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Purusha

This article is about the Hindu concept of Purusha. For Purusha program associated with the Transcendental Meditation Movement, see [TM organizations](#).

Purusha (Sanskrit *puruṣa*, पुरुष) is a complex concept whose meaning evolved in Vedic and Upanishadic times. Depending on source and historical timeline, it means the cosmic man or it means Self, Consciousness, and Universal principle.^{[1][2][3]}

In early Vedas, Purusha meant a cosmic man whose sacrifice by the gods created all life.^[4] This was one of many creation theories discussed in the Vedas. The idea parallels Norse Ymir,^[5] with the myth's origin in Proto-Indo-European religion.^[6]

In Upanishads, Purusha concept no longer meant a being or cosmic man. The meaning evolved to an abstract essence of Self, Spirit and the Universal Principle that is eternal, indestructible, without form and all pervasive.^[4] The Purusha concept is explained with the concept of Prakrti in the Upanishads. The universe is envisioned, in these ancient Sanskrit texts, as a combination of perceivable material reality and non-perceivable, non-material laws and principles of nature.^{[3][7]} Material reality, or Prakrti, is everything that has changed, can change and is subject to cause and effect. Purusha is the Universal principle that is unchanging, uncaused but is present everywhere and the reason why Prakrti changes, evolves all the time and why there is cause and effect.^[7] Purusha is what connects everything and everyone, according to various schools of Hinduism.

There is a diversity of views within various schools of Hinduism about the definition, scope and nature of Purusha.^[2]

1 Definition and description

Purusha is a complex concept, whose meaning evolved over time in the philosophical traditions now called as Hinduism. During the Vedic period, Purusha concept was one of several theories offered for the creation of universe.^[8] Purusha, in *Rigveda*, was described as a being, who becomes a sacrificial victim of gods, and whose sacrifice creates all life forms including human beings.^[4]

In the Upanishads and later texts of Hindu philosophy, the Purusha concept moved away from the Vedic definition of Purusha and was no longer a person, cosmic man or entity. Instead, the concept flowered into a more complex

abstraction.^[9]

Splendid and without a bodily form is this Purusha, without and within, unborn, without life breath and without mind, higher than the supreme element. From him are born life breath and mind. He is the soul of all beings. —Munduka Upanishad, (Translated by Klaus Klostermair)^[10]

Both Samkhya^[11] and Yoga schools of Hinduism state that there are two ultimate realities whose interaction accounts for all experiences and universe - Prakrti (matter) and Purusha (spirit).^{[3][12]} In other words, the universe is envisioned as a combination of perceivable material reality and non-perceivable, non-material laws and principles of nature. Material reality, or Prakrti, is everything that has changed, can change and is subject to cause and effect. Universal principle, or Purusha, is that which is unchanging (aksara)^[2] and is uncaused. The animating causes, fields and principles of nature is Purusha in Hindu philosophy. Hinduism refers to Purusha as the soul of the universe, the universal spirit present everywhere, in everything and everyone, all the times. Purusha is Universal Principle that is eternal, indestructible, without form and all pervasive. It is Purusha in the form of nature's laws and principles that operate in the background to regulate, guide and direct change, evolution, cause and effect.^[3] It is Purusha, in Hindu concept of existence, that breathes life into matter, is the source of all consciousness,^[2] one that creates oneness in all life forms, in all of humanity, and the essence of Self. It is Purusha, according to Hinduism, why the universe operates, is dynamic and evolves, as against being static.^[7]

Both Samkhya and Yoga school holds that the path to moksha (release, Self-realization) includes the realization of purusha.^[13]

2 Related concepts and diversity of views

The abstract idea Purusha is extensively discussed in various Upanishads, and referred interchangeably as mahatman and brahman (not to be confused with Brahmin).^[2] Sutra literature refers to a similar concept using the word *purns*.

