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SĀMĀKHYA THEORY OF CREATION AS REFLECTED IN THE PADMAPURĀṆA

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Abstract

The theory of creation which is primarily associated with the origin of the universe is one of the most significant theories. The philosophical speculations of India are somehow related to the Vedas. Although the Vedic accounts are based on mythology, yet they have great scientific value. Thus all the philosophical theories which have their origin in the Vedas are scientifically approved theories. The Sāṁkhya system, one of the oldest and realistic systems of India, is notable for its theory of creation which finds favour with other systems of India and also the later Indian literature. The Purāṇas are the most important religious literature of India, next to the Vedas and the Mahākāvya, i.e. the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. As a class of literature, the Purāṇas deal with all the aspects of Indian culture, its religion and philosophy, social practices, art, science and so on. Cosmogony forms one of the fundamental topics discussed by the Purāṇas. Out of the fivefold characteristics of the Purāṇa, the sarga or the creation of the universe is the first and foremost. The Purāṇic theory of creation very much corresponds to the theory of creation of the Sāṁkhya philosophy. The Padmapurāṇa is one of the important Vaiṣṇava MahāPurāṇas where creation and dissolution of the universe are discussed as in the other Purāṇas. In the present write up we propose to trace the theory of creation of Sāṁkhya philosophy as depicted in the Padmapurāṇa.

From the very ancient time men are curious about the origin of the universe. How, when and why has the universe come into existence? These are the perennial questions, which have excited human minds from time immemorial. The ancient culture like Greek, Egyptian, Iranian, Indian etc. obsessed different theories on creation or cosmogony. They proposed different cosmological accounts. These accounts are sometimes mythological and sometimes much more scientific. As cosmogony is concerned mainly with this extra largic world so it is a very

important topic of discussion for the scientists also. In India, the theory of creation of the universe persists in the Vedic and post-Vedic literature. The Vedic thinkers were aware of the philosophical problems of the origin and nature of the world. In the *R̥gveda*, there are hymns¹ that show the cosmological ideas. But they do not present any generally accepted theory as to the origin of the world. It was especially the curiosity as to the origin of the world that gave rise to the philosophical speculations in this regard and hence different theories of creation.

The Sāṃkhya philosophy is considered to be amongst the oldest systems in the arena of Indian philosophy. It occupies a unique and esteemed place in the system by virtue of its rational and realistic approach towards systematizing the philosophical thinking in explaining the problems of reality. As a dualistic system, it explicitly recognizes the independent existence of the dual principles of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. In fact, the nature of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and their relationship forms the central doctrine of this system.

