CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
Right from the early stages of evolution, human mind started to respond to the visible and invisible phenomena of world and formulated various conceptions about each and every process taking place in the world. As is evident from the history of civilizations, the thoughts of the people belonging to different parts of the world in the ancient past are recorded in the language of myths. Later, when the religions, which are the civilized form of the ancient beliefs and systems of savage human, came into existence many of the ancient myths were appropriated and re-formulated from the religious point of view. Religions, as an essential factor, imagined a creator-god behind the origin of the universe. The remnants of these tales are extensively visible in the religious scriptures. Deciphering the myths pertaining to the creation of the universe and also of the beings in it, is significantly vital in tracing out the trajectories of the development of human thought and culture.

The universe and its incomprehensible nature were a mystery for humankind all the times. This very mystic nature of universe made the human mind to place a divine power as its cause. This divine cause or causes varied to different civilizations both in nature and number. The primitive cosmogonic images of ancient civilizations took an anthropomorphic form in the later ages. Gradually, the human society made this concept powerful. It was charged with more function and was believed that the whole process taking place in the universe was governed by this power. There has been a perceivably slow and gradual development of the conception of god through various stages of worship followed by primitive man.

**Defining Cosmogony**

The word cosmogony is formed by the two Greek words ‘kosmos’ (world) and ‘gonia’ (to be born). It is the branch of study which deals with the
theory of the origin of the universe.¹ The definition of cosmogony given by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is "a theory, however incomplete, of the origin of heaven and earth, such as is produced by primitive races in the myth-making age, and is afterwards expanded and systematized by priests, poets or philosophers."² Thus, the discipline that deals particularly with the ‘origin/creation and history of the universe’ is designated Cosmogony. Hence, it stands apart from Cosmology which mainly is concerned with the ‘theories related with the structure of the universe’. Both Cosmogony and Cosmology are prime issues of concern of both religion and science.³

All ancient civilizations with no exception preserve stories about the origin of the world mostly in the language of myths, the traces of which are undoubtedly impregnated in the religions. Such stories gradually and unconsciously have been assimilated as intrinsic features of the religious beliefs. Distinguishing myth, religion and belief, Barry B. Powell says ‘“Myths are traditional stories; religion is the course of action that follows from belief. Belief is best defined as ‘what you accept (with or without proof) as a basis for action.”⁴ Thus, as the real course of the development of religious history can be decrypted only by analysing the myths associated with them, Mythology as the study of myths, contributes a lot to the study of Cosmogony.

³ The most popular and accepted scientific alternative to religious creationism is the Big Bang theory of the universe. The theory is basically formulated on the principles of Physics and Mathematics. It traces the evolution of the universe to an explosion taken place 14 or 15 billion years ago from a singularity of infinite density. Thus, the proponents of the theory say that matter, energy, time and space originated with Big Bang. After this initial explosion, the matter started to expand and the temperature of the universe cooled. It eventually led to the formation of various kinds of atomic and sub atomic particles, the stars and galaxies, leaving out the chances of life to appear in the universe. The process of expansion and cooling of the universe is still going on. See Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Books, London, 1989; Paul F. Lurquin and Linda Stone, *Evolution and Religious Creation Myths: How Scientists Respond*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp.109 ff; G. K. Sasidharan, *Mahāprapancham* (in Malayalam), D. C. Books, Kottayam, 2007 (3rd Edition), pp.26 ff.
Interpretation of Myth

How to interpret and understand the creation myths is a serious issue in the study of the cultural history of any society. Though the term myth was initially understood as “narratives or beliefs that are untrue or merely fanciful”\(^5\) formed by the ‘savage’ or ‘primitive’ man, the modern studies have proven beyond doubt that these stories bear some significance related with human psyche, life and culture in the remote past. The function of the creation myths (or the myths as a whole) varies from one to another. Theories developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the scholars of various fields of knowledge have generated a new awakening in the interpretation of myths. In the Anthropological level, Sir James Frazer (1854-1941 CE) formulated the Ritual Theory of myth relating the origin of myths to religious rituals. Another widely celebrated Anthropological theory regarding myth was the Charter Theory formulated by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942 CE). His theory, based on ‘functionalism’ proclaimed that the myths most often serve as a justification of the realities in the human life. Thus, they often perform a social function. Linguistic interpretations of the myths also were formed in these periods. The Psychological approaches developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 CE) and Carl Yung (1875-1961 CE) analysed myths connecting with psychological patterns. Freud’s arguments were generally based on his views on human sexuality and the interpretations of dreams. Another way of studying myths was suggested by Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009 CE) who insisted that the real meaning of a particular myth can be drawn from a structural analysis of the possible variants of the myth. He tried to trace the origin of myths to the nature of human mind to perceive things as binary opposites. The myths are formed as a part of the

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attempt to reconcile these opposites. These theories undoubtedly contributed much to comprehend the essential ideas and meanings conveyed by the myths.

