

CREATION IN THE BHĀGAVATAPURĀṆA

Dr. Mani Sarmah

Abstract

One of the most popular and widely circulated Purāṇas is the Bhāgavatapurāṇa. The Purāṇa discusses the theory of creation very clearly. This paper analyses the creation theory of Bhāgavatapurāṇa in the following lines, viz. Brahman and Bhāgavat, God as the Cause of the Universe, the Kārya Sarga, the Creation of Brahmā, the Ten-fold Creation.

Introduction :

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is one of the most popular and widely circulated Purāṇas. This Purāṇa occupies a unique position in the religious as well as philosophical literature of India. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the most valuable treatise of the Vaisnavas from the standpoint of theological and philosophical doctrines. Wilson remarks in the preface of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* that “The *Bhāgavata* is a work of great celebrity in India and exercise a more direct and powerful influence upon the opinions and feelings of the people than perhaps any other of the *Purāṇa*.”¹ According to the *Vāyu*, *Matsya*, *Agni*, *Nāradya* and *Devībhāgavata* and also the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* it consists of 18000 verses which is divided into twelve *Skandhas*. It is narrated by *Sūta* to the *Rsis* at *Naimiṣāraṇya*. But *Sūta* actually repeats what was said by Śuka, the son of *Vyāsa* to king *Parīkṛit*. The incarnations of Lord *Viṣṇu* are described here in great detail. As many as forty incarnations are ‘mentioned here. The *Bhāgavata* and the *Viṣṇu*, the two *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas* have many things in common. Many legends in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* are also found in the *Bhāgavata* in an enlarged form. Among all the *Skandhas* the tenth *Skandha* is most interesting and upon it is founded the popularity of this *Purāṇa*. It also contains the biography of Śri Kṛṣṇa which is here given in much greater detail than in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃsa*. This *Purāṇa* is famous

for its gospel of bhakti. The *Bhāgavata* preaches the highest form of bhakti. This *Purāṇa* deserves to be appreciated as a literary production on account of its unique composite style. This *Purāṇa* has been translated in to almost all Indian languages.

The date of this *Purāṇa* is a much debated one. Many scholars are inclined to ascribe a much later date to it. There are some scholars like Colebrooke, Bumouf and Wilson who think that the *Bhāgavata* is composed by Vopadeva, the Grammarian who flourished in 1300A.D. R G. Bhandarkar; S.N. Dasgupta and S.D. Gyani place it in 1000A.D. There are again scholars who try to put it in 300A.D. Examining all these dates of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Dr. T.S. Rukmani opines that the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was certainly in existence about the 5th century A.D.²

Brāhman and Bhāgavat :

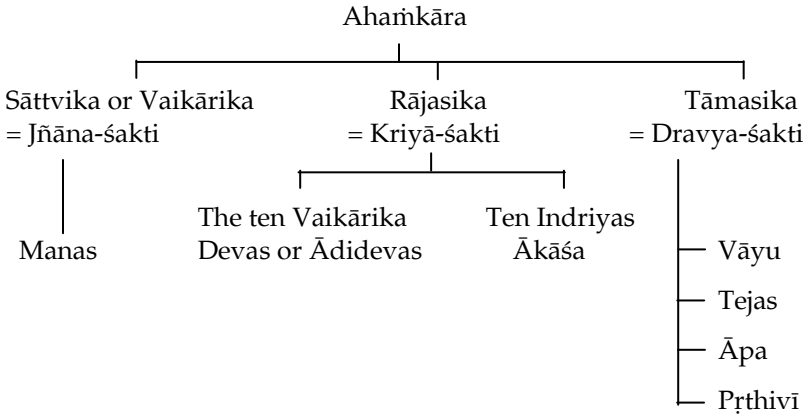
The ultimate Reality in the *Bhāgavata* is called by different names. e.g., Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavat. The essence of this Reality is non dual consciousness.³ When the ultimate reality is viewed from the Upaniṣadic standpoint it is Brahman. i.e., devoid of any quality and adjective (nirguṇa and nirveśeṣa) and is of the nature of pure bliss. In that case this reality is conceived in a featureless way in its abstractness.⁴ But when this reality is realized as the possessor of diverse powers and all auspicious qualities, He is called Bhagavat.⁵ This is the view of the *Bhāgavata* s or the Vaiṣṇavas. Hence, Brahman is nirguṇa and nirveśeṣa whereas Bhagavat is saḡuṇa and saviśeṣa. When the reality is the absolute controller of the individual selves which are like rays emanating from Him and are dependent on Him, then it is called *Paramātman*.⁶ In this way the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* maintains that the Supreme Reality who is also the Supreme Lord is both immanent and transcendent. The world is originated from that Reality, exists in it and at the end is dissolved into it. But during this world process, the Supreme Lord exists as the one abiding principle, the world process being traceable to *Māyā* or cosmic illusion.⁷ *Īśvara* creates this world by His power *Māyā*, consisting of three guṇas. This *Māyā* represents only His external power, through which He creates this universe. Śrīdhara Svāmin has pointed out that God

