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Cosmology in Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2

Nobuo Inoue

In Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2, the dying King Parikṣit is taught by Śuka the yoga technique and the path of release upwards through the universe into the final beatitude. In this paper we will inquire into the cosmology attested in this yoga instruction. This can be an interesting point of view to investigate the place of this text in the history of Indian literature.

1. The general survey of Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2

1. Introduction (II. 1. 1-14)

The merit of praising Bhagavat-Hari is emphasized.

2. The yoga technique (II. 1. 15-2. 14)

This is a theistic yoga system in which Bhagavat is the highest god, and it has many techniques in common with the Yogasūtrabhāṣya.

In II. 1. 15-19 Śuka enumerates all the techniques. After some preparatory techniques, he teaches mental concentration (dhāranā), then meditation (dhyāna), and finally the state called Viṣṇu’s supreme place (parama pada), in which the mind becomes peaceful.

In the next verses, the objects of mental concentration (dhāranā) are explained: In II. 1. 20-2. 1 the object is the whole universe as the body of Bhagavat. In II. 2. 8-14 Bhagavat is further described as puruṣa in the heart, having four arms equipped with a lotus flower, a disc, a conch shell and a club. (In six intervening verses [II. 2.2-2.7] thorough renunciation is recommended.)

3. The ascension of the released to heaven (II. 2. 15-31)
The process of the yogin’s rise to heaven which ends in his attaining to the supreme ātman.

4 Conclusion (II. 2. 32-37)

2. Cosmology in Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2

II. 1. 25-28

There are two groups of verses in Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2 which relate to cosmology. First we will look into II. 1. 25-28, which belong to the teaching of mental concentration (dhāraṇā) on the universe as Bhagavat’s body. The text and translation follow:

āṅḍakoṣe śarire’smin saptāvaraṇasāmyute/ vairājah puruṣo yo’sau bhagavān dhāraṇāśrayah//25// pātālam etasya hi pādamūlaṃ pāṭh-anti pārśniprapade rasātalaman/ mahātalaman viśvasṛjo’tha gulphau talātalaman vai puruṣasya jaṅghe//26// dve jānuni sutalam viśva-mūrter āruḍvayaṃ vitalaṃ cātalam ca/ mahātalaman tajjaghanam mahīpate nabhaśtalaman nābhisaro grṇanti//27// uraṃsthalam jyotir-anikam asya grivā mahar vadanam vai jano’sya/ tapo raraṭiṃ vidur adipūṃsaḥ satyaṃ tu śiśāṃ sahasraśīṃṣaḥ//28// “Bhagavat in this body [that consists] of the [cosmic] basket [in the form] of egg equipped with seven covers, who is that Puruṣa born of virāj, is the support for [mental] concentration (25). They recite that Patala is his very sole and Rasātalama is [his] heel and toe. Then Mahātala is the ankles of the creator of everything, Talātalama is Puruṣa’s shanks (26). Sutala is the two knees of him who has every form, Vitala and Atala are [his] two thighs. The surface of the earth (mahītalama) is his hip, oh lord of the earth (Parikṣit), the atmosphere (nabhaśtalama) is the lake of [his] navel, they praise (27). The [region] with the array of heavenly bodies is the plateau of his breast, Mahar is [his] neck, Janas is his mouth. They know Tapas as the first man’s forehead, while [they know] Satya as the
heads of the thousand-headed (28)."

What can we read from these verses? First of all, the world is regarded as the body of Bhagavat. This reminds us of Bhagavadgītā XI, where Vāsudeva (Bhagavat) shows Arjuna his supreme form. In XI. 13 Sañjaya, the narrator says: tatra-kastham jagat kṛṣṇam pravibhaktam anekadā/ apaśyad devadevasya sarire pāṇḍavas tadā// "Then the son of Paṇḍu (Arjuna) saw the entire world assembled [and yet] divided variously there in the body of the god of the gods (Bhagavat)."

