



## The Origin of Earth in Purāṇic Scripture

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**Abstract** – In the context of India, the Purāṇic literature provides a complex and symbolic understanding of the birth of the planet, not as a mere physical or geological occurrence but as a divine, cyclical, and cosmic process. Modern scientific explanations of the origin of the universe are evolutionary and cosmological; the Purāṇas include metaphysical, mythological and spiritual interpretations of cosmogenesis. The creation of the earth, or pṛthivī, is regarded as an expression of divine will (īcchā-śakti) intimately linked with the larger doctrines of sṛṣṭi (creation), sthiti (sustenance), and pralaya (dissolution), as described in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, and others.

The universe is not linear but cyclical, according to the Purāṇas, which speak of many cycles of creation and disintegration (kalpa and manvantara). The genesis of the earth is explained in terms of divine acts such as the churning of the cosmic waters, the appearance of the cosmic egg (brahmāṇḍa) and the saving action of Lord Varāha, the boar avatar of Viṣṇu who lifts the earth out of the primaeval seas. The image of Bhū-devī (Mother Earth) is evoked again and again, underscoring the holy, nurturing and feminine nature of the earth.

Sanskrit lines such as “ādau sṛṣṭiḥ kṛtā tena jagataḥ sthāpanāya vai” emphasise the link between divine intent and the material manifestation of the earth. The Purāṇas picture the earth as the basis of dharma and spiritual progress, therefore making its creation purposeful and sacred. The earth of the Purāṇas is not simply physical topography. It is a sentient being, pṛthivī-mātā, worshipped as supporting life and being divine.

This article considers the different Purāṇic stories of the genesis of the earth, including symbolic motifs such as primordial waters, the golden egg (hiraṇyagarbha), and divine intervention. It also considers the philosophical bases of these myths, their allegorical meaning and their importance in today’s ecological discourse. Based on original Purāṇic texts and scholarly interpretations, the study underscores the interrelation of myth, cosmology, and devotion in the Purāṇic vision.

In the end, the Puranic story of the origin of the earth emphasises interconnectivity, sacredness, and cyclical rebirth. It is not the same as modern secular beliefs, but it adds to them by giving them a spiritual depth and symbolic meaning. Purāṇic cosmology is not a primaeval myth, this article contends, but rather a refined cultural model, by means of which ancient Indian intellectuals imagined the world and the position of humans within it. This perspective is still highly important to modern debates on environmental ethics, sustainability, and the sacredness of the land.

**Keywords:** Purāṇas, Pṛthivī, Origin of Earth, Sṛṣṭi, Pralaya, Hiraṇyagarbha, Varāha Avatāra, Cosmology, Bhū-devī, Kalpa.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The inquiry into the genesis of the Earth has captivated humans since antiquity. Various civilisations generated cosmological myths, theological interpretations, and philosophical contemplations regarding



the origin of the cosmos and the Earth. In the Indian setting, the Purāṇas constitute a principal body of literature that offers detailed narratives of creation (sṛṣṭi) and dissolution (pralaya). These narratives are not scientific in the contemporary sense but are articulated symbolically, spiritually, and mythopoeically. The Purāṇas are characterised as comprehensive books that amalgamate mythology, cosmology, philosophy, ritual practices, and ethical doctrines. Their notable contributions include a realistic depiction of the earth's genesis and its function in supporting life and dharma. In the Purāṇic perspective, the earth is not a lifeless planet but Bhū-devī, the heavenly mother who sustains all beings. This study analyses the Purāṇic narratives of the genesis of the earth, focusing particularly on the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, and Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. The essay examines the symbolic and philosophical implications of these myths within the wider framework of Hindu cosmology and environmental philosophy.

## 2. COSMOLOGY IN THE PURĀṆAS

The Purāṇas describe a cyclic perspective of time and creation. Creation isn't a solitary event of starting. It is an infinite series of cycles (each of which lasts a kalpa, or a day of Brahmā, which is equal to 4.32 billion human years). In each cycle, the earth is produced, maintained, and eventually disintegrated, only to re-emerge in the following cycle. The hiraṇyagarbha, or golden cosmic egg, is one of the most important cosmological themes of the Purāṇas. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa it is said that in the beginning all was contained unmanifest in the cosmic waters. The golden egg came from these waters, and out of it was born Brahmā, the creator god.

