CHAPTER SIX

BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF
THE ORIGIN OF UNIVERSE
Origin of the universe is a major subject of discussion in almost all mythologies of the ancient civilizations. The scriptures of all religions show the influence of the mythologies with respect to cosmogony. Unlike Hinduism the life of many prominent religions is based on a specific scripture and certain sanctified documents. For Christianity, which is prominent among Semitic religions, the Bible is believed to be holy text by the followers. The Bible, in fact, is the fundamental religious scripture not only of Christianity but Judaism, another major Semitic religion, also maintain it as its canonical basic text. It is believed to be the message of god given through the medium of man for the salvation of human being.

The Bible presents the universe as the creation of god. The universe and everything in it according to the Bible, depend up on god and he, the one and only Supreme Being protects them. In the very beginning itself, it presents a detailed description about the origin of the world and the living and the non-living things. Thus, a detailed account of cosmogony is available in the first Book of the Bible i.e. Genesis. Other Books of the Old Testament and the New Testament also bear significant cosmogonic ideas. The present chapter examines the narratives on the origin of the universe presented in the Bible as a whole.

Nature of the Bible

Like the Veda-s the literature of the Bible was handed down from mouth to mouth from a period of antiquity. The various oral traditions of the Biblical literature were compiled later in order to give them an organised form. Because of the presence of various traditions, the Bible contains repeated narrations and various versions of the same incidents. Regarding the number of Books in the Bible there are different opinions. The Jews
admitted only the Hebrew versions of the Bible as canonical. The other versions written in Greek and in Aramaic languages were not included by them as the portions of the Bible. As far as the Hebrew tradition is concerned, the Bible consists of three different sections namely Law (Torah), Prophets (Nabiim) and Writings (Ketubim). The Torah is otherwise known as Pentateuch and will be discussed below in detail. The second category, as the name implies include the Prophetic works like Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings etc. The other Books like Job, Pslams, Proverbs etc. were collectively called as Writings. Among these, Torah had gained the dignity of canon already by 4th century BCE while the final form of the Jewish canon was fixed in the first century CE at Jamnia.

However, Christianity holds a different view with respect to the problem of canon. They approved the Deuterocanonical Books besides the canonical Books of the Jews, as sacred. The Books 1 and 2 Maccabees along with Tobit, Judit, The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, Baruch and some portions of Daniel (3:24-90, 13-14) and Esther (11-16) which were considered as Apocrypha or Deutero-canonical by the Jews, were added to the Roman Catholic Canon by the Trent council in 1546. Later, the Book of Lamentations was considered as separate which till then was included in the Book of Jeremiah. Thus, the forty-six Books of the Old Testament and the twenty seven books of the New Testament altogether form the Christian Bible which in total contains seventy three books.

---

3 Ibid., p.171.
The Writing of the Pentateuch

One of the most significant areas of interest in the Biblical studies is the first five Books of Genesis which is collectively known as Pentateuch (a Greek word for ‘five scrolls’). To understand the background of the Book of Genesis, an awareness about Pentateuch in which Genesis comes, is essential. As mentioned before, the word Pentateuch means the first five Books of the Bible namely Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. In the Jewish tradition, these books are called ‘Torah’ (law or teachings). Traditionally these five Books were believed by the religious scholars to have been written by the prophet Moses. But, in fact, the tradition of the ascription of Mosaic authorship of Pentateuch seems obscure and these five Books themselves do not claim him as their author. However, on logical grounds, it cannot be imagined that the whole of the vast collection personally belonged to Moses.

As a whole, the Pentateuch shows many divergences of language and style between different parts and there are too many repetitions and different accounts of same events. The various contradictory narratives of the creation, flood etc. and the logical inconsistencies around some passages paved way for the critical scholars of the Bible to think over the possibilities of assuming the occurrence of more than one version belonging to separate literary strands of these narratives and also of a possible process of edition or compilation which these might have undergone. The serious scholarly discussions in this regard which exercised much of the problems like ‘the occurrence of two or more versions of what appeared to be the same incident, the inconsistencies in the

---

5 Moses is presented as writing down the laws given by god in some passages in the Pentateuch like Exodus, 24:4; 34:27, Numbers, 33:2, Deuteronomy, 31:9 and so on. Portions in the historical books which record the history of Israel after the death of Moses, the Pentateuch is referred to as ‘The Law of Moses’ or ‘The Book of Moses.’ See, 2 Chronicles, 23:18; 35:12, Ezra, 3:2; 6:18, Nehemiah, 8:1; 13:1. etc.
narrative and its recurring chronological difficulties\textsuperscript{6} have made considerable contribution to the field of Biblical research. These studies brought into light the fact that the possible editors of Pentateuch must have collected the various religious stories and myths prevailed in their age, preserved in the form of both oral and written documents and put them together with slight or sometimes serious modifications under a common religious as well as theological frame.

**Four Sources of the Pentateuch**

The most worth mentioning result of the studies using the tool of textual criticism or much precisely saying, source criticism, underwent by the Biblical scholars is the theory of multiple sources of Pentateuch known as ‘Documentary Hypothesis.’ Though the theory was given its final form by Julius Wellhausen, it could not be considered as developed by him. It emerged as a result of a long series of studies which took so many centuries to reach at its culmination. Though serious thinking on the Mosaic authorship of the whole Book of the Pentateuch seems to have appeared from the time of Ibn Ezra (1167 CE) who himself was a Jewish Rabbi. It is Jean Astruc (1753 CE) who in the scientific sense started studies in source criticism.\textsuperscript{7} ‘The Older Documentary Hypothesis’ supplied by him, which established the existence of two main documents and a number of minor sources was supplied and refined with novel insights from time to time by the theories like ‘The Fragment Hypothesis’, ‘Supplementary Hypothesis’ and also by ‘New Documentary Hypothesis.’\textsuperscript{8} The general concept of different sources supplied by the source criticism which contributed to present form of the five Books of


\textsuperscript{7} For a detailed study on this topic, see Craig A. Evans et. al. (Eds.), *The Book of Genesis Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, pp.3-27.

\textsuperscript{8} Mathew. V. Kuzhipellil, *Daiavijnaneeya Vijinthanangal* (in Malayalam), The Theological Literature Council, Thiruvalla, 2013, pp.27-31.
the Bible is hardly deniable and seems universally accepted by the scholars, sometimes with slight modifications.

In its broadest sense, the Documentary Hypothesis speaks about the four sources or group of traditions which were used by the redactors to form Pentateuch. They are the Jahwist source (J), the Elohist source (E), the Deuteronomist source (D) and the Priestly source (P). The earliest of these documents which is known as J is so called because of its use of the name Yahweh\(^9\) for god in the narrations of Genesis. This is dated back generally to the period of Solomon i.e. about tenth century BCE\(^10\) and seems to have the fragments of the traditions of the Southern tribes of Palestine.\(^11\) In the document E, the name of the god is referred to as Elohim as it was used prior to the specific revelation of the name Yahweh to Moses at Sinai and is dated back around 800 BCE. Next is the source D which belongs to the period of c. 700 BCE. The peculiarity of this source lies in its preaching style. The last and representative of the thoughts of Jewish priesthood was termed as P source. It is post-exilic in origin and belongs to c. 550 BCE.

The process of formation of the Pentateuch in terms of the Documentary theory can be summarised as follows: ‘The redactor R\(^{JE}\) combined these two documents into a single narrative JE. Another redactor R\(^{D}\) combined the JE with the document D with a considerable amount of additional material to the older descriptions. The fourth document P which

\(^{9}\) In German source criticism, the letter J was used instead of Y to indicate the divine name Yahweh. The four consonants YHWH of the divine name was regarded as too sacred to pronounce and the medieval Masoretes added the vowel signs of Adonai which means ‘lord’ indicating that the divine name should be rendered as Adonai. The words Kyrios and Dominus which mean ‘lord’ were used by the Greek and Latin translators to indicate the divine name and the rendering Jehovah also is of later origin of the medieval age. See, W. David Stacey, Op.cit., pp.159, 229-230 and Joseph Kottackal, Op.cit., pp.137-139.

\(^{10}\) Lancelot Pereira, Origins, 1964, Pontifical Athenaeum, Poona, p.218.

\(^{11}\) The occurrence of two independent narrative strands of J namely J1 and J2 was suggested by Wellhausen of which the latter was thought to have been composed probably after a century from the period of the former and included the traditions of the north tribes also. See, Nolan B. Harman, Op.cit., p.200.
contains a great amount of priestly legislation was conflated by redactor R^P with JED and thus by harmonizing these four separate documents, the present Book of Pentateuch took its birth.' Thus, one of the assured results of the Documentary theory is that the source P is the outer as well as the foundational layer which functions as a thread on which the further texts are arranged well. Anyway, this need not be taken as the final word or the findings are not beyond disputes. What values most is the strong frame provided by the theory, which in fact served as the base of further inquiry in the field of the Biblical studies.

**The Book of Genesis**

The first Book of Pentateuch which deals with the narratives from the creation of the universe up to the death of Joseph in 50 chapters is called the Book of Genesis. As the name signifies, the Book serves as a kind of prologue to what continues in the further texts till Deuteronomy. The main events of Genesis are the creation of the universe and man, the story of Eden, the flood and the life story of Abraham, Issac and Joseph. According to a more critical approach, the stories embedded in Genesis can be classified into two sections i.e. the narratives of pre-history (Genesis, 1-11) and the ancestral history of Israel (Genesis, 12-50).

