Introduction

We have discussed the following points in the previous essays

1. Maya is of the nature of the three gunas – sattva, rajas and tamas and it has two powers – āvaraṇa and vikṣepa. Āvaraṇa veils Brahman and paves the way for vikṣepa to project the world of names and forms.

2. Consciousness with the upādhi of māyā is called Iśvara or the Lord and Iśvara is at once the efficient and material cause of the universe, i.e., the abhinna-nimitta-upādana-kāraṇa.

It is important that these concepts are understood thoroughly for these will form the basis of our future discussions. From this essay onwards we shall describe the process of creation according to the vedantic adhyāyopāna. First comes the creation of subtle elements which are called sūksma-bhūtas or more commonly as tanmātras. It is these tanmātras that later on combine with themselves to create

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1 Refer to July 2003 issue of Tapovan Prasad; 2 Refer to September 2003 issue; 3 Refer to August 2003; 4 October 2003; 5 June 2003.
the gross elements which in turn form the gross universe that we perceive. In this essay we shall elaborate on the creation of the subtle elements, the tanmātras.

The Creation

In the enlivening presence of Consciousness, under the influence of the vikṣepa sakti, from māyā which has got a preponderance of tamas the creation starts. In Vedānta Sūtra, Swami Sadananda elaborates on this:

From Consciousness associated with the projecting power of ignorance which has a preponderance of the quality of tamas, has evolved space which in its turn, has produced air, from air has come fire, from fire water and from water earth.6

It is to be noted that Swami Sadananda in the context of creation, which has been quoted above, makes three specific observations

1. Creation happens from māyā which has got a preponderance of tamas.
2. Māyā by itself does not create – it has to have the presence of Consciousness.
3. Creation happens only when māyā is associated with vikṣepa sakti.

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6 These ideas of the prakaraṇa granthas are based on passages from the Upaniṣads like the Taittirīya 2.1.1 – tasmād vā viśvāṃśād itamānāḥ ākāśāḥ saṁbhavāḥ ākāśādvayuh vyojoragnih agnerāpah abhāyāḥ prthivīḥ – from Brahman indeed which is this Self, was produced space. From space emerged air. From air was born fire. From fire was created water. From water sprang up earth. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.2.3,4 speaks only of three elements – fire, water and earth. But these three are considered as representative (upalaksana) of all the five elements and hence there is no contradiction between the Upaniṣads.
Why does he make these three observations? We shall take up each of them for further discussion:

1. The cause is inferred from the effect, for the principle is that the material cause must be essentially the same as its effect. Swami Sadananda rightly asserts that creation proceeds only from māyā which has a preponderance of tāmas, because we see that the created world is predominantly inert. Inertness is an attribute of tāmas. Thus this is a logical inference. Swami Sadananda himself clarifies this point—‘teṣu jādyādikya-darśanāt tamahpradhānyanā tatkāraṇasya — on account of the preponderance of inertia observed in their effects, their cause must have an excess of tāmas’. ‘Preponderance’ means that the tāmas aspect is more than the other two aspects of rajas and sattva.

2. The second observation is about the pivotal role of Consciousness in creation — Māyā by itself cannot create because it is inert and it has no existence apart from Consciousness which owns and possesses it. Just as the strength of a person cannot exist independent of the person to whom it belongs, so too māyā has no existence apart from the Consciousness which is its substratum and owner. Thus enlivened by the Consciousness aspect of Īśvara, māyā creates the world from itself.

3. The third point makes clear the role of vikṣepa sakti in creation. When the āvarana sakti has veiled Brahman, then the vikṣepa sakti gets into action and starts projection. Thus the āvarana sakti is responsible for the veiling and vikṣepa sakti is responsible for the creation. Hence creation is rightly associated with vikṣepa sakti or the projecting power.

This can be mathematically expressed as tāmas>rajas>sattva.

Sāṅkhya and Nyāya are two important schools of ancient Indian Philosophy. The sāṅkhyaists posit that the inert pradhāna (or prakṛti) can independently create without the need of any conscious factor. So too the naiyāyikas postulate that the inert anu (atom) can create by itself. Vedānta refutes both their arguments as fallacious. Matter, be it pradhāna of the sāṅkhyaists or the anu of the naiyāyikas, is inert and without the presence and propelling power of a conscious factor they cannot act. We don’t see inert substances like rice, dal, water and salt getting into the kitchen, entering the bowl, putting the gas on and getting themselves cooked! There is an intelligent factor which does or at least oversees these things, thus ensuring that all these happen rightly.
The Qualities Of The Tanmātras

The principle of creation and specifically pariṇāma\(^9\) (transformation or evolution) is that from the simple and the subtle the complex and gross would evolve and not vice versa. From space the subtlest of all the five elements arises air that is a little grosser compared to space. From air is born fire, the next grosser element and from fire, water and from water comes about the grossest, the earth. Fire is subtler than water and hence we have fire preceding water in the sequence of creation\(^10\). What is subtle and what is gross? Grossness is directly proportional to the number of qualities an element possesses. The fewer the qualities the subtler, and the more the number of qualities, the grosser it is. This principle makes space the subtlest and earth the grossest.

