virāj as “cosmic egg.” K. F. Geldner’s translation reads, “Aus ihm ward die Virāj geboren, aus der Virāj der Puruṣa,” *Der Rg Veda* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), III, p. 287; he notes, however, that virāj is “das weibliche Schöpfungsprinzip . . . die spätere Idee des Hiran-yagarbha oder Narayana” (p. 287, n. 5). R. N. Dandekar notes that “the precise meaning of Virāj is uncertain. Here [Rg Veda X.90.5] it seems to represent a kind of cosmic source—perhaps the waters themselves—from which creation proceeds” (“The Cosmic Order In The Vedic Hymns,” *Sources of Indian Tradition*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary *et al.* [New York, 1958] p. 16, n. 11). In S. Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (eds.), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, 1957), the translation agrees with Geldner and Dandekar. A note is also used to explain virāj as “the female principle” (p. 19, n. 1). Whatever its full intent, part of which we have already commented upon in relation to kāla, the Śat. Br. understands the hymn to reflect Prajāpati, which we have quoted from the Rg Veda (see Śat. Br. VI.1.1.3–5). This is a good example of the multivalent power of Indian cosmogonies and symbols.
shall spread her lap, Tvashṭr shall build the form, Prajāpati shall pour [the semen], and the creator shall fashion for them the fruit of life."

We are compelled to ask a question, since it will be, and undoubtedly has already been, asked: Why should procreation proceed in this way? India, along with other traditions and archaic cultures has the answer; “We must do what the gods did in the beginning. Thus the gods did; thus men do” (Sat. Br. VII.2.1.4).

The historical-ethnological problem of the origin and relation of these cosmogonies is beyond our investigation. It may be noted, however, that Baumann, in the conclusion of his book on the bisexual in ritual and myth, believes that this phenomenon does not appear to be fully structured until the so-called archaic high culture of plough agriculture. He admits, “mit aller Vorsicht,” the following hypothesis: (1) an early stage in the archaic high culture which knew of a myth expressing father sky and mother earth as sexually differentiated gods, but resembling the “twins” of primitive reality; (2) a middle stage involving world parents as a bisexual unity which later is separated, as for example, the world egg; (3) a late stage, which posits bisexuality through abstract categories and concepts (such as yin and yang in China, the rayi and prāṇa of the Pṛāṇa Upanishad); in this stage the gods possess independent female potencies, as for example, Śakti in Hinduism; (4) the last stage, which is an attempt to recover the antagonistic duality of bisexuality.23 Whether this can be linked to an historical development of matriarchal and patriarchal cultures is itself an open question, since the problem itself seems open and unresolved.24 Given the above hypothesis we can with caution place the above cosmogonies in the middle stage of Baumann’s schematism with the probability that their origin is to be found in India-Indonesia.

Returning to the cosmogony, it seems possible that we may understand it from two dimensions other than a “general” Śāṃkhyan structure. It must be emphasized that neither of these dimensions is entirely eclipsed by the other. The first dimension would manifest a cosmic beginning from a primordial latency. It seems to be a very explicit structure which brings the cosmos into being. The texts we have cited indicate that Purusha/Prajāpati/


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Vishnu are always there “in the beginning.” The important factor to be noted, however, is that the creation is not strictly identical with the creator gods. Furthermore, the same must be said for the creation that proceeds from this evolution. Prajāpati enters the egg, or copulates with what he has created. The Purāṇa is also explicit on this point in that Vishnu, the “supreme lord,” is not identical with Vishnu/Brahmā who enters or becomes manifest in the egg. In philosophical terms we might say that every actuality is more than its potentiality. Pettazzoni has given us a methodological clue for understanding this when he writes that every “phainomenon is a genomenon.” More incisively, and from a phenomenological standpoint, we may say that these “stages” are more than evolutions or self-formulations; they are strictly speaking “rebirths” or initiations. Thus the phenomenon of Prajāpati who enters the egg is the genomenon of birth. It is, so to speak, the assumption of a new mode of being. The form of this rebirth is manifested in terms of a self-procreation or incubation in the womb from which the All proceeds. The variations and meaning of “fertility” as found in cosmic creations in the history of religions have been discussed and summed up in Eliade’s already classic and widely quoted book, Patterns in Comparative Religion, for which we are greatly indebted.

At the moment, what we are particularly interested in is the continuity of the cosmogony within India. The primordial waters, the egg as the vast womb, the primordial couple, become the foundation or ground from which that which is existent takes place. Each step is a rebirth and each rebirth is a new birth. This is not something new to what we may call the Hinduism of the Vishnu Purāṇa. Our text is an undeniable reference for the continuing value of this expression within India. We may also point out that the “womb” as potentiality for what is actual is also immortality, rest, rta, as in the Vedas. For we would recall that when Agni is afraid or exhausted he returns to the “womb of rta.” From there he returns and is “reborn.” He is hunted and brought back so that creation may begin. When the spark ignites into flame creation begins anew. The Vedic sacrifice is more than anything else cosmically significant. Its value is never lost, as can be seen in the Brāhmaṇas and Upanishads, where, though transformed, it

27 Ṛg Veda IV.1.12; III.1.14; X.13.3.

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becomes the description of a person’s life. The Vishnu Purāna also refers to Vishnu as sleeping on his serpent couch in the waters at the end of every creation after which he creates anew. Furthermore, the earth-, space-, and sky-creating shouts of Purusha/ Prajāpati after emerging from the egg—“Bhuh!” “Bhuvas!” and “Svah!”—are inextricably bound with the rituals of birth and the magic of wish fulfilment, among other uses.

