

Productive Prolivity: Evidence from Indian Cosmology

By

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Abstract

Paraphrasing Amartya Sen's classic book "The Argumentative Indian", this paper explains how even the three Primary Hindu Gods – Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva – could not resist the proclivity to prolixity while recreating the earth and its inhabitants, which had then been lost to a huge tsunami (Pralaya in Sanskrit). The paper first explains that process of the debate and then highlights how productive that long process of argumentation ultimately turned out to be. It then draws parallels between that prolixity and its productivity to the 'Big Bang' theory of the creation of the world and examines how even these three prominent Hindu Gods had to go through the ordeal of being evaluated by an Independent Evaluator/ External auditor – a job then done by a great sage Bhrigu. Sage Bhrigu's verdict after the evaluation was loud and clear: Brahma is not worth worshipping on earth; only Shiva's symbolic lingam, not his body, is worth worshipping; only Vishnu's body is worth worshipping on earth. A few exceptions apart, casual empiricism shows that even today most Hindus do practice Sage Bhrigu's verdict.

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Productive Prolivity: Evidence from Indian Cosmology

1. Introduction

In his well-known book on “The Argumentative Indian”, Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics, wrote so elegantly: “The Greek and Roman heritage on public discussion is, of course, rightly celebrated, but the importance of public deliberation also has a remarkable history in India. As it happened, even the World-conquering Alexander the Great received some political lecturing when he roamed around northwest India in the fourth century BCE” (Sen, 2005, p. 28-29). No wonder, the Indian epic, Mahabharata, written by the great Indian Sage of his time – Vedayasa -- is known to be the longest epic ever written.

Based on ancient Indian cosmological evidence, this paper attempts to show that the Indian propensity to prolific prolivity is even deeper, so much so that it started much before the creation of the earth and its inhabitants themselves. How did it all happen? Ancient Indian cosmology -- a method of explaining how the universe was created and sustained over many trillion years – provides one answer for that question. Hindu cosmology is the description of the universe and its states of matter, cycles within time, physical structure, and effects on living entities according to [Hindu texts](#). “*Hindu cosmology is also intertwined with the idea of a creator who allows the world to exist and take shape*” (BBC “The Nature of God And Existence in Hinduism”).

The remaining part of the paper provides: an account of how the prolivity began just after Aadimaya – the Virgin Mother – gave birth to the triplet Hindu Gods -- Hari, Hara, and Brahma and appointed them to recreate the world that had been destroyed by a huge Tsunami (Section 2); a description of the process of prolivity among the triplets (Section 3); an analysis of how profound the prolivity and its productivity ultimately turned out to be (Section 4); an account of how even those primary Hindu Gods were subjected to scrutiny by an independent evaluator/external auditor (Section 5); an analogy between the recreation of the world and the Big Bang theory of cosmology (Section 6); and a brief summing up of the paper (Section 7).

2. How Did the Prolivity Begin?

As Amartya Sen so eloquently expressed: “A basic doubt concerns the very creation of the World: did someone make it, was it a spontaneous emergence, and is there a God who knows what really happened” (Sen, 2005, p.7). “Humans are curious beings and the question on how this world came into being and what is its future has always been on our minds” (Dokras, p.1). In other words, Indian cosmological thinking, perhaps bordering on the mythological sphere too, provides one set of answers to these somewhat philosophical questions, and that constitutes the core of the storyline presented in this paper. “Unlike the West, which lives in a historical world,

India is rooted in a timeless universe, of eternal return: everything which happens has already been done before, though in different guises” (Dokras, p.3).

That storyline begins with an initial condition under which the entire world and everything around it had been submerged in a huge flood – Pralaya (in Sanskrit/Kannada, or Pralay in Hindi -- something equivalent of a huge tsunami). A goddess by the name of ‘Aadimaya’ – meaning the very first and the most divine -- (perhaps, and only perhaps, similar to Virgin Mary in Catholic Christianity) suddenly comes alive out of the darkness that had surrounded the world.

