

Creation of the World in the Padma Purana

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ABSTRACT: One of the most important Puaranas is the Padma Purana. It is divided into seven kandas viz., Srsti, Bhumi, Svarga, Brahma, Patala, Uttara and Kriyayoga. In this Purana the creation of the universe is found very clearly. Padma Purana is Vaisnavite in character like all other VaisnavitePuranas creation here starts from Visnu and it is also co-related with the Samkhya system. That is why I am trying to discuss about the creation process found in the Padma Purana.

KEYWORDS : Brahma, Visnu, Siva, Vaisnava, Vyakta and Avyakta.

I. INTRODUCTION

The second Purana in the list of eighteen Puranas is always mentioned as the *Padma Purana*. It is a voluminous work and is said to contain 55000 (fifty-five thousand) verses. The Purana itself says that it is called Padma or Padma because it contains an account of the lotus which existed before creation or of which the world is full.¹ Two different recensions of this Purana are available. The Venkatesvara press edition has seven Khandas, viz., Srsti, Bhumi, Svarga, Brahma, Patala, Uttara and Kriyayoga. The Bengal edition has, on the other hand five Khandas, the last two mentioned khandas are not found in this edition. The Purana itself states that it consists of five Khandas. These five parts are named as, Srsti, Bhumi, Svarga, Patala and Uttara.² The names of these Khandas, however, convey only a partial notion of their contents.

I. The SRSTI KHANDA as its name suggests, deals with the section of creation. In this KhandaSuta was sent by his father to the Naimisa forest to recite Puranas to the Rsis assembled there. Suta tells *Padma Purana* to them. Here first two or three chapters only narrate the creation process and genealogy of the ancient families much in the same way as the *VisnuPurana*. The appearance of the lotus from which arose Brahma and the account of creation by him etc. are found in these chapters. Alongwith this account of creation here we also find the genealogies of Solar and lunar dynastics. The descriptions of the lake Puskara and of various feasts and vows. We also find some myths relating to Visnu as the destroyer of demons. Though it is a VisnuitePurana, yet we find here the story of Sati as also some vows and feasts performed in honour of goddess Durga.

II. The BHUMI KHANDA is related to earth. This part begins with the story of Somasarman who in his later birth became prahlada, the great-devotee of Visnu. The first forty chapters here deal with the fruit of the obligatory and occasional gifts. The book also contains various legends to prove the sanctity of various Trithas or holy places of pilgrimage.

III. The SVARGA KHANDA contains the descriptions of various lokas (worlds) of gods, like vaikuntha etc. Here also we find the story of Dusyanta and Sakuntala which is not in conformity with that of the Mahabharata rather it conforms more to the drama of Kalidasa. The duties of four castes and asramas are also explained here. The legend of Pururavas&Urvasi and many other legends which are found in the epics are narrated here.

IV. PATALAKHANDA : The 4th section of this Purana is related to the nether world. It deals with the subterranean regions and snake gods. Here we find the story of Rama which though conforms to the story of Ramayana, yet is in many cases in literal agreement with kalidasasRaghuvamsa. This book also contains some chapters on Krsna and on the duties of Visnu worshipper.

V. The UTTARA KHANDA : The fifth khanda is called uttarakhanda. This is the most voluminous of all the khandas. It expounds mainly Visnu cult and the ceremonies and feasts connected with it. Bhakti or devotion in Visnu is explained very extensively. The ten incarnations of visnu are glorified. This book also contains a glorification of the Bhagavadgita.

VI. The BRAHMA KHANDA : The book begins with a description of the characteristics of the devotees of Visnu. The charming of ocean, different types of vratas like Janmastami-vrata, Ekadasi-vrata etc. and various expiations are described here.

VII. The KRIYAYOGASARA : This khanda is sometimes added as a kind of Appendix to the uttarakhanda. The virtues of Visnus devotees are narrated here. Uttering the names of Visnu, wearing. His marks, worshipping in His temples, taking a pilgrimage to the Ganges and celebration of the festivals dedicated to Visnu are described here as the means of attaining final liberation.

The *Padma Purana* is no doubt a Vaisnavite work where the devotion in Visnu is glorified in different ways. The greatness of Visnu is also narrated in various khandas. However, this Purana is not entirely sectarian.

II. THE ULTIMATE REALITY

As in all other vaisnavitepuranas so in the *Padma Purana* also Visnu is regarded as the Ultimate Reality. He is also called Narayana, Govinda, Vasudeva etc. In srsti, the nature of Visnu is described as eternal, unborn, inexhaustible, immutable and devoid of all qualities.³ He is the best among the best, the greatest and the Supreme spirit. He is none other than Brahman itself. He is without any form or complexion, is without any attributes and devoid of decay or destruction, change and birth.⁴ Govinda is the creator protector and the destroyer of the universe.⁵ He creates this world taking up the form of Brahma, preserves it as Visnu and destroys it as Siva.⁶ Time is only a form of the lord.⁷ He is both the creator and the created and the protector as well as the protected. The entire world is but His forms.⁸