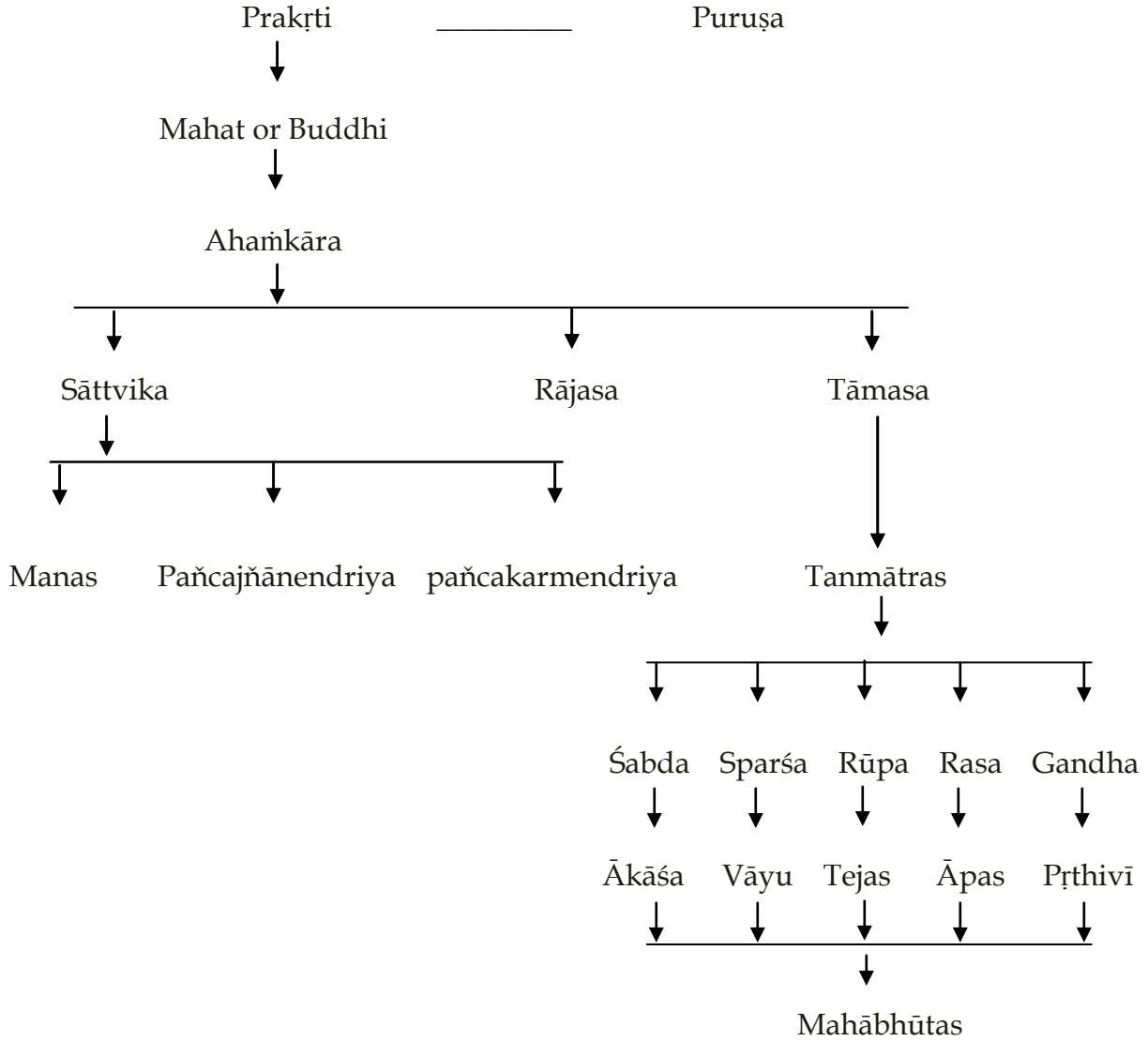
The Sāṃkhya is notable for its theory of creation which finds favour with many other systems of thought. According to them, *prakṛti* is the fundamental substance out of which the world evolves. *Prakṛti* evolves the world when it comes into relation with *puruṣa*. As the close proximity of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* brings the evolution, so it is said that the association of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* has no beginning but can have an end. The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* also says about the close proximity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, which makes the scheme of evolution possible.² The evolutionary process of Sāṃkhya is not from simplicity to complexity but from the indeterminate to the determinate, from homogeneity to heterogeneity and from the more subtle to the less subtle or gross.

Before creation, there is an equal balance of the three *guṇas* viz., *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* in *prakṛti*.³ When this equilibrium is once destroyed by the presence of *puruṣa*, there arises an equal aggregation of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* at different moments. When one *guṇa* is preponderant in any particular collocation, the others are co-operant. Being disturbed and dislocated from its state of