The pre-history is narrated as starting from the universal beginnings of world and humanity up to Abraham. The pre-historical section begins with the events like global beginnings and the creation of the first humans viz. Adam and Eve (Genesis, 1:1-2:4) and further depicts their living in the garden

---

12 Ibid., p.189.
13 To see some refutations on it, refer to Craig A. Evans et. al. (Eds.), Op. cit., pp.27-50.
14 Ibid., p.29.
of Eden and further fall (Genesis, 2:5-3:24). It continues by depicting the story of their sons Cain and Abel, the murder of the latter by the former and the descendants from Adam to Noah (Genesis, 4:1-5:32). Due to the wickedness of humankind, god causes a great flood with the exception of Noah, who survives the deluge (Genesis, 6:1-8:22) with his family and the animals taken with him in the ark. God makes a covenant with Noah and the descendants of his sons gradually spread across the earth (Genesis, 9:1-10:32). Then the making of the tower of Babel is picturised which resulted in the scattering of the makers of the tower by god (Genesis, 11:1-9). The narration ends with the list of generations from Shem, son of Noah to Abraham.

The narratives presented here bear legendrical, literary and also spiritual importance. As the so-called pre-history recorded in these chapters is characterised by its mythic nature both in themes and in narration, there must have existed some myths or legends either native or foreign as an undercurrent. ‘Origin’ is the most favourite theme to begin with in every such pre-historical narrative and the matter is same with Genesis also.

**Cosmogony in Genesis: Two Stories of Creation**

*Genesis* begins with two creation stories; 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-2:25, which albeit the differences in many aspects are supplementary each other. The pre-historical narratives recorded here provide an almost vivid picture about the mythical concept of creation of the universe and man as a whole. They are traced back to two distinct sources Priestly and Yahwist respectively, by the valuable critical scholarship in the area of Biblical researches. The two chapters which is the result of the combination of two principal sources are concentrated on the portrayal of primaeval origins, although not in a unanimous fashion. First narrative is concerned more about proclaiming the
sovereignty of god over his creations and presents the creative process through a strict religious frame. The second account is of the mythical creation of the first man and woman by god rather than the world beginnings. A close observation of the two narratives is done in the following portion for a clear understanding of the different traditions and archetypes relied on by their compliers.

It has already been pointed out that the P document is of more use than the J in understanding the basic cosmogonic thoughts of the Genesis. But the Interpreter's Bible puts forward another document which is almost similar to the accounts in the P document.\textsuperscript{17} The latter is named as J2\textsuperscript{18} and both of them bear marks of having elaborated by the writers other than the original authors. There are only minute variations between these two documents which sometimes are hardly noticeable. In view of the popularity of the P document and its necessity in understanding specific terms in it, the account given in it is discussed here first.

**Priestly Document on Creation**

The first chapter of Genesis presents the initial creation of the world in six days by the word of god. According to it the process of creation of the universe is as follows:

1. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.


\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.465.
And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let there be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And the God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And god said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and the wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the
earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living things that moves upon the earth.” 29 God said, “see, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have hem for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. 4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.”

Thus the creation accounts given in Genesis finish with in six days.

Creation Account in Yahwist Source

After the above description, in the following lines another view of cosmogony is introduced which differs in every particulars like creator and the place and order of creative work. The following lines will make clear the differences.

“In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field had yet sprung up- for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground- 7 then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became living being. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of god and evil......... 18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 19 So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God
caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” 24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”

Obviously Yahwist author has relied upon a completely different tradition and mythological sources to express his views on creation or it could be understood that his ideas on the origin of the world and man were shaped in a different cultural situation compared to that of the Priestly scribe.

**Points of Discussion in the Cosmogony of Genesis**

The events in the Bible for a long time were thought as historically true and the Bible as a whole, as a historical record which reveals the history of the chosen people i.e. the people of Israel. Even now the traditional reading of the Bible considers the creation stories as actual events happened at a particular time. This belief tends to overwhelm the mythic nature of these stories. In the preface of the study “Creation Un-Creation and Re-creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1-11” Joseph Blenkinsopp remarks a significant point which should be borne in mind that “in order to understand creation in the biblical sense we must take into account not just an event at point zero but a mythic history.”19 The description follows the narrative style with the enumeration of what happened on each day and the symbolism used in denoting both the persons and also geography like Adam, Eve, Eden etc. adds to its mythic nature.

As has been said above, the two sources P and J are different in their nature. The creation narrative in Genesis 1 is composed in prose style. But

---

some scholars consider this as hymnic in character\textsuperscript{20} and the prose style is only superficial. Thus, as observed by Frank H. Polak,

“The highly individual style of the Hymn of Creation issues from the Priestly style. Alternatively, it may be maintained that the redactor of the genealogical framework of the \textit{Pentateuch} used some Priestly language in order to adapt the hymn to his prose history.”\textsuperscript{21}

**Discordance between the Traditions**

The descriptions on the beginnings in terms of the motifs like chaos, deep, and darkness are completely absent in the Yahwist vision. Rather, particular geographical features are introduced by the author. On contrary to the P document, the J document gives a colourful picture. It mainly deals with the creation of man, as a continuation of the descriptions given by the P document, even though there are variations between the two. The concepts like sin and the fall of man from heaven have found more importance in this document than the creation accounts. It mentions a specific place Eden deviating from the first account.

Another point of variation is the importance given to the description of the creation of man by god. According to the P document, the man and the woman were created together where as in the latter the creation of the woman comes after man. In the first chapter of \textit{Genesis}, it is mentioned that god created humankind or Adam in his own image (\textit{Genesis}, 1:26-28). Here no material is mentioned from which god created man. But in the Yahwist source, god fashioned man from dust like a potter.\textsuperscript{22} It is to be noted here that

\textsuperscript{20} This peculiarity leads to the doubt whether the function of the creation narrative of \textit{Genesis} 1 was similar to the Babylonian Epic \textit{Enuma Elish} which is used to recite in the New Year ceremony of the Babylonians. See, George H. van Kooten (Ed.), \textit{The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics}, Brill, Leiden, 2005, p.3.
\textsuperscript{22} Mathew V. Kuzhivelil, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.65.
the Hebrew word ṣādām was used to denote a personal name and as representing the singular meaning man and also collectively humankind. In the second account, it is explicitly mentioned that the man was created from the dust of the ground and the woman in turn from the ribs of man. Here a male dominated view of the author or his culture is upheld differing to the Priestly narrative.

The myth of creation of woman from the rib of man is presented in the Rabbinic interpretations with some interesting variations. From the priestly verse “Male and female, he created them” they formulate an androgynous origin of man as a two faced being turned in two opposite directions. Then the creator separated them which resulted in the creation of a distinct male and female. Thus, the Priestly and Yahwist narratives on creation of male and female are reconciled in the traditional Jewish interpretation.

The creation of the man comes first and follows the creation of the animals and the birds and finally ends in the creation of woman from the ribs of man. The names of four rivers that get divided from the river flowing out of Eden and which the Yahwist writer might have known also are mentioned

---

24 Hebrew root ishshah stands for woman and the root ish for man.
25 Rabbis are the spiritual or religious leader of the Jewish community. The Rabbinic interpretations of the Bible started to appear in the beginnings of third century CE. Sifre on Deuteronomy (early third century CE), Genesis Rabbah (fifth century CE), the Babylonian Talmud (sixth century CE), Tanhuma Genesis (seventh to ninth century CE), Pirql Rabbi Eliezer (ninth century CE), Abot de Rabbi Nathan (ninth century CE), and the commentary of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (also known as Rashi, eleventh century CE) etc. are some of the significant texts which fall in this line. Among these, Genesis Rabbha is the interpretation of Genesis and is very significant. In their interpretations, an increased affinity towards Torah can be met with. Thus it is believed that god created this world consulting Torah. See to Craig A. Evans et. al. (Eds.), Op.cit., p.581 ff.
there.\(^{28}\) The rivers are named as Pēshon, Gīhon, Tigris and Euphrates.\(^{29}\) It has more to say about the fall of man rather than the creation of the world and it also explains how the evil has come to the world and into the man. So, in the study of the creation accounts given in the Bible, the J document is not of much use and hence it could be put aside.

**Elohim: The Creator**

The name of the creative deity referred to in the P source is Elohim\(^{30}\) which is generic name rather than personal.\(^{31}\) The name of the god remains anonymous till the god himself declares his name to Abraham as El Shaddai\(^{32}\) in Genesis 17:1. But the divine name for the first time seems to have been revealed to Moses in Exodus when the god called him out of the burning bush (Exodus, 3:1-5) as Yahweh\(^{33}\) (Exodus, 3:14-15).\(^{34}\) The name Yahweh\(^{35}\) is revealed here and also in another passage of the same Book (Exodus, 6:2-3).\(^{36}\)

---

\(^{28}\) *Genesis*, 2.10-15.

\(^{29}\) The first two rivers may be Ganges and Nile. Lancelot Pereira (Ed.), *Origins*, Pontificial Athenaeum, Poona, 1964, p.242.

\(^{30}\) The god is also named as Yahweh El Elyon (*Genesis*, 14:19-20; 22), El Olam (*Genesis*, 21:33) etc. Most of the studies generally assume some connection between these names and the religion of Canaan where El was considered as a supreme deity. See, M. H. Segal, ‘The Religion of Israel before Sinai’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 52, No. 1, 1961, pp.41-68.


\(^{32}\) The traditional rendering of the name El Shaddai is God Almighty (King James’ Version of the Bible) and the passage reads as “I am God Almighty.” To know about the arguments on the original feminine nature of El Shaddai and its later male transformation, see, David Biale, ‘The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible’, *History of Religions*, The University of Chicago Press, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1982, pp. 240-256.

\(^{33}\) But *Genesis*, 4:26 says that people began to invoke the name of Yahweh at the time of Enoch, the son of Seth.

\(^{34}\) “God said to Moses "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and this is my title for all generations." (The word LORD stands here for the Hebrew name YAHWEH).

