
**PART 3: THEMES OF
SVĀMINĀRĀYAᅆA HINDU THEOLOGY**

10) MĀYĀ

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10) MĀYĀ

Having expounded upon the four sentient eternal entities of the Svāminārāyaṇa metaphysical quintet, we now move on to the final and only non-sentient entity, māyā. Known variously as māyā, mūla-māyā and mahā-māyā, as well as Prakṛti and Mūla-Prakṛti, it is the root or universal material source of the world, the cosmic material principle. Often depicted as feminine in nature, juxtaposed against Puraṣa, its masculine counterpart in the creative process, it represents matter complementing – not necessarily opposing – the spirit (caitanya) of the other entities. While irreconcilably different from each other, together, they form and enliven all that there is.

Also known as avidyā, because it is antithetical to vidyā or knowledge, māyā is also the ignorance that shrouds intelligent beings. Māyā is thus the root cause of suffering and sorrow that attends the incessant transmigration through various live-forms. It has to be transcended to secure final liberation.

It is this dual form and function of māyā as primordial matter and ignorance that we shall be exploring in this chapter.

10.1) Nature of Māyā

Svāminārāyaṇa provides a succinct definition of māyā, calling it Prakṛti, in Vac.

Gaḍh. I.12. He states:

Prakṛti is composed of the three guṇas. It is characterised by both insentience and sentiency, is eternal, indistinct, the 'field' of all

beings and all elements including mahattattva, and also the divine power of God.

Our exposition of māyā can be guided by this compact elucidation. As we unpack each of these terms and aspects, we should eventually arrive at a fuller understanding of its nature.

10.1.1) Triune

Māyā has three fundamental qualities, or guṇas, known as sattva (literally, 'goodness'), rajas ('passion') and tamas ('darkness'). Literally meaning 'threads', these guṇas are sometimes described as the three fibres braided together to create the one māyā, but it should be noted that they are *qualities* of māyā, not its constitutive components. This is evidenced from the Bhagavad-Gītā where the guṇas are described as being "born of Prakṛti" (3.5, 13.19, 13.21, 14.5, 18.40) and otherwise distinct from it (3.27, 13.23). Svāminārāyaṇa, too, talks of them as "aris[ing] from māyā" (Vac. Loyā.10).

Each of the guṇas nevertheless lends its own specific strand to māyā.

Respectively, they lead to calmness and clarity, activity and creativity, inertia and obscurity. Naturally, each is found to be at work more sharply than the others in the three stages of creation: rajas is employed for and leads to generation, sattvas for sustenance, tamas for destruction. As we shall see shortly in the description of the creative process, the delicate balance of these forces, and their disturbance, is what triggers generation. Here, we should note that in all three

phases of the world – generation, sustenance and dissolution – māyā retains all three of its qualities.

In everyday life, these three primary qualities mix in differing proportions to create an infinitely diverse palette of propensities which colours everything created of māyā. (SU 4.5 describes māyā as “red, white and black”, referring to rajoguṇa, sattvaguṇa and tamoguṇa, respectively.) This helps explain why certain places or objects or foods are said to be predominantly sāttvic or rājasic or tāmasic. Since the mind and body are also products of māyā – the soul’s causal body is itself māyā – the three guṇas also deeply affect individuals. With all three qualities being in constant flux, the mood and attitude of each individual is accordingly fluid or unstable, influencing a person’s ever-changing actions and responses. When sattvaguṇa is predominant, one is more inclined to observe restraint, discretion, tolerance, humility, self-contentment (without indulging in sensorial pleasures), to engage in charity and other uplifting and enlightening activities, and generally be at peace with one’s self and in harmony with others. Under the influence of rajoguṇa, however, one finds a predomination of desire, intent, impulse, industry, indulgence, self-interest, arrogance, bravado. Most dangerously, tamoguṇa is what leads to avarice, anger, fear, quarrelsomeness, violence, infatuation, connivance, dejection, delusion, indolence, indecision, and the like.⁴⁰⁶ Importantly, however, no one guṇa works in isolation; there is always

⁴⁰⁶ See also, for example, BP 11.25.2-5, Mahābhārata Aśvamedha Parva 36-39, and BG 17.

a triadic combination at play, though one can have a greater prevalence over the other two.

Those who are uninfluenced by or have risen above the influence of these māyic qualities are called 'nirguṇa' (without the guṇas) or 'guṇātīta' (beyond the guṇas).

10.1.2) Characterised by Insentience and Sentiency

Māyā is essentially and eternally material, insentient, inert, without consciousness, i.e. jaḍa. It can never become sentient (cetana) like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, īśvaras, and jīvas.

However, it is sometimes referred to as being jaḍacidātmikā – characterised by both insentience and sentiency – because countless sentient beings (jīvas and īśvaras) lie dormant within Mūla-Māyā after final dissolution, giving the notion that it is 'ensouled' by them, just as, indeed, the physical body composed of māyā is ensouled by the jīva. Similarly, Mūla-Māyā's concomitance with the sentient Mūla-Puruṣa (an akṣaramukta) when initiating the process of creation also helps explain why māyā can be called cidātmikā, if only by association.

10.1.3) Eternal (Yet Mutable)

Like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, īśvaras and jīvas, māyā is eternal – without beginning and without end. It was never created, nor will it ever be destroyed.

(See, for example, SU 1.9, 4.5 and BG 13.11.) One may overcome it to secure liberation, but never eliminate it.

But unlike the other four entities, māyā is not immutable. As we saw in the opening chapter of this Part, māyā is set apart from those sentient entities which are immutably eternal (kūṭastha nitya) by having pariṇāmī nityatā, i.e. mutable eternality. Though never being obliterated, it nonetheless undergoes various transformations during the process of creation and sustenance. Upon final dissolution, however, it is not destroyed; it simply dissolves into an indistinguishably subtle yet compact form within one part of Akṣarabrahman's light.

It is this aspect of māyā's mutability that allows its products – the material body, objects, and all the features that comprise the world – to be changing and perishable. Thus, all things evolved from Mūla-Māyā, including the elements of mahattattva, etc., are indeed generated and destroyed in each cycle of creation.

10.1.4) Indistinct

During the period of complete rest after final dissolution, māyā is said to be nirviśeṣa, or non-distinct, because all its creations with name and form have been dissolved within it. It, too, dissolves into a subtle, unmanifest (avyakta) form within Akṣarabrahman.

In contrast, when called into action for the process of creation, māyā becomes especially gross and manifest through its myriad creations, each with a distinctive name and form inspired by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

10.1.5) Material Substratum of All Beings and Things

Māyā as matter is not necessarily opposed to spirit. In fact, it can be complementary and positively useful, as we shall see further on, especially in attempting to understand God's purpose in creating the world. As we also learned earlier, the psychosomatic body is a necessary and powerful tool for the intelligent soul by which to know, act and enjoy, and eventually to secure liberation.

As the material from which the bodies of all jīvas and īśvaras are composed and from which all objects are made, Prakṛti serves as their substratum. This is often termed as māyā being the "field" or kṣetra (with the intelligent beings called the "field-knowers", or kṣetrajña). This idea is also useful in analogously explaining the creative process. At the time of rest after final dissolution, the jīvas and īśvaras lie dormant like un-germinated seeds in the "field" (i.e. soil) of māyā. Upon raining, i.e. Puruṣa associating with Prakṛti, those beings 'sprout' forth from māyā into forms with names and identity. Svāminārāyaṇa employs this analogy in Vac. Gaḍh. III.10, using it also to reiterate the eternity of jīvas and īśvaras as well as of māyā.

