

Chapter – VIII

CONCLUSION

In the earlier chapters, we have concentrated on a survey of the great god Prajāpati, his prominence from the Vedic to the Purāṇic literature. Prajāpati is extolled as one of the prominent gods in the Vedic literature as a creator and sustainer of this universe. He is recognized as the distinct god mainly in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature. In the Epics and Purāṇas, the deity has come to be designated as Brahmā and thus Prajāpati, whose position Brahmā usurps in the post-Vedic period is highly acclaimed as a supreme god.

Yāska, in his *Nirukta*, has given the etymological meaning of the term ‘Prajāpati’ as the protector or supporter of the creatures. According to him Prajāpati is—‘*prajānām pātā vā pālayitā vā*’ (Nir., 10.42). The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* states that the word Prajāpati means productiveness (Ś.B., 5.1.3.10). The *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* also explains the term Prajāpati as the creator and the protector of the progeny (G.B., 1.1.4). The *Vāyu Purāṇa* also explains the term as the protector of the creatures (V.P., 1.6.40). Sāyaṇa, in his commentary, explains the term Prajāpati as the protector of the creatures by his own power (R.V., 4.53.2). According to Mahīdhara, Prajāpati is the protector and generator of the creatures (V.S., 8.10). Śāṅkarācārya construes the term Prajāpati as the protector of the subjects (Chā.U., 1.12.5).

According to A.B.Keith, 'Prajāpati is even slighter figure than Viśvakarman in the *Ṛgveda*, and his name as a distinct deity occurs only four times, one late hymn being given to him (R.V., 10.121, 85.43, 169.4, 184.1). In that hymn (R.V., 10.121), however, in an appended verse his supremacy is clearly asserted, and in more effective manner than in the older hymns. He is there said to have created and established the heaven and the earth. The name, Prajāpati, means lord of offspring, and is applied once in the *Ṛgveda* to Savitr, who is described as the Prajāpati of the world, and the supporter of heaven, and also to Soma as compared with Tvaṣṭṛ and Indra. In the *Atharvaveda* and the other texts of the later literature his connection with offspring is regularly referred to. But Prajāpati is essentially in the later Saṁhitās and Brāhmaṇas regarded as the chief of the gods, and in special the father god, who produces everything, who is the father of the gods and also of the Asuras. Prajāpati is the hero of the cosmogonic myths of the whole of the *Brāhmaṇa* period; he creates the worlds, the Vedas and the castes'.¹

A.A.Macdonell observes that, there are many passages in the Brāhmaṇas where Prajāpati is recognized as the chief god (Ś.B., 11.1.6.14; 2.4.4.1; T.B., 8.1.3.4. etc.) and in the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* (3.4), he is identified with Brahmā. Prajāpati also occurs in the *Ṛgveda* as an epithet of Savitr (4.53.2) and as also of Soma (9.5.9). In one hymn Prajāpati bears the title 'Hiraṇyagarbha', the

1. Keith, A.B., *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Pt. I, p. 207

Germ of Gold (10.121.1). Hiranyagarbha is alluded to in the *Atharvaveda* (4.2.8) where it is stated that the waters produced an embryo, which as it was born, was enveloped in a golden covering. His position is definitely identified with that of Prajāpati in the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*, and in the post-Vedic literature he is chiefly a designation of personal Brahmā.²

The *Brhaddevatā* rightly remarks ‘Both of what is not and what is, this source is really Prajāpati, as being this eternal Brahma which is at once imperishable (*akṣaram*) and the object of speech (*vācyam*)’.³ In the present context, A.A.Macdonell remarks thus: ‘Prajāpati is a form of the supreme Brahma, which alone is eternal (*nitya*) and, though transcending thought and speech, can be directly expressed (*vācyā*) in the Vedāntist formula’.⁴