equipoise, *prakṛti* undergoes transformation and creates *mahat* or *buddhi*. *Mahat* or the cosmic intellect is the first product of the evolution of *prakṛti*.⁴ From *mahat*, *ahamkāra* appears. Psychologically, the function of *ahamkāra* is *abhimāna* or self-love. The term is composed of the personal pronoun 'aham' and the root 'kr' means to do make or perform. Here it is used to mean the individuating principle. The *guṇas* take three different courses of development from *ahamkāra* and accordingly the latter is known as *vaikārika* or *sāttvika*, *taijasa* or *rājasa* and *bhūtādi* or *tāmasa*. As the transformation continues, the *manas* (mind), the *pañcajñānendriyas* (the five organs of knowledge) and the *pañcakarmendriyas* (the five organs of action) come forth from *sāttvika ahamkāra*; and the five *tanmātras* (subtle elements) viz, *śabda* (sound), *sparśa* (touch), *rūpa* (form), *rasa* (flavour) and *gandha* (odour) are emerged from *tāmasa ahamkāra*. The *rājasa* aspect stands midway and plays its part in both. Thus from *ahamkāra* the twofold creation emerges.⁵ Then from the *tanmātras* come out the five gross elements, viz, *ākāśa* (ether), *vāyu* (air), *tejas* (fire), *āpas* (water) and *pṛthivī* (earth).⁶

With the manifestation of the sense particular (*mahābhūtas*), the process of cosmic evolution comes to rest. The Sāṃkhya concept of evolution indicates the gradual development of different categories of existence and not mere changes of qualities or new combinations of the objects of the same order. The whole course of evolution of Sāṃkhya purely exists in the chain of causation from the cosmic substance (*prakṛti*) to the gross elements.

The process of creation of Sāṃkhya has been shown in the following chart-



The theory of creation or cosmogony is one of the fundamental topics discussed by the Purana. The classical definition of the Purana⁷ makes it mandatory for all the Purāṇas to have a section on the theory of creation. The Vedic theories of creation do not show any influence of the Sāṃkhya theory. But the Purāṇic concept is mostly indebted to the Sāṃkhya theory of creation.

The *Padmapurāṇa* is one of the important *Vaiṣṇava MahāPurāṇas*, in which description of the theory of creation is found at more than one places with some variations.⁸ A common feature of the different versions of the theory of creation of the *Padmapurāṇa* is that they have borrowed the various steps of creation

from the Sāṃkhya scheme. And while doing so, the atheistic Sāṃkhya has been turned into a theistic one, because God has been accepted as the supreme source of all creation.⁹

A brief account of the theory of creation of the *Padmapurāṇa* is presented below-

According to the *Svargakhaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa*, after dissolution there was nothing in the universe. At that time there appeared a lustre regarded as Brahman, who is pure, devoid of all *guṇas* and blissful.¹⁰ That Brahman knowing the world as merged into himself began to create it. From him emanated *Pradhāna* and again, from it came up *mahat*, which is of three kinds, viz, *sāttvika*, *rājasa* and *tāmasa*. From the

threefold *mahat* the threefold *ahamkāra*, i.e. *Vaikārika*, *taijasa* and *tāmasa* were produced.¹¹ Then, from *tāmasa ahamkāra* (known as *bhūtādi* also) was created the *śabdatanmātra* from which came *ākāśa* (ether) having the attribute of sound. The ether produced the *sparśa tanmātra* from which came *vāyu* (air) having the quality of touch. From air the *rūpa-tanmātra* was produced and from it came out *jyoti* (light) having the attribute of colour. From *jyoti rasatanmātra* was created and from it *ambha* (water) was produced. Again the water produced the *gandha-tanmātra* and from which came *mahi* (earth) having the quality of smell. The five cognitive organs, namely, ear, skin, eye, nose and tongue; and the five conative organs, viz, voice, hands, feet the organ of excretion and generation are said to have came out from *taijasa* or *rājasa ahamkāra*. The ten Devas, presiding over the ten *indriyas* and *manas* are said to be *vaikārika* or *sāttvika*.¹²

Here it is said that all these elements mentioned above being endowed with different powers cannot create anything if they are not mutually combined. Through their mutual combination these elements form one mass of entire unity. Then being supported by the *puruṣa* and with the acquiescence of *Pradhāna*, *mahat* and the rest upto the *mahābhūtas* (gross elements) formed an egg.¹³ This egg gradually expanded like a water bubble. That egg became the *Prakṛta*

