

PRAJAPATI

The *Rg-Veda* is a sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns and is also one of the four major sacred texts of Hinduism, the Vedas. Within the *Rg-Veda* many Hindu deities are identified as are the origins of their creations. Among these deities, there is mention of a supreme creator god known as Prajapati. Prajapati is identified as the first god, and creator of all other gods and beings. He is also associated strongly with ritual sacrifice and takes on many zoomorphic forms. In later scripts he is associated with the god Brahma and many believe that Brahma himself is Prajapati. He is a god who, although not widely mentioned in the *Rg-Veda*, plays a major role in Hindu traditions and still has influence today over modern India regardless of his worshipped form.

Prajapati is introduced in the tenth book of the *Rg-Veda* and is said to have been produced in the form of a golden egg. In the story he hatched from this egg and with his first breaths created the gods Agni (god of fire), Indra (god of lightning), and then Soma (the sacred plant). From his downward breath he created the *asuras*, creating darkness. The tears he wiped away with his hands created air, the tears that fell into the waters became earth and the tears wiped upwards became the sky. From his first wounds came the seasons and other planets and then he created everything else (Coulter and Turner 388). Through his daughter Usas, the goddess of the dawn, he became the father of all living things (Kapoor 1438). Other tales say that his first words created the worlds and the seasons. In the Brahmanas it is said that Prajapati sacrificed himself to *tapas*, the cosmic result of which was *brahman*, transcendent reality, and then the gods, humans, animals and so on.

There is a hymn addressed to Prajapati, the *Rg-Veda* 10.21, called the *Hiranyagarbha*, which addresses the “golden germ.” He is identified as the burning seed or embryo which is produced in the waters. The *Artharvaveda* portrays images of the seed, egg, and embryo which have become guides for *samskaras* such as marriage, pregnancy, offspring deliverance, first feeding, and first tonsure (Jones 7356).

In post Vedic scripts, there is an association of Prajapati with Brahma, god of Ka. This occurred as the word Ka, or who?, was elevated in the Brahmanas to a godly ranking and was then equated with Prajapati, who possessed many of his godly qualities. Brahma is associated largely with Prajapati; in fact his “mental sons” are known as *prajapatis*. There is no official number of *prajapatis*. Most texts cite ten beings, while others state as few as seven, and some cite up to twenty one. The ten most recognized *prajapatis* are: Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Daksha, Vasishtha, Bhrigu and Narada. Another relation Prajapati holds is to one of his created gods, Agni. To perform his sacrifice, Prajapati constructed a great fire place, and upon finishing it became Agni or came to exist within the fire place (Gonda, 6). He then sacrificed himself to the *tapas*, fervour of ascetic and erotic heat (Jones 7356), and was dismembered. It must be noted that this account of sacrifice is known as the first sacrifice in Hinduism. It essentially created *yajna* and therefore Prajapati himself is sacrifice. Currently, the act of building a fireplace for sacrificial purposes is associated with cosmologically restoring the dismembered pieces that constitute Prajapati or Agni.

Almost all Hindu gods and deities are associated with animalistic forms which are often associated with their respective characteristics. It is therefore no surprise that the creator of all beings and gods is associated with not one but many animalistic forms which include the boar, goat, bull, horse, stag, ant, and one of the most sacred animals, the cow, among many others

(Jones 7356). Prajapati takes the form of the boar to raise the earth out of the waters and to create the starting point of the myth cycle of the boar incarnation of Visnu (Kapoor 1211). His current association with Visnu may be linked to this tale. One count tells of his daughter Usas, changing herself into a gazelle, upon which Prajapati turns himself into the corresponding male figure and has sexual intercourse with Usas. However, it must be noted that in other versions, he marries off all his daughters, including Usas, to Soma (Kapoor 1211).

Being a supreme god, it is no wonder that there are many rituals devoted to Prajapati. Among those, one famous example is that of the horse sacrifice or *asvamedha*. To perform this ritual an emperor would select his best horse, which would then undergo a three day ceremony and then be released into the wild to roam freely for a year. If the horse, representing the king, wandered into another ruler's territory the owner of that land had to choose to either let the horse wander freely in his kingdom, submitting himself to the owner of the horse, or to keep it for himself and wage war. After the year of wandering, the horse would then be returned to the kingdom where it would then undergo a sacrifice. During the ritual, a dog representing the king's enemies would be sacrificed and then the horse would be suffocated. The queen would then perform a mock copulation on the horse, which would then be dismembered and sacrificed into the fire. The chief priest, the horse and the king are representative of Prajapati and are elevated to his cosmological status during the ceremony. During the ceremony rice would be consumed which was meant to distribute the horses' virility among the priest, king and Prajapati (Rodrigues 63).

The Vedas are the oldest Hindu sacred texts that exist in the religion and are very much a backbone to the Hindu way of life, and the *Rg-Veda* identifies a supreme god known as Prajapati. Prajapati is a deity and symbol of many things such as *yajna* and divinity, and is a god who has

had many different roles in the Hindu tradition. Obviously, one of the most important aspects of his history is that he created all forms of life, natural and cosmological, including himself. He is the god who sacrificed himself to the world and has embodied himself in the likes of Agni among others. Certain Hindu's today believe that Visnu and Krsna may be the reincarnates of Prajapati. The more popular belief is that the god Brahma is himself Prajapati, which is also why Prajapati is sometimes referred to as Brahma-Prajapati. On top of still being portrayed in current Hindu traditions, he also played a significant role in formerly practiced sacrificial traditions, such as the *asvamedha*, which was made to unite certain individuals with Prajapati himself. Though there are many inferences of the power of Prajapati in the *Rg-Veda*, nothing can compare to the magnitude of his accomplishments and it is for this reason his essence lives on today in modern India

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Noteworthy Websites

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<http://www.hindunet.org/god/summary/index.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prajapati>

<http://hinduism.about.com/od/godsgoddesses/p/brahma.htm>

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