\(^{35}\) Some scholars argue that in ancient Semitic religions, every male god had a consort also and Yahweh is considered by them as the female consort of the male god Yahu. A. H. Sayce, ‘Polytheism in Primitive Israel’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1889, p.36.

\(^{36}\) “God also spoke to Moses and said to him: ‘I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, Issac and Jacob as God Almighty, but my name ‘the LORD’ I did not make myself known to them.”
Though the whole document seems to convey monotheism, the polytheistic signs percolated into the religion of Israel from their surrounding heathen cultures were evident from the earliest periods of Biblical studies. The word Elohim used here as a synonym for Yahweh is originally plural in nature.\(^{37}\) There is nothing new in the opinion that the pagan religions of ancient period maintained a polytheistic view of gods. The god of Israel also in some passages of the *Old Testament* is praised as the god of all gods admitting the existence of other less significant gods than the true god Yahweh.\(^{38}\) So the Priestly author, who concentrated more on the religious ideas, might have used the name Elohim to denote the god of Israel as the sole creator. This is what Walther Eichrodt expressed as,

"... by choosing this particular name, which as the epitome of all-embracing divine power excludes all other divinity, he was able to protect his cosmogony from any trace of polytheistic thought."\(^{39}\)

### The Beginning

The story of creation in *Genesis* starts with the word bērēšīt i.e. ‘in the beginning of.’\(^{40}\) This is the usual form adopted by the ancient cosmogonies to start with the creation narrative and the *Genesis* 1 also follows the same manner. This word represents no particular time or period and so does not speak about an absolute beginning in a particular time or space. The concept of time does appear only simultaneously with or after the starting of creation. When god began to create or created the heaven and earth, the earth was conceived as a formless and void mass (tōhû wābôhû) from which the earth

---

\(^{37}\) Plural image of Elohim is seen in *Genesis*, 1:26 ("Let us make humankind in our own image, according to our likeness"), Yahweh Elohim in *Genesis*, 3:22 (See, the man has become like one of us) Yahweh in *Genesis*, 11.7 ("Come, let us go down and confound their language there"). These are later explained in Christianity in terms of the doctrine of Trinity. See, *Genesis*, 18:2 also.

\(^{38}\) *Deuteronomy*, 10:17, *Psalm*, 95:3; 97:7 etc.


came into existence by the word of God on the third day (Genesis 1:9-10). This shapeless mass along with the watery abyss (těhôm) and the spirit of God or the wind from God (růaḥ ʿēlōḥîm) that swept over the surface of the water all together express a primaeval chaotic state. The ocean or the watery abyss i.e. těhôm covered the earth and after the creation of earth, God is thought to have made a boundary to the water to prevent its return to cover the earth again. “You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth”\(^41\) The earth was at first ‘without form and void’ which hints at a state of chaotic emptiness. There is a picture of a chaos, which God began to reduce to order. So, the God created by ‘forming a formless waste and by filling an empty void’.\(^42\) The těhôm or primaevval watery chaos is in some way related to the Babylonian chaotic monster Tiamat.\(^43\) This watery chaos is sometimes thought to be creative as in the Akkadian mythology where the gods are said to have originated from the same.\(^44\) Regarding the use of the specific terms in Genesis 1 Walther Eichrodt observes;

“The use of the term běrēʾšît fixes an absolute beginning for the creation, a beginning, that is, in terms of a normative, not a causal approach to the genesis of the universe. By contrast heathen mythological and philosophical thought speaks of the world as having no beginning... It has always been recognized that the words tōhû wābōhû in this verse expressed the formlessness of chaos. Moreover, the těhôm or primordial waters overlaid with darkness, the relationship of which to the Babylonian chaos monster Tiamat is beyond doubt, has in this context shed all vestige of mythological content. It no longer represents that which is hostile to God, that which ought not to exist, but rather serves as an image for the formlessness and lifelessness which precede the divine act of creation, without any tangible or objective quality.”\(^45\)

\(^{45}\) Ibid., pp.104-105.
Thus it can be precisely said that all the mythological elements in the narration on origin of the universe are carefully covered by the Priestly author with a layer of his theological ideas.

**Creation and Making**

*Genesis* 1 ascribes the act of creation to god by the use of the Hebrew verb bārāʾ (to create) and 'asah (to make). The former is used to denote the fashioning of something new and perfect. Thus the verb used in the first sentence of *Genesis* is bārāʾ and it means that in the beginning god created the heaven and earth (*Genesis*, 1:1). The term bārāʾ is said to have denoted the supernatural creative act of the creator god without any external reason or pre-existent matter and so as representative of creation from nothing. So the traditional interpreters hold a view that bārāʾ is always connected with the creative process of god and 'asah with natural creation out of pre-existing material. But there are Biblical evidences which prove the interchangeable use of the two words. For example, god is said to have created the heavens and earth (*Genesis*, 1:1, 2.4) and also man (*Genesis*, 1:27). These are also said to have made by him. (*Genesis*, 2:4; 5:1; 6:6 etc.). The acts of creation, making and formation are applied to god in *Isaiah*, 43:7. So god is usually the subject of the verb ‘to create’ but he does the acts of making and forming also. Even though there are differences in meaning, both the words bārāʾ and 'asah seem to be used interchangeably in most cases. The word bārāʾ is used in the Hebrew version in order to get the meaning ‘create’ and thus the text makes a

---

46 The term also denotes the meanings ‘to shape’, ‘to form’ and ‘to transform.’
47 Yatsar and banah are synonyms of these terms and the latter is used in *Genesis*, 2:22 to denote the creation of Eve.
49 *Genesis*, 2:7, 18, 22.
clear distinction\textsuperscript{50} between the creation (bārā’) and making (‘asah).\textsuperscript{51} The ‘creation’ means a process of bringing forth through which something comes into existence which did not exist previously. So, the universe in *Genesis* is of new origin and the god himself is responsible for it.

**The Wind from God**

There is a reference in the Biblical creation account to the wind from god (rūḥāʾ ʾĕlōhîm) which was moving over the face of the waters (*Genesis*, 1:2) as a sign of the creative power and the presence of god in the process of creation. The word Ruah used here may be translated variously as wind (gentle or mighty), breath,\textsuperscript{52} or spirit.\textsuperscript{53} The Hebrews also, like other ancient cultures, shared the concept of wind or breath as principle of life.\textsuperscript{54} The same thought is present in the mind of the Yahwist writer when he narrates Yahweh as breathing life breath into Adam and making him alive (*Genesis*, 2:7).

The words used by him like tōhû wābōhû -the formless void and tĕhôm -the primordial waters covered with darkness and the rūḥāʾ ʾĕlōhîm which is expressive of the wind sweeping over the waters etc. are altogether successfully capable of suggesting the primaeval non-existent state-characterised by formless and lifeless situation with full of darkness and also with gentle or mighty wind- before the creative work of the god begins. This is what the author clearly intends to picturise also. Thus, the basic ideas of

---

\textsuperscript{50} The word 'creation' and 'making' are separately used in many chapters of the Bible. Their slight variation in meaning could be understood by examining the portions like *Exodus*, 34:10, *Numbers*, 16:30 etc.


\textsuperscript{52} *Psalm*, 18:15, 33:6. etc.

\textsuperscript{53} Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Op.cit.*, p.33. The concept of divine spirit is prominent in Christianity. The Trinitarian concept of Christians considers the father, the son and the Ruah as the three aspects of the same god and identifies the wind from god to the Ruah.

\textsuperscript{54} In Egyptian and Babylonian mythology, speech or breath of the deity is identified with the life-giving wind. See Chapter 7 in the present study.
cosmogony of the Priestly author matches with the translation of the word Ruah as wind.

Some scholars connect the sweeping of the wind from god over the waters with the Phoenician cosmogony of the cosmic egg.\textsuperscript{55} According to such studies, the image of a cosmic egg which is hatched by the wind from god is present here\textsuperscript{56} as the exact meaning of the word ‘merahefet’ which is generally translated as blew or swept, is ‘hovered.’ Thus the verse 2 conveys an image of a bird which broods over the egg.\textsuperscript{57} At the same time another explanation given to the term ‘rûaḥ ’ēlōhîm connects it with the primaeval chaotic state. In this regard Walther Eichrodt says;

“the picture of the raging rûaḥ ’ēlōhîm, the mighty wind which rushes along without rest or purpose, serves to convey the impalpable character of a situation devoid of all creative potential, and to complete the picture of ‘nonexistence’ at which the author clearly is aiming.”\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, it can be assumed that the spirit/wind from god moving over the waters is taken by the scholars as an indication of the chaotic state also.

The Creative Word

Even though the cosmic wind has an importance in the concept of Priestly creation, the preference is to the divine word which became responsible for the process of creation starting from light. As in the case of wind, the representation of word as a mysterious agent of creation also is found in ancient cosmogonies other than that of the Bible.\textsuperscript{59} But the ‘word’

\textsuperscript{55} There is a common cosmogonic theory of world-egg which traces the origin of the universe to the hatching of egg in all ancient cultures like Vedic, Phoenician and Egyptian. This is a common theme of Orphic mythology also. See David Adams Leeming, \textit{Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia}, ABC CLIO, California, 2010(2nd Edition), pp.313-314.

\textsuperscript{56} Mathew V. Kuzhivelil, \textit{Op.cit.}, pp.79-80.


expresses the specific will of god rather than a simple magical word and is capable of bringing order out of the chaos. Many Biblical passages use this motif in connection with creation. For example, “He spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” indicates nothing other than the cosmic power of god’s word.” In several passages of Deutero Isaiah and Psalm, this motif is frequently made use of but with more mythological shade. This cosmic significance of divine word was used by John with a new theology as:

“In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being.”