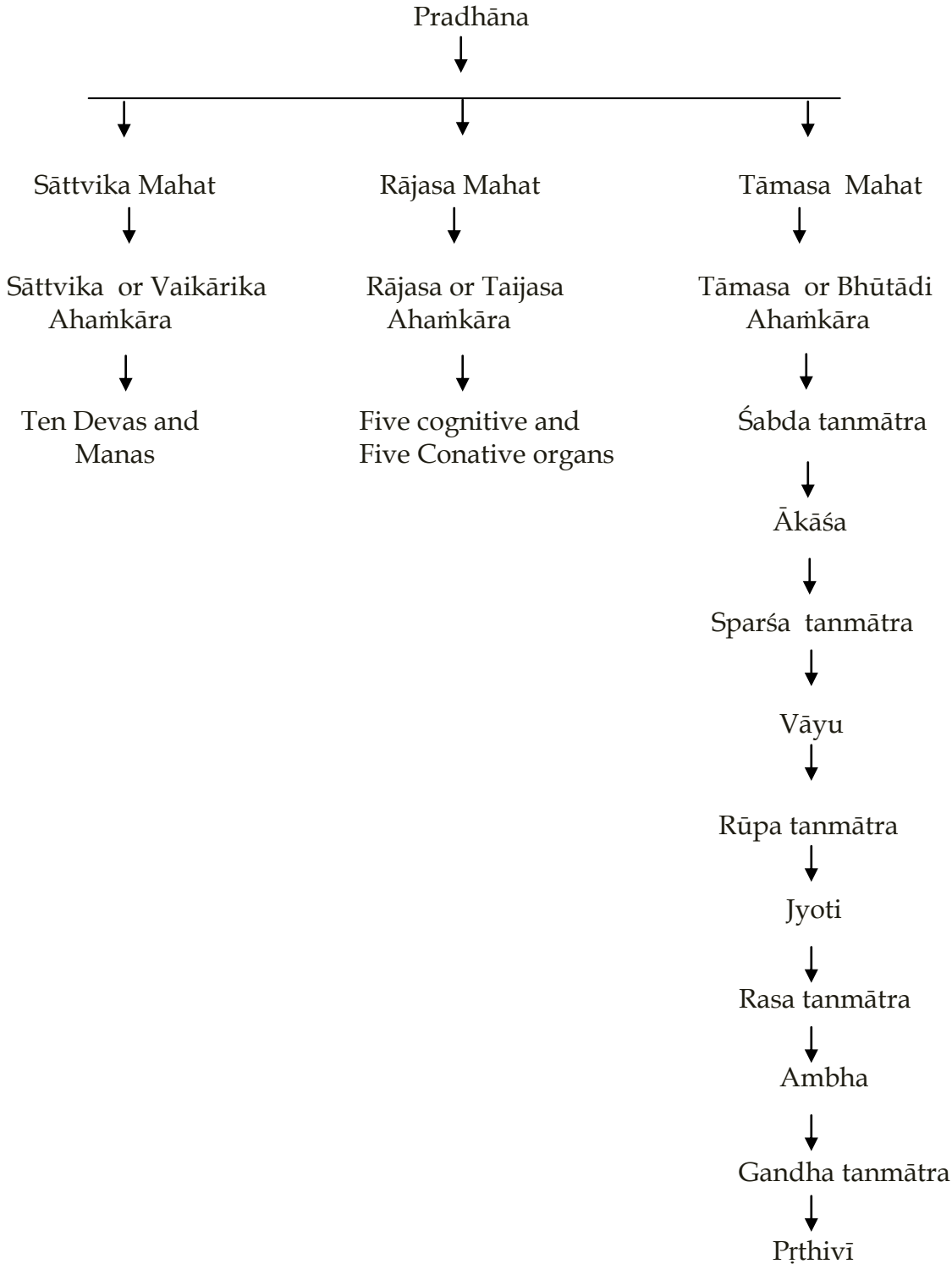
resort of Lord Viṣṇu. The unmanifest Viṣṇu resided therein.¹⁴ However, the *Padmapurāṇa* also says that through the will of Lord Viṣṇu a lotus sprung up from his navel, which became the Golden Egg.¹⁵ Again, it is said that Lord Viṣṇu endowed with *rajoguṇa* manifested himself as *Brahmā* and indulged in creation.¹⁶

In this account there are two different versions regarding the emergence of the cosmic egg --- first is that *mahat* and the rest created the egg; and second is that the Golden Egg emerged from Lord Viṣṇu. The first version is very much connected with the Sāṃkhya principles, whereas the other is purely mythical and Purāṇic in nature.