Using her divine powers, she creates ‘the Three Murthies’ – a triplets of the most important Gods in Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu (Hari), and Shiva (Hara.). Aadimaya appoints the three of them to recreate the earth with all its glory and splendor that had been lost due to the huge Tsunami. She appoints: Brahma to create the earth and its inhabitants including humans; Hari to preserve what Brahma creates; and Hara to carry out ‘creative destruction’ of what was created and preserved by Brahma and Vishnu. Aadimaya also assures them that whenever they face extreme difficulties while discharging their duties, they should pray for her and she would strive hard to find solutions to resolve those difficulties. In modern language, one could say that Aadimaya underwrote the ‘inherent risks and uncertainties’ involved in the recreation, sustenance, and creative destruction of the world.

By their inherent nature, or what is referred to as their ‘gunas’, Brahma is Rajasika (noble/kingly); Hari is ‘Sattvica’ (calm and cool); and Hara is ‘Tamasika’ (easily excitable almost bordering on being angry). Those who seek a written summary of these ideas may like to refer to BBC: “The Nature of God And Existence in Hinduism”). “Hindus believe that all matter will go through different stages, known as the *Tri-guna*. This is the idea that everything is created, remains in existence and then is destroyed. This links to the Trimurti, as Brahma is the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Shiva as the destroyer’ (BBC “The Nature of God And Existence in Hinduism”

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/deities/vishnu.shtml>).

3. The Process of Prolivity

As soon as the Aadimaya departs after the appointment of the triplets, the three start a huge argument with each other – representing the high propensity to prolific prolivity by Indians.

It was Brahma who starts the provocative prolivity. He starts arguing that he is more equal among the three equals. He declares himself as the leader among the three; therefore, Vishnu and Shiva should report to him. He supports that argument by highlighting the fact that unless he recreates the lost earth, the other two will be fully jobless (unemployed, to use a term from

economics). There is some logic to Brahma's argument, but then the other two do not agree with it.

Vishnu – the idol of patience in general, or Sattvica, tries his very best to explain calmly to Brahma that all three of them should treat each other as equals; none among them should consider himself as more equal among the equals. For a while, Shiva enters the debate by arguing that he is the most unique among the three, as he has a special third eye on his forehead (opening of which can destroy everything); he is thus uniquely suited to be the leader.

Vishnu, however, convinces Shiva that there would be nothing for his third eye to destroy until and unless Brahma starts recreation. Shiva, by his very nature of being like a person in hurry, agrees with that and announces that there would henceforth be no difference between 'Hari and Hara' – they both would cooperate in discharging the duties entrusted to them by their Virgin Mother.

Brahma, however, continues his argument with Vishnu. After arguing for quite a while, Vishnu suggests to Brahma that there is no point in continuing the debate and discussion and instead they should look for empirical evidence to settle the debate (to an economist, this sounds very much like Milton Friedman's 1957 classic book "The Methodology of Positive Economics"). In other words, an empirical test looks for 'what is', not with 'what ought to be' (Friedman, 1957, p.4). The triplets then think of how to carry out the empirical test on such theological issues? Finally, the empirical test they settle for is a kind of creative speculation, perhaps to the extent of being mythological too (Wellman 2023): one enters the other's body, investigates what one finds there, returns and reports what he found honestly, no cheating allowed whatsoever. Agreed unanimously.

Brahma takes the first turn and lets Vishnu enter his body. How? through Brahma's mouth. Brahma now tries his best to close all the nine openings (doors, or *dwaras* in Sanskrit) of his body, so as to give Vishnu a hard time. Unfortunately, Brahma is capable of closing only eight of the nine openings of the body, and hence keeps the anal door open. Vishnu, being most practical among the triplets, does not at all mind sneaking out of Brahma's anal opening. Almost reflecting the well-known Darwinian principle of the 'survival of the fittest', Vishnu happily accepts the option of getting out through Brahma's anal opening. Therefore, Vishnu is also called 'Adhokshaja' – one who is born/reborn through the anal opening.

