Introduction

We have covered the topics of kāraṇa and sūkṣma sṛṣṭi quite elaborately. We now enter into the sthūla-sṛṣṭi, which is the creation (sṛṣṭi) of the gross world (sthūla). The gross world, which is perceived by our senses is created from the tamaṣ aspect of the five tanmātras which are space (ākāśa), air (vāyu), fire (agni), water (āpah) and earth (prthīvī). But why does Vedānta emphasise that the gross world has to be born from the tamaṣ aspect? This is because the gross world that we perceive is inert (jaḍa) and since inertness is indicative of tamaṣ, the gross world is inferred as created from the tamaṣ aspect of the tanmātras.

The gross world cannot be directly created from the tanmātras for they are subtle in nature. If the subtle world can only be created from the subtle, the gross world too has to be created only from the gross elements. The tamaṣic aspect of the sūkṣma tanmātras (subtle elements) undergoes the process of pāṇḍćikarana by which they become sthūla-bhūtas or gross elements. It is these sthūlabhūtas that combine with each other to produce the gross world that we perceive.

Tanmātras and Sthūlabhūtas

When the five elements — space (ākāśa), air (vāyu), fire (agni), water (āpah) and earth (prthīvī) — exist in their pure natural states they are called tanmātras – tad mātram (that alone). But during the process of pāṇḍćikaraṇa they lose their pure natural states by mutually combining and thus coming to possess aspects of the other

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1 Refer to the essays from July 2003 to February 2004.
2 The sattva aspect of the tanmātras produces the jñānendriyas and anatākaraṇa and the rajas aspect of the tanmātras produces the karmendriyas and pāṇḍćaprāṇas. This is just to recapitulate the ideas already dealt with in the previous essays.
elements also. To explain — the tanmātra ākāśa (space) contains only space but after pañcikaraṇa, the sthūla-ākāśa will not only have space but the other four elements also, i.e., air, fire, water and earth. So too sthūla-vāyu (gross air), sthūla-agni (gross fire), sthūla-āpāḥ (gross water) and sthūla-prthivī (gross earth) will all have aspects of the other elements.

As tanmātras, space (ākāśa), air (vāyu), fire (agni), water (āpāḥ) and earth (prthivī) are all subtle, unavailable for sensory perception, but after pañcikaraṇa they become gross and are available for sensory perception. Yad indriyaih upalabhyate tat sthūlam — that which is perceived by the senses is gross.

Before pañcikaraṇa the five elements are called apañcikrīta-pañcabadhūta (the five elements which have not undergone pañcikaraṇa) and after pañcikaraṇa they are called pañcikrīta-pañcamaḥ-badhūta (the five great elements which have undergone pañcikaraṇa). It is to be noted that in Vedantic terminology the term pañcabhūtas normally refers to the tanmātras that have not undergone the process of pañcikaraṇa and the term pañcamaḥ-badhūta normally refers to the tanmātras after they have undergone the process of pañcikaraṇa.

It is pañcikaraṇa which transforms the whole scenario of creation by changing the subtle into gross. Thus pañcikaraṇa is an important stage in the evolution of matter. One can very well broadly divide creation into ‘before pañcikaraṇa’ and ‘after pañcikaraṇa’.

Pañcikaraṇa

The word ‘pañcī-karaṇa’ literally means ‘creating (karaṇa) fives (pañcī)’. It is a process of five-fold division and mutual combination by which the five pañcamaḥ-badhūtas are created. This has been elaborately described in many prakaraṇa-granthas (introductory texts). It is fascinating to see Sri Swami Vidyaranya giving

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3 The only exception being sthūla ākāśa which because of its inherent predominant space aspect remains unperceived by the senses. In Vedaṭṭa space and time are sākṣi bhāṣya i.e. they are revealed by the witness self and are not perceived by the senses (pratyakṣa) or inferred (anumāna) by the mind. Sthūla vāyu, though not perceived by the eye, is perceived by the tvak (skin).
By dividing each *tanmātra* into two equal parts and subdividing the first half of each element into four equal parts, and then adding to the other half of each element one sub-division of each of the remaining four, each element becomes five in one.

The above verse may be very terse to understand. Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda has developed a graphic diagram to explain the *pañcikaraṇa*. Refer to the diagram below as you go through the stages mentioned in the next page:

### The Process of Five-Fold Self-Division and Mutual Combination  
**PANCHEEKARANA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Space 1</th>
<th>Air 2</th>
<th>Fire 3</th>
<th>Water 4</th>
<th>Earth 5</th>
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- **Description**
  - (i): Tanmatras; each in itself
  - (ii): Tendency to divide into two equal parts.
  - (iii): The split complete.
  - (iv): One half remaining intact, the others split into 4.
  - (v): Each half married with 4-bits borrowed from all the others.

Sky = $\frac{1}{2}S + \frac{1}{8}A + \frac{1}{8}F + \frac{1}{8}W + \frac{1}{8}E$.
Air = $\frac{1}{2}A + \frac{1}{8}S + \frac{1}{8}F + \frac{1}{8}W + \frac{1}{8}E$.
Fire = $\frac{1}{2}F + \frac{1}{8}S + \frac{1}{8}A + \frac{1}{8}W + \frac{1}{8}E$.
Water = $\frac{1}{8}W + \frac{1}{8}S + \frac{1}{8}A + \frac{1}{8}F + \frac{1}{8}E$.
Earth = $\frac{1}{2}E + \frac{1}{8}S + \frac{1}{8}A + \frac{1}{8}F + \frac{1}{8}W$.  

