

The Origin of the *Rig Veda* and India's Relation with Egypt, Babylon, and the Biblical Old Testament–II

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India and the *Old Testament*

The impact of the Babylonian religion on the Judeo-Christian Bible is well known, yet little attention has been devoted to its interconnection with the religion of India. There are ten similarities concerning the sequence of events in the creation of the world as given in Genesis (1:1-27) and the Laws of Manu (LM 1:5-46, 96). 1) A formless universe is immersed in darkness (Gen. 1:2; LM 1:5). 2) God acts on the primordial world composed of water (Gen. 1:2; LM 1:8, 10). 3) The world was created by God's word or thought (Gen. 1:3; LM 1:8). 4) God severed the darkness (Gen. 1:4; LM 1:6). 5) God created Heaven and Earth (Gen. 1:7-10; LM 1:12-13). 6) God created vegetation (Gen. 1:11; LM 1:42, 46). 7) God created the heavenly bodies (Gen. 1:14-16; LM 1:24-25, 38). 8) Animals are created (Gen. 1:20-21, 25; LM 1:36, 39-40). 9) God created human beings (Gen. 1:27; LM 1:16). 10) The superiority of mankind (Gen. 1:26; LM 1:96).¹⁷

According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2:1) 'From the Self (Brahman-Atman) sprang ether; from ether air; from air fire (that through which we see); from fire water, from water earth. From earth herbs,

from herbs food, from food seed, from seed man.' This causal sequence of the creative process is paralleled in Genesis by the statements, 'The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep' (Gen. 1:2) (ether); 'the Spirit (or wind) of God was moving' (Gen. 1:2) (air); 'God said, "Let there be light and there was light"' (Gen. 1:3) (fire); 'in the midst of the waters' (Gen. 1:6) (water); and 'God called the dry land Earth' (Gen. 1:10) (earth); 'Let the earth put forth vegetation' (Gen. 1:11) (herbs); 'plants' (Gen. 1:11) (food); 'yielding seed' (Gen. 1:11) (seed); and 'God created man' (Gen. 1:27) (man).¹⁸

There is a remarkable correspondence between the Indian Flood hero Manu, as described in the *Shatapatha Brāhmana* (SB 1:8.1.1-6) and the *Mahabharata* (MB 3:186) and Uta-Napishtim as discussed in the Babylonian *Gilgamesh* (G 11:1-161). A. Kalyanaraman identified Uta-Napishtim the Babylonian Flood hero with Nabha-Nedishtha, the son of the Indian Manu,¹⁹ and we add the Hebrew Noah. Based on astronomical calculations and genealogical lists of kings, the Babylonian Flood has been estimated to have occurred in 3189 B.C.²⁰ Using similar Indian data it has been calculated that Manu, the Flood hero, lived in 3167 B.C. and his son

Nabha-Nedishtha in 3149 B.C. The Hebrew Flood described in the *Old Testament* is dated 3154 B.C. based on the authority of 120 Biblical experts, and analyzing data given in the *Septuagint*, S. R. Driver (1846-1914) specified the Deluge took place in 3066 B.C. One source indicated that the Indian deluge occurred in 3110 B.C. Some traditional Indian sources state that the present age (the *Kaliyuga*) began in 3102 B.C.²¹

There is a remarkable correspondence between the Hebrew and Indian Flood story, as described in the book of Genesis (6:5 to 9:29), the *Shatapatha Brāhmana* (SB, 1:8.1.1-10) and later in the *Mahabharata* (MB, III, 186, pp. 393-96). The following thirteen affinities between Noah and the Indian Flood hero Manu (nine occurring in the older *Shatapatha Brāhmana*) indicate that the two stories are quite likely to be regional variations of the same legend. It is possible that two independent versions of the Deluge were combined into a single Biblical narrative. The Biblical story is drawn from the Priestly code (P) and the Jahwistic document (J). While the Indian story tends to be more in line with the Priestly code, it parallels the Jahwistic documents for items six and the last part of seven and eleven given below.