Vishnu has the empirical evidence of what he saw in Brahma's body. He narrates it to Brahma: he saw mountains of dead bodies of the previous several eras plus a lot of precious metals, including gold. Reflecting Brahma's richness, Vishnu gives him a surname – *Hiranyagarbha* -- one who has a 'golden womb' --with tremendous riches tucked in his tummy. It is Brahma's turn go into Vishnu's body and collect empirical evidence of what he sees inside Vishnu.

Brahma sees the entire world tucked in Vishnu's body – including all the planets – so wonderful that it was difficult to absorb it entirely and describe in detail. It is said that Brahma saw the entire universe past and present – 'Brahmanda' -- in many Indian languages -- tucked inside Vishnu's tummy. Brahma is said to have seen 11 forms of Rudras/Shivas, 12 forms of Sun – Surya, and a lot, indeed a lot more, tucked in Vishnu's tummy. That is why Vishnu has also been referred to as 'Brahmandodhara' -- one who holds the entire Universe -- 'Brahmanda' in many Indian languages-- tucked in his tummy. Brahma was now humbled by what he saw in Vishnu. He is now convinced beyond any doubt that Vishnu is certainly the one who is more equal among the three equals – the supreme among the triplets. Vishnu, in a somewhat mischievous way, now decides to close all the nine openings of his body, lets Brahma struggle a little more, so that Brahma becomes a less proud and a more humble being.

It is Brahma's turn to come out of Vishnu's body and report what he saw there – empirical evidence. However, by that time, Vishnu had fallen into what is referred to as 'yoganidra' - somewhat like a 'meditational sleep'. When someone is having a meditational sleep – one is supposed to be in a state of consciousness between walking and sleeping. Brahma now wisely decides to pray and plead with Aadimaya to show him the way out of Vishnu's body. Keeping up her promised role as an underwriter of such risks of the triplets, she helps Brahma to come out of Vishnu's body through Vishnu's bellybutton, which apparently blossomed into a lotus flower to help Brahma to get out.

Brahma is curious to report what he saw in Vishnu. However, noting that Vishnu is in 'yoganidra', Brahma decides not to disturb him. Hence, he now comfortably sits on the lotus-flower that sprang out of Vishnu's belly button (Dokras, undated). As a result, Brahma is also referred to as 'Padmasana' – someone seated on a lotus flower . While he was waiting, Aadimaya blesses Brahma with five faces, so that he can monitor the entire universe from many sides/angles-to use a geometric term. Henceforth, he became 'Panchamukhi' – five-headed.

4. The Product of Prolivity

The story has it that while Vishnu was in 'yoganidra', he was just clearing his ears using his little finger. In that process, two huge demon-like humans – twins - were born out of Vishnu's ear wax - 'Kilbisha' – as it is called in Sanskrit and some South Indian languages. As soon as they were born, they name each other just by gently touching each other's body. Hence one names the other as Madhu (someone having a soft body) and the other Kaitava (having a rock hard body). Just after they were born, the twosome felt so very hungry that they started churning the water under which the earth had been submerged, on the hope that they might find something to eat. No wonder, 'food poverty', or extreme poverty (with the World Bank's benchmark of \$1 a day) is seen as the worst form of poverty even today.

When hunger strikes, everyone tries their very best to find some food. Vishnu now wakes up from his 'yoganidra' and sees those demon-like twosome. He assures Brahma of his safety from Madhu and Kaitava, as also that he would take care of the two demon-like beings. Vishnu was now challenged by the twosome to fight with them or else get lost, literally. The fight between Vishnu and the twosome is believed to have gone on for 5000 years. Finally, Vishnu accepts defeat. However, Vishnu mischievously offers to give them any blessings/boon that they would like get from him.