has two powers- *Vidyā-śakti* and *Avidyā-śakti*. By His *Vidyā-śakti* He controls the *Avidyā* or *Māyā-Śakti*.⁸

God is the Cause of the Universe :

The cosmogony of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* follows the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to a great extent. But it has a Vedantic touch and stand nearer to the view of Śankarācārya. It is said in this *Purāṇa* that God is the cause of all. The all pervasive Lord assumes the three *guṇas* - *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* with the help of *Māyā* for the purpose of creation, sustenance and destruction of the world. But this *Purāṇa* categorically says that these three *guṇas* cannot influence Him and in essence He is *nirguṇa*.⁹ When He is invested with the power of *Rajas*, He is *Brahmā*, the creator, when invested with *Sattva*, He is *Viṣṇu*, the preserver and when He is invested with *Tamas* He becomes *Rudra*, the destroyer. At the beginning of creation the God being desirous of becoming many accepted *Kāla*. *Karman* and *Svabhāva* by his own power *māyā*.¹⁰ *Kāla* here means the flow of *Time* which according to *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is a power (*śakti*) of *Puruṣa*. *Karman* is the *adrṣṭa* of the *jīvas*. *Svabhāva* is nothing but the essence of *Prakṛti* which is the equilibrium of three *guṇas*. Under the influence of *Puruṣa*, this state of equilibrium of the *guṇas* is disturbed by *Kāla*. Then *Svabhāva* becomes the cause of transformation and *Karman* becomes the cause of *Mahat*.¹² This describes the creation of *Mahat* from the primeval *Prakṛti*. When God desired to create the universe, at that time the balance of the *guṇas* becomes disturbed and by the favourable condition of the *adrṣṭa* of the *jīvas* and by the transformable nature of *Prakṛti*, the principle of *Mahat* is evolved. All this is possible only because of the direction or presence of God. In the *Mahattattva* *Sattva* and *Rajas* predominate. When *Mahat* undergoes modification, it evolves *Ahaṁkāra* where *Tamas* predominates.¹³ After that there takes place the three fold modifications of *Ahaṁkāra*, Viz., *Sāttvika*, *Rājasa* or *Taijasa* and *Tāmasa*. These three types of *Ahaṁkāra* are also known as *jñāna-śakti*, *kriyā-śakti* and *dravya-śakti* respectively. As a result of the evolution of *Tāmasa Ahaṁkāra* also called *Bhūtādi*, first of all *śabda-tanmātra* (sound potential) is produced and from *śabda-tanmātra*, *Ākāśa* comes out. *Śabda* is the quality of *Ākāśa*. From that *Ākāśa sparśa-tanmātra* (potential of touch) is produced and from that, *Vāyu* comes into existence. Then

Vāyu is transformed into *rūpa-tanmātra* (colour potential) and from it *Tejas* is born. Similarly from *Tejas*, *Rasa-tanmātra* and Water (*Apa*), from *Apa gandha-tanmātra* and earth, come out, *Ākāśa* possesses the quality of sound, *Vāyu* possesses touch and sound; *Tejas* colour, touch and sound, water possesses taste, colour, touch and sound and lastly earth possesses the attributes of smell, taste, colour, touch and sound inheriting the attributes of the previous elements. From *Rājasā Ahaṅkāra* or *kriyā-śakti* five *jñānendriyas* and five *karmendriyas* came into existence. It is the *Sāttvika Ahaṅkāra* from which *Manas* and ten *Vaikārika Devas* came out.¹⁴ The evolution process of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* may be shown in the following chart :



The *Vaikārika devas* also known as *Ādidevas* are ten in number who are the presiding deities of the ten organs.