March 2004
Stage (i) : Tanmātras remain in their own individual pure state.

Stage (ii) : Each tanmātra of all the five elements shows a tendency to split into two equal halves.

Stage (iii) : They split into two halves.

Stage (iv) : At this stage half-tanmātra of each element remains intact and the other half divides itself into four equal bits – each bit would be one eighth of the whole tanmātra. Thus at this stage each tanmātra has split into five segments:
   a) one-half bit and b) four one-eighth bits.

Stage (v) : In this last stage, each half remains the same and it combines with the four one-eighth bits borrowed from all the other four elements.

The Individual Designation

After the completion of the pañcīkaraṇa, if every sthūlabhūta (gross element) has aspects of other elements, why at all call them by individual names? In other words, if ākāśa has aspects of vāyu, agni, āpah and prthiṅi, then why call it ākāśa? The answer is provided by Sri Veda Vyasa in the Brahma Sūtra (II.iv.22)—“vaiśeṣyāttu tadvādastadvādah—but owing to the preponderance (of any one), occurs the corresponding designation”. Thus even though all the five elements are included in each element, there is a preponderance of a particular element in each one of the sthūlabhūtas (gross elements). Depending upon the preponderance the designation is given. Thus in ākāśa even though there are aspects of the other four elements vāyu, agni, āpah and prthiṅi they are all only one-eighth while ākāśa per se is one-half. That becomes the reason for that particular element to be designated as ākāśa. This applies to the other sthūlabhūtas also.

The Pramāṇa for Pañcīkaraṇa

None of the Upanishads has even mentioned pañcīkaraṇa. And

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4 The explanation and chart are taken from Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayanandaji's commentary on Sri Sankara's Atma-bodha, Verse 12, CCMT Publications.

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hence there is a grave misgiving whether the concept of *pañcikaraṇa* is just a speculation which does not derive its authority from the *Vedas*. This objection will not stand valid for a student of *Vedānta* who has grasped the overall picture provided by the *Upaniṣads*. The concept of *pañcikaraṇa* has evolved from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which speaks of the *trivṛtkaṇaṇa* (triplication) and the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and others which make clear mention of elements being five. To understand this we need to see in a little more detail what the *trivṛtkaṇaṇa* is.

The *tāṇḍmātras* mentioned in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, chapter VI, are only three: *agni* (fire), *āpah* (water) and *prthivī* (earth). There is no mention of the other two *tāṇḍmātras* – *ākāsa* and *vāyu*, in this chapter dealing with creation. With these three elements the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (VI.iii.3,4) propounds the *trivṛtkaṇaṇa* (triplication) process. The three *tāṇḍmātras* (stage I) – *agni* (fire), *āpah* (water) and *prthivī* (earth) – are first divided into two parts (stage II). One half is retained intact while the other half is divided into two parts (stage III). One-fourth part of each element is united with the half of the other two elements (stage IV). In this

![Diagram of the trivṛtkaṇaṇa process](image)
way, by combination with the other elements the tanmātras be-
come sthūlabhūtas (stage V) ⁵.

On the other hand, many Upaniṣhads, the Taṭṭṭitiṛya Upaniṣhad
(II.1) for example, speak of all the five tanmātras but do not men-
tion any process of division and combination among the elements.
Vedānta acharyas have combined both these and evolved the
paṅcikaraṇa. From the Taṭṭṭitiṛya Upaniṣhad and other Upaniṣhads
which speak of the five elements, they have arrived at the number
of elements being five and from the Chāndogya Upaniṣhad they
have discovered the principle of division and mutual combina-
tion. The triṁśkaraṇa when applied at the level of the five ele-
ments naturally becomes paṅcikaraṇa and hence there is no ques-
tion of paṅcikaraṇa not having a vedic basis. Thus the objection
that paṅcikaraṇa is aprāmāṇya (not based on the Vedas) does not
hold the scrutiny of reason. Sri Swami Sadananda in Vedānta
Sāra clarifies this succinctly:

अस्य अप्रामाण्यं न आशाङ्गनीयं विवृतकरणशुते: पञ्चीकरणस्य अपि उपलक्षणवात्।
Asya aprāmāṇyaṁ na āśaṅkanīyam triṝrṭkaraṇaśruteḥ paṇcikaraṇasya
apī upalakṣaṇatvāt.

The authoritativeness of this method of compounding should
not be questioned, for the triple combination described in the Śruti
indirectly refers to this paṇcikaraṇa⁶.

Conclusion

These sthūlabhūtas (gross elements) that have been created from
the process of paṇcikaraṇa create the four types of sthūla śarīras
(gross-bodies) and the fourteen lokas which form the sthūla-prapaṇca
(gross-world). This shall be the topic for the next essay.

- This pictorial representation has been taken from ‘Taṭ Taṃ Asi – notes on Chāndogya
Upaniṣhad’ by Swamini Vimalananda, CCMT Publications.

- One may still have some doubts lingering – why does not the Chāndogya Upaniṣhad
mention the two elements akāśa and vāyu and why does the Taṭṭṭitiṛya Upaniṣhad not
speak about the five-fold division and mutual combination? These do not form the
main topic of our discussion and hence to avoid digression, these topics are not
discussed here.

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