Besides speech, actions like separation, making etc. also are relevant in the creative work of god. But the concept of the divine speech or the word of god was treated with more cosmic importance rather than action.

**Light as First Creation**

The creation accounts in Genesis 1 demand no prior conditions. There was no time at the time of creation and was only god. The created time begins only when light and the rhythm of day and night come into being. The light was formed first by the divine command of god as ‘Let there be light.’ The creation of light and the second verse in the P document presuppose the existence of darkness before the creation of the earth. The light was considered as the most perfect symbol of the meaning of god and this could be seen in almost all the ancient creation myths like Babylonian and Egyptian.

---

60 Psalm, 33:9.
62 In the Babylonian myth the creation comes from the sun-god Marduk and in the Egyptian myths also there is a sun-god named Ra. Most of the ancient cosmogonies like Greek, Indian etc. give a specific place to the creation of light and the author of the P document might be aware of the myths prevailed in his age. See Nolan B. Harman (Ed.), Op.cit., p.469 and Lancelot Pereira (Ed.), Op.cit., p.246.
Although there did exist darkness before the creation of light, the *Genesis* does not speak about it as a creation of god.

The creation of the sun and the moon comes later. There seem some problems with the chronology in the creative work of god as the creation of light before the creation of sun. So it could be assumed, albeit it appears to be strange, that the author might not be aware of the relation between sun and light as cause and effect. This may be the reason behind the lack of order in describing creation. Or, it may also be supposed that it is the religious aspiration of the author or scribe that gave no room for the doubts about the question of the order. The creative work however, begins with the word or command of god as ‘Let there be light.’

**Ordering the Universe**

Like the other ancient cultures, the Hebrews also indicated the whole world using the phrase ‘heavens and earth.’ The description here is of an organised universe and not of an orderless one. The chaotic emptiness points out an orderlessness or confusion of matter out of which the Supreme Being created all life. When the god made the heavens and earth, the earth was covered with water and the water was covered with darkness. The creative power of god penetrates into the chaos of the darkness, water and earth and it brings order successively by dividing each element of chaos into its pair of opposites.63 On the first three days god ‘forms’. On the first day god creates the day and night by separating light from the darkness. On the second day god’s action reaches water. The sky and sea were created by separating the waters above the firmament from the waters below. The firmament which separated the waters above and waters below was named sky or sometimes

---

63 This sometimes is compared to the creation of the world from the body of Tiamat by Marduk of Mesopotamian mythology. Details are given in Chapter 7 in this study.
heaven. The firmament or the sky was the first thing emerged out of the primaeval chaos and its function was the separation of heavenly and earthly oceans. In the poetic imagery of the people of Israel, the heaven was like a tent stretched over the earth by Yahweh (Isaiah, 40:22) and it rested on pillars (Job, 26:11).

On the third day god created the dry land by pushing the waters of the sea from earth. Thus at the end of the third day the primordial chaos has been ‘formed’ as night-day, sky and dry land-sea. After the process of ‘forming’, god started the ‘filling’ from the third day itself. After forming the land, he clothed it with vegetation. Then on the fourth day, god fills the heaven by creating sun for the day and moon and stars for the night. On the fifth day, by creating the birds of the air and fish in the ocean, he fills the sky and sea. On the sixth day the dry land was filled by animals and last of all man was created. On the seventh day, after his eight works of creation, god rests. It is clear from this description that god forms and fills with definite plan and method. Hence, it is interpreted that there is specific reason or intention behind each of his creations.

**Creation and Sabbath**

There are a number of passages in the Bible besides the major portions where the creation of the world by god is referred to. One of the usual occasions where it is found is the observance of Sabbath. The command of god related to the observance of Sabbath appears in Exodus, 23:12; 34:21 and 35:2 etc. It is worth mentioning that in these contexts the matter is mentioned not with a reference to the creation in six days that is preserved in the book of

---

64 It was believed that the heaven had windows and the opening of these windows by god caused release of the rain to the earth. The excess flow of the heavenly and earthly waters can cause flood also. See Genesis, 7:11; 8:2, Kings, 7:2,19, Psalm, 78:23.
Genesis.\textsuperscript{65} But in a few passages of the Bible, Sabbath is explicitly connected with the creation of God in six days and his divine repose on the seventh day. The fifth command given by God is about the observance of Sabbath and it is as follows:

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work-you, your son or your daughter, your male and your female slave, your live stock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea,\textsuperscript{66} and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.” (Exodus, 20:8-12).

The creation of sea after the heaven and earth is little different with the narration presented by Genesis, 1. But the passage 31:17 of Exodus which has the mention of Sabbath commandment, doesn’t mention the creation of the sea. There Sabbath is presented as the symbol of creation of heaven and earth by God and his rest on the seventh day.

These citations clearly indicate that while some Biblical passages connect the observance of Sabbath with creation and rest by God, some others are conspicuously silent about this connection. The passages in the former category do not always follow the Genesis 1 (Priestly) method which uses the motif of creative word and the divine rest. The concept of divine rest also, according to some scholars, does not belong to the people of Israel originally but is a part of ancient mythologies.\textsuperscript{67}

From these evidences, a conclusion may be formed that as far as the passages related to Sabbath provided in the Old Testament is concerned, these do not stick on to the model provided by Genesis 1 creation story. A notable

\textsuperscript{65} Exodus, 23.12, Deuteronomy, 5.14 Jeremiah, 17.19-27 etc. are silent on the creation story.

\textsuperscript{66} The creation of sea with heaven and earth is cited here and this is different from Genesis 1.

\textsuperscript{67} For Frank H. Polak, the idea of the divine repose match more with the Enuma Elish and it is not specifically Priestly in origin. See, Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Eds.), Op.cit., p.3.1
remark made by Frank H. Polak is to be supplemented here. He writes, “The Hymn of Creation, partly preserved by the account of Genesis 1, is a particularly eloquent representative of a rich tradition.” There are reasons to believe that Genesis 1 one is not the final word of the views of the Bible on the origin of the world. It must have preserved more than one narrative on creation as well as Sabbath.

Extra-Genesis Concepts of Creation in the Old Testament

The conceptions on cosmogony in the Old Testament are not restricted to the Genesis or Pentateuch. The other Books of the Old Testament Literature such as Historical Books, Books of Wisdom and Poetry and the Prophetic Books also contain scattered but significant theories about the origin of the world. The latter two sections of books provide with interesting ideas. Some pivotal points of them are discussed here.

Creation in the Book of Isaiah

Even though the book is named after the prophet Isaiah who is known to have worked in the second half of eighth century BCE (740-700), the scholarly studies have proven that the whole book is not the contribution of a single author. The chapters 40-55 which form the second part of the book known as Deutero-Isaiah is thought to be the contribution of an anonymous writer. This part is addressed to the Judeans who lived under the rule of Babylonian Empire. From the historical references available from the book itself, its composition must have done in c. 550-530 BCE.

---

68 Idem.
About the creation of god, Isaiah says, “he created it a chaos but he formed it to be inhabited.” (Isaiah, 45:18). Though the creation is described here using usual idioms, some particular metaphoric verbs like spreading, measuring, laying foundations etc. are frequently met with. Thus, god sitting above the circle of earth created the heavens and stretched them out like a curtain and also spreads them like a tent to live in. He also spread out the earth and gave breath to people (Isaiah, 40:22-23; 42:5-6; 45:12,18). The foundations of the earth were laid down by none other than the lord (Isaiah, 51:13). He has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span. He enclosed the dust of earth in a measure. The mountains were weighed in scales and the hills in a balance by god. In this task of creation god didn’t seek any help. No one has directed his spirit and or no counselor has instructed him (Isaiah, 40:12-14). The world and its inhabitants are identified with the earthen vessel and god with the potter. (Isaiah, 45:9).

The Priestly source of Genesis and this book belong to the same period even though the latter is not dependent on the former. Differently from the creation of light and its separation from darkness mentioned in Genesis, 1.3-5, here god creates both light and darkness. The author seems to want defend the monotheistic belief of the people of Israel. Thus the god himself proclaims that “I am the LORD, there is no other.” (Isaiah, 45:5, 18) and also that “Before me no god was formed nor shall there be any after me.” (Isaiah, 43:10). It is in this context that the idol worship of the Babylonian gods namely Bel and Nebo is clearly criticised by the prophet (Isaiah, 46:1). Even though the religious rituals or beliefs of the Babylonians are rejected in many ways by the Deutero-

70 In the Babylonian belief, Marduk made use of the help of Enki in the process of creation. See Chapter 7 in this study for details.
72 ‘I form light and create darkness’ (Isaiah, 45:7).
Isaiah, his descriptions on creation are not fully free from the mythological elements that were a part of the creation stories rooted in the culture. Thus the mythological figure Rā́hab appears here and god is said to have cut Rā́hab in to pieces (Isaiah, 51:9). Under the particular political and religious crisis that the people of Israel had to face during the period, the last part of the Book shares a hope about a new creation as a symbol of a renewal in all sense (Isaiah, 65:17).

**Psalms on Creation**

Throughout the whole book, Yahweh is repeated as the creator of the world and he is the one and only god existed from all eternity (Psalm, 90:2). His abode is repeated as heaven in many verses of the book (Psalm, 33:13; 82:1; 102:20 etc.). As the creator, the heavens and earth and all that is in the world belong to god (Psalm, 24:1; 89:11). In the Genesis, the word of god is conceived as creative. This view is shared by the Psalm also. The heavens and earth were created by the word or command of god. (Psalm, 33:6, -9; 148:5). The divine wisdom is also praised here as the god had made this whole world in wisdom (Psalm, 104:24; 136:5). Everything in the world including directions (Psalm, 89:11; 136:7-9) and heavenly luminaries (Psalm, 104:19) are his creations.