Rishi Angiras of the Atmopanishad belonging to the Atharvaveda explains that Purusha, the dweller in the body, is three-fold: the Bahyatman (the Outer-Atman) which is born and dies; the Antaratman (the Inner-Atman) which comprehends the whole range of material phenomena, gross and subtle, with which the Jiva concerns himself, and the Paramatman which is all-pervading, unthinkable, indescribable, is without action and has no Samskaras.^[14]

The Vedanta Sutras state *janmādy asya yatah*, meaning that 'The Absolute Truth is that from which everything else emanates' Bhagavata Purana [S.1.1.1].

Theistic schools of Hinduism

There is no consensus among schools of Hinduism on the definition of Purusha, and it is left to each school and individual to reach their own conclusions. For example, one of many theistic traditions script such as Kapila-surisamvada, credited to another ancient Hindu philosopher named Kapila, first describes purusha in a manner similar to Samkhya-Yoga schools above, but then proceeds to describe buddhi (intellect) as second purusha, and ahamkara (ego) as third purusha. Such pluralism and diversity of thought within Hinduism^[15] implies that the term purusha is a complex term with diverse meanings.

Other Modern Views

Some, like Sadhu Chellapa (who has mastered the knowledge of the Vedas and the other Hindu scriptures) also believe that animal sacrifices in Vedic times in India are shadows for the real sacrifice of God or Prajapatti. For instance, he states that,

“Though the animal’s blood is not a substitute, it was expected that man would repent and turn away from his sinful ways by seeing the animal, which is being sacrificed on his behalf. But mankind started practicing it just as a ritual, and thus came into condemnation.

If mankind were to be saved from this predicament, as Thertiriya Aranyaka 3rd verse says again, “thad raktham Paramatmena punyadana baliyagam” which means that blood has to be through the sacrifice of God himself.

The Purusha Sukta says, there is no other way other than the sacrifice of Purusha Prajapati. Purushao vava yagna (Chandokya Upanishad 3.16.1), God, the Purusha is the sacrifice.

Not only by acknowledging but also by accepting this sacrifice as one’s own, and for one’s own sake, the identity of one’s self with the Divine Self is achieved.” [Sadhu Chellappal^[16]

The Rig Veda specifies ten important requirements for the sacrificial Purusha.

1. Should be without a blemish (Nishikalanga Purusha) Kaatyaayana Srautasootram describes in chapter six, that the water and fire were to be used for the purifica-

tion of the animals, since blameless (defect less) animals are not available in this world.

2. The Purusha has to be separated from others While sacrificing the horse, the sacrificial horse is always separated from other horses. A bush of thorns is usually placed on the head of the horse to inform the people that this horse is separated from the sacrifice. Also the head of the horse is considered to represent the Purusha (Sathapatha Brahmana 13th kanda, 6.22).

3. The Purusha has to be rejected by his own people In Itareya Brahmana it is written that the sacrificial animal should be rejected by its father, mother, brother, sister and friends (2.16).

4. The Yagna Purusha has to suffer silently Rig Veda 5.46.1 says, “Like a horse I have yoked myself, well knowing to the pole. I seek neither release nor turning back”.

5. The Purusha has to be tied to a post In Satapata Brahmana it is written, never do they immolate an animal without tying it to a pole. “Na varute yapaat pasum alabhate kadachana (III –7.3.1)”. It is important to tie the animal to a sacrificial pillar before it is sacrificed. This pillar is called “Yupastampa (sacrificial pillar)”, which has now become a flag mast.

6. The blood of the sacrificial man should be shed Bruhad Aranyaka Upanishad (3.9.28.2) says, “Tvacha evasya rudhiram, prasyandi tvacha utpatah, Tasmaat-tadarunnaat praiti, raso vrukshadi vahataat”, As the sap comes out of the cut tree, blood comes out of the Purusha who is cut.