The concept of Prajāpati as an ‘all creating’, ‘Lord of creatures’ is arising in the form of various aspects in the *Saṁhitā* literature. In the *Ṛgveda*, Prajāpati is invoked as a distinct deity only in a few passages. Prajāpati appears as an epithet of Savitr̥ (R.V., 4.53.2) and Soma (Ibid., 9.5.9) in the *Ṛgveda*. In a hymn of the *Ṛgveda* (10.121), Prajāpati is invoked as a creator of the heaven and the earth, of the waters and of all that lives. Prajāpati was born as the lord of all that exists, the one king of all that breathes and moves. He is the one god above the gods. All beings and the gods follow his ordinances. He

2. cf. Macdonell, A.A., *Vedic Mythology*, p. 118-119

3. asataśca sataścaiva yonireṣā prajāpatiḥ /
yadaḥṣaram̐ ca vācyam̐ ca yathaitadbrahma śāśvatam // B.D., 1.62

4. Macdonell, A.A., (tr.), *The Brhaddevatā*, Pt. II, p. 14

established the heaven and the earth; and he embraced with his arms the whole world and the creatures. In the hymn, the deity is directly named as Hiranyagarbha, yet the hymn ends with a prayer to Prajāpati (R.V., 10.121.10). It is worth noting in this context that Hiranyagarbha has become an appellation of Brahmā in the later period.

In the *Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā*, he is invoked as the god before whom nothing was born (V.S., 23.63) and he has pervaded the entire universe as the Supreme Soul (Ibid., 8.36). Prajāpati is the lord of the world and he is earnestly prayed to protect all the living creatures (Ibid., 18.44). The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* declares that all the gods are Prajāpati (T.S., 2.1.4.3) and he is the creator (Ibid., 2.1.1.4). Prajāpati is Hiranyagarbha (Ibid., 5.5.1.2) and he is unlimited (Ibid., 1.1.7.3). He created the fire and he became desirous of supremacy (Ibid., 5.7.6.6). Prajāpati also created the various sacrifices (Ibid., 1.6.9.1) and he assigned the sacrifices to the gods (Ibid., 2.1.4.3).

In the *Atharvaveda*, he is closely connected with the generative power and gift of progeny (A.V., 6.11.2). He is stated to act in unison with progeny (Ibid., 2.34.4) and he bestows pleasure to his devotees (Ibid., 3.15.6). He maintains all the worlds (Ibid., 10.7.7), the highest, lowest and middlemost all the worlds are created by him (Ibid., 10.7.8). Prajāpati is said to have formed thirty-three worlds (Ibid., 11.3.52) and he is identified with Prāṇa (Ibid., 11.4.2). In the *Sāmaveda* also, Prajāpati is extolled as Parameṣṭhin and it is stated that he abides in the highest region (S.V., 6.2.3.1). Thus, the greatness of Prajāpati is extolled in the *Saṁhitā* literature.

In the entire *Brāhmaṇa* literature, Prajāpati is referred to as the creator, supporter or preserver of these worlds. In the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, Prajāpati is said to be the alone in the beginning and he wanted to become many in order to attain magnitude (Ś.B., 2.2.4.1). Prajāpati represents productiveness (Ibid., 5.1.3.9) and he produced all the creatures (Ibid., 7.1.2.1). He is the breath and everything here is after Prajāpati (Ibid., 4.5.5.13). He is all the beings (T.B., 2.1.9.3). He assuredly is the Brahman, for Prajāpati is of the nature of Brahman (Ś.B., 13.6.2.8). He is stated as the Self (Ibid., 4.5.9.2) and he is this universe (Ibid., 10.2.3.18). Prajāpati is said to practise severe penance and the whole creation along with the gods, Vedas, metres, sacrifices etc., was born of that penance. Prajāpati is presented as creating the earth, the firmament and the sky by uttering *bhūh*, *bhuvah* and *svah* respectively (Ibid., 1.1.6.3). Having assumed the form of a tortoise Prajāpati created the living beings (Ibid., 7.5.1.5). It is also stated that Prajāpati assumed the form of a Boar and lifted up the earth which remained plunged in water (T.B., 1.1.3.5-6). Thus, some of the incarnations of Viṣṇu are being shared by Prajāpati in the *Brāhmaṇas*.