1) The Flood heroes were virtuous men (Gen. 6:9 P; MB 3:186, p. 393). 2) Brahman-God tells them to build a ship (Gen. 6:13-14 P; SB 1:8.1.4; MB 3:186, pp. 393-94). 3) Brahman-God warns them of an imminent deluge (Gen. 6:17 P; SB 1:8.1.2, 4; MB 3:186, p. 394). 4) They are told to save organic life (Gen. 6:19 P; MB 3:186, p. 395). 5) They construct the vessel (Gen. 6:22 P; SB 1:8.1.5). 6) They enter the ship and set sail (Gen. 7:7 J; SB 1:8.1.5; MB 3:186, p. 395). 7) All other living creatures

are destroyed (Gen. 7:21 P, 23 J; SB 1:8.1.6; MB 3:186, p. 395). 8) The Deluge is long-lasting (Gen. 7:24 P; MB 3:186, p. 395). 9) The ship eventually lands on a mountain (Gen. 8:4 P; SB 1:8.1.5-6; MB 3:186, p. 395). 10) The flood subsides (Gen. 8:13 P; SB 8:1.1.6). 11) They offer a religious sacrifice (Gen. 8:20 J; SB 1:8.1.7; MB 3:186, pp. 395-96). 12) They repopulate the world as the father of the human race (Gen. 9:1 P; SB 1:8.1.10; MB 3:186, pp. 395-96). 13) Long genealogies of their descendants are provided (Gen. 10:1, 21-31; 11:10-32). As indicated by Irenaeus (c. 125-202), Luke provides a genealogy of seventy-two generations from Jesus back to Adam, which means sixty-three generations from and including Noah to Jesus. In the Indian tradition there is a genealogy of sixty-three generations of descendants from and including the Flood hero Manu, down to the Divine Incarnation Sri Rāma (*Vishnu Purāna*, 4:1-4).²²

In the ancient Indian scriptures the world is considered to have originated from the all-pervading, cosmic, celestial waters. Primordial waters (*apah*) are the material from which the world came into existence. Consequently, Indian religious scriptures often interpret the Flood-narrative not as an earthly incident, but as a cosmic event. The Indian deluge story has been interpreted as an allegory, which describes the destruction of the universe at the end of a cosmic cycle. In the *Mahabharata* the earth is depicted as being inundated by water, fire dries up the waters, wind consumes the fire, and primal spatial matter swallows up the wind. After the great cataclysm of the Flood, there is neither sun, nor sky, nor earth. The universe is a dead expanse of primordial water, where there is no life and the firmament ceases to

exist. Until the time when it is rematerialized, the universe exists in an unmanifested state. When the universe dissolves, the sequence of events transpire in reverse order compared to the creation process.²³

It is also possible to interpret the Biblical narrative of Noah, as a cosmic rather than an earthly flood. In the creation story, it is mentioned that 'the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters' (Gen. 1.2) and that God created a firmament separating the waters of heaven from the waters of the earth (Gen. 1.6-10). Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) believed that 'the waters' in Gen. 1.2 signify formless matter and that air was extended over the face of the waters. More recently Arnold Guyot and Augustus Strong (1836-1921), an American Baptist theologian, affirmed that the waters mentioned in Gen. 1.7 and possibly Ps. 148.4 refer to the primordial cosmic material. Thus, the cosmic waters described in the first chapter of Genesis could also be the waters alluded to in the Noah deluge narrative.²⁴

Noah's Ark landed on Mount Ararat (Urartu in Assyrian) in the country of Armenia near the Iranian border. The word Ararat may be related to the ancient name for India, *Āryāvarta* (i.e., land of the Aryans=Nobles). In Iran the people referred to themselves as Airya. The word Iran is a cognate of Ariana. Ariyanem (Ariana), also meaning 'The Land of the Aryans', covered the geographical area of the whole of modern-day Afghanistan as well as the eastern part of Iran and up to the Indus River in Pakistan.²⁵ At one time, India, Iran, and Afghanistan were a single country with a common language.²⁶

According to the *Old Testament*, people of all nations of the world are descendants

of Noah. The Lord's covenant with Noah applies to all people. In the table of seventy nations that inhabit the world (Gen. 10), three geographical locations, Havilah, Ophir, and Put have been associated with India by Flavius Josephus (c. 37-100), Eusebius (c. 263-340), and St. Jerome (c. 340-420). It is mentioned in the *Old Testament* that every three years a fleet of merchant ships from Ophir brought King Solomon (1 Kings 10:11, 22) cargo that consisted of gold, silver, sandalwood, pearls, ivory, apes, and peacocks, all products of India. The Hebrew words for parrot, peacock, ivory, cotton-cloth, and apes are derived from the Tamil language.²⁷