Let us analyse this in detail. Every element has its own special quality that is called \(sva-viśeṣa-guṇa\) (\(sva=\)one's own, \(viśeṣa=\)special, \(guṇa=\)quality). When it evolves from the previous element it carries with it the earlier cause-element's quality also, which is called \(sva-kāraṇa-guṇa\) (\(sva=\)one's own, \(kāraṇa=\)cause, \(guṇa=\)quality). Thus Space has one quality i.e., sound - but Air has the quality of sound, which is its \(sva-kāraṇa-guṇa\) as well as its own newly evolved quality, that is touch, which is its \(sva-viśeṣa-guṇa\). When Fire evolves from Air - it carries the qualities of Space and Air i.e., sound and touch and comes to have its own special quality (\(sva-viśeṣa-guṇa\)) which is form. When Water next evolves from Fire it has the qualities belonging to its 'forefathers' and 'father' i.e., sound, touch, form and then its own quality which is taste. The last and the grossest element Earth evolves from Water and

\(^9\) Maya and the subtle elements are the pariṇāma kāraṇa and Consciousness is the viśvarta kāraṇa of the created universe. That cause, which undergoes a modification during creation, is called as pariṇāma kāraṇa and that cause which does not undergo any modification (like the rope in the case of the apparent creation of the snake) during creation is called as viśvarta kāraṇa. Please note that the consciousness aspect of Isvara is not only the nimitta-kāraṇa but also is the adhiśṭhāna or substratum of the whole creation. This point is not be forgotten while studying about the creation.

\(^10\) Refer to Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji's commentary on the Taittiriya Upaṇiṣads 2.1.1 for further explanation about the sequence of creation.
has totally five qualities – four qualities as *sva-kāraṇa-guṇa* from the earlier cause-elements, which will be sound, touch, form, taste and one more which is its own special quality (*sva-viśeṣa-guṇa*) that is smell.

Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth are called ākāśa, vāyu, agni, āpah and prthivi respectively in Sanskrit. Also in Sanskrit, sound is *sabda*, touch is *sparṣa*, form is *rūpa*, taste is *rasa*, and smell is *gandha*. Please remember these Sanskrit words as you go through the tabular column which will give you a birds eye view of the various qualities of the elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tanmātra</th>
<th>Sva-kāraṇa-guṇa</th>
<th>Sva-viśeṣa-guṇa</th>
<th>Total Number of qualities = (<em>sva-kāraṇa-guṇa + sva-viśeṣa-guṇa</em>)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ākāśa</td>
<td><em>sabda</em></td>
<td><em>sabda</em></td>
<td><em>sabda = 1</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vāyu</td>
<td><em>sabda</em> + <em>sparṣa</em></td>
<td><em>sparṣa</em></td>
<td><em>sabda + sparṣa = 2</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agni</td>
<td><em>sabda</em> + <em>sparṣa</em> + <em>rūpa</em></td>
<td><em>rūpa</em></td>
<td><em>sabda + sparṣa + rūpa = 3</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>āpah</td>
<td><em>sabda</em> + <em>sparṣa</em> + <em>rūpa</em></td>
<td><em>rasa</em></td>
<td><em>sabda + sparṣa + rūpa + rasa = 4</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prthivi</td>
<td><em>sabda</em> + <em>sparṣa</em> + <em>rūpa</em> + <em>rasa</em></td>
<td><em>gandha</em></td>
<td><em>sabda + sparṣa + rūpa + rasa + gandha = 5</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that we are now only talking about the subtle elements. It is these subtle elements that later on combine through the process of *pañcakaraṇa* (which will be elaborated in the later essays) to become the gross elements and by further combination become the gross world that we perceive.

### Further Description of the Qualities

In certain texts we have elaborations of the inherent or *svābhāvika* qualities – the sound, touch, form, taste and smell of these five elements. They are enumerated below. Please note that for each tanmātra there will be *sva-kāraṇa-guṇa* and *sva-viśeṣa-guṇa* except for the first one space which has only its *sva-viśeṣa-guṇa*. Every

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1 Space does not have an element as its cause. It is directly born from *māya-upahita-caitanya* – Consciousness conditioned by *māya*. 