The Kārya Sarga :

Creation in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is divided into two stages. viz., the *Kāraṇa-Sarga* and the *Kārya-Sarga*. The creation of the principles or the elements (*Tattvas*) is called *Kāraṇa* creation, while the creation of the individuals and the universe is called *Kārya*-creation. These constitute the power to produce the presiding deities, the power to produce the sense organs and the power to produce the elements.¹⁵

Now, the above mentioned elements were unable to unite together and could not form the body. As such creation could not proceed further. Then being directed by the power of God, they came together and assimilated with one another as the primary and the subsidiary or as the manifest and the unmanifest constituents. Then they produced the Cosmic Egg (Brahmāṇḍa). This egg remained in the causal water in a unconscious condition for a long period of thousand years. After that *Puruṣa* influenced *Kāla*, *Karman* and *Svabhāva* to infuse life into that egg and then *Virāt Puruṣa* possessing thousands heads, eyes, mouths etc. came out bursting open that egg.¹⁶ Here the universe as a whole is represented as an Egg and the *Virāt-Puruṣa* is the soul of the Egg. Individuals and the *lokas* (worlds) are the germs in the Egg. The *Virāt Puruṣa* is the first *Avatāra* and functions as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the cosmic world.¹⁷ The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also describes the origination of the different things of the universe from the different limbs of *Virāt-Puruṣa*.¹⁸

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, II.10 another description of the creation of the universe is found which is not- much different from the above description. Here it is said that the creation of *Mahat*, *Ahaṅkāra* and Subtle elements etc. from the *Prakṛti* due to the disturbance in the equilibrium of the *guṇas* is called *sarga* or, subtle creation. The gross creation produced by the *Virāt Puruṣa* is called *Visarga*.¹⁹

The Creation of Brahmā :

In Skandha III the creation of this world from Brahmā is described. Brahmā was born from the navel lotus of Vāsudeva, the Supreme God. Before creation, it is said, the whole world was submerged in water. At that time Vāsudeva was lying on that water on the serpent *Śeṣa* with His eyes shut. All beings remained then in a subtle state of latency in His body, only time which is His potency was active. Then after a period of one thousand Yuga, the aggregate of the subtle elements lying within Him got agitated being impelled by *Time*. That aggregate of Subtle matter then came out of the navel of Lord of Viṣṇu in the shape of a lotus. From that lotus Svāyambhu (self-born) Brahmā appeared.²⁰

Being directed by God and practising penance for many years Brahmā acquired the power of creation. First of all He divided the navel lotus into three in the shape of the three worlds. That Lotus was immensely large and it was manifested as the fourteen regions and more.²¹ This is the creation of the Tri-loki. Of these fourteen lokas, the higher ones, viz., *Mahar, Jana, Tapas* and *Satya* are the transformations of Nişkāma-karma and as such they are not liable to dissolution in each *Kalpa*. They last for two parārdhas.²²

Then proceeding with actual creation the creator Brahmā, at first, created the verities of ignorance of *avidyā*, viz. *tamas, moha, mahāmoha, tāmīra* and *andhatāmīra*. These are actually the different aspects of ignorance. This creation is full of sin and darkness. Seeing this sinful creation Brahmā was unhappy and started meditation. When his mind was purified by meditation, he brought forth another creation. He created the four sages viz. Sanaka, Sananda, Sanātana and Sanatkumāra. These sages were not interested in actions and lived in perceptual celibacy. Hence, when Brahmā asked them to procreate they declined. Due to this defiance of his sons Brahmā was angry and his rage was born as a son of dark-blue complexion from the middle of his brows. This son of Brahmā was named Rudra by him. Being ordered by his farther Rudra started procreating children who were like him in prowess, form and nature. Then seeing this hordes of Rudras of fearful form and devouring the world Brahmā ordered him to stop and perform penance. After that ten sons were born to Brahmā who became the progenitors (Prajāpati) of the population of the world. They were : Marīci, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhṛgu, Vasiṣṭha, Dakṣa and Nārada.²³

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* then gives a description of the evolution of different mental states and other things from the different limbs of Brahmā. Thus, *dharma* was born from his right breast, from his back was born adharma. *kāma* (desire) was born in his heart, *krodha* (anger) from his brow, *lobha* from his lower lip, *vāk* (speech) from his mouth, the rivers from his penis and *nirṛti* from his anus.²⁴ From the four mouths of Brahmā four Vedas were produced. Similarly Āyurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharvaveda and Sthāpatya Veda were also created from the mouths of the creator.²⁵

Even then the creation process was limited and the aforementioned sages also had a limited progeny. Seeing this Brahmā again began to think. While he was thus thinking his body was split into two. From that bifurcated body was created a pair of a male and a female who were Svāyambhuva Manu and Śatarupā respectively. The subjects or the beings then began to multiply from their relationship as husband and wife.²⁶

