



ADAM'S SIN OF EATING OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE LIGHT OF THE HINDU NARRATIVE OF THE WISH-YIELDING TREE

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ABSTRACT

The Biblical narrative of Adam is largely parallel to the Hindu narrative of Swayambhuva Manu. In particular, the tree of knowledge and life are parallel to the wish-yielding tree and the medicinal plants. However, there is a dramatic difference in the views of the two texts regarding sin. The conventional Biblical interpretation is that God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge but they ate of it and sinned. In contrast, the Hindu texts tell of those people eating of the wish-yielding tree in a matter-of-fact way without any stigma whatsoever though with greed. However, the Biblical narrative could also be interpreted as God wanting Adam to eat-but-not-devour of the tree. His and Eve's "sin" was that they devoured of the tree. This interpretation is 89 percent parallel to the Hindu texts and brings the Biblical and Hindu theological understandings in sync with each other.

Keywords: Adam; Swayambhuva; Genesis; Vayu; Tree of knowledge; Wish-yielding tree; Tree of Life; Medicinal plants;

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Number of scholars have noted the similarities between Adam and Swayambhuva. Williams Jones had suggested that Adam was parallel to Swayambhuva and that both were born in 4006 BCE (1799:313). Thomas William Doane drew attention to the parallel between the Biblical Garden of Eden and Hindu Mount Meru (1882:3, 13). Mircea Eliade drew parallel between the creation of Eve from Adam's ribs and the primeval pair of Yama and Yami described in the Rig Veda (1958:423). Joseph John Campbell drew parallel between the making of woman from man's ribs in the Bible and the splitting of the primeval being into husband and wife in the Hindu texts (Campbell 1962:9-10, Vayu 10:7-8).

The theological views embedded in the narratives regarding "sin" are different. The Bible says that Adam sinned in eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In contrast, the Vayu portrays the eating of the wish-yielding tree in a matter-of-fact way.

We explore whether the differences in the theological views regarding sin could be reconciled by making alternative interpretations. To clarify, the Hindu texts tell of two persons named "Manu."

The first was Swayambhuva—the first man—who is the subject of this paper (Vayu 10:7-11). The second, Vaivaswat, was a descendant of Swayambhuva and lived at the time of the deluge (Mani 1975:484).



1. HERMENEUTICS

In the Biblical view God encompasses the whole creation: “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You” (1Ki. 8:27) and “I am the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:8). This encompassment would include the non-Biblical religions as well. Hitherto, Biblical exegesis has been confined to the Bible “as a whole” (Witherington 2006). We expand this to include other religions and begin with Hinduism. We agree with the canonical method the inspired texts have to be read in the whole (Clouser 2021:149; Witherington 2006). However, we include texts from Hinduism in the “whole” while applying this method.

Problems with the existing interpretations of the standalone texts have been noted variously.¹ We read the Bible and Vayu in parallel and examine if alternative meanings of the words that underly the differences. Then we select such meanings that are in sync with the other text (Sharp 2021:2, Frei 1974:282).² In doing so we do not endorse “free interpretation” (Diaz 2012). We consider both the texts to be inspired and approach them with utmost reverence (Firestone 2014). Our departure is that we consider the two inspired texts together rather than either text standalone.

We defer judgment in case of irreconcilable differences as has been done where the text appears to be contra science or violates our moral standards (Firestone 2014). It has been noted that the community interprets the Bible and the meaning is ascribed by the reader (Witherington 2006:1; Firestone 2014; Sharp 2021). We expand the “community” to include the Hindus.

We agree with the redemptive-historical method that considers God’s word as a progressive revelation of God’s mighty acts in Jesus Christ (Van Popta 1998). This study is confined to the study of God’s word regarding Adam aka Swayambhuva including such revelation.

We have taken the note of the warning given by Rabbi Samuel Sandmel against extravagance in tracing parallels between religious texts (1962:2). Following his advice, we have looked at both the parallels and the distinctions between the two texts.³

On the Hindu side, the discussion is focused on which text to rely on. The two streams of the texts are the Shruti (the “heard”) and the Smriti (the “remembered”). The former contains the Vedas and the Upanishads while the latter contains the Epics and the Puranas including the Vayu Purana relied upon by us. History is a subject matter of both the texts (Prakash 1984). Often it is held that the Puranas are the common person’s tools to understand the essence of Vedas and relegated to a lower level of credibility (Sastry n.d.). However, we find that the narrative of Swayambhuva is found in much greater detail in the

1 For example, Hill says, “if Adam and Eve were historical persons, then how does one explain the many fanciful aspects to the Garden of Eden story, such as Adam being formed from the “dust of the ground,” the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, and a talking snake?” (2021). Similarly, Purfield 2015(:9): “Does the Bible contain errors? Yes. In the book of Daniel, the author states that Babylonian King Belshazzar was killed, and “Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old” (Dan 5:30-31). In truth, Darius didn’t succeed Belshazzar as king.