The creative procedure of Prajāpati is also associated with some sacrifices or some sacrificial rites. He created the creatures by the Agniṣṭoma (J.B., 1.68), Atirātra (T.M.B., 4.1.7), Sākamedha (T.B., 1.6.8.1), *Vaiśvadeva śāstra* (Ibid., 1.6.2.1) etc. Prajāpati is often described as the supporter and the preserver of the universe (Ś.B., 6.8.1.14). He is stated as the lord of world (Ibid., 9.4.1.16) and Dhātṛ (Ibid., 9.5.1.35). Prajāpati freed all creatures from evil,

even from Death, therefore, he is identified as Life (Ibid., 8.4.1.4). He is both father and mother (Ibid., 5.1.5.26) and he is regarded as *gopā* (T.B., 3.7.7.2). Prajāpati is also depicted as the annihilator of this universe (Ś.B., 5.1.3.13.) and he is exclaimed as *anta*, i.e. Death (Ibid., 5.1.3.13).

Prajāpati is intimately connected with various sacrificial rites and he is identified with the sacrifice (Ibid., 4.3.4.3). He is regarded as *Prātaranuvāka* (J.B., 2.37) and Viśvajit sacrifice (K.B., 25.11). The Rājasūya, the Vājapeya, the Aśvamedha, the Darśapūrṇamāsa sacrifice etc., are created by Prajāpati. It is stated that the Vājapeya was kept reserved for himself by Prajāpati and he gave a share to the gods only when they requested him (T.B., 1.3.2.5). Prajāpati created the Aśvamedha sacrifice and he is identified with this sacrifice (Ś.B., 12.4.2.1). The Agnihotra is sacred to god Prajāpati (Ibid., 12.4.2.1) and by this sacrifice, Prajāpati created the beings (J.B., 1.67). Prajāpati is regarded as the Soma sacrifice and he is the king Soma (Ś.B., 12.6.1.1). By means of the four parts of the Cāturmāsya sacrifices, Prajāpati fashioned for himself a body (Ibid., 11.5.2.1-6). He is associated with the Mahāvratā sacrifice also (G.B., 1.4.10).

Prajāpati's relationship with the various Vedic gods is also broadly discussed in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature. He is stated as all the gods (T.B., 3.3.7.3) and he is the father of gods (Ibid., 3.9.22.1). Prajāpati is identified with Agni and it is said that while Prajāpati was creating the living beings, he created Agni also (Ś.B., 2.3.3.18). Prajāpati is also none other than Indra (T.B., 1.2.2.5). Indra is said to

have obtained *śakvarī sāman* from Prajāpati in order to kill Vṛtra (T.M.B., 13.4.1). Vāyu is clearly the form of Prajāpati (K.B., 19.2) and Prajāpati is Vāc (T.B., 1.3.4.5). Prajāpati is described as the consort of goddess Uṣas (Ś.B., 6.1.3.7). The obnoxious Purāṇic account of Prajāpati's desire for his own daughter and the ultimate incest with the punishment awarded to Prajāpati is well-rooted in the Vedic texts (Mai.S., 4.2.12). Prajāpati also acts as an arbitrator in order to settle the disputes which are found mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas (Ś.B., 4.1.3.14). Another important aspect of Prajāpati, as noticed in the Brāhmaṇas is that he is described as Kāla or Time (Ibid., 1.6.3.35).

In the *Āraṇyaka* literature also, Prajāpati is depicted as the creator of the world (T.Ā., 1.23.1-2). It is also described that Prajāpati uttered the first word, consisting of one syllable or two, viz. *tata* or *tāta* (A.Ā., 1.3.3). He is also recognized as Brahmā, Katama, Svayambhū, Saṁvatsara, Āditya, Hiraṇyagarbha etc., (T.Ā., 10.63.1) in the *Āraṇyaka* literature. Thus, Prajāpati's supreme position is extolled in the *Āraṇyakas* also.