The watery chaos figured in Genesis I:2 is presented here using some different idioms. The flood, the deep or the pit etc. are pictured here as evil forces that oppose the creation or beginning. Thus the poet prays:

"Do not let the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the Pit close its mouth over me." (65:19).

The victory of god over the sea or the primaeval waters is sometimes mentioned like in the verse 7 of Psalm 33. It says:
The reference made to the creation by the divine word of God just before (33.6) and after (33.9) might not be accidental.

The mythologies about the deep water monsters and the great serpent of the waters that are found here might be a part of the poet's cosmogonic ideas or the author might have borrowed these mythologies from the creation stories which were strong at that time. Thus it is natural to see an encounter between God and the evil forces of waters narrated in the Psalm in which the victory is of God's alone. Thus God has destroyed the dragons of the waters and crushed the heads of Leviathan\(^73\) and Rahab (Psalm, 74:13-14; 89:10).

The ideas about the creation of heavens and earth is little different here from the Priestly author’s version. As in the book of Deutero-Isaiah, here also, earth is thought to be established in the waters (Psalm, 24:2). God has laid down its foundations (Psalm, 102:25) and its pillars are kept steady by God (Psalm, 75:13). It is spread out on the waters (Psalm, 136:6). In the chapter 104 of Psalm, the creation of heavens and earth is described in detail.

“You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters.” (104:2b-3a).
“You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains,
rann down to the valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth”(Psalm, 104:5-9).

---

\(^73\) In the verse 104:26, Leviathan is said to be created by God.
A characteristic feature of this Book is that it is mainly concerned with the praise of god and the creation of world is repeatedly cited in order to signify god’s supremacy. The two main concepts treated here with priority are the creation by the word of god in one hand and the divine wisdom on the other. The waters or the deeps are also a part of the cosmogony of Psalm. It is notable that none of the verses with respect to creation provides even a hint at the six-day creation, the central theme of Genesis 1.

*The Book of Job and Creation*

*The Book of Job* celebrates god as the creator of the whole world. He stretched out the heavens and created the stars of the heaven (*Job*, 9:8-9). He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heaven. A long description on the creative work of god is found in *Job*, 26:7-14. There it is said that earth is hung upon and Zā’phon (north) is stretched over nothingness (26.7). The heaven is supported by pillars (v.11) and the waters are bound up in the clouds (26.8) He gave to the wind its weight and appointed out the waters by measure. The decree for rain and the way for thunderbolt were made by god. (*Job*, 28:27-27). The mythological figure Rā’hab appears in this Book also.74

A strong metaphor of the world-building is presented in this book where the foundations, measures, pillars etc. are discussed. God is said to have laid down the foundations of earth and determined its measures. At the end of the book, god asks Job:

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"

---

74 By his power he stilled the sea;  
by his understanding he struck down Rā’hab.  
By his wind the heavens were made fair;  
his hand pierced the fleeing serpent." (*Job*, 26:7-14). In the verse 9:8 of the book, god is said to have trampled the waves of the sea or the back of the sea dragon. See, the verses 3:8, 9:13 also.
Tell me if you have understanding.  
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its base sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone...  
Or who shut the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb?—  
when I made the clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors.” (Job, 38:4-10)

All the processes in nature are mentioned here as ordered and governed by him with his “counsel and understanding.” Belief in creative nature of the spirit/breath of God is expressed in Job, 33.4 as “The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” And so, “If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself the breath, all flesh would perish together and all mortals return to dust.”

**Cosmogony in Sirach**

The cosmogonic notions of the above Books are found here also with no considerable differences. Following the Genesis pattern, the author affirms that God has created human beings out of earth and in his own image. It is repeatedly proclaimed that everything would return to the earth. The creatures in the hand of God are compared with the clay in the hand of the potter. The author has taken effort to emphasise the existence of an eternal order and purposefulness in the creations of the Lord. Thus it is said that “When the Lord created his works from the beginning, and, in making them, determined their boundaries, he arranged his works in an eternal order and

---

75 Ibid., 12.13.  
76 Ibid., 34.14.  
77 Sirach, 17.1,3.  
78 Ibid., 16.30; 33.10; 40.11.  
79 Ibid., 33.13.
their dominion to all generations.” and “everything has been created for its own purpose.”

Wisdom as the First Born

The creation story in the book of Genesis is a narrative about god’s creative works in six days and it is all about the visible creation. There is no mention whether anything was created before the first creation done by god or anything else was present when god has begun his creative work. As an answer to this puzzle, in Proverbs, 8:22-31, there is a peculiar description where wisdom is personified as the first born of creation. The style of composition of the above mentioned verses in Proverbs is of a discourse done by wisdom to her children. It follows as;

“The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills,
I was brought forth
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world’s first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the foundations of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

80 Ibid., 16.26; 39.21.
81 ‘The Lord’ is the translation of Yahweh.
82 Or ‘me as the beginning.’
83 The Hebrew word used here for springs is sometimes interpreted as the primaeval floods from which springs are fed. Walther Eichrodt, Op.cit., Vol.II, p.102.
The poem conceives wisdom as came into existence in the very beginning even before the beginning of heaven and earth. She is claiming her origin even before the origin of the primaeval waters. But wisdom is not presented here as self born, but she is created\(^{84}\) by Yahweh either at the beginning or as the beginning. 'Amon' is the Hebrew word that is translated in the poem as 'master worker' (verse. 30). But in another reading it bears the meaning ‘little child’ and in this reading wisdom is personified as daughter of god. She was conceived as the agency by which god created the world (Proverbs, 3:19).

This concept which is unfamiliar to the creation account in Genesis is mentioned in some other Books of the Old Testament such as Psalm (104:24) and Sirach. As the Book of Sirach preaches, wisdom was created before all other things (1:4) and it is god who created her (1:9). At another passage (Sirach, 24:9) wisdom is mentioned to have created by god and that for all the ages she will not cease to be. Her birth is explained as:

“...I came from the mouth\(^{85}\) of the Most high, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. Alone I encompassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held away. Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide?” (Sirach, 24:3-7).

A significant evaluation made by Joseph Blenkinsopp on this personified wisdom needs mention in this context. It is evident that the concept of theogony or the origin of god/s which is a characteristic feature of Greek or Babylonian mythology is practically absent in the Bible. In Genesis

---

\(^{84}\) The Hebrew word used here is qānāh which means to create as well as to acquire. The former seems suitable in this context. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, Op.cit., p.47.

\(^{85}\) Compare this with the verse 1:5 of Sirach which is found in some ancient authorities on this Book. There wisdom is said to have originated from the word of god.
also the author introduces the god as ‘in the beginning God...’ (*Genesis*, 1:1) and is completely silent about his origin. But here, there is clear mentioning of the time of the birth of personified abstract wisdom and from where and by whom she was created. The period of final composition of both the above poetry is estimated as at around second century BCE, when the province of Judah was under the Egyptianised Ptolemaic rule. Blenkinsopp, based on several reasons, assumes that the authors here must have been influenced by the myths of the Egyptian goddesses like Isis and Maat who were connected with the creation and cosmic order. This personified wisdom as in the Jewish thought held influence on Christian Writings also and this will be discussed in the forthcoming pages. Following different traditions of exegesis, it may precisely be ascertained that god created the world either by means of wisdom or Torah or by means of his son.

**Solitary Conceptions of Cosmogony**

The idea of absolute and a time-bound creation seems clearly denied in the Book of *Ecclesiastes*. A distinct philosophical thought different from the other Books of the *Bible* is rendered here. The author preaches as there is nothing new in the world. He asks ‘Is there a thing of which it is said “see, this is new?” and the answer is given by himself as ‘It has already been in the ages before us’ (*Ecclesiastes*, 1:10). The same thought is repeated in another passage of the same Book (3:15) as “That which is, already has been; that

---

86 There appears some contradiction in the verses of *Sirach*, 24:9 and 24:18. The former line considers Wisdom as created by god while the latter as eternal.
87 See Chapter 7 in the present study.
89 *Proverbs*, 8:22.
which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.” The core of this Book seems to uphold the thought ‘all is vanity’.

The idea of considering birth as a mere chance is criticized and strongly rejected elsewhere.

“Short and sorrowful is our life,
and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,
and no one has been known to return from Hades.
For we were born by mere chance,
and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,
for the breath in our nostrils is smoke,
and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts;
when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes,
and the spirit will dissolve like empty air. ...
For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow,
and there is no return from our death,
because it is sealed up and no one turns back.
Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist,
and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.”

Likewise, an indication about the five elements is met with in Wisdom, 7.17. It reads as “For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements…” In Old Testament, it is repeatedly emphasized that man was created from dust. But this concept has got a different treatment in Sirach, 40.1 where it is said, “Hard work was created for everyone, and a heavy yoke is laid on the children of Adam, from the day they come forth from their mother’s womb until the day they return to the mother of all the living.” Though in Genesis, 3.20, the same dignity is attributed to Eve, as far as Sirach is concerned scholars are suggestive of earth as the mother of all.