In the *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa*,¹⁷ there is almost similar description of the theory of creation. One peculiarity of this account is that the cosmic egg was surrounded by the seven *āvaraṇas* viz, water, fire, air, ether, *bhūtādi* , *mahat* and *avyakta* or *Pradhāna* -- each succeeding one being the *āvaraṇa* of each preceding one.¹⁸

In another account of the theory of creation, occurring in the *Uttarakhaṇḍa*¹⁹ of the *Padmapurāṇa*, it is clearly stated that Lord Viṣṇu entered into the *prakṛti* and from *prakṛti* the principles of *mahat*, *ahamkāra* etc are evolved.²⁰ From these, there is emergence of an egg which consists of the fourteen *Lokas*, oceans, islands, creatures and the high mountains.²¹ But all the created beings obtain *Lokas* and bodies from God only.²²

The following chart is given here to show the process of creation as found in the *Svargakhaṇḍa* of the *Padmapurāṇa*-



A glance at the different accounts of creation of the *Padmapurāṇa* shows that they have much in common with the Sāṁkhya theory of creation. Even though there are some differences about the theory of creation between the two, there are many similarities also in the process of creation. Both the

Sāṁkhya and the *Padmapurāṇa* accept *prakṛti* or *pradhāna* as the fundamental substance out of which the world evolves. But though the *Padmapurāṇa* accepts the evolutionary system of the Sāṁkhya philosophy, yet the *Padmapurāṇa* as in the other Purāṇas accords *prakṛti* a subordinate

place in their metaphysical concept. In the *Padmapurāṇa*, *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* are not the ultimate realities as the Sāṃkhya philosophers hold. They are nothing but the two different manifestations of God.²³ The Sāṃkhya does not postulate the existence of God whereas according to the *Padmapurāṇa* matter evolves under the supervision of God. Hence not only the concept of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa*, but the whole cosmic evolution process also is entirely dependent on God. At the very beginning in the process of creation, the Sāṃkhya says that the equilibrium of *prakṛti* is disturbed by the proximity of *puruṣa*. Most of the *SāttvikaPurāṇas* say that it is *kāla* that upsets the equilibrium of the *guṇas* in *prakṛti*.²⁴ But the *Padmapurāṇa* is not clear about how disturbance is affected and what is the exact role of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* in the process of creation. The *Padmapurāṇa* says that the Lord Viṣṇu himself takes the form of *prakṛti* or *pradhāna* and from this the other principles are emanated. From these references we find that the cosmogonical speculation of the *Padmapurāṇa* stands nearer to the Vedānta philosophy than to the realistic system of Sāṃkhya. In this regard the observation of Jacobi is noteworthy. He says, “Here, too, the evolutionary theory of Sāṃkhya has been so modified as to agree with the Vedānta doctrine about the oneness of Brahmān, by assuming that *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* are, but two forms of the Supreme Deity, who is identified with one of the popular gods according to the sectarian character of the work.”²⁵

The products of *prakṛti*, such as, *mahat*, *ahamkāra* etc. are evolved almost in similar way. However, in the Sāṃkhya scheme, the ten organs and *manas* are ascribed to the *sāttvika ahamkāra*, the five *tanmātras* are

produced from *tāmasa ahamkāra* and *rājasa ahamkāra* stands in midway and plays its part in both. But according to the *Padmapurāṇa*, the ten gods who presided over the ten organs and *manas* are emerged from the *Vaikārika* or *sāttvika ahamkāra*, so the ten organs naturally are relegated to a different origin and therefore are stated to have come out from the *tājasa* or *rājasa ahamkāra*. The products of the *tāmasa ahamkāra*, i.e., the five *tanmātras* are same as in the Sāṃkhya. The idea of ten presiding gods is totally absent in the Sāṃkhya philosophy.