III. THE CREATION PROCESS :

The creation process in the *Padma Purana* is similar to that of other Vaisnavite Puranas like all other Vaisnavite Puranas, creation here starts from Visnu. It is said here that the avyakta (unmanifest) eternal cause creates all distinctions upto Mahat. Avyakta is of the nature of sat (being) and asat (non-being). Brahma is described as the creator of the universe. Brahma, on his part, was born in the golden egg.⁹

According to the *Padma Purana* at the time of creation because of the disturbances of the gunas the Lord assumed the form of Mahat which is of three types – sattvika, rajasika and tamasika.¹⁰ From Mahat Ahamkara was born. This Ahamkara resembles the principle of pradhana and is enveloped by the seeds of three types, viz. Vaikarika or Sattvika, Tajasa or Rajasika and Bhutadi or Tamasika. Ahamkara arose five elements and ten cognitive and conative organs.¹¹ Akasa of the nature of Sabda – tanmatra i.e., subtle element of sound, was four form Bhntadi, or Tamasika Ahamkara. Bhutadi then envelopes that Akasa. Akasa being thus productive created the subtle element of touch which is called Vayu. Vayu is strong and has touch as its quality. Akasa then covered Vayu as a result of which Vayu became effected and created the rudiment of form. In this way other two subtle elements were also produced.¹² From Vaikarika Ahamkara the five sense organs and five motor organs were born. Mind is the eleventh organ.¹³ The five elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether are called visesa or particular. As they are endowed with the special characters of tranquility, violence and stupidity.¹⁴ This description of the evolution of the rudimentary elements etc. is actually the same as that of the *Visnu Purana*. The only difference is that here it is not mentioned how disturbance of the gunas is effected and what is the role of Purusa and prakrti in the process of creation of Mahat etc.

Now these products starting from Mahat being of different strength and separated could not procreate further.¹⁵ Hence being controlled by purusa and formed by prakrti they were united. Then by mutual contract and inter dependence they produced an egg.¹⁶ That egg gradually increased like a water bubble. Then janardana who is of unmanifest nature assumed the manifest form of Brahma and took resort in that egg.¹⁷ All the beings like gods, demons men etc. were born in that egg. The egg was covered from outside by water, fire, air, ether and bhutadi, Bhutadi was

covered by Mahat and Mahat by Avyaktaprakrti. This covering is like the covering of the coconut seed which is covered by external scabbards. Brahma is entrusted with the work of creation by Janardana who is only the enjoyer. After each kalpa the lord creates darkness and in a terrible form. He eat up all beings. The world is then submerged in water where assuming His full form the Lord sleeps on the bed of sesa serpent. Again being awake from that sleeping state He takes up His various forms for creating preserving and destroying the world as Brahma, Visnu and Siva respectively.

In the third chapter of the *Padma Purana* different kinds of creation from Brahma are described. This description also may be said to be a repetitions of the nine types of creation described in other sattvikapuranas. Nevertheless, we shall here given an account of the nine kinds of creation as found in the *Padma Purana* for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the view of *Padma Purana* with other sattvika Puranas.

From Visnu, the Supreme self pounded a spontaneous creation which is full of darkness. This consists of five kinds of ignorance, viz. Tamas, Moha, Mahamoha, Tamisra and Andhatamisra.¹⁸ Then when Brahma, the creator pondered about creation, at first, the immovable came out. These are dark from within and without. This is called the Mukhya sarga.¹⁹ But this creation was ineffective and as such Brahma created the tiryak- srotas which were the animals other than men. These animals were full of ignorance and lacking in perception. Finding these also ineffective he then created the gods who were virtuous and stood high up and as such were called urdhva-srotas. Brahma then thought of another excellent effective creation and created the human beings who were called arvak-srotas. They were bright within and without and were efficient. The next creation was called Anugrahasarga which was arranged in four ways : error, success, power and satisfaction. This was both virtuous and vicious. The last in this line was called kaumara sarga.²⁰

In this way there were nine types of creation viz. Mahat, Bhutadi, Vaikarika (i.e., sense – organs), Mukhyasarga, Tiryaksrotas, Urdhvasrotas, Arvaksrotas, Anugraha and Kaumara. Of these the first three were called prakrta the next five were vaikrta and the last one is both prakrta and vaikrta.²¹ These nine creations of prajapati were the root causes of whole world.²²

Just like the other Puranas, the *Padma Purana* also describes the creation of different beings of the world from different parts of the body of the creator. The demons were created from his buttock, gods were born from his mouth, the serpents were born from his hair and so on. The pitrs (manes) were born from a body full of virtue which Brahma took up and human being were produced from another body full of activity. The ghosts and goblins were created from his anger. The creator then created the *Gandharvas*.²³ Then follows a description of the creation of different types animals from different parts of the body of the creator.²⁴

The *Padma Purana* also points out that all the beings of the universe are created according to the result of their good and bad action. At the time of universal dissolution, all these things are withdrawn by the Lord.²⁵ In this way the creation and dissolution of the universe go on from beginning less time.

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