There follow the epithets of Bhagavat: vairāja puṣuṣa "Puruṣa born of virāj (25c)" and sahasraśīrṣan "the thousand-headed (28d)" remind us of Rgveda X. 90, the Puruṣasūkta: sahasraśīrṣā puṣuṣah sahasraśīrṣāh sahasraśīrṣāh "Puruṣa has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet (X. 90. 1ab)"; tāsmād virāj ajāyata virājo ādhi puṣuṣah "From him virāj was born, from virāj Puruṣa (X. 90. 5ab)." Bhagavat, whose body is the universe, is regarded here as equivalent to Puruṣa in the Rgveda. This god was already called Puruṣa in the above-mentioned chapter of the Bhagavadgītā: sanātanas tvam puṣuṣo mato me "You were considered to be eternal Puruṣa by me (XI. 18d)"; tvam ādidevaḥ puṣuṣah purāṇas "You are the first god, the ancient Puruṣa (XI. 38a)." Thus we recognize that the theology in this Purāṇa is the same as that in Bhagavadgītā XI.

Looking into the cosmic structure, we can see the world in the cosmic basket in the form of egg (āṇḍakośa) with seven covers. This apparently presupposes an idea which had been popular since a stage in the development of the Purāṇic theory of cosmology. According to many sources, such as Viṣṇupurāṇa I. 2. 59-60ab; II. 7. 23-25ab, the seven covers, starting from the innermost are Water, Fire, Wind, Ether, the principle of ego (ahāmkāra) which is also the origin of the elements (bhūtādi), the principle of mahat and the unmanifest principle (avyakta).
Then, according to the verses quoted above, the world consists of fourteen layers or regions. From the bottom, the lower seven are Pātāla, Rasātala, Mahātala, Talātala, Sutala, Vitala and Atala. This idea of seven underground regions is common to the Purāṇas and other literature, though the individual names and the order vary a little. The upper seven regions are mahītala "the surface of the earth", nabhaśtala "the atmosphere", jyotiranīka "the [region] with the array of heavenly bodies", Mahar, Janas, Tapas and Satya. These can be regarded as equivalent to Bhūr-, Bhuvar-, Svar-, Mahar-, Janas-, Tapas- and Satyaloka, which appear commonly in the cosmological section of the Purāṇas.

Mahītala "the surface of the earth" corresponds to Bhūrloka as it is defined in Viṣṇupurāṇa II. 7. 168, for example: pādagamyan tu yat kīṃcid vastu asti pṛthivīmayam/ sa bhūrlokaḥ samākhyāto...// "If any thing made of the earth can be attained on foot, it is called Bhūrloka." And nabhaśtala "the atmosphere" indicates Bhuvarloka, which is described as follows: bhūmisūryāntaram yac ca.../ bhuvarlokas tu so 'py ukto...// "And that which is between the earth and the sun, is likewise said to be Bhuvarloka." The author uses the words mahītala and nabhaśtala instead of Bhūr- and Bhuvarloka, obviously in order to rhyme them with Pātāla, Rasātala and so on.

The epithet jyotiranīka "the [region] with the array (anīka) of heavenly bodies (jyotis)" is here to be considered to indicate Svarloka, which is defined for instance in Viṣṇupurāṇa II. 7. 1810: dhruvasūryāntaram yac ca.../ svarlokaḥ so' pi gadito...// "And that which is between the polar star and the sun, is likewise said to be Svarloka." The word is elsewhere attested only in Rgveda VII. 35. 4 as an epithet of Agni, meaning "having the face (anīka) of light (jyotis)." So, here the compound itself is taken from the Rgveda, given a new meaning.

Thus we can attest also in Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2 the
idea of the cosmic egg with seven covers, seven underground regions, and seven upper regions, which are common to other Purāṇas\textsuperscript{13}.

\textbf{2 II. 2. 24-31.} Eight other verses are related to cosmology; namely II. 2. 24-31. They are part of the explanation of the ascent to heaven of a yogin who has abandoned his body.

In verse 24, he is said to go upwards through the path called \textit{sūṣumnā} to \textit{vaśvānara}, then to \textit{ṣaiśumāra cakra}. The former might possibly be an epithet of the sun, while the latter is the dolphin-shaped constellation that has the polar star on its tail\textsuperscript{13}. According to the definition quoted above, they should be included in Svarloka.

The next two verses are as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{tad viśvanābhim tv ativartya viṣṇor anīyasā virajenātmanaikah/ namaskṛtam brahmavidām upaiti kalpāyuṣo yad vibudhā ramante} //25// \textit{atho anantasya mukhānalena dandahyamānaṁ sa nirīkṣya viṣvam/ niryāti siddhēśvarajujñadhiṣṇyam} yad dvāiparārdhyam tad u pārāmeśthyan//26//
\end{quote}

"Then, passing over that navel of everything [viz. the \textit{ṣaiśumāra cakra}] belonging to Viṣṇu, with the [form of] a more subtle self, he approaches alone to the revered [place] of the brahman-knowers, where the wise enjoy themselves, living as long as a \textit{kalpa} (25). And then, observing everything [below] burning by the fire of Ananta’s mouth, he sets out for the beloved place of the lord of Siddhas. [This place] which [lasts] for 2 \textit{parārdhas} belongs to Paramēśthin (26).”