There is another important difference between the view of the Sāṃkhya and that of the *Padmapurāṇa*. The *Padmapurāṇa*, as in the other *Purāṇas* accepts the cosmic egg theory, whereas the Sāṃkhya does not mention the theory at all. A cosmic egg is mythological motif found in the creation myths of many cultures and civilizations. The germs of this theory are to be traced back to the very ancient time. Typically, the cosmic egg is a beginning of some sort and the universe or some primordial being come into existence by hatching from the egg. The *Padmapurāṇa* describe the cosmic egg theory with some variations. This differs from the Sāṃkhya and the generally accepted scheme of creation as well.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the theory of creation of the *Padmapurāṇa* is mostly dependent on the Sāṃkhya theory of creation. There may be some differences on certain aspects, but on various steps of evolution they are similar to each other. In conclusion, it can be said that the *Padmapurāṇa* has described the evolutionary process of the universe in its own style combined with a slight variations from the Sāṃkhya scheme.

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2. *tasmān na badhyate 'ddhā na mucyate nāpi samsarati kaścit saṃsarati badhyate mucyate ca nānāśrayā prakṛtiḥ.* SK. 62
3. *sattvarajastamasām sāmyāvasthā prakṛtiḥ,* SS.I.61
4. *yat prakṛteḥ ādyam kāryam tat mahat.....*, SSV . I. 71
5. SK. 24-25
6. *tanmātrānyaviśeṣāstebhyo bhūtāni pañca pañcabhyaḥ,* Ibid, 38.
7. *sargaśca pratisargaśca vaṃśo manvantarāṇi ca, vaṃśānucaritam caiva purānam pañcalakṣanam.* AK, 1.5. P.33.
8. PP. Svarga, chap. 1&2; Sṛṣṭi, chap. 2; Uttara, 228.95-103; kṛiyayoga, chap. 2
9. Ibid. Sṛṣṭi, 2.117, 119; 3.33; Bhumi. 9.5-6; Uttara, 227. 81 etc.
10. *sṛṣṭeṣu pralayādūrdham nāsit kiñcidvijottamāḥ Brahmāsamjñamabhudekam jyotirvai sarvakārakam,* Ibid. Svarga, 1.19
11. *tasmāt pradhānamudbhutam tataścāpi mahānabhūt , sāttviko rājasascaiva tāmasasca tridhā mahān.*
.....
trividho 'yamahamkāro mahattattvādajāyata. Ibid,I.23-25
12. Ibid, 1.37
13. *puruṣādhiṣṭhitattvācca pradhānānugraheṇa ca mahadādayo viśeṣāntādaṇdamutpādayanti te.* Ibid, I.44
14. Ibid, 1.45-46
15. *anādinidhanasyaiva viṣṇornābheḥ samutthitam yat padmam taddhemamandamabhūcchrikeśavechayā.* Ibid, 1.50
16. *rajoguṇadharo devaḥ svayameva hariḥ paraḥ brahmarūpaṃ samāsthāya jagat sraṣṭum pravarttate.* Ibid, 1.51
17. Ibid. Sṛṣṭi, chap. 2
18. Ibid, 2.109-110
19. Ibid. Uttara , 228.95-103
20. *sa eva bhagavān viṣṇu prakṛtyām praviveśa ha . aṣṛjat prakṛtau brahambhūtādi mahadāśrayam, mahataḥ puruṣadāsmādahamkāro 'bhyajāyata.* Ibid, 228.98-99
21. Ibid, 228.102-103
22. Ibid, 229.89-91
23. Vide supra fn. 19.
24. Viṣṇupurāṇa. I. 2. 24, Bhāgavatapurāṇa, II. 5. 22 etc.
25. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 4, p.159

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