**Hinduism and Christianity: Divergences and Parallels**

Defining religion in the context of India is a complex task. As the history points out, the word ‘Hindu’ initially bore geographical connotation. It was connected with the river Sindhu or Indus of the north-western part of Indian sub-continent and was used by the foreign invaders to designate the people of the area to the east of the river. As S. Radhakrishnan in this regard observes points out, “The people on the Indian side of the Sindhu were called Hindu by the Persian and later western invaders.” It is only in a relatively recent past that the term changed its significance from territorial to religious. This is pointed out by Romila Thapar as “The term 'Hindu' to describe a religious identity came into currency as late as the second millennium A. D.” This change as well as the evolution of ‘Hinduism’ was undoubtedly the result of the European activities to make knowledge of Indian culture and civilization. Romila Thapar continues,

“In the course of investigating what came to be called Hinduism, together with various aspects of its belief, ritual and custom, many were baffled by a religion that was altogether different from their own. It was not monotheistic, there was no historical founder, or single sacred text, or dogma or ecclesiastical organization - and it was closely tied to caste. There was therefore an overriding need to fit it into the known moulds of familiar religions, so as to make it more accessible.”

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Leaving aside all the endless issues and debates on the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Hinduism’ what can be conclusively said at the outset is that; a study on Hinduism can be meaningful only by covering all the minute strands of mythology, rituals, customs etc. connected with it.

Hinduism is far different from Christianity which is defined as a monotheistic religion which accepts a text as sacred authority and possesses strictly codified beliefs and customs. Christianity is simply understood as a religion that traces its origin to Jesus Christ of Nazareth (4 BCE-29 CE). Though originated in Asia, it rapidly became popular throughout the western world. Allied with the teachings of Christ, it owes much to the activities of Apostles, doctrines formulated by St. Paul, the various philosophical as well as theological discussions arose from the beginnings of the first millennium CE etc. And the most significant point is that Christianity is the descendent of Jewish religion despite having considerable doctrinal differences. As is well known, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the three prominent Semitic religions which exhibit considerable religious differences from their heathen forefathers of ancient period. The Semitic people, as explained by William Robertson Smith, are

"the group of kindred nations, including the Arabs, the Hebrews and Phoenicians, the Aramaneans, the Babylonians and Assyrians, which in ancient times occupied the great Arabian Peninsula, with the more fertile lands of Syria, Mesopotamia and Iraq, from the Mediterranean coast to the base of the mountains of Iran and Armenia."

But, as the scholar himself points out, there exist ‘the old unconscious religious beliefs’ as a ‘part of the inheritance from the past’ as an undeniable

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undercurrent of these religions. Undoubtedly the myths related with world’s origin occupy a prominent place in these unconsciously inherited traditions.

**Scope and Relevance of the Study**

The present thesis entitled *Cosmogony and the Conception of God in Creation in Hinduism and Christianity* is a comprehensive investigation of the concepts of cosmogony and the role of god in it, basing on the scriptures of Hinduism and Christianity. Hinduism and Christianity, being two prominent religions of the world, an analysis of the concepts formulated by these two religions with regard to the origin of the universe and also the concept of god is expected to have a clearer understanding of the history of life and attitude of the people in a remote past. It is also thought to be of help in understanding the underlying principles of religious formations which in turn throws light to the cultural basis of two different civilizations. In this study, the meanings of the terms Hinduism and Christianity does not confine to religion alone. As is well known; beliefs, culture and religion, myths etc. are always interrelated, albeit they have separate identity of their own. So, the usage of the terms Hinduism and Christianity here is intended to comprehend the two religious traditions along with their cultural and intellectual heritage. Even if the cosmogony of these two religions has been analysed by several scholars from diverse perspectives, no comprehensive study has so far been carried out in this field to find out the relations of cosmogonic thoughts and the conception of god prevailed in these different religions. Hence it is expected that the present study is an inventive and relevant effort which would be of assistance in discerning the basic nature of religious thoughts and also the perceptions of ancient people.