All of this presupposes the Purānic eschatology as follows: The world is partly destroyed at the end of one \textit{kalpa}, which is equal to the daytime of the god Brahmā. An example can be found in \textit{Viṣṇupurāṇa} VI. 3. 11cd-12\textsuperscript{14}:
caturyugasahasram tu kathyate brahmaṇo dinam/11cd// sa kalpaś...
.../ tadante caiva maitreya brāhmaṇo naimittiko layah//12// “1000
caturyugas(5) is called Brahmā’s daytime (11cd). It is a kalpa....
At the very end of it, oh Maitreyā, there is a dissolution
caused by Brahmā (12).”

At the time of the dissolution, the world up to Svarloka is
burned by the fire of the serpent king, Śeṣa (=Ananta)(16). Then
the residents of Bhuvar- and Svarloka take refuge in Maharloka,
and they go up further to Janaloka(17) away from the heat.
Another example is Viṣṇupurāṇa VI. 3. 24–29(18):

tataḥ kālāgnirudro’ sau bhūtvā sarvaharo’nalaḥ/ śeṣāhiśvāsasaṃ-
bhūtaḥ pātālāni dahaty adhah//24// pātālāni samastāni sa dagdhvā
jvalano mahān/ bhūnim abhyetya sakalam babhasti vasudhātalam
//25// bhuvarlokaṁ tatas sarvaṁ svarlokaṁ ca sudārūṇah/ jvālā-
mālaṁmahāvartas tatraiva parivartate//26// aṁbariṣam ivabhāti
trailokyam akhilaṁ tadā/ jvālāvartaparivāram upakśīnacaracaram
//27// tatas tāpaparītās tu lokadvayaṁvāsinah/ kṛtādhiṅkāra gac-
chanti maharlokaṁ mahāmune//28// tasmād api mahātāpapātātā
lokāt tataḥ param/ gacchanti janalokaṁ te daśāvṛttyā paraisīṇah
//29//

“Then having become that Kālāgnirudra, the fire that makes
everything vanish, he (Bhagavat) joins with the breath of the
serpent Śeṣa and burns Pātāla [and the other underground
regions] below (24). Having burned all [underground regions
represented by] Pātāla, the big fire approaches the earth and
devours the entire surface of the earth (25). Then the very
fierce [fire devours] all of Bhuvarloka and Svarloka. The big
whirl of the flame garland revolves there (26). The whole
triple region [consisting of Bhūr-, Bhuvar- and Svarloka] blazes just like a frying pan at that time, surrounded by the
flame whirl, with the mobile and immobile [viz. all living and
non-living beings] exhausted (27). But the residents of
two regions [viz. Bhuvar- and Svarloka], surrounded by the heat, having been grated the privilege go from there to Maharloka, oh great Muni (28). Then, tormented by the great heat, they go even further from that region to Janaloka according to their condition of life, desiring more (29)."

It seems that some people have the privilege of escaping the world fire and going to the upper region twice. In the first of the two regions, the life-span can be one kalpa at most, because it is exhausted at the end of one kalpa. The second region lasts as it is till the final dissolution of the entire universe. (This period is two parārdhas, viz. two halves of the exceedingly long life-span of the god Brahmā19.)

Thus we understand that the doctrine of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa above presupposes the Purānic eschatology, and that the two regions mentioned above correspond to Mahar- and Janaloka.

The remaining verses explain the condition of life in the upperworld (II. 2. 27) and the process of the yogin’s successive access to the various elements, which ends in his arrival at the ultimate spirit (II. 2. 28-31). This process can be considered to be that of his escaping from the cosmic egg and its envelopes; as Śrīdhārasvāmin, the famous commentator of this Purāṇa says: tatra prastutasya bhagavadbhaktasya brahmāṇḍabhedanapraprakāram āha “There he tells how the praised devotee of Bhagavat pierces the Brahma’s egg (Bhāvārthabodhini, II. 2. 28)3." Thus ends the explanation of the yogin’s rise to heaven.