2 “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” Presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993 noted: “A written text has the capacity to be placed in new circumstances, which will illuminate it in different ways, adding new meanings to the original sense” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994:29). Clouser (2021) says that there is no conflict in reinterpretation of the text of the Bible. The conflict is with the tradition. Purfield (2015:7) says that Jews and Christians have different meanings of God’s word. Merrill (2019:253) says God’s word must be correctly understood.

3 We agree with Day (2020) that in that parallels need to be weighed, not merely counted. We have done this by examining the distinctions simultaneously.



Vayu Purana. While the Rig Veda to Swayambhuva (as “Manu”) but gives few details. The chapters of Vayu Purana containing this narrative were composed before 200 BCE (Hazra 1975:13, 174-175). We have assured ourselves that there is no contradiction with the Rig Veda and the interpretation of the Vayu Purana that we have made. We have quoted from the translation of the Vayu by G. V. Tagare.⁴

2. METHODOLOGY

The “comparative method” in Old Testament studies uses ancient Near Eastern texts to address historical and exegetical issues (Weeks 2019:287). It is implied that there is some ancient connection between the two sets of the texts. We explore whether such a connection may exist between the Bible and the Hindu texts.

We have summarized the parallels and distinctions in a table at the end of each of the six sections. Then we have combined the six tables and calculated the overall percentage of parallels between the two narratives in the Summary and Conclusions section. This method has been used in a study of Joh. 1:1-18 where it was concluded that the parallels overlapped in only seven percent of the studies (Scacewater 2016).

There are a number of instances where one text tells of an event while the other text is silent. We consider such narratives to be “silent” if it slips into the other narrative smoothly. For example, the Bible tells of the serpent implanting doubt in the mind of Eve regarding God’s prohibition (Gen. 3:1). The Vayu is silent on this point. On the other hand, the Vayu tells of Brahma having made seven continents (8:13). The Bible is silent on this point. However, both the narratives smoothly slip into the other without causing any dissonance. Therefore, we have excluded these from the summary tables for the calculation of percentages. With this preamble we now look at the parallels and distinctions between the narratives of Adam aka Swayambhuva in the Bible and the Vayu.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Evolution of Humankind

Adam was the first man in the Biblical tradition (Gen. 2:7). However, he and Eve were likely not the first two biological humans, but a chosen pair who took forward the humankind.⁵ Similarly, Swayambhuva was not the first biological human being but one from whom humankind developed (Vayu 8:36ff, 10:7-11).⁶

Chronology

One estimate of the time for Adam in the Jewish tradition is 3761 BCE and in the Christian tradition is 4004 BCE (Jewish Virtual Library n.d.; Wenham 1983:133). The Hindu texts do not suggest a date for Swayambhuva. However, we can get an estimate of his time indirectly. He and Marici were spiritual sons of Brahma (Mani 1975:483, 487). Indra was grandson of Marici (Mani 1975:318). Thus, Swayambhuva lived two generations or about a

4 The Hindu system tells of four ages. Verses 1-78 of Chapter 8 and Chapters 9-10 of the Vayu tell of the first Krita age while the verses 79-198 of Chapter 8 tell of the second Treta age. Swayambhuva was born in the first Krita age.

5 Huggins (2022). Murphy (2021:154) does not rule out the possibility that all present-day humans may have descended from a single male-female couple. Oppenheimer, however, states that the DNA studies create “a picture of the Adam and Eve gene lines spreading from Africa to every corner of the world” (Oppenheimer 2003).

6 The Vayu tells of the following having been created before Swayambhuva: four sets of 1000 pairs of human beings, nine Brahmas, four mental sons, eleven Rudras and numerous women (Vayu 8:36-38; 9:61-63, 65-66, 73, 81-8). Then Satarupa were born and she obtained Swayambhuva as her husband (Vayu 10:10-11).



century before Indra. The time of Indra can be reckoned from the Rig Veda that lauds his deeds in great detail. Linguist Koenraad Elst says Vedic culture was incipient from the early 4th millennium (n.d.). Greek scholar N Kazanas places the events of the Rig Veda in 4th millennium BCE (n.d.:29). Sanskrit scholar O. P. Bharadwaj says Rig Veda is to be placed before 3000 BCE (1986:34). Thus, we consider Indra to have been born in the mid-4th millennium BCE or, say, around 3500 BCE.⁷ His grandfather Swayambhuva would have been born about two generations earlier or, say, 3600 BCE.⁸ The parallel is that Adam and Swayambhuva both lived in first half of 4th millennium BCE. Distinction is that Adam lived in the early 4th millennium BCE (3761-4004 BCE) while Swayambhuva lived closer to mid-4th millennium BCE (3600 BCE).

Our hypothesis is that the Adam and Swayambhuva lived contemporaneously hence we do not posit any temporal sequence between them.⁹

Four Rivers and a Mountain

The Bible says that four rivers flowed out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14); and refers to Eden as the “holy mountain of God” (Ezek. 28:13-14). In parallel, the Vayu says that Lord Brahma, father of Swayambhuva, lived on Mount Meru where four rivers flowed out in four directions (34:65, 69-70, 42:13, 25, 41, 75-76). The Bible is silent on the four directions.