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12 Ibid., pp.1-2.
Hypothesis of the Study

There occur certain beliefs and thoughts shared by different civilizations with regard to the origin of the universe which have close affinity in their basic nature. Both the Hindu and Christian views on cosmogony and creator god show certain parallel aspects with the ancient mythologies of Egypt, Babylonia, Sumeria etc. This similarity may be natural because the primitive human society before the migration to different parts of the world is said to have lived together. Similarity in human thought albeit the regional and environmental difference is also possible and the parallelism in cosmogonic speculations shared by various civilizations may have occurred accidentally also.

As noted above, the pertinent point that the thoughts, beliefs and the world view of different civilizations in different parts of the world have striking resemblances in some aspects is an indication towards the fact that the humanity despite having visible differences, certain basic concepts and ideas are common in all over the world. However, it must be noted that the primitive man tried to answer the problem regarding the universe naturally from a metaphysical point of view without the help of scientific parameters. Thus the evaluation of these primitive thoughts on the basis of developed scientific theories regarding cosmogony lies completely out of context of this research work.

Method and Sources of the Study

The understanding of the world view of different religions originated in different parts of the world is plausible only through a thorough search of various aspects such as philosophy, theology, history and so on. In this study, the information supplied in the basic scriptures of Hinduism and Christianity
will be analysed from the above said perspectives. Inter-religious approach is also imminent in this search. The problem being examined here requires an inter-disciplinary treatment, for it is related with different fields of knowledge.

The main sources of cosmogony in Hindu religious scriptures are the Veda-s, the later Vedic literature and the Purāṇa-s. The initial references of cosmogony in Hinduism, are to be traced to the Veda-s, particularly Rgveda. Among the four Veda-s, Rgveda and Atharvaveda are cosmogonically more significant and so they are given importance compared to the other two Veda-s. The Brāhmaṇa texts and the major Upaniṣad-s are mainly considered under the area of later Vedic literature. Among the Purāṇa-s, the major Purāṇa-s are mainly examined. Other Purāṇa-s are also considered contextually. The stories about the origin of the world prevailing in the tribal mythologies also have been given due attention in this study. A comprehensive study on Hindu cosmogony demands the analysis of these tribal notions also. Hence relevant myths from the tribal tradition also have been collected and studied. As a part of the intellectual tradition of India, various theistic and atheistic philosophical schools also have seriously attempted to answer the question of the origin of the universe and the role of god in it, in their own way. The speculations and propositions of different philosophical systems of ancient India with regard to cosmogony too are subjected to the analysis in this study. The conventional classification of the Vedic and later Vedic literature as Saṁhitā-Brāhmaṇa-Araṇyaka-Upaniṣad, is followed in this research work for the convenience of the study. The original materials from the texts are quoted with English translation as far as possible.

As far as Christianity is considered, the Bible, the one and only authoritative scripture, forms the primary source. For textual reference,
Catholic Edition of the New Revised Standard Version of the *Bible* is utilised. The present study finds an interrogation into the earlier roots of the cosmogonic conceptions of Christianity necessary. Thus a close observation of the nature of Semitic cosmogony too is made in this study. Various studies on the above scriptures and also in the areas of history, philosophy etc. relevant to the present study are the secondary source in this study. Religious, inter-religious and theological materials also are utilised. The data of secondary level that are available mainly in English, Malayalam and Hindi languages are made use of.

Numerous scholars have attempted to study cosmogonic views and the concepts of creator shared by different religions. Most of the scholars like Y. Masih, Raimundo Panikkar, S. Radhakrishnan etc. in their respective studies have accentuated on the religious pluralism and the similarities between the basic religious concepts. Numerous Indian and Western scholars including F. B. J. Kuiper, H. W. Wallis, N. N. Bhattacharya, A. D. Pusalkar, P. V. Kane, A. A. Macdonell, E. W. Hopkins, D. D. Kosambi, Andrew Lang, Alka Barke, Kunal Chakrabarti and others have contributed much to the study of cosmogonic conceptions contained in the scriptures of Hinduism and accepted the existence of mythical elements in the religious beliefs. Biblical cosmogony has been studied by numerous scholars as a part of mythology and theology of the *Bible*. Almost all studies on the *Old Testament* deal with the creation account embodied in *Genesis*. The articles available on Biblical cosmogony in several journals also have been utilised in this study.