The eschatological description is noteworthy here. The author must have intended to say that this yogin is never affected even by the world fire. The teachings of eschatology in Mokṣadharma 224-22520 and 300 do not refer to the escape from the world destruction. The Purānic theology which demands the room for the escape from the ruin should have caused the above-quoted doctrine. We can attest this very theology in
Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 2. 25-26, but it should be later than the Viṣṇupurāṇa for instance, because it uses the terms such as kalpa and Ananta’s fire without any explanation.

We can trace this idea of escape back into Bhagavadgītā VIII. Bhagavadgītā VIII. 5-15 explains the yoga technique whereby one abandons one’s physical body to attain Bhagavat-Puruṣa (this reminds us of Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1. 15-2. 14). VIII. 16-22 describes the periodic dissolution and rebirth of the universe, the existence in which one never suffers, and the arrival at the supreme by means of devotion (to Bhagavat), as follows:


“The regions up to Brahmā’s abode return [to exist] again [and again], oh Arjuna. But there is no rebirth after approaching me, oh son of Kunti (16). Those people who know the day and night know that what is Brahmā’s day ends with 1000 yugas\textsuperscript{21}, and that [his] night ends with 1000 yugas (17). When [his] day comes, all manifest things come out from the unmanifest. When [his] night comes, they dissolve into the same thing, called the unmanifest (18). This mass of beings comes into existance as such again and again, and dissolves without their own will when [his] night comes, oh son of
Pṛthā. [And] when [his] day comes, it comes out (19). But another unmanifest, eternal existence is superior to that unmanifest thing. And this as such does not perish [even] when all [other] beings are lost (20). [This] is said to be the imperishable unmanifest. They call it the ultimate goal, after attaining which [beings] do not come back. It is my (Bhagavat’s) supreme abode (21). That superior puruṣa [viz. the ultimate goal mentioned above] should be gotten by the devotion having no other [aim than me], oh son of Pṛthā; [all] beings stand in him (puruṣa), this all is extended by him (22)."

This doctrine is somewhat different from the Purānic eschatology seen above, or it is not systematized yet in details, but we can confirm that the devotee of Bhagavat is believed to escape the universal destruction.

Further, the rest of Bhagavadgītā VIII mentions two heavenly paths of the dead to heaven, which are derived from the Upaniṣads22). From these arguments (the yoga technique of the dying man, the eschatological description, and the ascent to heaven), we can suppose that Bhagavadgītā VIII was the prototype of Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2.

3. Conclusion

Inquiring into its cosmology, we may conclude that Bhāgavatapurāṇa II. 1-2 represents the development of the theology of the Bhagavadgītā, adapted to the framework of Purānic cosmography and eschatology.

Notes


3) J. L. Shastri ed, Bhāgavata Purāṇa of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, with Sanskrit Commentary Bhāvārthabhodhini of Śrīdhara Svāmin (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1983).

4) There is another verse based on the Puruṣasūkta:

Bhāgavatapurāṇa II, 1, 37ab: brahmānaṇam kṣatrabhujō mahātmā viḍūrur āghanīṣritakṣṇavarṇaḥ/ “The Brāhmaṇahood is [Bhāgavat’s] mouth, the great-souled [Bhagavat] has the Kṣatriya-hood as his arm, the Vaiśyahood as his thigh, and the black-colored [Śūdras] resting on [his] foot.”

Puruṣasūkta 12: brāhmaṇo’asya mūkham āsīd bāhū rājanyāḥ kṛtāḥ / ērū tad asya yād vaiśyāḥ pādhyām śūdṛō ajāyata // “His [viz. Puruṣa’s] mouth was Brāhmaṇa, arms were made [as the] royal class [viz. Kṣatriya]. It is his thighs that were Vaiśya; from [his] feet the Śūdra was born.”


6) I used The Viṣṇumahāpurāṇam (Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1985). For parallel passages of I. 2. 59–60ab, cf. Kirfel, Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa 1. Abschn. Textgruppe IIA. 1. 27–28ab (p. 10). For those of II. 7. 23–25ab, cf. W. Kirfel, Das Purāṇa vom Weltgebäude (Universität Bonn, 1954) 1. Textgruppe 7. 16–17 right (p. 52). In the latter work Kirfel collected and compared the cosmography section of the Purāṇas, and reconstructed two groups of texts. He considered that that of Viṣṇupurāṇa is the closest to the original cosmography text which was added to and developed into those of the other Purāṇas.