Just as the seeds in the soil sprout by the association of rainwater, similarly, the jīvas, which are eternal, arise from within māyā, but new jīvas are not created. Therefore, just as īśvara is eternal, māyā

is also eternal. The jīvas residing in māyā are also eternal (Vac. Gaḍh. III.10).

10.1.6) Power (or Means) of God

Since māyā is insentient, it can only be effective in creation when 'crafted' by an intelligent creator, as clay is in the hands of a potter. In other words, while Prakṛti is the material cause of the world – the very 'stuff' from which all things are made – it is by the will and 'skill' (powers) of Parabrahman, the efficient cause, that creation is made possible. In this sense, Prakṛti is described as the "power" of God (see also SU 6.8) or the means by which he creates. This should not, however, be confused as implying māyā to be an inherent quality or consort of God. Svāminārāyaṇa makes this clear in Vac. Gaḍh. I.13 and Vac. Loyā.17 where he refers to māyā as well as kāla (time), Puruṣa, and even Akṣarabrahman as "God's powers", all of which have a role in the process of creation.

The possessive case in the phrase "God's power" or, as Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly uses, "God's māyā" [e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. I.34, Pan.3, Gaḍh. II.65] also alludes to māyā *belonging* to God and being under his authority and dependence. As we have already learned earlier, māyā is a part of Parabrahman's vast universal body, which he indwells, supports, mobilises and controls [e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. I.64, Kār.8]. Thus, even if māyā is the immediate material cause of the world, it is not

so independently of Parabrahman, making him the ultimate material cause of everything as well as its efficient cause.⁴⁰⁷

At the disposal of and empowered by Parabrahman, māyā becomes a powerful and mystifying force. Though singular in its causal state, it goes forth to transform into myriad effects, producing a world – worlds, in fact – of unimaginable and bewildering diversity, filled with all things bright and beautiful, all things great and small; all things weird and wonderful, bringing joy and sorrow to all.

10.1.7) Ignorance

Apart from its role in creation as the primordial material reality, on the personal plane, māyā is also avidyā or ignorance. It is therefore framed in terms of darkness (tamas), because it is seen as directly antithetical to knowledge (analogously presented as prakāśa, or light) and all that is enlightening. It is this māyā that enshrouds the essentially pure, radiant, conscious, blissful soul, thus obstructing an accurate realisation of itself and God, and instead, goading one to hanker after transient, relatively petty, and ultimately misery-filled worldly pleasures. In effect, it falsely binds one to the body, other people, possessions, sensorial pleasures, places, etc., perilously hampering a complete and loving relationship with God.

⁴⁰⁷ For a fuller discussion of this, see section 6.3.2.1: Parabrahman as Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver & Both Efficient Cause and Material Cause.

This seems to have led Svāminārāyaṇa to also define māyā in simpler, more pragmatic terms. Svāminārāyaṇa explains in his very first documented sermon:

Māyā is anything that obstructs a devotee of God while meditating on God's form (Vac. Gaḍh. I.1).

Svāminārāyaṇa returns to this idea in his very last documented sermon, this time presenting it with respect to the body and its affiliates.

What is God's māyā? Māyā is nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body (Vac. Gaḍh. III.39).

In Vac. Gaḍh. II.36, he is yet more firm and unequivocal.

Affection for anything other than God is itself māyā.

This, then, is the māyā that needs to be transcended for self-realisation and God-realisation, and in order to secure release from the suffering and sorrow that accompanies the incessant transmigratory journey through birth, death and rebirth.

10.1.8) Useful

Having said this about the nature of māyā thus far, Svāminārāyaṇa raises an intriguing question in Vac. Loyā.10 when he asks his audience:

Is there only misery in māyā, or is there also some happiness in it?

The dialectic discussion that ensues is worth reproducing here to provide a more rounded understanding of māyā in the Svāminārāyaṇa system as well as another

example of the applied theological reflection available in and possible from the Vacanāmrut.

Muktānand Swāmi, one of Svāminārāyaṇa's most senior paramhansas, predictably replies to the question:

Māyā causes only misery.

To this, Svāminārāyaṇa counters that of the three guṇas arising from māyā, sattvagūṇa is said to be a positive force, inspiring wisdom, tranquillity, self-restraint, etc. Quoting from the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, he adds:

Sattvam yad brahmadarśanam |

Sattvagūṇa leads to the vision [i.e. realisation] of 'Brahman' [i.e. Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman] (BP 1.2.24).

Svāminārāyaṇa therefore asks:

How is māyā in the form of knowledge which leads to liberation a cause of misery?

Muktānand Swāmi and the other paramhansas in the audience concede that they will not be able to answer the question, and request Svāminārāyaṇa to do so himself.

He begins, characteristically, with an analogy, this time of Yamarājā, the deity of Death. Reframed for simplicity in modern terms, it is akin to saying a police officer appears "frightful and terrible", "dreadful", or even "horrific like death" to

a grave criminal running from the law. To a law-abiding citizen, however, that same officer appears “very pleasant”. “Similarly,” Svāminārāyaṇa explains,

to those who are non-believers, māyā causes attachment and intense misery, while to a devotee of God, that same māyā is the cause of intense happiness.

In any case, he continues,

the entities that have evolved out of māyā – the senses and the inner faculties, and their presiding devatās – all support the devotion of God. Therefore, for a devotee of God, māyā is not a cause of misery; it is a source of great happiness.

At this, Mukṭānāṇḍ Swāmi rightly counters:

If māyā is a cause of happiness, why is it that when a devotee of God visualises the form of God and engages in worship, māyā, in the form of the mind, causes misery by generating many disturbing thoughts?

Svāminārāyaṇa acknowledges the experience of most devotees, but explains how it can be different.

Māyā, in the form of the mind, does not cause misery to a person who thoroughly understands the greatness of God and has an absolutely firm refuge of God, but it does cause misery to a person who does not have such a refuge.

Svāminārāyaṇa goes on to explain in practical terms how this is true, again drawing upon an analogy. For example, he says, a detractor may attempt to dislodge an irresolute devotee by disparaging his faith or luring him away with

enticements, but the same detractor would hardly succeed in dislodging a staunch adherent.⁴⁰⁸

Similarly, māyā, in the form of the mind, would never entertain a desire to daunt a person who has a firm refuge in God. Rather, it would help his devotion to flourish. However, māyā does deflect a person who has a slight deficiency in his refuge in God and does cause him misery. Then, when that person develops a complete refuge in God, māyā is not able to disturb him or cause him pain.

Svāminārāyaṇa thus concludes the discussion by returning to his original question.

Therefore, the answer is that if a person has such complete faith in God, māyā is not capable of causing him misery.

What is interesting here is that Svāminārāyaṇa is subjectifying the positive or negative impact of māyā on the strength of the individual's faith in God; māyā itself is neither intrinsically evil nor good. Since māyā belongs to God and functions only under his authority, why indeed would it harm anyone who also belongs to God and is similarly acting under his authority? In fact, māyā is there to facilitate devotion of God for fellow dependants. What Svāminārāyaṇa is emphasising, it seems, is the need to fully and exclusively submit oneself to God, and thereby not only escape the detractive effects of māyā but, more positively, take full advantage of its potential usefulness in worshipping him. For us, this provides a more holistic understanding of the nature of māyā in the Svāminārāyaṇa system.

⁴⁰⁸ In other sermons, Svāminārāyaṇa equally admonishes a foolhardy confidence over the mind and senses, warning that they are not to be trusted (Vac. Loyā.14) and should always be kept under careful watch and tight control by observing the moral injunctions codified in the scriptures (Vac. Pan.3).

10.2) Māyā as Jagat

While māyā in its state of rest is unmanifest and indistinguishably subtle, it becomes most distinctively manifest and gross as it transforms into the created world visible around us, including the bodies that each individual receives. It is to this world that we now turn to understand the workings of māyā, attempting to make sense as far as possible of how it was created, why it was created, particularly in the way that it is, and what happens to it hereafter.