Genealogy

The Bible says Cain, Abel and Seth were sons of Adam (Gen. 4:1-2, 25). Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4:8, 16). The lineage continued from the third son Seth (Gen. 5:3pp).

The Hindu narrative says that Tvasta, Indra and Vivaswan were grandsons of Marici, brother of Swayambhuva (Mani 1975:318).¹⁰ A conflict arose in which Indra killed Tvasta. The lineage continued from Vivaswan (Mani, 1975:879). The parallels are (1) Adam aka Swayambhuva had three grandsons; (2) one grandson killed another; (3) lineage continued from the third grandson. A distinction is that the lineage continued from Adam himself in the Biblical narrative while it continued from Swayambhuva’s brother Marici in the Hindu narrative.

Food Gathering Stage

God commanded Adam: “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard...” indicating they lived on fruits as in the food-gathering stage of human evolution (Gen. 2:7). In parallel the Vayu says that those “people used to roam here and there. They ate the vegetation, fruits and roots of plants growing from the earth” (8:47).

Archaeological studies indicate that human civilization progressed from food gathering to tending non-domesticated nut-bearing trees and then to settled agriculture

7 Marici and Swayambhuva are said to be “mental” sons of Brahma. Strictly speaking we cannot assume them to be direct genealogical descendants. Another method is of determining the time by astrological details. However, astrologists differ by thousands of years in making these estimates. Therefore we confine ourselves to the genealogical estimate even if it is not robust.

8 The Hindu texts give timelines spreading over millions of years. However, historian Romila Thapar says that this magnification a “fantasy on ciphers” (1996: 28). We have ignored these estimates.

9 Keister (2017) rightly points out that it is difficult to deduce borrowing from verbiage or age of a manuscript. We suggest that there was only one person called Adam aka Swayambhuva. The same narrative of his was carried by two different groups of persons. This does not threaten the inspired nature of the Bible because both the Bible and Vayu could be inspired texts.

10 The Hindu narrative divides the larger history in Manvantaras that are named after the fourteen Manus. Swayambhuva is the first among these fourteen Manus. For this reason, we consider the lineage to descend from Swayambhuva rather than Marici—the biological ancestor of Vivaswan.



(Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). This development is mentioned in the Bible as Adam having started to till the ground (Gen. 3:23). Thus, Genesis “dramatizes the movement from hunter-gathering mixed economies to the beginnings of agricultural civilization...” (White n.d.: 5).¹¹ Likewise, the Vayu says that at this time “the plants began to grow on being (ploughed and) cultivated” (8:154). The beginning of tillage is parallel in the two texts.

We have summarized the parallels and distinctions in the summary table below. All references are from Genesis or Vayu unless mentioned otherwise. The distinctions are marked in italics for easy notice.

Summary of the Section “Historical Context”

S1	Bible	Vayu	Points
1	Adam was the first man (2:7).	Swayambhuva first evolved human (10:7-11).	P
2	Time for Adam is 4004-3761 or <i>early</i> 4 th millennium BCE.	Time for Swayambhuva is <i>mid</i> -4 th millennium BCE.	P, D
3	Four rivers and a mountain (2:10-14, Ezek. 28:13-14).	Four rivers and a mountain (35:65, 69-70, 42:13, 25, 41, 75-76).	Px2
4	Three sons of <i>Adam</i> (4:1-2, 25).	Three sons of <i>Swayambhuva's brother Marici</i> (Mani 1975:318).	P, D
5	One son kills another (4:8).	One son kills another.	P
6	Lineage continues from third son not involved in conflict (4:26).	Lineage continues from third son not involved in conflict (Mani 1975:879).	P
7	“Eat freely of the fruit of the orchard” (2:7).	People ate of vegetation, fruits and roots of plants (8:47).	P
8	Beginning of tillage (3:23).	Plants began to grow on being cultivated (8:154).	P
	Count. P=9, D=2, Total=11.		

4. CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

Names of God

The name “Elohim” is used as the name of the “One” God of Israel in Gen. 1:1 through 2:3. Hereafter, the name “Yahweh Elohim” or “Lord God” is used as a “personal name” of the God of Israel (Jewish Encyclopedia n.d.). In the Hindu system likewise the name “Brahman” is used in verse 8:1 of the original Sanskrit version of the Vayu although Tagare translates it as “he.” The word “Brahman,” amongst others, means “universal, absolute, eternal” (Monier-Williams 1987:738). The name “Brahma” is used from verse 8:2 through Chapter 10. This name is used for both the “impersonal Spirit” as well as a “personal god” (Monier-Williams 1987:738).

The Hebrew word for “created” in Gen. 1:1 is “bara.” Sarna says that the “stem ‘b-r’ is used in the Bible exclusively of divine creativity” (1989:5).¹² The name “Brahman,” in parallel, contains the same stem “Br.”

¹¹ This line of argument is supported by Tremper: “the books of the Bible are careful to signal their relative age” (Longman 1994:19).

¹² It means “to separate” rather than “to create” on the strength of Mesopotamian literature (Wolde 2009).



The Bible begins with the verse: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). We read this with John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and what God was the Word was.” This indicates that God existed in form of sound when He created the universe. In parallel “Brahman” also means the sacred syllable “Om” which is “sound” (Monier-Williams 1987:737-738, 235-236).