Both Moses (Mosheh) and Manu (Manush) recommend the practices of: refraining from lying (Lev. 19:11/LM 4:138, 256; 6:46; 8:74-76, 81-83; 10:63; 11:56-57), being charitable and giving to others (Dt. 15:10-11/LM 3:95; 4:228-34), allocating funds to the Temple or the Priests (Ex. 25: 1-7; 35: 4-9, 22; 30:15; Num. 7:3, 15:1- 21/LM 7:82-85; 11:4, 6, 39), avoiding alcoholic drinks (Num. 6:3/ LM 9:235, 11:55), fasting (Ex. 34:28/LM 5:155, 11:167, 204, 212-16, 260), learning from a religious teacher (Dt. 34:9/LM 2:144-48, 200-01, 233-34; 4:162; 12:83), confession and repentance in order to remove the guilt of sinful acts (Lev. 5:5/LM 11:83, 123, 228-31); and being engaged in ritualistic expiatory rites of purification (Lev. 16/LM 11:242-64). They include bathing in water (Ex. 40:12, 31-32/LM 2:53, 176, 5:76-78, 85, 87, 11:224), shaving off one's hair (Lev. 14:8-9/LM 11:79), avoiding the defilement of touching a corpse (Lev. 21:1/LM 5:64, 85), and partaking of the animal sacrifice and giving burnt offerings (Lev. 1:7, 12, 17; 3:5; 6:9-

13; 9:24/LM 3:67; 11:75, 227, 261). Also, they both taught that the sacred scriptures should be maintained by the Priests (Dt. 17:18/LM 1:88, 97-108, 10:1-3, 74-76), that an individual receives in return whatever s/he gives to others (Gen. 9:6; Dt. 19:21; 24:16/LM 4:234), and that the hereditary punishment of the parent can be passed on to their children or grandchildren (Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Num. 14:18; Dt. 5:9/LM 4:173). In the post-Pentateuch section of the *Old Testament*, we find the following additional similarities. A person should abstain from anger (Prov. 16:32/LM 6:92) and sexual promiscuity (Prov. 5:3-4/LM 11:55, 59), a king should rule justly (2 Sam. 23:3-4/LM 7:20, 8:302-03; 11:21-23); one should read and study the Holy Scriptures (Neh. 9:3/LM 11:46, 76, 227, 246-51, 259-60), and a horse analogy is given (Ps. 32:9/LM 2:88).²⁸

‘Some scholars might contend that the Indians received the flood and creation stories from the Babylonians. A problem with this hypothesis is that there are some essential similarities between the Indian and Biblical accounts that are missing from the Babylonian version. For example, after the flood terminates, Manu and Noah repopulate the world (Gen., 9:1; SB 1:8.1.10; MB 3:186) and long genealogies are given of their descendants, which include cultural heroes like the Divine Incarnation Sri Rāma and the patriarch Abraham (Gen. 10:1, 21-32; 11:10-32; *Vishnu Purāna*, 4:1, 5, 22). In the Indian and Hebrew creation narrative, unlike the Babylonian, God creates the world by speech or thought (Gen. 1:3; LM 1:8; SB 11:1.6.3), the creation of animals is mentioned (Gen. 1:20-25; LM 1:36, 39-40, 43-45), and the superiority of man over

other life forms is emphasized (Gen. 1:26; LM 1:96).²⁹

Concerning the *Rig Veda* which he translated, Adolf Kaegi (1849-1923), a Swiss Professor of Sanskrit at the University of Zurich, discerned, ‘Its value for mankind cannot be easily overrated.... It best displays the first development of intellectual activities of our race.’ Since the time of Ram Mohan Roy, most studies comparing Indian texts with the *Bible* focus on the teachings of Jesus Christ. Yet in 1886, when Adolf Kaegi made the remarkable discovery of 116 parallel passages between the *Bible* and the Indian *Rig Veda* texts (with a few from the *Atharva Veda*), he found that 104 (90%) were from the *Old Testament* and only 12 (10%) from the *New Testament*. Forty-six percent of the comparable *Old Testament* passages he cited were drawn from the book of Psalms, 16% from Job, 9% from Jeremiah, 6% from Isaiah, and 23% from the remaining chapters of the *Old Testament*. More than 82% of the parallel passages are centered in the seven-book range from *Job*, the eighteenth book of the *Old Testament* to *Jeremiah* the twenty-fourth.³⁰

Well over half of the *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda* references that parallel Biblical passages are taken from the comparatively small number of hymns offered to the deity Varuna. Yet in the *Rig Veda* only about 30 of the 1028 hymns are addressed to Varuna and generally in association with Mitra. During the Vedic period, Varuna was the supreme deity that most resembles the Hebrew Yahweh (Jehovah). Etymologically Varuna is related to the Greek sky deity Ouranos, Baltic Velinas, Mitanni (of Eastern Anatolia, Turkey) Aruna, German Wuotan, and Nordic Odin.