The first thing that needs to be said about this world is that it is real, not illusory. This is made patently clear by Svāminārāyaṇa in Vac. Gaḍh. I.39 when he challenges an adherent and scholar of Advaita Vedānta who was sitting in the assembly at that time. As a good example of a theological discussion grounded in textual exegesis, it is worth recounting the sermon here in part.

First, Svāminārāyaṇa pointedly addresses the Advaitin regarding the central doctrine of strict monism. He says to him:

You claim that in reality only Brahman exists. Furthermore, you say that with the exception of that Brahman, jīvas, īśvaras, māyā, the world, the Vedas, the Śāstras and the Purāṇas are all illusory. I can neither understand this concept of yours, nor can I accept it.

Svāminārāyaṇa invites the scholar to defend the Advaitin position, but is clear about the terms upon which this theological discussion ought to proceed. The scholar should respond

by citing only the Vedas, the Śāstras, the Purāṇas, the Smṛtis or the Itihāsa scriptures. If, however, you reply quoting the words of some inauthentic scripture, then I will not accept your answer. But,

since I have absolute faith in the words of Vyāsji, I will be able to accept your reply if you reply quoting his words.

The Advaitin offered his defence using various arguments, but each time, the Vacanāmrut notes, Svāminārāyaṇa raised doubts to his response leaving the query unresolved. Thereupon Svāminārāyaṇa said:

Please listen as I resolve that query myself.

Svāminārāyaṇa began by explaining in detail that there are in fact “two different states” of spiritual experience, what he calls “savikalpa samādhi” and “nirvikalpa samādhi”. Those who attain the former state “see jīvas, īśvaras, māyā, and their supporter, Brahman, as being distinct from each other”, just as “a person standing atop Mount Meru⁴⁰⁹ sees everything in the vicinity of Meru distinctly – other mountains, trees, as well as the ground that supports the mountains and the trees.” In contrast, a person standing atop the exceedingly higher, cosmic Mount Lokāloka⁴¹⁰ “sees everything in the vicinity of Mount Lokāloka – the other mountains and trees, etc. – as being one with the ground, but he does not see them as being distinct.”

Similarly, those great liberated souls who have attained nirvikalp samādhi see jīvas, īśvaras and māyā as being one with Brahman – but they do not see them as distinct entities.

⁴⁰⁹ Also known as ‘Sumeru’, this refers to the sacred mountain mentioned in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmology, considered to be the centre of the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes. It is said to be to be 84,000 yojanas high (c. 1,082,000 kilometres or 672,000 miles). See references to ‘Mahāmeru’, for example, in the Mahābhārata at Ādi Parva 17. Śānti Parva 222.18 notes it as ‘the king of mountains’.

⁴¹⁰ This is another mountain mentioned in cosmological accounts within Hindu texts. It is described as the boundary to the three worlds, and being golden in colour and as smooth as glass (Devī Bhāgavata 8).

It is due to these differing experiential states of the seers who then share their vision in the scriptures that we find seemingly contradictory or inconsistent statements.

The words of those who have attained the savikalpa state noted in the Vedas, the Śāstras, the Purāṇas, etc. describe all of those entities as being satya [real]. However, the words of those who have attained the nirvikalpa state describe all of those entities as being asatya [non-real]. In reality, however, they are not asatya [non-real]. They are only described as being asatya [non-real] because they cannot be seen due to the influence of the nirvikalpa state.

Svāminārāyaṇa provides another analogy to reiterate his point about two different standpoints leading to two different views, and then explains how both descriptions can be correct – given that they are coming from different positions – thereby avoiding confusion and ensuring an essential congruency and harmony among all revelatory statements, since, crucially, they are all true. He concludes:

So, if one interprets ‘Brahman’ in this manner, then there will never be any contextual inconsistencies in the statements of the scriptures, but if one does not, then inconsistencies will arise.

Svāminārāyaṇa then ends the sermon with a stern warning against a lopsided reading of the scriptures – privileging those statements which propound the existence of Brahman alone and deny the existence of the world – without the contextual exegesis explained above, calling it “extremely foolish” and spiritually perilous.

Thus, for all its mutations and transience, the world is nonetheless real, and not some illusory figment of an inconceivable ignorance which will dematerialise

upon self-realisation. Even in the liberated state, Svāminārāyaṇa asserts, the world or māyā is not obliterated for the individual; it is merely transcended so as to become inconsequential. This means that if ever the world, the physical body, or any of māyā's other creations are described as "mithyā" [e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. I.14, Gaḍh. I.70, Sār.14, Pan.2, Gaḍh. III.38] or "asatya" [e.g. Vac. Gaḍh. I.16, Gaḍh. I.21, Gaḍh. II.30], it is simply to underscore their perishability and māyā's own mutability, especially in relation to the immutable eternality of Parabrahman and the other sentient beings. Svāminārāyaṇa makes this clear with his definition of 'satya' and 'asatya' in Vac. Gaḍh. III.38:

All forms that are the result of the entities evolved from māyā are asatya. Why? Because all those forms will be destroyed in time. Conversely, the form of God in Akṣaradhām and the form of the muktas – the attendants of God – are all satya....

Bringing this together with the earlier point that māyā can indeed be useful, we can arrive at an interesting theological and practical insight. Svāminārāyaṇa seems to advocate neither a world-negating nor world-affirming *Weltanschauung*, but what might be called a world-*contextualising* view. The world is not illusory; it is real, and therefore cannot be dismissed. Yet, being composed of māyā, it has a strong and natural propensity to distract the jīva away from God, and so cannot be blankly advocated either. Nevertheless, the world plays an essential role in providing a platform and set of tools with which the jīva can transcend it and reach God. What it requires is to be properly understood in its correct context, as a tool and servant of God. Those striving for liberation from māyā therefore find themselves straddling two realms; diligently fulfilling their duties in the material world yet using that as a form of praxis

(sādhana) to achieving a higher spiritual realisation of themselves and their creator and cause.

10.2.1) Parabrahman as Creator and Cause

Theologically, the most important thing that can be said about the world is that Parabrahman is its creator and cause. While this has been extensively discussed in our chapter on Parabrahman, it warrants some recapitulation and further reflection here in the context of our attempt to understand the māyic world.

We had earlier raised an important question on this topic: How justifiable is it that God be called the creator when Prakṛti, the primordial substance from which the material world is composed, is co-eternal with God? If Prakṛti already exists, what exactly has God 'created'?

The question becomes even sharper when we recall the satkāryavāda view of causality adopted by Svāminārāyaṇa and most other Vedāntins. It maintains that nothing new is ever created; substances merely change state, from a causal state of being to an effected state. Just as an earthen pot is not a new substance apart from the clump of clay from which it was crafted, so, too, the world always existed, albeit without distinguishable names and forms, in the causal state of primordial dormant matter.

Notwithstanding the radically different conceptualisation of *creatio ex materia* found generally in the Hindu traditions to those of other theological systems,

particularly the Abrahamic faiths, the question is nonetheless intriguing and worth exploring. A clue to its answer lies in the metaphor used to define the question itself. Firstly, the familiar clay-pot metaphor of the Nyāya system, it is argued by the Vedāntins, reveals the need for an intelligent creator. Just as a clump of clay cannot be moulded into a pot by itself, but in the hands of an adept potter, it can be transformed into numerous vessels and artefacts, similarly, Prakṛti may be the primordial material reality, but it is insentient, like the clay. It cannot of its own accord create the world. It needs a sentient world-maker to bring it to action, transformation, generation.