Prajāpati holds an exalted position in the Upaniṣadic literature. The Upaniṣads identify Prajāpati as Brahman, the Ultimate Reality (Mait. U., 2.6). He is Saḡuṇa Brahman, identified with the whole creation (Br. U., 5.3.1) as well as the Nirguṇa Brahman, the Unmanifest Reality, one without the second (Chā. U., 2.22.1). Prajāpati brooded on the world. From him thus brooded upon, the three-fold knowledge issued forth (Ibid., 2.23.2). Prajāpati is described as the year, month, day and night, food etc., in the *Praśna Upaniṣad*

(Pra.U., 1.9). Prajāpati is the father of gods, men and Asuras are his offspring. (Bṛ.U., 5.2.1). Prajāpati is the creator and he protects all creatures. All the creative activities are attributed to Prajāpati.

The Vedic Prajāpati has merged into a new appellation with his power and activities, namely Brahmā in the Purāṇic literature. But, a study of the chronological development of the concept of Brahmā clearly shows that Brahmā emerged with all the attributes of Prajāpati in the Vedic literature itself. The concept of Brahmā seems to have gone through various stages of development. It arises from the abstract concept *brahman*. The term *brahman* in neuter means a hymn or prayer (R.V., 10.50.4), while *brahman* in masculine means composer or reciter of the hymn (Ibid., 1.80.1). In the later period when the functions of sacrifices became complicated, the term came to denote a priest with his special duties (T.S., 1.1.7.1). The term also means a sacrifice (Pra.U., 2.6) or the Supreme Being, the Prime Cause of the universe, dealt with in the Upaniṣads. The *Atharvaveda* refers to Brahmā as the first born amongst all beings (A.V., 19.22.21) and he is invoked in the sacrifices for the attainment of the knowledge of the Vedas (Ibid., 19.43.8). The functions of some other Vedic gods like Brahmaṇaspati, Bṛhaspati, Viśvakarman, Tvaṣṭṛ etc., are found similar to those of Brahmā in the later period and therefore these gods are taken into account as the antecedents of Brahmā, i.e. the Vedic prototypes of Purāṇic Brahmā. Thus, the emergence of Brahmā can be traced in the Vedic literature itself.

Brahmā is extolled mainly as the creator and as a preserver also in the Purāṇas. He is said to have manifested himself as

Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra while creating, preserving and destroying respectively, the universe (Mār. P., 43.1-22). As a creator god, he created the worlds and he knows past, present and future (Br.P., 122.53). His supreme position is acknowledged as the self-existent god. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Brahmā is identified with the Brahman of the Upaniṣads. He is described as unborn (*Aja*), Unchanging (*Avyaya*), the resort (*Āśraya*), the highest abode (*Parama pada*) etc. (Mār.P., 45.27-28). He is the first creator and the fashioner of all things. The *Brahma Purāṇa* states him as the self-created *Svayambhū* and *Hiraṇyagarbha* (1.37.40). His different epithets, viz. Ādideva, Jagadyoni, Jagatpati (Ibid, 26.31), Prajāpati (M.P., 3.33), Aja, Lokakartṛ (Pd.P., 5.35.163) etc., also manifest his greatness. Brahmā's Boar incarnation also signifies that Prajāpati is associated with the creation and preservation of this universe.

In conclusion, it is found that amongst all the Vedic gods Prajāpati is the prominent one in the Vedic literature. He is the god who has the greatest number of functional similarities with Brahmā in the later period. Brahmā's emergence with the attributes of Prajāpati is noticeable in the Vedic literature itself. But, Brahmā, the first member of the Hindu Triad is most prominent as a creator god in the Purāṇic literature. Prajāpati rarely appears as an independent god in the Purāṇas, where his name is one of Brahmā's most frequent epithets. All the aspects of Brahmā, treated in the Purāṇas reveal the fact that Purāṇic Brahmā is none other than Prajāpati, extolled in the Vedas.