---

91 Wisdom, 2.1-6. The hedonistic views reflected here may be the result of the impact of the Epicurian thought. These thoughts bear resemblances with the Carvâka and other materialistic views of Hindu philosophy.
92 cf. Wisdom, 19.18.
93 In contemporary popular religious belief the mother referred to here is Mary.
Relation of *Genesis* 1 with Other Portions of the *Old Testament*

The ongoing discussion is based on the creation stories described in the various portions of the *Bible* composed by different authors at various periods. It may well be understood from this that some pre-exilic *Psalms* and the exilic *Deutero-Isaiah* and also the theologically and religiously refined priestly post-exilic narrative prove that the Israelites were well acquainted with a distinct concept of cosmogony. A main point evolved from the study is that with regard to cosmogony though the narrative in *Genesis* 1 highlights a motif of the creation of world in six days by the divine word of god, which is placed at the centre of the Biblical views, most of the extra-*Genesis* 1 conceptions of creation are not in a line with the same. There are so many passages which vary from the pattern of *Genesis* 1 creation account. The passages *Exodus*, 20.11; 31.17, *Nehemiah*, 9.6, *Psalms*, 33; 136; 148, *Jeremiah*, 4.23-27; *Amos*, 4:13; 9:2-6 etc. show some parallelism in either the idioms used or in the main motifs such as the six-day creation and the observance of Sabbath, creation by god’s word, the primaeval chaos prior to creation and the like. But the dependence of these passages on the Priestly version on creation is not proved beyond doubt. At the same time, a lot of passages in the *Bible* use different narrative strands to make a picture of the same. The mythological figures like Rā’hab, Le-vi’a-than\(^{95}\) and the concept of divine wisdom which was created even before the depths, are striking examples of this, about which *Genesis* 1 is unaware or keeps silence. It is also notable that these non-*Genesis* mythical figures and personification of lady wisdom etc. are found generally in the Books of *Wisdom* and *Poetry*. The *Deutero-Isaiah* also falls in this line but with an exception of the concept of wisdom.

---

\(^{95}\) *Isaiah*, 51:9; *Psalm*, 89: 10 ; 74:12; *Job*, 40:40; *Psalm*, 104:26 ; *Isaiah*, 30:6; *Job*, 7:12; *Ezekiel*, 29:3, and *Jeremiah*, 51:34.
The date of most of the portions of the Old Testament is still a matter of controversy and more exercise on this is out of the focus of the present study. So, arriving at a rigorous conclusion by determining the exact periods of these passages seems not easy. Rather, a comparison of the motifs and idioms used by the various Biblical passages to convey the views on creation seems to be more plausible and fruitful. A contented evaluation is made by Yair Hoffman on this puzzle which is highly obliging in the studies related to the Biblical theories on creation. As shown by him,

“Since the First Creation Story is commonly considered one literary cast, it is legitimate to assume, that whoever quoted any substantial portion of it was familiar with the entire story.” He continues “The First Creation Story is structured upon a clear literary form - the six days pattern. Thence any creation text referring or alluding to this pattern or to the idea of six creation days or a seventh day of rest is likely affiliated to the First Creation Story.” 96

A reasonable and favourable conclusion on this riddle is that there must have existed more than one narrative about the origin of the world among the people of Israel. And also, differences found in the conceptions may be suggestive of the different non-Israelite creation stories from which these received their ideas and moulded according to their religious situation. Thus,

“They all share with the First Creation Story a stock of common expressions used also in other creation traditions, which prove only that they are all fruits of the same orchard, namely, the ancient Near Eastern culture.” 97

Concept of Creation in the New Testament

The scripture of Christianity consists of the canonical texts of the Jews as well as the Books which are named as the New Testament. The Book of

97 Ibid., p.45.
*Genesis* and its views are taken as authoritative in the belief of Christians also as in the Jewish world. As far as the *New Testament* is considered, it does not treat creation as a particular subject of concern as in the *Old Testament*. From the four Gospels and the various letters written by the Apostles, some fragments of their views on creation are available. The early Christians shared the creatorship of God as the Jews, with a major difference of the incorporation of Jesus Christ into their world view. The divinity and the creative power of God’s word are found expression in *Genesis*. This thought is maintained in the early stage of Christianity also.

A study of the Christian view on creation⁹⁸ must start from the vision of Christ himself about God, he being the “Lord of heaven and earth” (*Mathew*, 11:25). In the passages *Mathew*, 19:4, *Mark*. 10:6; 13:19 etc. also God is presented as the creator through the words of Jesus Christ. The most pivotal representation of the ideas on creation in the *New Testament* is seen in the *Gospel according to John*. Thus, John identifies Christ with the word of God which was spoken in the beginning in the first few verses of his Gospel. He says, “In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (*John*, 1:4). These verses remind of the beginning lines of *Genesis*, 1 narrative. The doctrine of Logos presented here and its Graeco-Roman background are already discussed multifariously by many scholars. Another main peculiarity of John's conceptions is the identification of light with Christ as in *John*, 1:6 and 8:12. Here, Christ is identified with the

---

light of all people that is shining in darkness and could not be overcome by the darkness.100

In the Pauline Letters101 also, a number of references to the creation by god are available which generally follow the line of the traditional Jewish belief. But more than actual citations from Genesis, Paul depends on the central concept of Genesis on creation. God gives life to the death and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Romans, 4:17). All things are born from him and through him and to him (Romans, 11:35). In so many passages, god is presented as the creator (Romans, 1.20, 25; Ephesians, 3:9) and the world as his creation (Romans, 8.19) including humankind (1 Corinthians, 11.8-12).102 As the word of god, the divine wisdom, which is the first-generated of creation, is also related to Christ in the Christian belief. In the Pauline thought, Christ is the wisdom of god (1 Corinthians, 1:24, 30). All things according to him, comes into existence from god and through Christ (1 Corinthians, 8.6). In many verses god is praised as the sole creator of visible and invisible things. A praise thus goes as, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” (Hebrews, 11:3).103

In the verses 1:1-3 of the Epistle to Hebrews it is said that god created this world through his son, Jesus Christ. Once again the significance of Christ in the creation is expressed as,

100 Psalm, 84:11 identifies god with sun.
102 Here, Paul maintains the view that woman was created from and for the sake of man.
103 The Epistle to the Hebrews 4.4-10 refers to god’s rest on the seventh day.
"He is the image of invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on the earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or powers- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything." (Colossians, 1:15-20).

These lines seem to form the sum of the New Testament views on creation. The studies about Pauline Letters have revealed the affinity of Pauline ideas, especially on creation, with Hellenistic Judaism.\textsuperscript{104}

It may be said here that various philosophies and their views on cosmogony have influenced other Apostles also. God is invoked as the creator of heavens and earth by Peter in Acts, 4.24. In 2 Peter 3:5 the world is said to have created by god out of waters. It says “They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished.” Nowhere in the Old Testament, such a concept appears and this idea of waters as the primaeval element out of which world was formed clearly shows its Stoic connections.\textsuperscript{105} In addition to this, a reference to the elements as “But the day the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.”\textsuperscript{106} is met with in the same book as in Wisdom.

The topic of creation is dealt with more frequently in the letters than the four Gospels. Even though these conceptions follow the essence of the Old Testament, they are renewed with various philosophical views on creation.

\textsuperscript{104} Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (Eds.), \textit{Op.cit.}, pp.111-137.
\textsuperscript{106} 2 Peter 3:8.
'Creatio Ex-Nihilo'- The Doctrine of Creation from Nothing

The creative process of god as mentioned in Genesis, 1:1-2 is ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and earth, the earth was formless void and the darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.’ The original Hebrew version of the verse ‘when god created the heavens and earth’ can be also interpreted as ‘when God began to create.’ In some translations the first part of this opening sentence is considered as forming a distinct verse as ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.’ All these interpretations seem to be generally accepted correct. The difference is that in the first line of interpretation, the verse 1 is taken as a temporal clause and in the latter as forming a main clause. Here, the creation of heavens and earth is explicitly stated but the matter out of which god produced or created these remains obscure. In the New Testament, this is established as "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible." The passages of Revelation, 4:11; Romans, 4:17; and 1 Corinthians, 1:28 also are interpreted by some Biblical scholars in favour of this idea of creation from nothing which is known as 'creatio ex-nihilo'.

The question on the idea of creation from nothing (creatio ex-nihilo) is present in Genesis has been a matter of scholarly debate for centuries. The traditional Biblical interpreters of early Judaism and Christianity proclaim that this is mentioned in Genesis creation account. They point out the verse 2 Maccabees, 7:28 “I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognise that God did not make them out

---

108 Hebrews, 11:3 Or as "was not made out of visible things."
of things that existed”\textsuperscript{109} to show that this idea was present in the early Judaism before its appearance in Christianity.

The denial of the primordial material or a divine power other than god needs much more explanation. The idea of the pre-existence of god before the creation of heavens and earth and at the same time, the ‘creation out of nothing’ together seem little confusing. As a remedy to this problem, the idea of ‘withdrawal of God into himself’\textsuperscript{110} was put forward by the scholars.

“It in order to create a world ‘outside himself’ the infinite god must have made room beforehand for a finitude in himself. It is only a withdrawal by god into himself that can free the space into which god can act creatively. The nihil for his ‘creatio ex-nihilo’ only comes into being because - and is as far as the omnipotent and omnipresent god withdraws his presence and restricts his power.”\textsuperscript{111}

By this kind of withdrawal of god into himself the nothingness which is needed for the creation process is emerged. The essence of this idea is that god does not create merely by calling something into existence or by setting something afoot. But he creates by withdrawing himself which only can generate such a cosmic voidness.

There are, of course, disagreements with this theory. In the ancient Near-Eastern mythologies like that of Greek and Babylonia, chaos is conceived as the pre-existing primaeval matter out of which the world is produced. The words formless void, darkness and the wind of Genesis 1 are interpreted by some scholars as not referring to an absolute nothingness and so there are representative of chaotic or disordered condition from which the creator made this ordered universe. The verse 11.17 of Wisdom says that god has

\textsuperscript{109} An alternative of this interpretation reads as ‘God made them out of things that did not exist.’

\textsuperscript{110} It was the Biblical scholar Issac Laria who first of all developed this idea in her doctrine which is known as Zimsum. Zimsum means concentration and contraction and signifies a withdrawal of oneself into oneself. See, Jirgen Moltmann, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.86.