The Ten-Fold Creation :

In the 3rd Skandha of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The creation is again described as of ten kinds which came under three broad divisions. viz., *Prākṛta*, *Vaikṛta* and Mind.²⁷ According to it, in the process of creation *Kāla* plays a vital role. *Kāla* or time is the power of motivation which pursue the creative process at every stage. *Kāla* is described as a *Śakti* of Hari. It disturbs the *guṇas* of *Prakṛti* causing transformation in *Prakṛti*. However, *Kāla* itself has no special property and is without beginning and end. *Kāla* is regarded as the efficient cause in the creation of the universe. Puruṣa sportively manifested Himself as the universe by using Time as the efficient cause.²⁸ It is only *Kāla* that makes the universe manifest. In itself the world is nothing but Brahman which was covered by Viṣṇu's *Māyā*. It is manifested by God with the help of Time.²⁹

The *Prākṛta* creation is of six types. The five fold *kāraṇa* creation constitute the five kinds. The production of *Mahat* is the first creation which is the outcome of the first disturbance of the equilibrium of the *guṇas*. The second is *Ahaṅkāra* consisting of objects, knowledge and action.³⁰ The third is the evolution of the rudimentary matter (*Tanmātras*) which are the causes of the gross elements (*Mahābhūtas*). The fourth creation is that of the organs of senses, both of knowledge and action. The fifth is that of the presiding deities of the senses and manas from *Vaikārika*, *Ahaṅkāra*. The sixth one is *Tāmasa* which is the cause of ignorance of the *jīva*. These six are the *Prākṛta* creations as they pertain to *Prakṛti*.³¹

Next are the creations arising from *Vikṛti*. Lord Viṣṇu being invested with *rajas* and assuming the form of Brahmā creates this.³² Of the *Vaikṛta* creations immobile objects, i.e., trees come first. This

is the seventh creation in the above order. This is also called *Mukhya* (prominent) creation. The distinctive feature of this creation is that they rise upwards in search of food and are full of *tamas*. They have only internal sense of touch. The eighth creation is of animals and birds. They are devoid of the knowledge of future time, full of *tamas* and are incapable of retaining knowledge for long. They have the sense of smelling. The creation of men is the ninth one. Men have in them *rajas* predominantly, are full of activities and feels pleasure and pain.³³ The creation of gods also come under *Vaikṛta* category. The last category of creation i.e., of *Prākṛta-vaikṛta* is the creation of *Kumārs*. This is the creation of Sanatkumāra and others.²⁴

Thus, it is seen that the enumeration of the ten types of creation in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* corresponds with that of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. The process of creation of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is also similar to the *Sāṃkhya* system. But even this is somewhat different from the classical account which we find in the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*. According to the *Sāṃkhya* system, *Puruṣa's* proximity disturbs the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* and evolution takes place. But in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* it is said that when Lord was desirous of becoming many He disturbed the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* through *Kāla*. Thus, *Kāla* or Time is the disturber of the *guṇas* and not *Puruṣa*.

Conclusion

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the *Purāṇas* offer a uniform theory of creation. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, however, enumerates ten types of creation bringing *Tāmasa*, the five types of ignorance under *Prākṛta* creation. Although puranic cosmogony corresponds to the Sāṃkhya theory of evolution, *Prakṛti* is not independent according to the *Purāṇas* and thus incapable of bringing about the creation on her own. The Lord, i.e. Viṣṇu according to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* is the ultimate Reality who regulates both *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*.

The theory of creation in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also hints at Advaitic concept. It is said therein that the world is actually *Māyā* or cosmic illusion. Lord is here the abiding principle. Hence, we

can conclude that the primary theory of creation in the purāṇas corresponds to a great extent to the Sāmkhya system. But the purāṇas accept an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God as the real source and guide of the process of evolution of the world. *Kāla* or Time is said to play a vital role in the creation process of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. This is no doubt a deviation from Sāmkhya doctrine.