Moving on the Surface of Water

The Bible says that the earth was without shape and empty and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water (Gen. 1:2). The Vayu in parallel says: “When the surface of the earth had been completely covered by the water, when the elements remained undivided and undifferentiated, the self-born Lord, surveying everything, moved about like the glow-worm at night during the rainy season” (8:2-3).

The Bible tells of God creating a firmament in the midst of the waters and it dividing the waters from the waters (Gen. 1:6). The Vayu is silent on this point.

The Bible then tells of appearance of dry ground (Gen. 1:9). The Vayu in parallel says that “On seeing the earth fully engulfed in waters, he entered the waters after assuming the form of a Boar... and established [the earth] above the waters” (8:7). The Bible is silent on the Boar.

At this point the Vayu says that the Lord made the seven continents and the seven countries (8:8, 13). The Bible is silent on this point.

Then the Bible tells of creation of vegetation followed by the creation of “the greater light to rule over the day and the lesser light to rule over the night” (Gen. 1:11-12, 16). The Vayu in parallel tells that Brahma created the herbs, the souls of trees, creepers... night, day, fortnight, months...” in the same sequence (8:17-19).

Summary of the Section “Creation of the Universe”

Sl	Bible	Vayu	oints
1	“Elohim” is the One God (1:2-2:3).	“Brahman” is the Universal God (8:1).	
2	“Yahweh Elohim” used after Gen 2:4 in personal sense.	“Brahma” used after Vayu 8:2 as a personal god.	
3	The word for “created” has the stem “b-r-.”	“Br” is contained in the name Brahman.	, D
4	God created the heavens and the earth (1:1).	[Brahman] assumed Brahma-hood for the purpose of creation” (8:1).	
5	In the beginning was the “Word.”	One meaning of “Brahman” is the sacred syllable “Om.”	
6	Earth was without shape and Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water (1:2).	The elements remained undivided and Brahma moved about like the glow-worm during the rainy season (8:2-3).	x2
	Dry ground appeared (1:9).	The Lord established the earth above the waters (8:7-8).	
	Vegetation was created and separation of day from night took place (1:11-16).	Brahma created the herbs, the souls of trees, creepers, night and day (8:17-19).	x2
	Count P=10, D=1, Total=11.		



Creation of Humankind

The Bible says, “God created humankind in his own image... male and female he created them” and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it!” (Gen. 1:27-28). Subsequently, it says that “...there was no man to cultivate the ground” (Gen. 2:5). Since God had already created humankind earlier, we may assume that some vegetation did grow and some rain did take place. However, humankind did not undertake cultivation as implied in the statement that “there was no man to cultivate the ground.” The import is that although man had been created, he did not cultivate or multiply.¹³ At this juncture, the Vayu says that Brahma created a thousand pairs each from his mouth, chest, thighs and feet (8:35-39). However, it appears, they did not engage in creation, therefore, Brahma continued to create repeatedly (9:4, 6, 65-66, 68-70, 75-77, 93-94, 10:7-11). The Bible tells of only one effort at the creation while the Vayu tells of multiple efforts. We do not consider this to be distinct because the one effort could subsume the many efforts. That there was no man to cultivate the ground is parallel to Brahma having had to create repeatedly. The Bible tells of an explicit command to multiply while Vayu is silent on this point.

The Bible says that God gave the trees, animals, birds as food to man (1:30); and God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). The Vayu is silent on these points.

Dust and Darkness

Then God formed the man from “aphar” (Gen. 2:7). Number of scholars have associated this word with physical “dust” based on Mesopotamian traditions (Soden 2015, Bloom 2014:16). On the other hand, Murphy (2021:155) has associated dust with the psychic dimension of violence and Clouser has associated it with mortality (2021:149).

The Vayu in parallel with the psychic interpretation says: “The progeny did not multiply by any means... Brahma was enveloped entirely by darkness... (Then) violence and sorrow were born from unrighteousness... (10:1, 5). The creation from the physical element of dust is parallel to darkness; and the creation from psychic dimensions of violence and mortality is parallel to that from violence, sorrow and unrighteousness.

Living Being

After forming man, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). However, God had already created humankind in Gen. 1:27. A number of commentaries have noted that the phrase “living being” indicates development of rationality or thinking (Barnes' Notes on the Bible n.d.; Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible n.d.). At this point, the Vayu says that Brahma created nine mental sons who propounded the Vedas (9:61-63). The Vedas have a materialist orientation (Unni 2014). We propose that the rationality implied in the Bible is parallel to the materialist orientation of the Vedas: the “materialist virtue and rationalism together form the basis of Spinoza's integral rationalism” (Gillot 2021).

We shall discuss the narratives of the tree of knowledge along with the tree of life shortly. For the present we jump to the creation of woman.

Creation of Woman

Then the Bible says:

NKJV Translation: And the Lord God... took one (of Adam's) ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, He made into a woman and He brought her to the man (Gen. 2:21-22).

¹³ Haris (1968) says no rain indicates absence of cultivation of field crops.