The twosome could not stop laughing at Vishnu's offer, as they foolishly thought: 'what could, someone who has been defeated by them, ever give them anything anyway'. Hence, the twosome ask Vishnu for any blessing/boon from them instead. Vishnu agrees to it, uses his Machiavellian managerial capabilities and asks their lives as a boon from them. The twosome now figured out how badly they fooled themselves by their thick-headedness. But they now think, with whatever little intelligence they had, for a while, and see water everywhere. Hence, they agreed to sacrifice their life but on one condition: 'Vishnu should make sure that not even a drop of water should touch their bodies in the process of killing them'.

Vishnu agrees and asks them to keep their heads on his thigh. They agreed and Vishnu thus kills Madhu and Kaitava as per their condition--- not a drop of water touching their live bodies. The story has it that after killing Madhu and Kaitava – one soft and the other hard – Vishnu mixes the remains of their bodies with plenty of water around and recreates the earth – designed to delight as one may refer to it – with huge mountains almost touching the sky, rivers flowing amidst hills, and plains in between that could be used for agriculture etc. Henceforth, the earth has been referred to as Medhini (in many Indian languages) – to resonate with Madhu's name in the world. In return, Lord Vishnu has also been referred to as Madhusudhana -- one who demolished Madhu.

True to Professor Amartya Sen's assessment that Indians are highly argumentative but the arguments are also not just frivolous but substantive, and hence productive – the triplet Hindu Gods argued for quite a while but at the end produced something so very wonderful – Medhini – inhabited by humans and a variety of other animals and species, not to mention many, many, more wonderful things. In other words, most of the time the high propensity of Indians to argue about ends up to be productive, not sterile -- the product of prolixity. The three Murthies, with the able support of their Virgin Mother, recreated the lost earth and its inhabitants.

5. An Independent Evaluation of the Triplets

Time flies, and it is appropriate to evaluate the triplets and how good they are. Even Gods are not exempt from being subjected an independent evaluator, or an External Auditor, to use a modern

terminology. That job was done by none other than a highly accomplished Sage of his times, by the name of Bhrigu (also the father of Shukracharya – the teacher of the ‘asuras/demons’).

To cut a rather long story short, Sage Bhrigu first evaluates Brahma, followed by Shiva, and Vishnu. When he visits Brahma, he sees Brahma enjoying life like a king and completely ignoring Sage Bhrigu. Brahma now have to pay heavily for ignoring such a famed Sage. Noting that, Sage Bhrigu gets so very angry and curses Brahma; ‘nobody should ever worship him on the earth’. Then comes the turn of Shiva. Sage Bhrigu gets a second surprise in quick time: When Shiva saw Sage Bhrigu, he went on to hug him, instead of bowing/procrastinating before him. That infuriates the Sage and he curses Shiva that: ‘only Shiva’s lingam, not his entire body, is worth worshipping on the earth’ (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhrigu>).

It is now Vishnu’s turn to undergo the test. Vishnu somehow foresees that Sage Bhrigu is going to test him. Being a clever Machiavellian manger, Vishnu pretends as if he is fast asleep. Sage Bhrigu could not take it anymore. He thus indeed kicks Vishnu. Vishnu now wakes up, procrastinates before the sage, apologizes profusely, and indeed offers to massage Sage Bhrigu’s feet, just in case his feet got hurt in the process of kicking him. Sage Bhrigu is all smiles now. Satisfied to the tilt, Bhrigu is so pleased with Vishnu that he blesses that his entire body, unlike that of Brahma and Shiva, is worth worshipping on the earth. Vishnu thus becomes the most revered, or the supreme God, among the triplets.

Perhaps following these ratings, the common poetic rhythms most often referred to the threesome is: ‘Hari, Hara, Brahma’ – indicating the descending ordinal order of their importance. Put it another way, after Sage Bhrigu completes his independent evaluation of the three primary Gods, he rates Vishnu’s performance as exceptional, that of Shiva as good, and that of Brahma just about fair – a rating system which is used by many international companies and multilateral institutions today.