Endnotes :

1. Wilson, H.H., *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Preface, p. XXIV
2. *A Critical Study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Rukmani, Dr. T.S., p. 14
3. vadanti tattattvav idastattvaṃ yajñānamadvayaṃ/
brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavāniti śabdyate // BP, 1.2.11
4. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Dasgupta, S.N., Vol.-IV, p. 15
5. *Ibid*
6. cf. *Ibid*, p. 21
7. cf. BP, 1.1.1; Śrīdhara's Comm. On it.
8. anathropaśamaṃ sāksādbhaktiyogamadhokṣa je/
loksyājānato bidvaṃścakre sātvatasaṃhi tāṃ //
ibid, 1.7.6, Sridhara's Comm. On it.
9. sattvaṃ rajastama iti prakṛterguṇāstair yuktaḥ paraḥ puruṣa eka
ihāsyā dhatte/
sthityādaye haribiriñcīharetī samjñāḥ śreyāṃsi tatra khalu
sattvatanornṛṇām syuḥ //
ibid, 1.2.23 also vide, 2.5.18 Sridharas Commentaries on *Ibid*.
10. kālaṃ karma svabhāvaṅca māyeso māyayā svayā/
ātman yadṛcchayā prāptaṃ bibubhūsurupādade // *Ibid*, 2.5.21
11. prabhāvaṃ pauraṣaṃ prāhuḥ kālameke yato bhayaṃ/ *Ibid*,
3.26.16(a)
12. kālādguṇavyatikaraḥ pariṇāmaḥ svabhāvataḥ/
karmaṇo janma mahataḥ puruṣādhiṣṭhitādabhūt // *Ibid*, 2.5.22

13. mahatastu vikurvāṇādrajaḥsattvopavṛmhitāt/
tamaḥpradhānastvabhavad dravyajñānakriyātmakaḥ// Ibid,
2.5.23
14. Ibid, 2.5.25-31
15. Ibid, 2.5.24
16. Tadā saṁhatya cānyaonyaṁ bhagavacchaktieoditāḥ/
sahasrorvaṅghri bāhvakṣaḥ sahasrānanasirṣavān// Ibid, 2.5.33-35
17. eṣa hyaśeṣasattvānāmāmsaḥ paramātmanaḥ/
ādyo vatāro yatrāsau bhūtagrāmo vibhāvvyate// Ibid, 3.6.8
18. Vide, Ibid, 2.6
19. Bhutamātrendriya dhiyāṁ janma sarga udāhṛtaḥ/
brahmaṇo guṇavaīṣamyādvisargaḥ pauraṣaḥ smṛtaḥ// Ibid, 2.0.3
20. cf. Ibid, 3.8.12.-15
21. cf. padmakoṣaṁ tadāviśya bhagavat karmacoditaḥ/
ekaṁ bybhāṅksidurudhā tridhā bhāvyaṁ dvisaptadhā// Ibid,
3.10.8
22. etāvañjivalokasya saṁsthābhedaḥ samāhṛtaḥ/
dharmasya hyanimittasya vipākaḥ paramesthyasau// Ibid, 3.10.9
23. Ibid, 3.12.2-22
24. Ibid, 3.12.25-26
25. Ibid, 3.12.37-38
26. Ibid, 3.12.49-54
27. Ibid, 3.10.13
28. Ibid, 3.10.11; Sridhara's comm. on it.
29. viśvaṁ vai brahmatanmātraṁ saṁsthitaṁ viṣṇumāyayā/
īsvarena paricehinnaṁ kalenāvvyaktamūrtinā// *BP*, 3.10.12
30. ādyastu mahataḥ sargo guṇavaīṣamyamātmanaḥ/
dvītiyastvahamo yatra dravyajñānakriyodayaḥ// Ibid, 3.10.15
31. ibid, 3.10.15-18
32. ṣaḍime prākṛtaḥ sargā vaikṛtānapi me śṛṇu/
najobhājo bhagavato līleyaṁ harimedhasaḥ// Ibid, 3.10.18,
Srihara's comm. on it.
33. *BP*: 3.10.18-25
34. vaikṛtāstraya evaite devasargaśca sattama/
vaikārikastu yaḥ proktaḥ kaumārustūbhayātmakaḥ// Ibid,
3.10.26

Bibliography

Original Works

1. *Sāmkhyakārikā* of Isvarakṛṣṇa, with *Sāmkhyatattva-kaumudi* of Vacaspati Misra, Nirnay Sagar Press, Bombay, 1940
2. *Śrīmadbhāgavata Mahāpurāṇam*, Pandit Pustakalaya, Kashi, 1962

Modern Works

1. Das Gupta, S.N; A History of Indian Philosophy, vol I-IV, Cambridge University Press, 1940
2. James, E.O; Creation and Cosmology, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1969
3. Wilson, H.H: The Viṣṇupurāṇa , A System of Hindu Mythology & Tradition, Puthi Pustak, Calcutta, 1962