Sarna and Wenham suggest that these verses tell of God establishing a relationship between one man and one woman or the institution of marriage (Sarna 1989:23, Wenham 1983:69).

The Vayu says that Brahma divided his body into male and female repeatedly (9:67-85). Then he “split [his body] into two. With one half of his body, he became a man. With the other half he became a woman. The woman was named Shatarupa... The woman... obtained a man of brilliant fame as her husband. He was called [Swayambhuva] Manu” (Vayu 10:1-2, 10-11). The establishment of the institution of marriage is parallel in the two narratives. A distinction is that God brought the woman to the man; while Shatarupa herself obtained Swayambhuva as her husband.

Then God said that because woman was created out of man that is why man leaves his father and mother and unites with his wife (2:24). The Vayu is silent on this point.

Summary of the Section “Creation of Humankind”

Sl	Bible	Vayu	Points
1	God created humankind (1:27)	Brahma created a thousand pairs (8:35-39).	P
2	There was no man to cultivate the ground (2:5).	Brahma continued to create repeatedly (9:4ff).	P
3	Creation from the physical element of dust and the psychic dimensions of violence or mortality (2:7).	Creation from the physical element of darkness and the psychic dimensions of violence, sorrow and unrighteousness. (9:6).	Px2
4	Man became a rational being (2:7).	Nine sons of Brahma propounded a materialist orientation (9:61-63).	P
5	God created woman from man’s ribs (2:21-22) and <i>brought the woman to the man.</i>	Brahma split his body into man and woman (10:1-11). <i>Shatarupa obtained Swayambhuva as her husband.</i>	P, D
Count P=6, D=1, Total=7.			

Two Trees

The Bible tells of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. The Vayu in parallel tells of wish-yielding trees and medicinal plants. In this section we discuss the physical and social aspects of the two trees. We will discuss the theological aspects in the next section.

The Trees Appeared

The Bible says that at one time God had not caused it to rain on the earth (2:5). Then God planted an orchard and made all kinds of trees grow from the soil (2:8). In parallel the Vayu says “when the surface of the earth is drenched with rain only once, the trees begin to manifest” (8:78). Next, the Bible says the “tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the orchard” (2:9). In parallel the Vayu says that the wish-yielding tree manifested followed by the manifestation of the medicinal plants (8:86-90, 129).

Narrative of the tree of knowledge aka wish-yielding tree placed early

The narrative of the tree of knowledge is placed before the narrative of the tree of life in the Bible (2:15-3:15 and 3:22-24 respectively). In parallel the narrative of the wish-



yielding tree is placed before that of the medicinal plants in the Vayu (8:86-90 and 8:129-137 respectively).

Nature of the two trees

The tree of knowledge and the wish-yielding tree are both associated with the mental aspect of humankind. The tree of life and the medicinal plants are both associated with physical aspect of humankind.

Summary of the Section “Two Trees”

Sl	Bible	Vayu	Points
1	God had not caused it to rain on the earth (2:5).	“The surface of the earth [began to be] is drenched with rain only once (8:78).	P
2	Then God planted an orchard (2:8).	These trees provided “all the necessary objects of enjoyment” (8:79).	P
3	The “tree of life and the tree of the knowledge were in the middle” (2:9).	The wish-yielding tree manifested (8:86, 90) <i>followed by</i> medicinal plants (8:129).	P, D
4	The narrative of the tree of knowledge is placed before the that of the tree of life (2:15-3:15; 3:22-24).	The narrative of the wish-yielding tree is placed before that of the medicinal plants (8:86-90; 8:129-137).	P
5	The tree of knowledge is associated with mental aspect of humankind.	The wish-yielding tree is associated with mental aspect of humankind.	P
6	The tree of life is associated with the physical aspect of humankind.	The medicinal plants are associated with the physical aspect of humankind.	P
Count P=6, D=1, Total=7.			

5. ADAM’S SIN

Prohibition of devouring

The above discussion suggests that narratives of the two trees in the Bible and Vayu are parallel. A major distinction, however, is that in the conventional reading of the Bible, God prohibited Adam from eating of the tree of knowledge, he violated God’s command, ate of it and sinned; while there is no prohibition, violation or sin of eating in the Vayu. The Vayu only says that the greed of the people led to the wish-yielding tree perishing.

Hitherto we have compared one version of the Bible with the Vayu. We have remained within the conventional understanding of the Bible though with variations within the accepted scholarship. We now move beyond the confines of the conventional and put forth an alternative understanding beyond it. We are thus provided with two interpretations—the conventional and the alternative provided by us. Hence, we compare the two interpretations separately with the Vayu. Consequently we calculate the parallels separately with the two interpretations in the summary table at the end of the section.

God said:

NKJV Translation: *but* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not *eat*, *for* in the day that you *eat* of it you shall surely die (Gen. 2:17).

We consider the three words given in italics in the above translation.



But. The Hebrew text is written as “[conjunction] tree.” The conjunction is not specified. We propose that the conjunction “if” may be used as done in Num. 35:18.