Casual empiricism does support this rating and the ways of worshipping these three Gods on earth. There are hardly any, or may be only a very few, Hindu temples that worship Brahma, most Shiva temples have the ‘Shivalinga’ being worshipped, and only the entire body of Vishnu – sculpted of course, is worshipped. Since this is based on casual empiricism, I must allow for at least some exceptions to this pattern. Interestingly though, even the largest temple complex in the world – Angkor Watt -- located in Siem Reap city in Cambodia still has Vishnu as the main deity, even though Cambodia is mostly a Buddhist country now.

6. A Bing Bang Theory?

The model of how the universe and its inhabitants came into existence that has been sketched out in the preceding sections resonates with what in modern times referred to as the ‘Big Bang’

approach. “The Big Bang theory is the theory that the universe came into existence through a massive explosion The main idea in Big Bang is that everything is created from almost ‘nothing’ or at least something, unlike the form in which we see the universe presently” (Dalela, p. 82).

In a similar vein Kraus suggests that: “The Big Bang changed everything. So much so that the notion that the Universe had a beginning is now taken for granted across almost all cultures. Interestingly the Big Bang has been seen on the one hand as a validation of religious notions of creation, and on the other as a direct challenge... The very notion that the Universe had a beginning, whether or not that beginning is shrouded in mystery, is an essential part of the gestalt of modern life. We should celebrate that” (Kraus, 2009, p.11).

Indeed, Dalela explains the issue in so very logical terms, terms: “...if you see a leaf closely, you can see cells and their molecular mechanisms. If you abstract these details, you will see the leaf. If you abstract more, you can see a tree, and if you abstract even more, you can see the forest. Which of these visions is real? In modern science, only the sub-atomic particles are real, and all other abstractions are false. In Vedic Philosophy, all these abstractions are potentially real” (Dalela, 2021, p 6).

According to ancient Indian cosmology, “the overall life of the universe is more than 311 trillion years, and the current age of the universe is a little over half of that, or 156 trillion years. By comparison, modern science has it that the total age of the universe is about 13.7 billion , and scientists estimate that the remaining life of the universe is about 5 billion years” (Dalela, 2021, p.399).

Moreover, according to Indian cosmology, “the world is made up of two things: spirit and matter. Spirit is things that cannot be seen or touched whereas matter is things that can. Hindus believe that spirit is more important than matter because matter can be destroyed and spirit cannot” (BBC, “The Nature of God And Existence in Hinduism” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/deities/vishnu.shtml>).

In a similar vein, Dalela explains that reality doesn’t have to be only things that are fully visible to one’s eyes, as long as there are some effects of that reality that are visible (Dalela, 2021). “Just because I can touch something with my hand doesn’t mean it is close, and just because I cannot see something doesn’t mean it is far” (Dalela, 2021, p. 22).

7. Summing up

A key conclusion that could be drawn from the preceding sections is that for times immemorial, Indians had a high proclivity for prolixity. That said, even by cosmological evidence, that

prolixity has not be trivial but substantive and highly productive. Look at it this way: True, the very recreation of the universe that had been lost to the huge tsunami was preceded by a prolonged theoretical debate and empirical testing by the three predominant Hindu Gods. But at the end the debate and empirical testing, the triplets recreated the lost earth and its inhabitants with all its glory, variety, and the pomp and splendor-- a 'Big Bang' product indeed. "Prolixity is not alien to us (Indians). We are able to talk at length... The arguments are also, often enough, quite substantive" (Sen, 2005, p.18).

Indian cosmological storyline presented in the paper highlights that Indian proclivity to imaginative prolixity has, more often than not, been quite productive. As Albert Einstein famously said: imagination is more important than knowledge. Imagination is quintessential to meaningful prolixity too. "Imagination is the ability to envision new possibilities, explore different perspectives, and dream up new ideas. Without Curiosity and imagination, we become complacent, resistant to change, and closed-minded" (Roos, undated). Socrates, the well-known Greek philosopher (5th Century BCE and considered as one of the greatest figures of ancient Western Philosophy) put it slightly differently: "Wisdom begins with wonder" (Blankes, 2015, p. 58).

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