If we now modify and develop this analogy slightly, we can find new ways of understanding the world-maker and the world he makes. Can God insomuch be the creator of the world as a sculptor who creates a statue from a boulder of stone, a painter who creates a masterpiece with paints, or a musician who creates a symphony from musical notes? The stone, paints and notes all pre-exist, albeit indistinctively, but it is the creativity and mastery of the artiste that brings to life something wholly new from them yet not distinctly apart from what each was before. The creation is at once both new and the same. Similarly, it can be said, God inspires from the pre-existent, indistinguishable Prakṛti innumerable masterpieces each with their own name and form and all still intrinsically māyic.

This model of creation as art (as opposed to mere manufacturing) also helps in explaining how the 'work' of God might better be described as 'play' – joyful and

expressive. It is not the necessary, laborious, mostly unpleasant routine that is (unfortunately) most often associated with work, but that which occurs freely, willingly, and lovingly for the sheer joy of it by its creator. This metaphor of 'play' can in fact be found in an important discussion in the Brahmasūtras to help explain the purpose behind God's creation, which we shall be turning to shortly. Here we can accept that in this sense of artistic expression, Parabrahman can still be properly conceived as 'creator' of the world even though Prakṛti always exists.⁴¹¹

From the perspective of the creation, as is Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, or Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, the beautiful natural world of God can be understood as something to appreciate, cherish and protect, as it brings joy to its admirers and reveals something about the artiste himself.

But there is a danger associated with these analogies of which we should also be aware and guard against. They are not to become a basis of logical induction upon which to argue for the existence of God, moving from the world to its maker. To be clear, we are using the metaphors as a way of better understanding the world-maker God and God-made world as already primarily, completely and authoritatively revealed by scripture.⁴¹² Like all metaphors employed to help describe reality, those above are imperfect and incomplete. Where the clay-pot

⁴¹¹ I was pleasantly surprised and grateful to discover that George Hendry includes creation as "artistic expression" in his models of creation found in Christian theology. Reading his *Theology of Nature* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), pp. 147-62 has helped in enhancing this paragraph.

⁴¹² See 'Arguing the Existence of God', chapter 2 in Clooney's *Hindu God, Christian God*, pp. 29-61.

or paint-painting, etc. metaphors reach their natural limits, for example, is that unlike the potter or painter, God is the material cause of the world as well as its efficient cause. This can only be learned from scriptural revelation (BS 1.1.3). It teaches us that in being the omnisoul – pervading, supporting, controlling, empowering everything, including Prakṛti – Parabrahman is, in every way, the fundamental and universal cause of the world. Since it is completely true to say, then, that without him there would be no creation, it is wholly correct to describe Parabrahman as the ‘creator’, the one who brings the world into being by his mere will. Svāminārāyaṇa thus describes Parabrahman as such repeatedly throughout the Vacanāmṛt (Vac. Gaḍh. I.37, Gaḍh. I.56, Gaḍh. I.59, Gaḍh. II.10), sometimes tying in Parabrahman’s role as sustainer and dissolver as well (Vac. Gaḍh. I.51, Gaḍh. I.78, Loyā.1, Loyā.17, Pan.1, Gaḍh. II.53, Var.2, Gaḍh. III.35, Amd.7). As an example of each:

It is through God that everything mobile and immobile is created
(Vac. Gaḍh. II.10).

It is God who is the creator, sustainer and dissolver of the world
(Vac. Loyā.17).

As we shall see next, *creatio ex materia* is not only compatible with a Creator God, it also ensures his irreproachability. Otherwise, all evil that is ingrained in a previously non-existent material reality would have to be attributable to God.

10.2.2) Purpose of Creation and the Irreproachability of its Creator

Two major objections still need to be contended with in our discussion about creation, both of which appear in consecutive adhikaraṇas in the second chapter of the Brahmasūtras.

In the ongoing debate about whether 'Brahman' can be distinguished as the cause of the origination, etc. of the world [BS 1.1.2], and therefore the goal of knowledge [BS 1.1.1], the objectors firstly assert that even if Parabrahman is confirmed as the efficient and material cause of the world, it only means that he is *capable* of creating, sustaining and dissolving the world. But *why* would he do so?

This is the charge presented at BS-SB 2.1.33: It is obvious to everyone that all activities by sane people have some sort of purpose [prayojana]; they do things to satisfy some self-interest or for the benefit of others, or both. But if God eternally has all his desires attained [nityam avāptasamastakāma] and is forever fulfilled with his own divine bliss [divyanijānaṇdasantr̥pta], he has no reason to create, sustain or dissolve the world for himself. As for anything that is done for the benefit of others, that is marked by benignity. Since the created world has a plenitude of misery and suffering, it cannot have been made out of any wish to be helpful and kind (especially by someone who has all his wishes fulfilled). If it had, the world would have been made such that everyone would always be perfectly happy. It is not, hence God cannot have made it for the benefit of others. And if God cannot have created, etc. the world for others nor for himself (and it is

axiomatic that he is sane), there is no other reason for him to have done so.

Hence, without a purpose, God cannot be the world's creator, etc.⁴¹³

To this, the Sūtrakāra pithily replies that there is a purpose.

Lokavat-tu līlākaivalyam |

But it is mere sport, as in the ordinary world (BS 2.1.34).

The Bhāṣyakāra explains: Just as a generous benefactor may naturally, effortlessly and happily engage in philanthropy, purely out of his own goodwill and because it brings him inner joy, similarly, God, who is supremely benevolent and compassionate – wishing to liberate all jīvas and īśvaras, which brings him joy even though he is innately blissful himself [sahajānanda] – will naturally and joyfully, without any exertion at all,⁴¹⁴ engage in the creation, etc. of the world.⁴¹⁵

The Bhāṣyakāra here is confirming that the act of creation by Parabrahman is indeed for the benefit of others. If there is any self-interest on God's part, it is only that he graciously wishes to help the finite beings to liberation.

Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates upon this in Vac. Kār.1. He begins:

God does not create and sustain the world for his own sake.

⁴¹³ BS-SB 2.1.33, p. 183.

⁴¹⁴ The Bhāṣyakāra expands "sukṛtam", which qualifies creation at TU 2.7.1, as meaning "easily [literally, 'joyously'], effortlessly done". He defends his explanation by explaining that there would be exertion if the efficient and material causes of the world were different. Since Parabrahman is himself both, he can create the world "joyously and effortlessly". MuU-SB 2.7.1, p. 381.

⁴¹⁵ BS-SB 2.1.34, p. 184.

The framing of God's creative work as 'līlā' also reinforces the metaphor we explored in the previous section, where artistic creations are more 'play' than 'work', produced willingly, joyfully, and bringing joy to their admirers as well.

He then moves to explain the definite purpose of the world and how it is of benefit to others by firstly citing the following verse from the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa,

Buddhīndriyamaṇaḥprāṇān janānām asṛjat prabhuḥ |
Mātrārtham ca bhavārtham ca hyātmane kalpanāya ca (BP
10.87.2) ||

translating it thus:

This verse means: God created the intellect, senses, mind and vital breaths of all people to enable the jīvas to enjoy the sense-objects, to take birth, to transmigrate to other realms, and to attain liberation.

Then expanding upon the verse, Svāminārāyaṇa explains:

Therefore, God created this cosmos for the sake of the jīvas' liberation. God sustains it for the sake of the jīvas' liberation. In fact, God also causes its dissolution for the sake of the jīvas' liberation. How is that? Well, he destroys it to allow the jīvas – tired as a result of undergoing many births and deaths – to rest (Vac. Kār.1).

“In all ways,” Svāminārāyaṇa reiterates at the end, Parabrahman “acts... for the benefit of the jīvas”.