Eat. The Hebrew word for “eat” is “akal.” It is used in the positive sense of eating-without-devouring as well as negative sense of eating-with-devouring in the two verses below. The places where the word “akal” has been used are marked in italics:

Ps. 105:35: “They *ate* all the vegetation in their land, and *devoured* the crops of their fields.”

Ps.14:4: “All those who behave wickedly do not understand –those who *devour* my people as if they were *eating* bread, and do not call out to the Lord.”

It is furthermore used stand-alone in the sense of eating-with-devouring in Joe. 1:4, Na.3:15, Jer. 5:17, Am. 1:7 and Zec. 11:1. The context of the word for eating indicates its meaning (Prosic 2010:732). Accordingly, in the alternative interpretation of this verse, we use the word “akal” as “eating” in the first instance and as “devouring” in the second instance.

For. The Hebrew word for “for” is “kiy.” It indicates causal relations of all kinds. We propose to translate it as “although, or” as done in Gen. 48:14. This verse may thus be rendered as follows:

NKJV Alternative Translation: *if* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not *eat*, *although/or* in the day that you *devour* of it, you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

However, Adam did not eat of it. Then the serpent planted doubt in Eve’s mind whether God had actually prohibited them from eating of the tree (Gen. 3:4-5).¹⁴ Subsequently, God asked Adam and Eve:

NKJV Translation: And He said, “Have you *akal* from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not *akal*?” (Gen. 3:11).

Based on the discussion above, we propose to render this word as “devour” in both instances in this verse. Thus, NKJV Alternate Translation: And He said, “Have you *devoured* from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not *devour*?” (Gen. 3:11).

It follows that God reprimanded them for devouring the tree. This, we propose, was their “sin.”¹⁵ This rendering draws support from the creationists and theistic evolutionists that Adam and Eve must have eaten of the tree in order to stay alive (Morris 1998).

Other scholars have denied wrongdoing by Eve altogether. Westermann denies that there ever was a historic fall (Wenham n.d.:6), Aaron Milavec portrays Eve as a “truth-

¹⁴ The negative or anti-God portrayal of the serpent persists through the commentaries (Emmrich 2001:11). This is problematic because the snake is divine emblem in the near eastern texts; and the staff the is tree of life in Babylon and Greece (Frothingham 2016:190,192,195). This problem gets resolved if God actually wanted Adam and Eve to eat of the tree and the serpent assisted in doing that. Therefore, the portrayal of the serpent as adversary in Enuma Elish is not likely to be the source of the serpent in Genesis as suggested by Hill (2021:138-139).

¹⁵ Augustine’s concept of inherited sin has two forms: “a common guilt that we bear because we were in Adam when he sinned and somehow sinned with him, and a constitutional fault composed of ignorance and carnal concupiscence, a state of disordered desire blameworthy and sinful in itself” (Couenhoven 2005:387). Adam’s sin would fall in the first category if God had prohibited them from eating. It would fall in the second category if they devoured the tree in absence of a prohibition. Our interpretation falls in the second category.

It is equally logical to say that Adam sinned in devouring because he was greedy as suggested by van Asselt: “Before Adam people committed only natural sins (*peccata naturalia*). Unlike Adam, they had not sinned against a positive law (*peccata contra legem*). For that reason, the sins that were committed before the law (*ante legem*) were not counted, and thus did not resemble the sin of Adam” (2012:95). This concept defines natural sin as the act undertaken when there was no prohibition. We define natural sin as a constitutional fault of ignorance.



finder” (2016). Sally Frank says that one is justified to “break a law when a more important value is at stake” (1996:109). These scholars accept that there was a prohibition that was broken but justify it. In contrast, we suggest that there was no prohibition of eating of the tree at all. The prohibition was only of devouring the tree.

The Vayu in parallel says

The wish-yielding trees manifested in their houses again. They yielded clothes, fruits and ornaments... As time elapsed, they were overcome with greed once again. They forcibly took possession of the trees... Due to this misdemeanour committed by the people, the wish-yielding trees perished at some places (8:86, 89-90).

The eating of the tree of knowledge in the conventional interpretation, the devouring of the tree in the alternative interpretation and the greed of the people in the Vayu—all point to a negative attitude to the eating of the tree and we consider these to be parallel. However, there is no hint of devouring of the tree in the conventional interpretation while there is indication of devouring in the alternative interpretation of the Bible as well as in the Vayu hence, we consider conventional interpretation to be distinct from; and the alternative interpretation to be parallel to the Vayu on this point.

Eve’s Explanation

Then God asked Eve “What is this you have done?” Eve replied:

NKJV Translation: “The serpent *deceived* me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13).

The Hebrew word for “deceived” is “nasha.” However, this is problematic. In Jer. 4:10, this interpretation leads to accusing God of deceit: “Then said I, Ah, Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.” The Pulpit Commentary notes that “much difficulty has been felt in interpreting this verse, partly because it seems directly to charge Jehovah with ‘deceit’” (Pulpit n.d.). This difficulty may be removed if we were to translate “nasha” as “to guide.” The word is used 13 times in the OT other than Gen. 3:11. Of these, in 11 instances it can be used as “guide” without changing the meaning of the verse as in Jer. 4:10, 23:39, 29:8, 37:9, 49:6, Isa. 19:13, 36:14, 37:10, 2Ki. 18:29, 19:10 and 2Ch. 32:15. Thus, we understand Eve to have replied:

NKJV Alternative Translation: “The serpent guided me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:13).

