

regions is of different hue like white, black, red and yellow. It is filled with rubbles, black granite and gold. Once Nārada on his return to Svarga from Pātāla said that Pātāla was more beautiful than Svarga. The ornaments worn by nāgas are profusely studded with shining diamonds. Daytime is lighted by the Sun and the night by the Moon. There is neither heat nor cold there and the happy nāgas living contentedly do not feel the passage of time.

Under the Pātāla is Ādiśeṣa, a tāmasic form of Mahāviṣṇu, known to the Siddhas as Ananta. He has a thousand heads and Svastika as his badge. Holding in one hand a plough and in the other a wooden pestle he sits worshipped by Śrīdevī and Vāruṇidevī. At the time of the end of the world the Saṅkarṣaṇamūrti, Rudra, is born from the face of Ādiśeṣa shining brightly like poisonous fire and it consumes all the three worlds. Ādiśeṣa worshipped by all gods bears this earth on his head like a crown and sits in Pātāla. When Ananta yawns this world begins to quake along with its oceans, rivers and forests. Nobody has seen an end of his qualities and that is why he is known as Ananta (no end). It was by worshipping this Ananta that the ancient sage Garga learned the truth about the results of Nimittaśāstra (predictions by omens) a division of Jyotiṣaśāstra.

The distinguishing characteristics of each of the seven divisions of Pātāla are given below :—

1) *Atala*. The first region of Pātāla. Here lives Bala, the celebrated son of Maya. He has created ninety-six kinds of magical arts capable of giving everything one desires. Those interested in magic are even now using some of these. When Bala yawns three kinds of women will come out of his mouth. Puṁścalīs (harlots), Svairiṇīs (adulteresses) and Kāminīs (lustful maidens). These women have a charm called Hāṭaka to tempt all who enter Atala. This hāṭaka is a rasāyana which will excite sexual passion in men so that the women can enjoy a sexual life with them for a prolonged period. These women after enticing the men would live with them enjoying a life of bliss produced by bewitching side glances, charming smiles, erotic embraces and exciting amorous talks. The men who live with them will be in such a state of bliss that they would say with pride "I am perfect, I am god. I am one with the might of ten thousand elephants."

2) *Vitala*. This is the abode of Hāṭakeśvara who is none other than Paramaśiva. This god accompanied by Bhavānidevī and surrounded by pramathagaṇas (prominent demigods who attend on him) and worshipped by devas, presides over this place increasing the prajās created by Brahmā. The semen virile of Pārvatī-Parameśvaras flows there as the river Hāṭakī. The gold named Hāṭaka is what is vomited by the wind-blown Agni after drinking the rasa of that river. The wives of daityas wear ornaments made of this gold.

3) *Sutala*. This is the abode of Mahābali. Here lives Mahābali meditating on Mahāviṣṇu with more glory and grandeur than Indra. To please Indra, Mahāviṣṇu once went to Mahābali on earth and by deceit took all his possessions and binding him with Varuṇapāśa pushed him to Sutala through a hole made

on earth. Later Mahāviṣṇu felt he did a wrong in thus sending away Mahābali from earth by deceit and to remedy the sin committed he even now acts as a gatekeeper to Mahābali in Sutala. Once Rāvaṇa went to Sutala to attack Mahābali and then Mahāviṣṇu keeping watch over the palace-gate in the form of Vāmana gave Rāvaṇa a kick and sent him back.

4) *Talātala*. This is the place where Maya lives. This Maya is a mighty magician among demons. After the Tripuradahana (burning the three demons to death) Śiva blessed Maya and the latter is living as Tripurādhipati (chief of Tripura) in Talātala. Maya is the preceptor of all demon-magicians and many fierce-looking demons worship him always.

5) *Mahātala*. This is the abode of Kādraveyas. They got the name because they are all children of Kadrū, the cobra. All these cobras are fierce-looking multi-headed ill-tempered ones. The prominent ones among them are Kuhaka, Takṣaka, Suṣena and Kāliya. All these are long lean serpents possessing big hoods and great strength. These bad-tempered cobras live with their family terribly afraid of Garuḍa.

6) *Rasātala*. This is the residence of the notorious Nivātakavaca-Kālakeyas. They were enemies of the devas and they tormented them in many ways. The majestic authority of Mahāviṣṇu decreased their virility. They are now living in Rasātala frightened by the threats and beatings with a magic wand of Saramā, a mantrarūpiṇī (a sacred chant incarnate) deputed by Indra.

7) *Pātāla*. This is the abode of serpents. The nāgalokādhipatis (chiefs of the serpent world) like Vāsuki, Śaṅkha, Gulika, Śveta, Dhanañjaya Mahāśikha, Dhrtarāṣṭra, Saṅkhacūḍa, Kambala, Aśvadharma and Devadatta live here. These are all strong, long-bodied, greatly poisonous snakes with very bad tempers. They all possess hoods varying in numbers from five to hundred and the lustre of the diamonds on their hoods keeps the region of Pātāla always illuminated. At the base of this Pātāla-world is a place, separated from the rest, thirty thousand yojanas in area. It is here that the tāmasic Viṣṇukalā resides under the name Ananta. Ādiśeṣa or Ananta is the manifestation of this Viṣṇukalā. Śrī Ananta has got a name Saṅkarṣaṇa meaning one who proudly and arrogantly pulls at every thing that is seen and unseen.

It is well-known that all the worlds are being borne on his head by the thousand-hooded Ādiśeṣa. When, while bearing the worlds like this, he feels that he should destroy the animate and inanimate objects of the worlds, he brings forth from his forehead Rudra named Saṅkarṣaṇa with eleven demigods and weapons like triśūla (trident). Ananta is very beautiful with divine brilliance. Other serpent chiefs prostrate before him and at that time they see their reflection on the diamond-mirror-like nails on the toes of Ananta and for some time the serpent chiefs lie there pleasantly looking at the reflection of their own faces in the nails. The earrings of dazzling brilliance worn by these serpent chiefs reflect on their cheeks and the serpents feel extremely happy when they see the reflection of their faces on the nails.

The daughters of the serpent kings are all beautiful damsels with fair, spotless and lustrous bodies. They