Svāminārāyaṇa repeats this benevolent intentionality in Vac. Pan.1, focussing on two main objectives:

God..., at the time of creation, gives an intellect, senses, a mind and vital breaths to the jīvas that had been absorbed in māyā along with their causal bodies at the time of dissolution. Why does he give these to the jīvas? Well, he does so to enable them to enjoy the superior, intermediate and inferior types of sensorial pleasures as well as for [securing] liberation.

What Svāminārāyaṇa seems to be saying is that, firstly, Parabrahman did not create this world by mere chance or caprice. As the “Let me be many” passages

from CU 6.2.1 and TU 2.6.3 also reveal, a deep and active resolve initiated the creation of our world by God. It comes to being only by his will. More importantly, that resolve was grounded in and suffused by his loving compassion. He thus creates a world [in this context, referred to as 'bhogabhūmi'; literally, 'land for enjoyment'] wherein he grants each soul a body [bhogāyatana, or 'body for enjoyment'] complete with senses and faculties [bhogasādhana, i.e. 'means of enjoyment'] that it may enjoy the sense-objects [bhoga] he has created for them, but also so that they – ultimately realising both the finitude and transience of worldly enjoyment and the suffering inextricably tied with them – develop dispassion from these māyic pleasures and strive to secure liberation to attain the divine, limitless, eternal bliss of God. Creation, in this sense, is a purposive and supremely gracious act of benevolence by a supremely compassionate creator.

This brings us to the objectors' second main charge against God. If indeed Parabrahman graciously wished to benefit others, which would be marked by kindness towards the beneficiaries (or would involve not harming them at the very least), would he not have created a world which was filled with perfect joy and goodness for all? Why, instead, is the world afflicted with such suffering and evil? Moreover, it is not even as if this misery is evenly distributed among the people. While some are born into abject poverty, others wallow in affluence. Some are born into royalty, others into less comfortable ranks. Some enjoy a long and healthy life, others suffer disease, disability and untimely death. How can a world vitiated by such harsh inequalities and often heart-wrenching misery be

the work of a fair and compassionate God? Either accept God is partial and cruel, the objectors impel the Sūtrakāra, or that he is not the creator of the world.

The Sūtrakāra refuses to be drawn into this fallacious dilemma. He explains in BS 2.1.35 that Parabrahman cannot be made culpable of partiality or cruelty, because the inequality and suffering that one observes in the world is relative to the souls' own karmas. Each soul is responsible for its own present (and future) life-conditions; God merely dispenses them as karmic deserts that the soul itself has accrued over successive lifetimes. The proof of this, the Sūtrakāra asserts, can be found in the scriptures as well as analogously in the visible world.

The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates on the scriptural evidence by citing BU 4.4.5:

As a person does and as a person behaves, so he becomes. He who does good becomes good. He who does bad becomes bad. By meritorious acts comes merit. By sinful acts comes sin.... As [a person] wishes, so he acts; as he acts, so he accrues karma; as he accrues karmas, so he attains.

The determinant factor behind any attainment, good or bad, is thus the personal resolve and actions of each individual. This causal relationship can be practically observed, the Bhāṣyakāra adds, in a seed and its growth. Svāminārāyaṇa draws upon this famous analogy when the very question raised at BS 2.1.35 is posed to him in an assembly. In the style of a double-binding purvapakṣa found preluding a Brahmasūtra-adhikaraṇa, Cimanrāvjī, a respectable lay devotee, asks

Svāminārāyaṇa in Vac. Var.6:

Mahārāja, initially, at the time of dissolution, the jīvas with their causal bodies were absorbed within māyā. Then, at the time of

creation, the jīvas attained their gross and subtle bodies. A variety of life in the form of devas, humans, animals, etc. was also created. Was this due to karmas? Or was it due to God's wish? If we say that it was due to karmas, then that would prove the [atheistic] Jain doctrine to be true. On the other hand, if we say that it was due to God's wish, then it would suggest that God is partial and not compassionate. Therefore, please grace us by telling us how things really are.

Svāminārāyaṇa responds by firstly establishing the "intimate relationship" between the gross and subtle bodies with the causal body, "in the same way that a tree is intimately related to its seed."

Just as when seeds which are planted in the earth sprout forth after coming into contact with rainwater, similarly, during the period of creation, the jīvas, which had resided within māyā together with their causal bodies, attain various types of bodies according to their individual karmas by the will of God, the giver of the fruits of karmas.

Svāminārāyaṇa is effectively explaining that although rain allows the seeds to grow, it is inconsequential in *what* they grow into. That is determined entirely by each seed's own latent potentiality. Sugarcane seeds will only grow into sugarcane, and pepper seeds only into peppers. Equally, only sugarcane grows from sugarcane seeds, and only peppers from pepper seeds. Why is one sweet and the other hot? The difference is due to the genetic encoding within the respective seeds themselves, not due to the rain which indiscriminately falls for both. Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa maintains, the different conditions of individual beings is due to their own karmic 'DNA' stored in the causal body of each soul. This provides the decisive information according to which subsequent bodies will be composed and life-circumstances (place of birth, parents, etc.) determined. "That is why it is called the 'causal' body [kāraṇa śarīra],"

Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies, adding that it is “without beginning”. For each undying soul, this ensures two things: 1) an essential unity between lives, and 2) consistent fairness; he who sows the seed (in a past life) is the one who reaps the fruit (in a subsequent life), and the fruit he reaps is of the seed he himself sowed. The souls can neither complain about their lot nor blame it upon God.

But this then raises another complaint against God. If each soul is enjoying and suffering the consequences of its own karmas, where is there room in all of this for God’s compassion? How can creation still be regarded as an act of his benevolence, when it can neither fully be called ‘his’ nor is it fully ‘benevolent’? He is merely an automated dispenser, the last cog in the universal workings of karmic determinism. Impartial, yes. But apathetic, too.

Not so, the Bhāṣyakāra retorts. While the body, senses, faculties, sense-objects and physical realm that the soul deserves are its own earnings, they are nonetheless created for it by God, for who else has the power to activate Prakṛti and has the knowledge of what exactly needs to be made from it? Moreover, the dispensation of karmic fruits is not at all divorced of God’s pleasure and displeasure, just as a noble king metes out reward and retribution upon deserving subjects only after being pleased or displeased by their acts. You also forget, the Bhāṣyakāra reminds the objector, that it is God who graciously endows each soul with the means to act, know and enjoy in the first place. Along with that, he allows them the freedom to act and grants the capacity to discriminate between good deeds and bad, each having their own inescapable

consequences. With their highest welfare at heart, God has thus given finite beings the opportunity to use their God-granted material bodies and material things to secure liberation from their miserable transmigratory existence and enjoy eternal, blissful communion with him. How can God be so quickly dismissed from this system? And how can his compassion be denied? He is the very Soul of the souls, empowering, indwelling and supporting them, without whom they would not be able to do anything.