8) Cf. Kirfel, Weltgebäude 1. Textgruppe 7. 12 right (pp. 50-51).


11) So, this can be added to the examples of “archaism” attributed to this Purāṇa. Cf. Rocher, op. cit. p. 146 (with bibliography); A. S. Biswas, Bhāgavata Purāṇa a Linguistic Study, Particularly from the Vedic Background (Dibrugarh, Assam, 1968).


13) Viṣṇupurāṇa II. 9. 1 for example (cf. Kirfel, Weltgebäude 1. Textgruppe 9. 1 [p. 67]):

\[
tārāmayaḥ bhagavataḥ śīṣumārākṣṭi prabhoh / divi rūpam harer yat tu tasya pucche sthito dhruvah//
\]

“What is the form of Hari, the mighty Bhagavat, in heaven is made of stars, with the shape of dolphin. And on its tail the polar star is situated.”


15) A caturyuga is equal to 12,000 divine years. It is also equal to 4,320,000 human years, for a divine year is equal to 360 human years. Viṣṇupurāṇa VI. 3. 10-11ab for example (cf. Kirfel, Eschatologie 3. 10-11ab [p. 22]):

\[
mūsaiv dvādaśabhir varṣam ahorātram tu tad divi / tribhir varṣa-śatair varṣam śaṭtya caivaśuradvīśām//10// tais tu dvādaśasāha-sraiś caturyugam udāhitam /11ab/
\]

“A year is [made up] of 12 months, and it is a day and night in heaven. A year of the enemies of Asuras [viz. the gods] is
[made up] of 360 years (10). With 12,000 of these, a caturyuga is declared (11ab).

16) As for the serpent Śeṣa, see Viṣṇupurāṇa II. 5. 13-14ab (cf. Kirfel, Weltgebäude 1. Textgruppe 5. 13-14ab [pp. 38-39]):

\[\text{pātālānām adhaś cāste viṣṇor yā tāmāsi tanukḥ/ śeṣākhyā.../13/ yo'ṇantaḥ paṭhyate siddhāṃ daivō devaśīρūjitaḥ/14ab/}

"Under Pātāla [and the other underground regions] sits Viṣṇu's dark body named Śeṣa... (13). The divine one who is declared Ananta by the Siddhas, is worshipped by the gods and the Rṣis (14ab)."

17) Jano(<Janas)loka is also called Janaloka. See Kirfel, Weltgebäude 1. Textgruppe 7. 9a (p. 50) for example.


19) Viṣṇupurāṇa I. 3. 26–27ab (cf. Kirfel, Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa 1. Abschn. Textgruppe II A. 2. 20–21ab [p. 14]) for example:

\[\text{eva'lm tu brahmaṇo varśam eva'lm varṣākatam ca yat/ śatam hi tasya varśānām param āyur mahātmānāḥ/26/ ekam asya vyātitan tu parārdham brahmaṇo'nagha/27ab/}

"In the same way, there is a year of Brahmā, and in the same way his 100 years. Because the exceeding[ly long] (para) life-span of that Great-Souled [Brahmā] is 100 years (26). One half of the exceeding[ly long] (parārdha) [life-span] of that Brahmā is passed over, oh sinless one (27ab)."

See further Bhāgavatapurāṇa XII. 4. 5–6:

\[\text{dviparārdhe tv atikrūnte brahmaṇaḥ parameśṭhīnāḥ/ tadā prakṛtya- yāḥ sapta kalpāyante pralāyāya vai/5// eṣa prakṛtiḥo rājan pralayo yatra liyate/ āṇḍakośas tu samghāto vighāta upasādite //6//}

"When both halves of the exceeding[ly long] (2 parārdha) [life-span] of Brahmā–Parameśthin have passed, then seven primary substances become prepared for the dissolution (5). This is the dissolution of the primary substances, oh king, in
which dissolves the close union of the [cosmic] egg, when the destruction [of the universe] is brought about (6).” (As to the word *samghāta*, the union of the primary substances by the first creation of the cosmic egg, cf. Inoue, note 5.)


21) Comparing this with Mahābhārata XII. 224. 12–30, which has a parallel verse (224. 30), we can understand that this “yuga” is equal to the “caturyuga” that is mentioned in note 15.


(Graduate Student)