The Vishnu Purāṇa continually reiterates the theme that the Vishnu/Brahma of the egg is not the Vishnu of the supreme abode or point. Given the abstract categories in this particular section of the cosmogony, we would not deny that the intention of the text is directed towards Vishnu as supreme transcendence. This is the essence of Vishnu as he is in himself. Thus Vishnu does not create by direct action but affects creative activity as fragrance affects the mind from a distance. We must proceed with caution in these instances. Expressions such as these do not necessarily entail an attempt at systematic philosophy.

Once again it must be stressed that in no instance in the text we have used is the “supreme being,” the creator or great fecundator, equated with what is created. Purusha, it will be recalled, created as Virāj/Purusha. This emphasizes the importance of rebirth. It is interesting to note that in these instances the cosmos is emitted or born from that second birth. That is to say, the emphasis shifts from the transcendent one, who in Vedic terms stands three-fourths above creation to the one-fourth that creates, or, to the Purusha/Virāj, or Prajāpati as incubated in the egg. That which is transcendent remains transcendent; it is mystery, yet the primordial ground of all that is. The birth of creation always rests “in” and “because of” this ground, yet creation is also “in” the making and “because of” its own making. Birth, though conditioned, is always something new. The drama of the cosmos and life in the concrete takes its meaning from this presentation.

The second dimension of this cosmogony is related to the first. As we have seen, the creation is given in terms of the power of fertility and birth with all the values these contain in the history of myth and ritual. We have related the particular cosmogony in the Vishnu Purāṇa to the continuing tradition of India beginning with the Vedas. This is one stream of Indian perception in relation

28 We refer, of course, to such famous texts as Ch. Up. III.16.1–5, which begins, “Verily, a person is a sacrifice.” 29 For examples, see BĀ. Up. VI.4.25 and VI.3.3–6; Ch. Up. V.2.4–5; the various Grihya Sutras; M. Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, p. 110, where the dikṣa initiation is a return to the womb.

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to the religious in her culture. The other stream related to it is found in what is more popularly thought of as Hindu or Indian. This is the continuing reflection and expression concerning liberation—usually connected with Yoga.

We have expressed the supposition that religion is a phenomenon that is the concern and expression of life “in” and “because of” the ongoing world itself. Both these terms or processes include the dimension of transcendence. In religious terminology this is usually expressed in terms of creation and redemption, or liberation. Once again, we must emphasize that neither excludes the other; they are bipolar expressions. Methodologically speaking, this means that these two terms are universal categories by which we may understand the concrete expressions of particular religious histories. That religions manifest this double or bipolar concern is what relates them as religions; how they express and actualize this concern gives them their difference, contrast, and uniqueness.

The concern with creation and salvation is inextricably bound with the source, ground, or process of life.30 As we have indicated, the creation in the tradition of Indian literature often uses the mythology of the primordial parents and the cosmic egg. We have also shown that this is not itself the final ground of being or existence. Always reflected in this particular mythic perception is a transcendent reality that is the foundation and/or origin of all things. If we reverse the cosmogony as found in Vishnu Purāṇa I.2, we find that it is the exact path of “liberation” of which Yoga is the systematic expression. The world egg is like a coconut, or resembles an egg with several concentric layers consisting of the categories. Liberation in the tradition of Yoga is thus a reversal of creation, a movement back toward the supreme abode or point of Vishnu. In fact, we may view creation and dissolution as both macrocosmic and microcosmic. Dissolution is a satisfaction, an end in cosmic terms. Yogic samādhi reflects a similar dissolution, but here it is individual. Mythologically expressed, completeness, freedom, or salvation is a return to that from which all things proceed, and this is a return to that which transcends the initiatory rebirth or Purusha/Prajāpati/Vishnu in the egg. We may, therefore, look upon the cosmogony in the Purāṇa as a transfor-

30 Perhaps “salvation” or “redemption” is much too concrete a term to indicate what we intend by it. We mean salvation in the sense of satisfaction, completeness, unity, perfection, or wholeness. How this is defined and/or achieved depends upon the history of religions itself. We must also emphasize that the notion of “transcendence” as used above does not necessarily imply “the wholly other” as it does in some methods of understanding religions.

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mation of the creative world egg, together with its elements, into a redemptive motif. For we may certainly understand it to represent a "locked-in" cosmos. The worlds are apparently "in" the egg, although the language is ambiguous—perhaps rightly so. If we are correct in this understanding, liberation can also be seen as "separation from the egg." The cosmogony carries both "creativity" and "liberation" in its structure and meaning. Furthermore, we may understand the return, or movement back or out of the various envelopes of the egg, to entail a rebirth as initiation. Vishnu, as well as Prajāpati, is twice born as he enters the egg. The Brahman is also twice born through the upanāyana ceremony. Yoga, however, is the initiation of rebirth par excellence in the tradition of Indian literature. It is the labyrinth return to what is unconditioned, perfect, and at rest. Sleep and meditation are also expressions used to tell of Vishnu at the end of every cosmic dissolution. The sexual union of the primordial partners, the separation of the egg into the cosmos, or its evolution into a cosmos must, we believe, be seen as an expression at one and the same time of the creative/liberating dimensions that are at the root of India’s religious concern. This in itself, we hope, should deter us from any simple explanation of cosmogonies as protophilosophical or pseudophilosophical explanations of how or why the world began.