In that case, does this not make God at least partially or indirectly responsible for the souls' suffering or their inequality, for without him they would not have accumulated the karmas which they are now experiencing? No, the answer must be, for that would be tantamount to blaming the rain or soil for what the seeds grow into.⁴¹⁶

A marked feature of this Hindu theodicy, presented here in only a condensed and truncated form, is that it not only attempts to defend the goodness of God and ensure justice for individual beings, it also seeks to preserve God's indispensability and intimate relationship with those beings. God is not accountable for the inequity or suffering among the souls of the world because it is determined by the karmas that they themselves have accrued and therefore deserve. But nor does this make God redundant or detached, for the doctrine of karma is not simply an inert law of cause and effect. It requires to be presided

⁴¹⁶ Based on BS-SB 2.1.35-36, pp. 184-87 with further reflection.

over or mediated by God, because only an all-knowing, all-pervading, all-loving being – not the insentient karmas themselves (as the Jains believe) or some mysterious cosmic power (such as the Mīmāṃsākas' apūrva) – can know all the actions and thoughts happening in all places at all times, and then dispense with the fruits accordingly. As we saw, Svāminārāyaṇa was clear to add at the end of the passage above that it was “by the will of God” that the karmic fruits are dispensed and therefore the world created.⁴¹⁷

Other aspects of the so-called ‘problem of evil’ still require attention and further reflection, but the limited discussion here should nonetheless provide an idea of the scripturally grounded and reasonably argued attempt to reconcile the presence of suffering in a world created by a compassionate God. It also allows us to retrace the argumentation for the world’s creatorship introduced at the beginning of this section: God is not responsible for the diversity and suffering in the world therefore his impartiality and compassion remain intact. Since he is benevolent, he creates the world for the benefit of others. Because this amounts to a definite purpose for creating the world, it means God *can* be its creator.

10.2.3) Creative Process

Svāminārāyaṇa describes the process of creation in various sermons (Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, Gaḍh. I.13, Gaḍh. I.41), mentioning it still further in many others (e.g. Vac.

⁴¹⁷ See also the Phalādhikarāna – the last debate of BS 3.2 – that argues for Parabrahman as the grantor of karmic fruits to souls. BS-SB 3.2.36-39; pp. 310-12.

For a more detailed discussion on the topic of karma, including how endeavour, charity, sympathy, etc. can still be reconciled, see Brahmadarshandaś's *Karmasiddhānta ane Punarjanma*, 2 vols (Ahmedabad: Swaminarayan Aksharpith, 2002).

Gaḍh. I.51, Gaḍh. II.31). What follows is an account of that protological process ('utpatti-sarga') based on these sermons.⁴¹⁸

Our beginning is the pre-creation state of final dissolution, when all sentient (jīvas and īśvaras) and insentient (Prakṛti) matter is condensed within the being of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman (both residing with the akṣaramuktas in Akṣaradhāma). This is why CU 6.2.1 and AU 1.1.1, for example, speak of nothing existing "in the beginning" except pure "Being" or the "Soul". While according to the satkāryavāda view of causality it is true that the variegated world exists in all its potentiality during this causal state, it is indistinguishable by name and form from Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman, even though their distinction is real. Bringing this unmanifest world to its manifest, effected state is itself the very act of 'creation'.

The process for this creation is initiated when Parabrahman "sees" [CU 6.1.3, BU 2.1.5, AU 1.1.1] Akṣarabrahman, i.e. he looks with intent, with a resolve to create the manifest world for the benefit of the souls that they may seek liberation and redeem their karmic accrument. Upon perfectly receiving Parabrahman's will, Akṣarabrahman selects a liberated soul (akṣaramukta) from the countless millions in Akṣaradhāma and inspires it to engage with Prakṛti. Because of its primal role in this process, the akṣaramukta is given the designation of 'Mūla-Puruṣa' (sometimes also called 'Mahā-Puruṣa' or 'Akṣara-Puruṣa'), and the

⁴¹⁸ The Bhāṣyakāra also presents the same account, for example, at MuU-SB 1.1.7, pp. 240-41.

Prakṛti it engages with is similarly referred to as 'Mūla-Prakṛti' (or 'Mahā-Prakṛti'). Together, they are called simply 'Prakṛti-Purasa'. Parabrahman 're-enters' this pair for the special task ahead, empowering both to continue forth the order of creation [e.g. TU 2.6.3].

Despite Mūla-Prakṛti being conceived of as feminine in nature, it is of course insentient. Moreover, the liberated soul, though termed in the masculine 'Puruṣa', is genderless and desireless. Hence the 'coming together' of Mūla-Prakṛti and Mūla-Puruṣa is not to be misconstrued as copulative, even though creation is sometimes metaphorically described in terms of human procreation [Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, BG 14.3, BP 3.5.26]. Rather, by its mere Parabrahman-empowered presence, Mūla-Puruṣa causes Mūla-Prakṛti to be stirred from its dormant state. Up until that point, the three fundamental qualities of Prakṛti – sattva, rajas and tamas – had been in perfect equilibrium. Once that delicate balance is disturbed, Mūla-Prakṛti produces countless parts from itself – rather like mini-versions of Prakṛti – each called Pradhāna-Prakṛti. Īśvaras (previously dormant within māyā) are called to individually join with each Pradhāna-Prakṛti, making countless pairs of what are each called 'Pradhāna-Puruṣa'. To briefly recap to this point: the primeval Mūla-Prakṛti and Mūla-Puruṣa – known jointly as Prakṛti-Puruṣa – produce countless pairs of Pradhāna-Puruṣas.

From each pair of Pradhāna-Puruṣa is produced a brahmāṇḍa (what we have loosely been calling 'world'). Since there are countless Pradhāna-Puruṣas,

countless such brahmāṇḍas are created, all as originally willed by Parabrahman and inspired by Akṣarabrahman.

Focussing now on a single brahmāṇḍa, a series of elements evolve from Pradhāna-Puruṣa which forms the 'body' of the world as we see it and beyond what is visible. We have to remember that this brahmāṇḍa is a living entity, which has an īśvara – called Vairāja Puruṣa (or Virāṭa Puruṣa) – as its soul.

First to evolve from Pradhāna-Puruṣa is mahattattva. As the name might suggest (literally 'great element'), it is the fundamental material source from which the other elements of the world-body will evolve. It also represents the citta (contemplative mind) of the world.

From mahattattva evolve three types of Ahaṃkāra, a form of cosmic ego, each formed predominantly from one of the three qualities of Prakṛti. From Sāttvic Ahaṃkāra evolves the (cosmic) mind and the deities who preside over the (cosmic) senses; from Rājasic Ahaṃkāra evolve the (cosmic) senses, intellect and vital breaths; and from Tāmasic Ahaṃkāra evolves the five gross elements and the five subtle elements.

The five gross elements (mahābhūta) are, in order of creation:

1. ākāśa ('space' or 'ether')
2. vāyu ('wind'), i.e. gaseous matter
3. tejas ('light'), i.e. high energy matter

-
4. jala ('water') i.e. liquid matter
 5. pṛthvī ('earth'), i.e. solid matter

The sequence follows a descending order of subtlety, with the first element being the most subtle and used to create the next element. Hence, the basest element 'earth' is created using all of the other elements. Importantly, all the elements are said to have Parabrahman as their ultimate source [e.g. MuU 2.1.6], and are indwelt and therefore empowered and controlled by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

At [Brahman's] command, the work of creation – conceived of earth, water, fire, air, and space – unfolds (SU 6.2).⁴¹⁹

The causes of these five gross elements are the five extremely subtle, quintessential elements called the tanmātrā. They correspond with the material elements as follow:

Subtle Element (Cause)	Material Element (Effect)
Gandha ('Smell')	Pṛthvī ('Earth')
Rasa ('Taste')	Jala ('Water')
Rūpa ('Sight')	Tejas ('Fire')
Sparṣa ('Touch')	Vāyu ('Air')
Śabda ('Sound')	Ākāśa ('Space')

⁴¹⁹ See also, for example, MuU 2.1.3.