Then to God said to Adam:

NKJV Translation: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life (3:17).

Archaeological studies indicate that civilization progressed from food gathering to tending non-domesticated nut-bearing trees and to settled agriculture (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). This verse tells of “the movement from hunter gathering mixed economies to the beginnings of agricultural civilization...” (White n.d.:5).¹⁶

Clothes

The Bible says that Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves both in the conventional- and alternative interpretations (3:6-7). In parallel, the Vayu says that the wish-yielding trees yielded clothes (8:87).

Tree of Life aka Medicinal Plants

Then God placed the cherubim to prevent Adam from taking of the tree of life:

¹⁶ Thus, Becking says, “according to the garden story the meaning of human life is to be found in the tilling of acres, and not in dwelling in a luxurious garden while the soil of the earth has no cultivator (Becking 2010:6).



NKJV Translation: (Then) Lord God said, “now, lest [man] put out his hand and *take* also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—therefore the Lord God sent him out

Sl	Bible (Conventional Interpretation)	Bible (Alternative Interpretation)	Vayu	Points Conventional Interpretation	Points Alternative Interpretation
1	God prohibited eating of the tree of knowledge (2:17).	God prohibited devouring of the tree of knowledge (2:17).	They took possession forcibly ((8:86-90).	P	P
2	If eat, then die. No hint of perishing (2:17/3:11).	If devour then die. Hints of perishing (2:17/3:11).	Greed and perishing (8:86-90).	D	P
3	They wore clothes of fig trees (3:7).	They wore clothes of fig trees (3:7).	The trees yielded clothes (8:87).	P	P
4	The <i>person</i> of Adam as in “eat” threatened the tree of life (3:22-24).	The <i>species</i> of Adam as in “devoured” threatened the tree of life (3:22-24).	<i>All of them</i> (plural) were overwhelmed with lust and greed (8:155).	D	P
5	[Adam may] live <i>forever</i> (3:22-24).	[Man may] live for a <i>long time</i> (3:22-24).	The medicinal plants [help live for a <i>long time</i>] (8:129-130, 137).	D	P
6	Take of the tree [not leading to its extinction] (3:22-24).	Lest [man] take of the tree [<i>leading to its extinction</i>] (3:22-24).	The medicinal <i>plants disappeared</i> (8:129-130, 137).	D	P
7	Cherubim appointed to protect.	ditto	Masters established to protect.	P	P
8	Cherubim to protect <i>the tree</i> (3:22-24).	Cherubim to guard <i>the tree</i> (3:22-24).	The masters established to <i>protect (generally)</i> (8:155).	D	D
	Conventional Count. P=3, D=5, Total=8. Alternative Count. P=7, D=1, Total=8.				

of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So... He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden... to guard the way to the tree of life (3:22-24).



The term “Adam” is used both for the person of Adam as well as the species of Adam. The Hebrew word for “take” in this verse “laqach” also means to “capture” and “seize” as in 1Sam. 2:16, 7:14 and Jud. 5:19. The meaning “take” aligns with the person of Adam as in the conventional interpretation while the meaning “seize” is similar to devour, is of wider applicability and aligns with the species of Adam as in the alternative interpretation.

At this juncture the Vayu says:

It was in the [second] Treta age that... the medicinal plants appeared... Then again all of them were overwhelmed with lust and greed... Due to their fault, the medicinal plants disappeared while they were looking on helplessly. They vanished as sand particles in handfuls... (8:129-130, 137).

Here the term “all of them” is distinct from the conventional perspective wherein the person of Adam had eaten; and is parallel with the alternative perspective wherein multiple persons are referred to. The Hebrew word for “forever” in 3:22-24 is “olam.” It can also be understood as “long time” (Morris 1998, Ditzel 2017).

At this juncture, the Vayu says:

Those who were masters (powerful ones) had (to follow) prescribed conventions and established them (as) Kshatriyas for the protection of others (8:155).

The Vayu tells of continued living of those people hence aligns with the alternative interpretation of living for a “long time.” There is no mention of overcoming of death. Hence it is distinct from the conventional interpretation of “forever.”

The Bible—both in the conventional and alternative interpretations—tells of a threat to the tree of life but no perishing of the same. The Vayu in distinction tells of the medicinal plants disappearing hence is distinct from both interpretations.

God placing the cherubim for the protection of the tree of life is parallel to the Lord establishing Kshatriyas for the protection of others. Distinction is that the Bible tells of the cherubin being appointed specifically to protect the tree of life while the Vayu says the masters were appointed for the protection of other people generally.

Summary of the Section Adam’s Sin

We have given separate columns for the conventional- and alternative interpretations in the table below and also calculated the parallels and distinctions separately.