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tanmātra has only one sva- viśeṣa-guṇa but many sva-kāraṇa-guṇas proportional to the number of elements which precede it.

1. Ākāśa or Space:
   śabda: the sound of pratidhvani (reverberation)

2. Vāyu or Air:
   śabda: the sound of sss sss
   sparśa: the feel which is different from that of heat, cold and grossness

3. Agni or Fire:
   śabda: the sound of buk buk
   sparśa: the feel of heat
   rūpa: the visual effulgence

4. Āpaḥ or Water
   śabda: the sound of sil sil
   sparśa: the feel of coolness
   rūpa: the colour of white
   rasa: the taste of sweetness.

Other tastes like bitterness, saltiness and sugariness are due the mixture of Earth element with Water.

5. Prthivi or Earth
   śabda: the sound of kata kata
   sparśa: the feel of grossness which is different from that of heat, cold and so on
   rūpa: the colours of white, black, yellow, red, green etc.
   rasa: the taste of pungency, sourness, sweetness, saltiness, bitterness and astringency
   gandha: both good and bad odour

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12 katu, amla, madhura, ślaṇa, tikta and kasāya are the satrasas or the six tastes.
13 There may be a doubt as to whether these descriptions are mere speculations or whether they have a Vedic basis. These descriptions are more like inferences based on the perceived world and their qualities. Though the perceived world is gross, made up of the gross elements, the nature of the subtle elements can be inferred from its effects.
The Various Names of the Subtle Elements

These subtle elements are called variously

1. **Tanmātra**: This word literally means ‘that alone’ – *Tat-mātra*. In the case of the subtle elements there is no mixture of the other elements. True it carries the quality of the element from which it is born (*sva-kāraṇa-guṇas*), but, it is not compounded with other elements unlike the gross elements which have within them after *pañcikaraṇa*, a proportion of all the elements.¹⁴

2. **Apāṅcikṛta-bhūta**: The subtle elements are also called *apāṅcikṛta-bhūta* or the elements which have not undergone the process of *pañcikaraṇa*.

3. **Triguṇa-bhūta**: Called so because they are made of the three guṇas – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. As mentioned earlier the subtle elements arise from *māyā* which has a predominance of *tamas* and a lower proportion of *rajas* and *sattva* and thus all elements have aspects of all the three guṇas in them.

4. **sūkṣma-bhūta**: Subtle element as compared to the *sthūla-bhūtas* or gross elements which arise after the process of *pañcikaraṇa*.

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¹⁴ *Pañcikaraṇa* will be discussed in the future essays.

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Seek Him in the smile of your friends, in the glow of angry eyes, in the throb of love, in the storms of passion. Everywhere it is His glow that is gleaming through different emotions, thoughts and actions. Seek Him in the thrill of the dawn, in the sadness of the dusk, in the embrace of rains, in the hustling storms, in the murmuring breeze – in green pastures, in the blue lotus, in the *sangam* of the graceful Ganges and the restless Jamuna. He is everywhere – in everything – not with mortal legs and hands – but in His presence is the Divine Joy Infinite. You are in Him – you are but He alone.

— Swami Chinmayananda
Conclusion

Thus in this essay we have discussed the following points:

- *Tanmātras* evolve from *māyā* endowed with *vikṣepa śakti* which has a preponderance of *tamas*.

- From *māyā* is born the *tanmātra* space, from space arises air, from air is created fire, from fire is born water and from water arises earth.

- Each of the elements have their own *sva-voiśeśa-guṇa* in addition to their *sva-kāraṇa-guṇa*. *Sva-voiśeśa-guṇa* will always be one but *sva-kāraṇa-guṇa* will be proportionate to the number of elements which precede that particular element.

- These subtle elements are called variously as *tanmātra*, *apaṇcikṛta-bhūta*, *triguṇa-bhūta* and *sūkṣma-bhūta*.

- It is these *tanmātras* which undergo the process of *pañcikaraṇa* to become the gross elements.

In the next essay we shall elaborate on the subtle-body which is the creation of the *tanmātras*.

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A student of Vedanta must be vigilant enough to detect his own intellectual doubts and he must be ever ready to enter into a sympathetic intellectual wrestling with his teacher, within the rings of devotion and respect, reverence and admiration. By raising doubts to the teacher we are opening up the cistern of knowledge locked up in the Master's bosom. A perfect Guru, from the questions, immediately detects the false line of thinking in the student and, while removing the very doubt, the teacher imperceptibly orders and re-organises the right way of thinking in the inner thought of the student. When this intellectual wrestling has been practised for a long time, the fragrance for perfection in the teacher as it were gets transferred to the student's life.

— Swami Chinmayananda

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