Ashura Varuna also shows many affinities with Ahura Mazda, the supreme God of the Zoroastrian religion. One of the oldest Vedic deities, Varuna is a universal monarch who resides in heaven and is the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent universal creator, sustainer, and sovereign ruler of the physical and moral order (AV 4:16). He supports and controls the celestial, atmospheric, and terrestrial regions. His ordinances cannot be violated by deities or humans. Ethical and devout hymns are addressed to him as the moral governor of the universe who punishes sinners. In the post-Vedic literature his status was reduced, and he no longer held this supreme position.³¹

Arumuga (Arumuka) Navalar (1822-79), a Northern Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) Shaivite, published a book in 1854 to counter the criticisms of the Christian missionaries regarding the religious practices of the Hindu Shaivites. He had acquired a thorough and detailed knowledge of Christian scriptures during the period from 1841 to 1848, when he assisted the Methodist missionaries from Great Britain with the translation of the King James Version of the *Bible* into the Tamil language. After 1848, this outstanding religious reformer devoted his life to the revitalization of the Shaivite religion among the Tamils. Navalar established an organization of Shaivite preachers, an educational system and curriculum, a printing press to publish his own writings and Tamil religious books, and a supporting lay organization. His efforts brought about a transformation among the Tamils that prevented large-scale conversions to Protestantism.

In his brilliant classic, *The Abolition of the Abuses of Shaivism* (1854), Navalar

confirmed that the worship of Shiva is in many ways akin to the worship of God as prescribed in the *Old Testament* and later practised by Jesus. Jehovah (Yahweh) commanded Moses to initiate many of these procedures, and repeatedly said they should be followed by all future generations up to this day, which the Shaivites were doing in their own way. He cited a large number of Biblical (primarily *Old Testament*) passages demonstrating scriptural support for the following modes of worship that are very much akin to Hindu forms of worship. God was worshiped three times each day, at morning, at noon and in the evening. The people 'fell on their faces' and knelt before the Lord. Incense was burnt before the altar; and 'sacred anointing oil' was used to consecrate and sanctify the tabernacle, the altar and all its utensils. Food offerings to the Lord at the Passover and the Lord's Supper were offered on the Sabbath and special days, at the consecration of priests and kings, and at sacred places.

Other *Old Testament* religious practices (similar ones were followed by the Hindus) mentioned by Navalar included: touching auspicious holy objects, and 'The seal of God upon their foreheads;' at communal assemblies and feasts a variety of musical instrument were played and people would joyfully sing psalms of praise to the Lord, and rejoice in His holy name; bodily purification techniques such as washing garments, hands, and feet when entering the tabernacle; certain objects were considered to be auspicious; sacred locations included mountains, rivers, cities; Holy days were observed for holding spiritual celebrations and for offering burnt offerings to the Lord; and a hereditary priesthood (Levites) was established.³² ■

REFERENCES

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- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Kalyanaraman (1969), p. 106.
- 20 S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (New York: Edwin S. Gorham, 1905), p. xxviii.
- 21 S. B. Roy, *Mohenjodaro and the Lanka of Ravana* (New Delhi: Institute of Chronology, 1982), p. 2; Pusalker, 'History,' pp. 272-74. According to an old South Indian record, 10,000 Jews came to Malabar in South India soon after the destruction of the second temple in 68 A.D. They referred to this as the 3168 year of the tribulation, which occurred in 3100 B.C. (T. Parasuram, *India's Jewish Heritage*, New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1982), p. 10. According to their calendar, the beginning of the Yucatan Mayan chronology has been estimated between 3373 and 3113 BC (A. Kalyanaraman, *Aryatarangini* II, New York, Asia Publishing House, 1970), p. 652. The archaic period of Egyptian history begins with their first King Menes (c. 3200-3100 BC). In the ninth century the Muslim Abu Mashar (c. 787-886) dated the Flood at 3101 BC (David Pingree, 1963, pp. 243-44).
- 22 For more details see Stavig (1999), which is on the Internet at Web: www.vedantawritings.com
- 23 *The Mahabharata*, tr. Pratap Roy (Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co, 1962), *Vana Parva*, III, sec. 186-87, pp. 394-96, 400; *Shanti Parva*, X, sec. 313, pp. 447-48.
- 24 ST, I, 68.2-3; Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1886, 1976), p. 395.
- 25 Web: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryan; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariana; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan
- 26 For more details see Stavig (1999), pp. 78-80, which is on the Internet; Kalyanaraman I, (1969), pp. 36, 106.
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