7. The sacrificed animal’s bones should not be broken In Itareya Brahmana 2.6 it is stated that the sacrificer separates the twenty-six ribs of the animal without breaking them

8. The sacrificed Purusha should return to life The Bruhad Aranyaka Upanishad says, “Yad Vruksho vrukshano rohati, mulannavatharah punah, martyah svinmrutyuna vrukshah, kasmaanmulaat prarohati, Retasa iti maavocata, jivatatast praja yate, dhanaruh a iva vai crau vruksho, anjasaa pretya sammabhavha”, which means, if the tree is cut, it will grow again from its root. But after the man (martyah) was cut off by death, from which root does he come forth? Do not say that has is from the ratas (seed or semen) because ratas comes from the one who lives. Remember this man is dead. But this man (Purusha) comes alive, on his own.

9. The flesh of the Purusha should be eaten by his saints In Satpata Brahmana(5.1.1.1,2) we find that Prajapati gave Himself up to them, thus the sacrifice became theirs, and indeed the sacrifice is the food of the gods (saints).

10. The sacrifice is for all Verse 8 in Purusha Sukta explains, Tasmaad yagnatsarvahutah, pasuntamscakre voayaryaa, naananyaan gramyaasca ye. By that sacrifice, all

these originated: sprinkled ghee and all kinds of animals of the sky, forest and country. The significance of sprinkled ghee represents the original sacrifice. Verse 9 of Purusha Sukta says: Tasmaad yagnat sarvahuta, nucha samaari jagnire, Chandaamsi jagnine, tasmaad yajustas naada jaayatah. From that sacrifice, Purusha offered everything that he had, including the Rig, Sama, Yazur Vedas and the Chandas (sacred writings).^[17]

Many believe that these Vedic requirements have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. *Vedic Fulfillments in Jesus*

Bhagavata Purana describes that Purusha is the first form of Supreme Lord Narayana^[18] and this Purusha is the source of everything in the universe. The Purusha in the title of Purusha Sukta refers to the Parama Purusha, Purushottama, Vedic Supreme God Narayana, in his form as the Viraat Purusha (Enormously Huge Being). It describes this form of his as having countless heads, eyes and legs manifested everywhere, and beyond the scope of any limited method of comprehension. All creation is but a fourth part of him. The rest is unmanifested. He is the source of all creation. Purusha along with Prakrti creates the necessary tattvas for the creation of universe.

3 Varna system

Main article: Purusha sukta

In one verse of Rigveda, *Varna* is portrayed as a result of human beings created from different parts of the body of the divinity Purusha. This Purusha Sukta verse is controversial and is believed by many scholars, such as Max Müller, to be a corruption and medieval or modern era insertion into Veda,^{[19][20]} because unlike all other major concepts in the Vedas including those of Purusha,^[21] the four varnas are never mentioned anywhere else in any of the Vedas, and because this verse is missing in some manuscript prints found in different parts of India.

That remarkable hymn (the Purusha Sukta) is in language, metre, and style, very different from the rest of the prayers with which it is associated. It has a decidedly more modern tone, and must have been composed after the Sanskrit language had been refined.
—Henry Thomas Colebrooke,^[22]

There can be little doubt, for instance, that the 90th hymn of the 10th book (Purusha Sukta) is modern both in its character and in its diction. (...) It mentions the three seasons in the order of the Vasanta, spring; Grishma, summer; and Sarad, autumn; it contains the only passage in the Rigveda where the four

castes are enumerated. The evidence of language for the modern date of this composition is equally strong. Grishma, for instance, the name for the hot season, does not occur in any other hymn of the Rigveda; and Vasanta also does not belong to the earliest vocabulary of the Vedic poets.

—Max Müller,^[23]

The Purusha Sukta is a later interpolation in the Rig Veda. (...) Verses in the form of questions about the division of Purusha and the origins of the Varnas are a fraudulent emendation of the original.

—Babasaheb Ambedkar,^[24]

4 See also

- Adam Kadmon
- Anthropos
- Brahman
- Cipactli
- Hindu deities
- Hindu idealism
- Hindu mythology
- Indian caste system

5 Notes and references

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- [8] An example of alternate theory is Nasadiya Sukta, the last book of the Vedas, which suggests a great heat created universe from void. See: Klaus K. Klostermair (2007), A survey of Hinduism, 3rd Edition, State University of New York Press, ISBN 978-0-7914-7081-7, pp 88
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