



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## THE CONCEPT OF PRALAYA IN THE VISNU PURANA

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### Abstract

Pralaya or dissolution is co-related with the theory of creation. When there is a creation there must be dissolution. Pralaya simply means the destruction of the three lokas. There are four types of pralayas i.e the Naimittika, Prakritika, Atyantika and Nitya which is described very clearly in the Visnu Purana.

Keyword : Pralaya, Visnu Purana, Naimittika, Prakritika, Atyantika and Nitya

The concept of *Pralaya* or dissolution is intimately related with the concept of creation. It is believed that the process of creation is beginning-less and the chain of creation and dissolution continues without break. After each creation, there is dissolution and after dissolution there is again new creation. The *Visnu Purana* regards Visnu not only as the creator, but He is the destroyer of the universe also. That is why in the *Visnu Purana* we find the description of *Pralaya* also.

*Pralaya* means the destruction of three *lokas*.<sup>1</sup> In the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the first book of the *Visnu Purana* *pralaya* is described as of four kinds. These are: *Naimittika* (occasional), *Prakritika* (elemental), *Atyantika* (absolute) and *Nitya* (perpetual).<sup>2</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup> book again three types of *pralaya* are described, the perpetual dissolution is left out there.<sup>3</sup>

### *Naimittika Pralaya:*

This *Pralaya* is also termed as the *Brahma Pralaya*. This *Pralaya* occurs when Brahma, the lord of the world reclines in sleep.<sup>4</sup> It occurs at the end of a *kalpa* or at the end of a day of Brahma's life.<sup>5</sup> The *Visnu Purana* also describes the span of time of Brahma's day. Thus, it is said that one year of man makes one day and night of the gods. Three hundred and sixty such days constitute a year of gods. An aggregate of four ages of men contains twelve thousand divine years. A period of four thousand ages is called a day of Brahma. This period is also called a *kalpa*.<sup>6</sup> After a *kalpa* *Naimittika pralaya* occurs. As a *kalpa* constitutes a day of Brahma so his night is also of the same duration. During this period a vast ocean submerges the world and God sleeps upon the ocean in the form of Brahma. When the Universal spirit sleeps, all the creatures are destroyed. This dissolution is termed incidental because Hari, in the form of Brahma sleeps there as its incidental cause.<sup>7</sup> It is also indicated in the *Visnu Purana* that this dissolution occurs only in the three *lokas*, i.e., *Bhu*, *Bhuva* and *Sva*.<sup>8</sup>

The *Visnu Purana* also gives a very fearful description of this dissolution. It is said that Visnu, the destroyer of all things in the form of Rudra at first reduces the *patala* into ashes. Then that great fire consumes the earth (*Bhu*), the atmosphere (*Bhuva*) and the sphere of the gods (*Svar*). Then Janardana in the person of Rudra having consumed the whole world breathes forth heavy clouds. These clouds at first quench the dreadful fire by showering down torrents of water. These rains then inundate the three worlds, which look like a great ocean.<sup>9</sup>

**Prakrtika Pralaya:**

This *Pralaya* occurs when the whole *Brahmanda* dissolves in *Prakrti*. At that time all the things of the world return to their causes. This dissolution takes place in the opposite order of their creation. Thus, the seven forms of *Prakrti* from *Mahat* to earth enter successively into their causes. The Egg of Brahma is dissolved in the waters that surround it with its seven *lokas*, seven oceans, seven islands and the mountains. Water is drunk up by fire; that of air absorbs the stratum of fire. Air is merged in ether and *Bhutadi* or *Ahamkara* devours the ether. *Mahat* again takes up *Ahamkara*. Then *Prakrti* absorbs *Mahat* and all these. *Prakrti* and *Purusa* also are dissolved into the Supreme Spirit. This is *Prakrta Pralaya*.<sup>10</sup>

**Atyantika Pralaya :**

Absolute or final dissolution is attained by the knowledge of the Supreme.<sup>11</sup> It is said that all beings are afflicted by three kinds of worldly pains, viz., *adhyatmika*, *adhibhautika* and *adhidaivika*. The *Visnu Purana* also describes these three types of pains. *Adhyatmika* is of two types bodily and mental. That kind of evil, which is inflicted upon men by beasts, birds etc. are called *Adhyatmika*. *Adhidaivika* pain is the work of cold, heat, wind, rain, lightning and other atmospherical phenomena. These three types of afflictions are described in the Samkhya system also in the similar vein.<sup>12</sup>

Only true knowledge can rescue men from these three kinds of affliction. When a man attains true, knowledge and detachment from human afflictions, he obtains final dissolution. In this dissolution the yogis are merged in the Supreme Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

**Nitya Pralaya :**

The *Visnu Purana* describes this *Pralaya* in one line only. It is said that *Nitya* or perpetual dissolution is the constant disappearance of all living beings. However, it is not clear what actually the *Visnu Purana* means by this. This fourth kind of dissolution is not included in the 6<sup>th</sup> Book where other *pralayas* are elaborately discussed. According to Wilson, this means the death of the living beings, which occurs constantly. Vans Kennedy, whom Wilson refers to, maintains that “*Nitya* is the extinction of life, like the extinction of a lamp, in sleep at night”<sup>14</sup> But there is no proof in our Purana to explain this *Pralaya* as the sound sleep or deep slumber of a man. Actually the *Vedanta Paribhasa* of Dharmarajadhvarindra describes *Nitya Pralaya* as *Susupti* or deep sleep

**References :**

1. Naimittika, Prakritika, Atyantika and Nitya
2. naimittikah prakrtikastathaivatyantiko dvijah / nityasca sarvabhutanam pralayo'yam caturvidhah // VP, 1.7.38
3. sarvesameba bhutanam trividhah pratisancaraha / naimittikah prakrtikastathaivatyantiko matah // Ibid, 6.3.1
4. .. brahmo naimittikastatra yacchete jagatah patih // Ibid, 1.7.39 (a)
5. brahmo naimittikastesam kalpante pratisancaraha / Ibid, 6.3.2
6. Ibid, 6.3.10-12
7. ekarnave tatastasmin sesasayyasthitah prabhuh / brahmarupadharah sete bhagavanadikrddharah // Ibid, 6.4.4
8. ekarnavam bhavatyeva trailokyamakhilam tatah // Ibid, 6.4.1
9. Vide, Ibid, 6.3.14-39
10. Ibid, 6.4.32-33.
11. jnanadatyantikah prokto yoginah paramatmani / Ibid, 1.7.40 (a)
12. Ibid, 6.5.1-9; SK, 2
13. Supra, P.
14. *The Vishnu Purana*, H.H. Wilson, P.49