6. FORTUITOUS CURSES AND PROGRESS OF HUMANKIND

Overview of the Curses

Then God cursed the serpent, Eve and Adam in succession. Scholars have noted that these curses are followed by progress. Matt Champlin writes that the blessings given by God in Genesis are only partly offset by the curses (2018). Jacob Gerber says that God does not abolish the goodness of His blessings entirely. The curses only make a break in the larger fortuitous continuity (2016:8). We examine the three curses in this background.

Curse on the Serpent: Dust and Darkness

Then God said:

NKJV Translation: So, the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust All the days of your life (Gen. 3:14).

The Vayu gives an event that is parallel. At one time Brahma did not like the creation that he had made. Then:

Vayu: On seeing them with displeasure, the hairs of that intelligent one withered. But due to heat and cold, they climbed up the Lord. As the hairs... dropped down they (the



serpents) are called Ahis... Their abode is below in the earth under the sun and the moon (9:30-32).

The parallel narratives are (1) Serpent being cursed by God is parallel to the displeasure of Brahma on seeing them; (2) The serpent going is parallel to them climbing up and down; and (3) The serpent eating of dust is parallel to the serpents living in darkness of the earth. The distinction is that the serpent in singular is said to go in the Bible while the serpents in plural are said to climb up and down in the Vayu.

7. CURSE ON THE WOMAN: INCREASED PROCREATION

God cursed the woman:

He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children..." (Gen. 3:16).

The terms "multiply" and "bringing forth children"—in plural—suggest an increase in procreation. Scholars have noted the fortuitous aspect of this curse in fulfilment of the promise in Gen. 1:28 "Be fruitful and multiply" (Ronning 1997: iii). Gerber quotes John Sailhamer, "The pain of the birth of every child... (is) as well a sign of an impending joy" (2016).

The Vayu gives a more vivid description:

The menstrual flow that used to take place only at the end of life in the case of women then ceased to be so... menstruation began to take place every month (8:81-82).

Both texts tell of an increase in the number of children borne by women hence the increase in the pain of childbearing.

Curse on the man: Toil

Lastly God cursed the man:

Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life before the narrative of the tree of life (3:17).

In parallel, the Vayu says that the plants began to grow on being cultivated (8:154). A distinction is that the Biblical curse is pronounced before the narrative of the cherubim is mentioned while the Vayu tells of the ploughing after the medicinal plants have perished.

Summary of the Section "Fortuitous Curses"

Sl	Bible	Vayu	Points
1	God cursed the serpent (3:14).	Brahma saw the serpents with displeasure (9:30-32).	P
2	The serpent shall eat dust all the days of its life (Gen 3:14).	The abode of serpents is in darkness (9:30-32).	P
3	You shall go All the days of your life in <i>singular</i> (Gen. 3:14).	Snakes climbing up and down in <i>plural</i> (9:30-32).	P, D
4	God multiplied the conception of women (Gen 3:16).	Menstruation began to take place every month (8:81-82).	P
5	Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life <i>before the narrative of the tree of life</i> (3:17).	The plants began to grow on being cultivated (8:154) <i>after the narrative of the medicinal plants</i> .	P, D
Count P=5, D=2. Total=7.			



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We give the parallels and distinctions in the six sections of this paper in the table below to present an overall view. Regarding Adam's Sin we give the alternative- and conventional interpretations in two separate rows numbers 5 and 8 respectively.

Summary of the Paper

Sl	Section	Parall	Distinctions	Tota	Percent Parallel
1	Historical Context	9	2	10	80
2	Creation of the Universe	10	1	11	91
3	Creation of Humankind	6	1	7	86
4	Two trees	6	1	7	86
5	Adam's Sin (Alternative Interpretation)	7	1	8	88
6	Fortuitous Curses and Progress of Humankind	5	2	7	71
7	Average	7	1	8	84
8	Memo: Adam's Sin (Conventional Interpretation)	3	5	8	38

We get 84 percent parallels in the alternative interpretation (Row 7). The Bible and the Vayu are in sync with each other in this interpretation.

On Adam's Sin, we get 88 percent parallels in the alternative interpretation (Row 5) while we get only 38 percent parallels in the conventional interpretation (Row 8). There is a need, therefore, to consider the alternative interpretation more deeply because that provides an extra-Biblical confirmation of the Biblical narrative.

A few observations made be made from the contemporary standpoint before closing. The parallels sought to be established by us between the narratives of Adam and Swayambhuva are challenged by the view that in the Bible, everything that happens in the cosmos "unfolds according to God's plan" whereas the "other cultures of the ancient Near East had no such theological conception" (Currid 2016:44). However, God's plan could be that of the alternative interpretation.

Second seemingly irreconcilable point is that reducing the sin of Adam from eating of the tree of knowledge in violation of God's command to mere collective greed seems to challenge the concept of Jesus being the redeemer. We think that redeeming from the sin or redeeming from greed—are both redemptions. In fact, the Hindu philosophy says redemption consists of submit all one's works to God (Gita 3:30, Mukundanand n.d.). The majesty of Jesus Christ is not diluted if he redeemed people from greed.

The parallels give an occasion for both the Biblical and Hindu religions to re-examine their understandings of these narratives in the light of the other religion. In the process, the two religions can move towards establishing a common understanding.

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