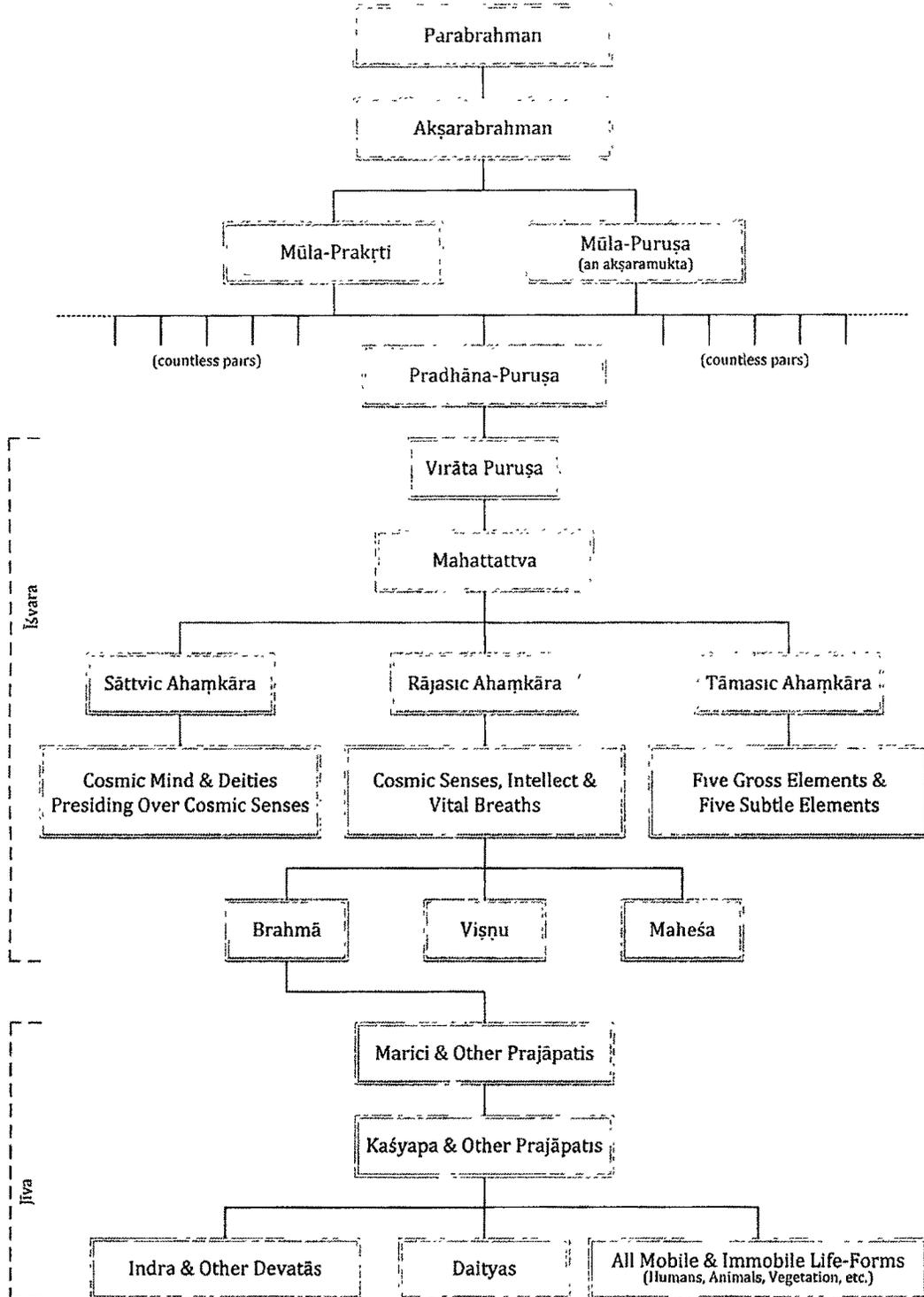
Together, these form the gross and subtle 'body', i.e. a brahmāṇḍa, of Vairāja Puruṣa (metaphysically an īśvara-soul), ready for it to enter and enliven it, only after being 're-entered' by Parabrahman himself.

Parabrahman's re-entering and empowering continues as each new element of the order is created, allowing it to continue the process further. This ensures that Parabrahman remains both the efficient cause and the material cause of all of creation.

From Vairāja Puruṣa originates Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa, each with their own īśvara-souls, and then from Brahmā (empowered by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman) extends the rest of the creation for jīvas. This begins with Marici and other such Prajāpatis, then Kaśyapa and other such Prajāpatis, and finally Indra and other devatās (divinities), daityas ('demons'), humans, animals, vegetation, and all other mobile and immobile life-forms.

This order of creation can alternatively be presented in the following chart.

The Protological Process (Utpatti-Sarga)



Each brahmāṇḍa is said to comprise of 14 realms, or lokas. Of these, the eighth from the bottom, called Mṛtyuloka, relates to earth, which humans inhabit. Above Mṛtyuloka, the higher realms (collectively called 'svarga') are inhabited by devatās, seers and higher beings, while the lower regions (collectively called 'pātāla') are inhabited by daityas, nocturnal creatures and lower beings. The 14 lokas are:

	Loka	Inhabitants
14	Satyaloka / Brahmaloaka	Brahmā
13	Tapaloka	Bṛgu and other sages
12	Janaloka	Bṛgu and other sages
11	Maharloka	Aryam and other ancestral divinities
10	Svargaloka / Indraloka	Indra and other devatās
9	Bhuvarkala	Impure devatās
8	Mṛtyuloka	Humans
7	Atala	Daityas
6	Vitala	Daityas
5	Sutala	Daityas
4	Talātala	Nocturnal creatures
3	Mahātala	Nocturnal creatures
2	Rasātala	Nocturnal creatures
1	Pātāla	Serpents

Each fourteen-realm brahmāṇḍa is said to have aṣṭa āvaraṇa, or ‘eight sheaths’. These material constituents refer to, in ascending order: pṛthvī (‘earth’), jala (‘water’), tejas (‘light’), vāyu (‘wind’), ākāśa (space), ahaṃkāra, mahattattva (‘great element’), and Prakṛti (both Pradhāna-Prakṛti and Mūla-Prakṛti) [see also BG 7.4].

In all, each brahmāṇḍa is said to be composed of “the 24 elements”⁴²⁰. These are the māyic products of mahattattva which refer to the five elements (pṛthvī, jala, tejas, vāyu and ākāśa) that comprise its gross body plus the nineteen elements (the five cognitive senses, five conative senses, five subtle elements, and four inner faculties) that comprise its subtle body. Interestingly, these are the same elements that go into composing the human body (as we saw in the chapter on jīva), revealing an intimate connection between humans and the world.

10.2.4) Dissolution

What happens to the world once created?

In an earlier chapter we learned about the omniagency of Parabrahman and his relationship with the material and immaterial world. A model for this relationship is provided by the body-soul doctrine wherein Parabrahman has the whole world as his body. As the soul is to its body, God indwells, empowers,

⁴²⁰ This is similar to the 24 elements found within Sāṃkhya School (see, for example, Sāṃkhyakārikā 3), but with some significant differences in what is included, omitted or conflated within something else. For example, the Sāṃkhya School propounds mahattattva and buddhi (cosmic intellect) to be the same, whereas Svāminārāyaṇa distinguishes between them.

controls, and supports the world in every way possible. It is totally dependent on him. But while sustaining and nourishing the world and regulating its workings, Parabrahman also chooses not to directly intervene, allowing instead the natural course of events and effects to unfold, because while endowing beings with the power and means to act, he also grants them the freedom to choose their actions and the capacity to discriminate between them. These beings include not only the jīvas on earth but also the īśvaras deputed by Parabrahman to preside over the functioning of the universe. This is how the world is sustained upon creation, thus called its state of sustenance, or stithi.

By the very nature of Prakṛti, though – it is mutable and perishable in its effected states – the created world begins to degenerate immediately. This is called dissolution, or pralaya. It is not the destruction of māyā, since it is ontologically eternal, but the opposite of its evolution, where māyic products return towards their original condition of rest in Mūla-Prakṛti, i.e. from an effected state to the causal state. This “reverse order” is also debated and confirmed at BS 2.3.15.