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Idem.}
created the world out of formless matter. Following this view, some interpretations consider the chaos or the deep waters mentioned in Genesis as the primordial matter already existed out of which god created the earth. In support of this they quote the verse 2 Peter, 3:5-6 which is, “They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God, heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world out of that time was deluged with water and perished.” The waters are said here to be the matter out of which the earth was created and its perish also caused by the same. But those who disagree with this, deny the ‘uncreatedness’ of waters and consider it as one of the creations of god as Proverbs, 8:24 which says “When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water”, conceives a state without the depths i.e. the primaeval water.

The scholarly discussions on this are endless and the followers of each view interpret the Biblical verses as to defend their own conceptions. Whatever may be the result of these debates, the above citations themselves would prove that the Bible does not hold the idea of ‘creation from nothing’ explicitly.\textsuperscript{112} The interpretation of the passage 2 Maccabees, 7:28 seems problematic as it is written under Hellenistic influence.\textsuperscript{113} So nothing can be said contented in this regard. The author of the Priestly source may not be much concerned with the matter out of which god created. For him, more concentration was to be paid on the religious beliefs and rituals. Anyway,

\textsuperscript{112} There are many problems with the verse 2 Maccabees, 7:28 which speaks of the theory of creation from nothing. The creation of human race is equated with the creation of heaven and earth i.e. god did not make both out of things that existed. But Genesis gives clear evidence to say that god created human beings out of dust. The situation is a conversation with a mother and her son when he is going to be killed. She is speaking about god’s power and mercy and it is not a serious or philosophical discussion on the origin of things. After all, this book does not belong to the canonical texts of Jews.

there are scholarly studies which insist on the post Biblical origin of this concept. These studies maintain a view that ‘creatio ex-nihilo’ was a theological development of the Second century CE and this was taken up by the Jewish and Christian thinkers to counteract the theological and philosophical opponents such as Gnostics, Stoics, and Platonists.\(^{114}\) The use of the verb bārā’ is interpreted by scholars as ruling out the chance of a primordial material in god’s creative process. Although some vague references are available, the absence of any clear evidence supporting the occurrence of such a material, might have promoted the later inception of such a philosophical or rather theological concept into the Biblical hermeneutics. However, the idea of creation of the universe by god from nothing (creatio ex-nihilo) is now one of the main religious ‘truths of belief’ in Christianity. In the fourth Lateran Council held in 1215 CE, the Catholic Church declared it as the official doctrine.\(^{115}\)

**Trinitarian Cosmogony**

The Christian cosmogonic notions are centered on the belief in the doctrine of Trinity. The nature of the god and the relation of the ‘Son Jesus Christ’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ with ‘Father God’ were seriously discussed in by the Christian theologians from the second century CE onwards. There are so many verses in *Genesis* which throw light towards the working of the spirit of god and Christ in creation. *Genesis* 1.2 itself gives a picture of the wind/spirit from god sweeping over the face of the waters. “The spirit of god has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (*Job*, 33:4), “By his wind, the heavens were made” (*Job*, 26:13), “When you send forth your spirit they are


\(^{115}\) Adrian Hastings et.al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p.137.
created; and you renew the face of the ground.” (Psalm, 104.30), “By the word of Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” (Psalms, 33.6) etc. are other Biblical statements underlining the concept of the spirit of god.

It may be seen that several New Testament passages beyond doubt certify Christ’s role in Creation. The first few lines of the Gospel According to John identify Christ with word of god. He further states that ‘this word was god and all things came into being through him and without him nothing came into being’. This notion of Christ as the medium of creation is further asserted in Colossians, 1:15-17 as:

“He is the image of the visible God, the first born of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...all things have been created for him and through him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

The Letters to the Hebrews, 1:2 also asserts that god created the worlds through his son Jesus Christ. Similarly, Romans, 11:36 says “For from him and through him and to him are all things.”

It was a theological need to formulate certain theoretical view culminating the function of the Father, Son and Spirit in the act of creation. And the Church fathers encountered with the problem of reconciling these various passages of the Bible. In the Council of Nicaea which took place in 325 CE, it was established that the Son and God are distinct yet united as one god. Later, the Nicene Creed which was formulated at the First Council of Constantinople (381 CE) well established that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons and united in one god. The creative role of each of the three persons is proclaimed in the Nicene Creed as;

“We believe in one God, the Father the All-sovereign, maker of heaven and earth, and all things visible and invisible; And in one
Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, through whom all things were made...
And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the life-giver, that proceedeth from the Father (and the Son)...."\textsuperscript{116}

Thus by the 4\textsuperscript{th} century CE, the Trinitarian concept became the part and parcel of Christian theological as well as cosmological notions.

\textbf{Cosmogonical Views of Major Graeco-Roman and Christian Theologians}

The rise and growth of Christian cosmogony as an independent doctrine can only be analysed in the context of Gnostic, Stoic and various Graeco-Roman philosophical systems. An early Greek attempt to describe cosmogony can be found in \textit{Theogony} of Hesoid\textsuperscript{117} where origin of the universe is supposed to be from chasm or chaos.\textsuperscript{118} The concept of the 'maker of the universe' (Demiurge) introduced by Plato was highly influential on his successive philosophers. The maker and the father of the universe fashioned the visible world in likeness of an eternal model.\textsuperscript{119} Like a craftsman, he brought forth the universe from disorder to order and that action is viewed as a combination of reason and necessity.\textsuperscript{120} The god according to Plato, in no way is responsible for the imperfections of the world, for everything created by him was good and perfect. For the creation, he made use of the materials which are uncreated. Thus the Demiurge of Plato stands apart from the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{116}] Lee W. Bailey, \textit{Introduction to World's Major Religions}, Vol.IV (Christianity), Greenwood Press, London, 2006, p.31. It was finally accepted by the council of Chalcedon in 451 CE.
\item[\textsuperscript{117}] Hesoid is generally traced back to the end of 8\textsuperscript{th} century or beginning of 7\textsuperscript{th} century BCE. See Glenn W. Most (Trans. & Ed.), \textit{Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p.xxv.
\item[\textsuperscript{118}] In truth, first of all Chasm came to be, and then broad-breasted Earth, the ever immovable seat of all. Translation of \textit{Theogony}, 116-17 by Glenn W. Most, \textit{Ibid.}, p.13. In translations, chasm and chaos do appear synonymously. But, the meaning of the term chasm is suggested as gap or opening. Thus it stands as something different from chaos which signifies the primaeval formless state. See \textit{Idem}.
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] Plato, \textit{Timeaus}, 27c-29d.
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] \textit{Ibid.}, 30a and 48a.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Biblical god in all respect. Later, basing on Plato’s teachings, Aristotle developed the notion of god as the Prime Mover or Unmoved Mover who caused the existence of universe in motion. Like Plato, he also insisted on the eternity of the universe.

In the Stoic cosmogonic thought also, the concept of god was something different. Creation and destruction of the universe is a continuous process according to the Stoics. The world is formed through a particular kind of cosmogonic interaction of the four elements viz. fire, air, water and earth. They view the original state or substance of the universe as fiery which by undergoing a series of transformations becomes the ordered universe. God who is called Zeus meaning ‘the active principle’, is speculated in this system as co-existing with the initial substance which is passive principle, and working upon it to transform it to the cosmos through successive phases of transformation.

A blending of the Platonic and Stoic cosmogonic concept can be met with in the thoughts of the Jewish-Hellenistic thinker Philo of Alexandria (1st Century BCE). He heavily relies on the Platonic notions like the image of god as the father and maker of the world and creation of an incorporeal world in

---


123 Stoicism is a prominent school of Hellenistic philosophy and was founded by Zeno Citium belonged to c.300 BCE and flourished during the early stages of Christianity. Laurence W. Wood, *Op. cit.*, p.21.

124 H. van Kooten (Ed.), *Op. cit.*, pp.200-202. A fragment of the Stoic cosmogonical concept runs as, "The world, they hold, comes into being when its substance has first been converted from fire through air into moisture and then the coarser part of the moisture has condensed as earth, while that whose particles are fine has been turned into air, and this process of rarefaction goes on increasing till it generates fire. Thereupon out of these elements animals and plants and all other natural kinds are formed by their mixture." *Ibid.*, p.202.

125 Idem.
the Divine Reason before the formation of the corporeal one. The pre-
existence of a formless matter out of which god fashions an ordered and
harmonious world, appears to be a commonly accepted theme in both these
thoughts. But the eternity of the world as insisted by Aristotle and Plato is
refuted by him. Following Stoic philosophy, he views creation in terms of
an active cause which is known by various names like Mind of the universe,
transcending virtue and transcending knowledge. This active cause shapes
and quickens the passive object and also sets it in motion. He states that
time itself had begun either simultaneously with the world or after it. It is
worthy to mention here that in the teachings of Philo, the logos i.e. the word of
god, is identified with the wisdom. Both these concepts were more
developed by the later Christian theologians.

