

The Rig Veda 10.9

Purusha (man) and the Primordial Sacrifice

- 1 A Thousand heads hath Purusha, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. On every side pervading earth he fills a space ten fingers wide.1
- 2 This Purusha is all that yet hath been and all that is to be; The Lord of immortality which waxes greater still by food.
- 3 So mighty is his greatness; yea, greater than this is Purusha. All creatures are one-fourth of him, three-fourths eternal life in heaven.
- 4 With three-fourths of Purusha went up: one-fourth of him again was here. Thence he strode out to every side over what eats not and what eats.
- 5 From him Viraj was born; again Purusha from Viraj was born.
- 6 When Gods prepared the sacrifice with Purusha as their offering, its oil was spring, the holy gift was autumn; summer was the wood.
- 7 The balmed as victim on the grass Purusha born in earliest time. With him the Deities and all Sadhyas and Rishis sacrificed.
- 8 From that great general sacrifice the dripping fat was gathered up. He formed the creatures of the air, and animals both wild and tame.
- 9 From that great general sacrifice Ricas and Sama-hymns were born: Therefrom were spells and charms produced; the Yajus had its birth from it.
- 10 From it were horses born, and from it all cattle with two rows of teeth: From it were generated cattle, from it the goats and sheep were born.
- 11 When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
- 12 The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rajanya made. His thighs became the Vaisya , from his feet the Sudra was produced.
- 13 The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth; Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and Vayu from his breath.
- 14 Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky was fashioned from his head; Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions. Thus formed the worlds.
- 15 Seven fencing-sticks had he, thrice seven layers of fuel were prepared, when the Gods, offering sacrifice, bound, as their victim, Purusha.
- 16 Gods, sacrificing, sacrificed the victim: these were the earliest holy ordinances. The Mighty Ones attained the height of heaven, there where the Sadhyas, gods of old, are dwelling.

Ralph T.H. Griffith, The Hymns of the Rg Veda, 1896.

Verse 1: Refers to the great wisdom of Purusha-a God figure.

Food: Food offered by sacrifice

All creatures: His body is the world, a macrocosm. All things are a part of him. This "giant man who is the universe" concept appears in other cultures as well, notably, Hebrew.

Viraj: Female force/entity. Note paradox, she is necessary for his (Purusha's) creation (birth) so he creates her.

Sadhya: Heavenly figure, "the Gods of old."

Rishi: Sage or prophet.

Great general sacrifice: In Vedic thought, the entire universe was born of a sacrifice, and furthermore the universe was maintained by proper sacrifice. It was man's responsibility to maintain order by properly performing ritual duty. Compare to Egyptian concept of ma'at.

Brahman: This passage refers to the divine creation of the caste system, wherein individuals are born to a particular role, and expected to fulfill that role. Brahman refers to the priestly caste, who spoke spells and performed rituals.

Rajanya: This passage refers to the divine creation of the caste system, wherein individuals are born to a particular role, and expected to fulfill that role. Rajanya refers to the royalty, or kshatriya, warriors who maintained civil order and fought enemies.

Vaisya: This passage refers to the divine creation of the caste system, wherein individuals are born to a particular role, and expected to fulfill that role. Vaisya refers to the worker caste, merchants, craftsmen, farmers, etc. The producers of society.

Sudra: This passage refers to the divine creation of the caste system, wherein individuals are born to a particular role, and expected to fulfill that role. Sudra refers to the slave caste, most likely the darker, indigenous people of India conquered by Indo-Aryan invaders. The Sudra performed hard labor and served other castes.

Indra: God of War, Soma (inebriating drink used in ritual).

Agni: God of Fire. Very important in early Vedic ritual.

Vayu: God of the Wind.

Worlds: Refers to dimensions, the underworld, the mortal world, the heavenly world. Not a reference to the physical planets per se.