It should be noted that all three states or phases of the world – origination, sustenance and dissolution – flow seamlessly in a continuum. As morning subsides it gives rise to the afternoon, and the afternoon eventually passes whereupon night is born. In this perpetual chain the day is maintained, as is the life of a brahmāṇḍa within its triadic phases.

Furthermore, of decisive importance in this context is the cyclic conceptualisation of time. After the night ends, morning will come again. Similarly dissolution is not the 'final' end, but the end to only one rotation of the cycle, which continues to spin perpetually at the will of God.

And just as night is as necessary as the morning and afternoon, so, too, is the state of dissolution following sustenance and origination. As we saw earlier, Svāminārāyaṇa explains that God's gracious purpose in creating the world extends until its end.

God also causes its dissolution for the sake of the jīvas' liberation. How is that? Well, he destroys it to allow the jīvas – tired as a result of undergoing many births and deaths – to rest (Vac. Kār.1).

In what could be called 'Hindu eschatology', there are four types or degrees of 'end'. In increasing level of dissolution, they are:

1. Nitya Pralaya (constant dissolution)
2. Nimitta Pralaya (stimulated dissolution)
3. Prākṛta Pralaya (general dissolution)
4. Ātyantika Pralaya (final dissolution)

Svāminārāyaṇa describes all four in detail in Vac. Gaḍh. I.12, Vac. Amd.2 and Vac. Bhūgoḷ-Khagoḷ, with the last also including an account of the vast cosmic timescale and domain of a brahmāṇḍa. Based on these sermons, we can arrive at the following description of each level of pralaya.

10.2.4.1) Nitya Pralaya

The first level and most frequent type of 'end' is the physical death of the beings of earth. Svāminārāyaṇa states simply:

The day-to-day death of the bodies of individual devas, demons, humans and others is called Nitya Pralaya (Vac. Gaḍh. I.12).

In explaining death, he adds in Vac. Amd.2 that the "adjuncts" of the jīva, i.e. the māyic constituents of its body, are all "absorbed" back into their respective mahābhūtas and other elements; bodily earth returns to cosmic earth, bodily water to cosmic water, and so on.

On a more personal level, Svāminārāyaṇa states in the same sermon that even "the jīva's deep sleep" can be called Nitya Pralaya, because during this period of complete inertness and unawareness, the soul has absolutely no consciousness of its own body or the world around it.

10.2.4.2) Nimitta Pralaya

If the Nitya Pralaya is related to jīvas, the Nimitta Pralaya relates to īśvaras. In the same vein as above, Svāminārāyaṇa describes Nimitta Pralaya as "Brahmā's deep sleep", when the great part of "īśvara's adjuncts are absorbed" [Vac. Amd.2].

He elaborates upon this in Vac. Gaḍh. I.12 drawing upon the cosmic timescale and composition of a fourteen-realm brahmāṇḍa.

The body of the īśvara called Virāṭa [Puruṣa] has a lifespan of two parārdhas [2 x 10¹⁷ human years]. Fourteen manvantaras [c.

306,720,000 human years]⁴²¹ elapse during one of Virāṭa Puruṣa's days. His night is of the same duration as the day. During his day, the lower ten realms of the brahmāṇḍa remain in existence, and after his night falls, they are dissolved. This is called Nimitta Pralaya.

At the end of Nimitta Pralaya, then, the bottom ten of a brahamanda's fourteen realms are disintegrated, i.e. up to and including Svargaloka.

10.2.4.3) Prākṛta Pralaya

Moving further now, we see an even greater return to the original causal state in the Prākṛta Pralaya. Svāminārāyaṇa explains:

When the two parārdhas [2×10^{17} human years] of Virāṭa Puruṣa have elapsed, the body of Virāṭa is destroyed along with Satyaloka and the other realms. At that time, Pradhāna-Prakṛti, Puruṣa, and the 24 elements including mahattattva are absorbed back into Mahā-Māyā. This is called Prākṛta Pralaya (Vac. Gaḍh. I.12).

In other words,

Prākṛta Pralaya is that in which all of the entities that had evolved from Prakṛti are assimilated back into Prakṛti (Vac. Amd.2).

This means that in Prākṛta Pralaya, "all of Puruṣa's adjuncts are absorbed" (Vac. Amd.2).

⁴²¹ This relates to the period that one Manu reigns over the world. Fourteen such Manus are said to reign successively during one day of Brahmā.

10.2.4.4) Ātyantika Pralaya

This brings us to the final and universal level of 'end', which can be of two types: subjective and actual. The first is called Jñāna Pralaya, or dissolution by knowledge.

10.2.4.4.1) Jñāna Pralaya

This is a state of individual spiritual understanding whereby Prakṛti-Puruṣa and the entities evolved thereof do not come into view, and one sees only pure consciousness, within which only the form of God resides, but no other forms remain. In other words, all māyic influences are dissolved, as if a complete dissolution (Ātyantika Pralaya) has taken place for that particular individual.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains:

In Ātyantika Pralaya, which is Jñāna Pralaya, everything up to and including Prakṛti is eclipsed by the light of Brahman (Vac. Amd.2).

Elaborating upon this state, he adds in Vac. Gaḍh. I.24:

I shall explain how an elevated spiritual state can be attained by jñāna. Firstly, what is that jñāna like? Well, it transcends Prakṛti-Puruṣa. When an elevated spiritual state is attained by this jñāna, Prakṛti-Puruṣa and the entities evolved from them do not come into view. This is known as Jñāna Pralaya.

Guṇātītānanda Svāmī relates this to the state of being brahmarūpa, where all forms of māyā are transcended. He explains:

What is Jñāna Pralaya? It is to eradicate every single work of Prakṛti from one's heart and become brahmarūpa. Then nothing else remains to be done. This was the very principle of Svāminārāyaṇa (SV 5.195).

What is also clear from this is that during this subjective state of enlightenment, the brahmāṇḍas still remain in existence for everyone else; after all, they are real, not illusory. They simply cease to have an influence on that particular enlightened being.

10.2.4.4.2) Actual Dissolution

Actual, final dissolution occurs when Parabrahman decides.

This is when countless millions of brahmāṇḍas are destroyed. At that time, even Prakṛti-Puruṣa – the cause of Pradhāna-Puruṣas – draws countless brahmāṇḍas within itself, and is then eclipsed by the light of Akṣara-Puruṣa [who in turn is absorbed into Akṣarabrahman]. This, the fourth type of dissolution, is called Ātyantika Pralaya (Vac. Bhūgoḷ-Khagoḷ).

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly describes it in Vac. Kār.7:

During the dissolution of the brahmāṇḍas, the 24 elements which have evolved from Prakṛti are assimilated into Prakṛti. Then Prakṛti-Puruṣa also disappear into the divine light of Akṣarabrahman.

Thus everything, including Mahā-Māyā, “is absorbed into the divine light of Akṣarabrahman – as night merges into day” (Vac. Gaḍh. I.12).

Quite simply, then:

During final dissolution, nothing remains of anything that has evolved from Prakṛti-Puruṣa (Vac. Gaḍh. III.10).

That would mean that everything that transcends māyā continues to exist beyond final dissolution. Svāminārāyaṇa thus explains in Vac. Gaḍh. II.24 that during this ‘end time’, nothing remains except the divine form of Parabrahman in

Akṣaradhāma, Akṣaradhāma itself (i.e. Akṣarabrahman), and the akṣaramuktas (liberated souls) in Akṣaradhāma. This fittingly leads us closer to the *end* of this thesis and the final chapter in this Part, where we expound upon this liberated spiritual state.