The Gnostics were dualists who considered god and evil as two
co-eternal opposing forces. The god of the Old Testament is designated by
them as Demiurge who is the fashioner of the universe while the matter is
said to have emanated from Sophia, the wisdom of god. Thus they argue
that the matter is created. The concept of emanation is central to the Gnostic
teaching as it proclaims the nature of the true god is to emanate. This
emanation is portrayed as hierarchical or as downward development.
Demiurge also is conceived as one of these emanations. Similar views are

---

127 Ibid., 7-8.
128 Ibid., 8-9.
129 Marian Hilliar, From Logos to Trinity: The Evolution of Religious Beliefs from Pythagoras to
130 Gnosticism refers to a group of thoughts which flourished in the early ages of Common Era.
131 Ibid., p.33.
upheld by Neo-Platonism also.\textsuperscript{133} Creation is nothing but a series of emanations as in Gnosticism. The matter is conceived as evil while the creator is perfect and good.\textsuperscript{134}

The urge to form independent views on creation shown by the Christian theologians was in fact a response to the difficulties created by such philosophies of their period. As different from Platonic ideas, Justin Martyr (150 CE) insisted that the matter also was created by god.\textsuperscript{135} But this view itself caused some degradation to the sovereignty of god as needed the help of some material. Origen (184-254 CE) made considerable contributions to the field of Christian cosmogony. His observation of the Father, Son and Spirit as the three persons in god and the identification of the Spirit of god with Reason etc. formed a strong base to the Trinity concept.\textsuperscript{136} Later, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus (both belonged to 2\textsuperscript{nd} century CE) expressed their views regarding the doctrine of creation ex-nihilo. Both believed that god needed the assistance of no matter in his act of creation.\textsuperscript{137} For Theophilus, the establishment of such a doctrine was essential to differentiate the god from the mere creative works of human beings.\textsuperscript{138} The place of the word (Logos) and wisdom of god (Sophia) in creation also was insisted by him. In the teachings of Irenaeus also, the role of word of god was given much importance. But it was much different from the Gnostic concept. The Gnostic notions like emanation, intermediary role of word and the hierarchical creation were utterly denied by him. With his two hands (word and spirit) god

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{133} The system was established by Plotinus in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century CE. It is indebted highly to the teachings of Plato and of Gnosticism. Martha C. Sammons, \textit{War of the Fantasy Worlds}, ABC CLIO, California, 2010, p.113.
\textsuperscript{137} Craig A. Evans, et.al. (Eds.), \textit{Op.cit.}, p.564.
\end{footnotesize}
creates the whole world. Another prominent Christian theologian worthy of mention in this regard is Basil who belonged to 4th Century CE. In his discussions, he asserts that everything is created by god. It is worth to mention that he is vigilant in staying away from anthropomorphic interpretation of god. He formulated his own views regarding concept of time and eternity. As he says, the first moment of creation in *Genesis* signifies a temporal beginning or the beginning of time. Thus, the beginning is “something momentary and timeless belonging to creation.”

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was another prominent figure among early Christian theologians. His interpretations of *Genesis* were in one way intended to refute the philosophy of Manichaeism which completely denied the creation of the universe as enumerated in the *Bible*. The followers of this trend were dualist who defined the world in terms of two opposing and eternal forces of good and evil (light and darkness). The world, in their teachings was created as result of the conflict between these two forces. Augustine was extremely against the tendencies which describe the world in terms of dual principles. According to him, there was no pre-existent material co-eternal with god. He created the whole universe out of nothing and everything created by god was good. According to him, there was no special reason behind god’s creation other than his goodness. The beginning of the universe itself is the beginning of time as time itself had begun with the beginning of the world. Setting aside the literal

---

140 Craig A. Evans, et.al. (Eds.), *Op.cit.*, p.570.
141 Augustine, *Confessions*, XII, 7 and 8.
"And if the sacred and infallible Scriptures say that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, in order that it may be understood that He had made nothing previously, - for if He had made anything before the rest, this thing would rather be said to have been made " in the beginning," - then assuredly the world was made, not in time, but simultaneously with time. For that which is made in time is made both after and before some time, - after that which is past, before that which is future. But none could then be past, for there was no creature by
interpretations on the days of *Genesis*, he proposed that god created all things together.\textsuperscript{144} He also argues that the creative act is a continuous process. From the creatures which were created at the beginning in potency i.e. inserted seminally, further creation happens from time to time.\textsuperscript{145} The concept of Trinity has got an excellent treatment in the writings of Augustine. The oneness of Trinity and their role in creation was established by him as;

“We believe, we maintain, we faithfully preach, that the Father begat the Word, that is, Wisdom, by which all things were made, the only-begotten Son, one as the Father is one, eternal as the Father is eternal, and, equally with the Father, supremely good; and that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit alike of Father and of Son, and is Himself consubstantial and coeternal with both; and that this whole is a Trinity by reason of the individuality of the persons, and one God by reason of the indivisible divine substance, as also one Almighty by reason of the indivisible omnipotence; yet so that, when we inquire regarding each singly, it is said that each is God and Almighty; and, when we speak of all together, it is said that there are not three Gods, nor three Almighties, but one God Almighty; so great is the indivisible unity of these Three, which requires that it be so stated.”\textsuperscript{146}

And by the words, “God saw that it was good,” it is sufficiently intimated that god made what was made is not from any necessity, nor for the sake of supplying any want, but solely from His own goodness, i.e., because it was good.

The teachings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE) on the doctrine of cause, and on the variety of things deserve special mention in this context. According to him, there is no being in the world which exists as uncaused.\textsuperscript{147} God is the universal cause of all being and he creates everything from


\textsuperscript{145} Idem.


\textsuperscript{147} *Summa Theologica*, 44.1.
nothing. The world was not made by chance but only by the divine intellect and will. There is no cause behind his intellect. Thus, god is the voluntary agent and is different from the agent acting through nature. Only the voluntary and intellectual agent can determine an end for itself. The creation is not made by movement or change as both pre-supposes the existence of something from which creation can be undergone. In this sense, creation is defined by Aquinas as the emanation of things from nothing or non-being. In the metaphysical discussions about the creator and creation, the relation between the two must be strictly defined. This is well established by Aquinas as:

"Creation signified actively means the divine action, which is God’s essence, with a relation to the creature. But in God relation to the creature is not a real relation, but only a relation of reason; whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation, as was said above in treating of the divine names.”

Thus he asserts that the world as the creation is undoubtedly dependent on god who is the exemplar of things and also is the final cause. The act of creation is common to the three persons in Trinity. God creates through his word which is his Son and though the love which is the Spirit or ‘Holy Ghost’. Aquinas suggested a particular kind of order in explaining the power of creation attributed to the Trinity. As he says, the Son receives the power of creation from the Father and the Spirit from both. In creation, the Son is the mediate cause while the Spirit is the governing and quickening principle. The traces of the Trinity are present in every creature.

---

148 Ibid., 45.1.2.
149 Ibid., 19.4; 15.2.
150 Ibid., 45 1; 45.2.
152 Ibid., 44.4.
A major focus of Aquinas was in keeping his theological doctrines in line with the nature itself. The serious discussions regarding the diversity of nature and the cause behind it are indicative of Aquina’s attempt to place god as responsible for every natural phenomenon. He says:

“Hence we must say that the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.”

As the creation owes to the divine wisdom of god, the distinction and inequality between creatures is caused by the wisdom itself.

It is not possible here to make a detailed inquiry of the cosmogonical arguments of the whole Christian theologians as it lies out of the purview of this study. From the second half of 19th century, Christian church faced severe threats from scientific views on the origin of the universe. The theories of evolution and the Big Bang were essentially opposite to the Christian worldview. The Church, now a days, prefers a theistic interpretation of evolution and Big Bang without compromising its essential views. Pope John Paul II argued that creation and evolution are not mutually contradictory. According to him, “Evolution pre-supposes creation. Creation in the light of evolution is a temporally expansive event- creatio continua - in which God is visible to the eyes of faith as the ‘creator of the heavens and the earth.”

---

XVI also thought that both creation and evolution do respond to two different realities in their own way. But he was not interested in picturising chance and error as the cause of life. Thus, though the doctrines of evolution and creation are interpreted as complementary as the former pre-supposes the latter, the divine actions are not identical with evolution. The essence is that Christianity in general regards the creation account of Genesis as a topic to be interpreted spiritually and not literally.

**Reflections on the Arguments**

As it is seen, the Christian doctrine of creation is formulated on the basis of the basic teachings of the Bible along with the later theological and philosophical discussions about it. As observed by Colin E. Gunton, the Christian theology with respect to creation of the world is ‘credal in form’. In other words, in Christianity, cosmogony is treated as an ‘article of creed’. Thus, it forms the essential part of the very religion and its theology. The meaning conveyed by a text is often determined by the mode of interpretation. The Christian views of cosmogony, in its exact sense, is the sum total of the narrations presented in the Biblical references and the serious theological discussions made upon it by the Church Fathers over the long period of time. Some of the Church Fathers demanded a strict literal interpretation of Genesis and understood it as an actual and historical description of the creation of world by god. Archbishop James Ussher followed this method and proclaimed Biblical creation as an event took place on 23 October 4004 BCE. But there were another line of theologians who

---

156 *Idem*.
158 *Idem*.
were against this trend and supported the view that *Genesis* is written in a very symbolic and allegoric mode to suit with the faith and understanding of the people of that period. According to Augustine, “there is no way of preserving the literal sense of the first chapter of Genesis, without impiety, and attributing things to God unworthy to him.”

Although the general belief in Christianity about universal origins is marked out by the first verse of *Genesis* – ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’ - the *Bible* as a whole put forward different conceptions about the same. In the rigid theological outline presented by this verse, a large variety of cosmogonic ideas are met with. It is natural for ancient cultures to share common beliefs and myths with or without influences or adoptions among them. The *Old Testament* also, in addition to its native beliefs, bears striking similarities with the cosmogony of their heathen cultures and it was affected by various exegetic and philosophical movements from time to time. In the *New Testament* all this was culminated in Jesus Christ. Thus, it can be assumed that Biblical cosmogony as a whole is a composite of myths and philosophies. However, a full comprehension of the Biblical cosmogony, especially of the *Old Testament*, is possible only with a general understanding of the myths related to the origin of the universe that were prevalent in the surrounding cultures of Israel. As this is a desideratum an attempt is made in the following chapter to discuss about this topic.

---