**"Hiraṇyagarbhaḥ samabhavat agre, bhūtasya jātaḥ patir eka āsīt."**

**Rgveda–Rgveda–10.121.1, later echoed in the Purāṇas**

From Brahmā, the creation proceeds, and then the earth, heavens and netherworld are formed. The earth itself is conceived as flat and held up by cosmic elements and gods, frequently represented by the cosmic boar Varāha raising it out of rivers.

## 3. THE VARĀHA AVATĀRA AND THE LIFTING OF THE EARTH

One of the most important Purāṇic stories about the birth of earth is the myth of the Varāha incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Canto 3) tells that when the demon Hiraṇyākṣa pulled the earth into the depths of the cosmic ocean, Viṣṇu took the shape of a huge boar and saved her.

**"daityenākrāntā jaladhau vasudhā dharṇī  
uddhṛtya varāhenadhṛtā svadantayoḥ"**

Bhāgavata Purāṇa 3.13.30

Here the land is not only rescued but also restored to hallowed status, signifying the triumph of dharma over adharma. The myth stresses the protective role of the divine in preserving creation and the fundamental interconnection of the cosmic order.

## 4. SYMBOLISM OF EARTH IN PURĀṆIC THOUGHT



A lot of the Purāṇas personify the earth as Bhū-devī, the celestial mother. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa she is described as a goddess, the consort of Viṣṇu, embodying patience, fertility and nurturing virtues. Not only does her origin mean tangible creation, but also the birth of a moral and spiritual world.

**"Mātā bhūmiḥ putro'ham pṛthivyāḥ."**

(Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva 68.35)

This verse emphasises the filial tie of human beings to earth and the holy duty of ecological responsibility.

## 5. ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Modern scholars regard these myths as metaphorical, not literal. The golden egg represents the potentiality of creation; the cosmic seas reflect the unmanifest state; the deed of Varāha depicts divine intervention restoring balance. The myths encode metaphysical truths about existence, the divine will, and the sacredness of nature.

Thus, the Varāha tale, for example, might be interpreted as a metaphor of regeneration, where chaos (ocean) is defeated by divine order (Viṣṇu), and the earth can arise as the basis of life and dharma. • Comparative Accounts in Puranas Different Purāṇas describe the genesis of the earth with different specifics. • The Matsya Purāṇa stresses dissolution and recreation of the cosmos after every cycle. • The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa talks about the function of the primaeval waters and the creation of Brahmā. In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, dedication (bhakti) is embedded in cosmology, with Viṣṇu being the source and support of the world.

This multiplicity is a measure of the richness of the Purāṇic imagination, in which cosmology, religion and mythology are woven together.

## 6. PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Philosophically, the Purāṇic origin of the earth reflects key concepts of Hindu thought:

- Cyclicity of Time (kālacakra) – The processes of creation and annihilation are eternal.
- Unity of Existence – Earth is part of a cosmic totality subject to divine will.
- Sacrality of Nature – Earth is sacred, not only material.

These beliefs are in line with the ecological worldview that focuses on sustainability and respect for nature.

## 7. RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

The Puranic view of the planet as sacred and alive might contribute a lot in the present situation of ecological crises. The tale of Varaha pulling the earth from chaos can be viewed as a call to humanity to protect and save the planet from catastrophe. Reverence for pṛthivī-mātā can create a spiritual ecological ethic.

## 8. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars like Stella Kramrisch (The Presence of Śiva), Cornelia Dimmitt (Classical Hindu Mythology), and R.C. Hazra (Studies in the Purāṇic Records) have studied Purāṇic cosmology extensively. Their works



highlight the symbolic depth of creation myths and their role in shaping Hindu religious imagination. Modern ecological interpreters, such as Pavan Varma and Kapila Vatsyayan, emphasise the environmental ethics embedded in these myths.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The Puranic account of the origin of the earth is not a primitive tale but an elaborate cosmic vision. It combines theology, philosophy and devotion into a coherent narrative which affirms the holiness of the environment. The stories of Varāha, Hiranyagarbha and cosmic rivers indicate a worldview where creation is divine, cyclical and intentional.

In the present age of environmental devastation, returning to these Purāṇic stories reminds us of our obligation towards the world. The Purāṇas instruct that the earth is a mother, not only a resource, and ought to be revered and protected.

## Citation & Footnotes

1. Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Book I, Chapter 5.
2. Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Canto 3, Chapter 13.
3. Matsya Purāṇa, Chapter 2.
4. Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Chapter 45.
5. Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana Parva.

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