

C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION
=====INTRODUCTORY:

The Purāṇas are a type of mytho-historical literature which have for many centuries played a unique role in the development of Indian Society and culture. They are now accepted as one of the important sources of Indian history,¹ as "they constitute an important source of the cultural history of India as they throw a flood of light on the various aspects of the life and time. They occupy an intermediate position, broadly speaking between the Vedic age and the period of classical literature. They have been influencing the life of the people throughout the centuries and are valuable as

1 Pusalkar A.D., Presidential Address, History Section, Proceedings and Transactions of the AIOC, XVIII Session, Annamalainagar, December, 1955, Part I, p.62.

supplying the materials for the study of such diverse subjects as religion and philosophy, folklore and ethnology, literature and sciences, history and geography, politics and sociology."²

The MKP is no exception to the general nature of the Purāṇas as stated above. It supplies valuable data on various aspects of ancient Indian culture. In the present thesis the social, religious and mythological material which is predominant in the Purāṇa is critically studied and evaluated. Besides, this Purāṇa is considered as the 'Bible' by the followers of the Devī-cult which is as important an aspect of Hinduism as Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. The Devī-worship forms a very important section of Indian religion with a great influence on Indian society which can even be seen in present times.

The study of the Purāṇa from the abovementioned three points of view is thus very useful for understanding and evaluating Indian culture as well as modern Indian

² Pusalkar A.D., Op.Cit., Introduction, p. xviii; for the historical value of the Purāṇas, vide Ibid, pp.lxvi-lxviii; Dikshitar V.R.R.,PI, Vol.I, Introduction,pp.xxxff.

society in some of its important aspects.

EARLIER AND LATER PARTS:

Before we start to examine the Purāṇa in details it is necessary to see whether the Purāṇa is a unitary composition or it is capable of dividing into its later and earlier parts. The detailed study of the Purāṇa shows that it is divisible into five parts,³ viz.:-

(I) Chaps 1-9, in which Mārkaṇḍeya directs Jaimini, Vyāsa's disciple, to four learned and wise Birds living in a cave of the Vindhya mountain, and they solve

3 This has already been noticed by Dr. K. M. Banerji (The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, BI, Introduction, p.1), Prof. F. E. Pargiter (The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, E.Tr., Introduction, pp. IVff) and Dr. V. S. Agrawala (The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, Eka Sāṃskṛitika Adhyayana, Gītā-Sandeha).

to him the four questions about the Mbh, and some allied topics.

(II) Chaps. 10-41, where, though Jaimini asks some further questions and the Birds reply them, the real narrators are Sumati alias Jaḍa and his father.

(III) Chaps. 42-77, where, though the Birds are the nominal speakers, the real interlocutors are Mārkaṇḍeya and his disciple Krauṣṭuki.

(IV) Chaps. 78-90, the DM in which the real interlocutors are sage Sumedhas and King Suratha, and the dialogue is only narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya to Krauṣṭuki.

(V) Chaps. 91-133, where Mārkaṇḍeya and Krauṣṭuki resume their dialogue from chap.77.

The concluding 134th chapter is a necessary corollary to the first part of the MKP.

It has already been concluded by F.E.Pargiter that only the third and fifth of these parts constituted the original MKP and the first and second parts and the DM were composed afterwards and then added to Purāṇa

proper.⁴ Over and above his arguments the following points also tend to supplement his view as regards the first, second, third and fifth parts:-

The first and second parts (i.e. first forty-one chapters) although they make some reference to Mārkaṇḍeya, are related by the Birds to whom Jaimini was directed by Mārkaṇḍeya. But actually they are neither the words nor a report of the words of Mārkaṇḍeya. While in third ^(chaps 42-77) and fifth ^(chaps 91-133) parts though the Birds are relating, they are giving a report of what Mārkaṇḍeya once related to his disciple Krauṣṭuki. Moreover, the proper topics of the Purāṇas viz. sarga, pratisarga etc. start here only. Obviously it is clear that the first and second parts form a separate section added to the Mārkaṇḍeya-Krauṣṭuki dialogue (i.e. the third and fifth parts) which formed probably the original MKP.

Furthermore the considerations of language and style of the above-mentioned sections strengthen the

4 For his arguments vide The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, E.Tr., Introduction, pp. iv-viii. D.R. Bhandarkar does not approve of the existence of the DM as independent of the MKP; vide his article on "the Date of the MKP", JBBRAS, Vol. XXIII, pp. 73ff.

above view, e.g. the first and second parts abound in many 'compounds'⁵ and 'rūpakas'⁶ which are comparatively few in the third and fifth parts.

DATE:

Amongst the eighteen Mahā-Purāṇas the MKP is probably one of the oldest works of the whole Purāṇa literature.⁷ The problem of its date has already been discussed by certain eminent scholars like H. H. Wilson, F. E. Pargiter, Dr. R. C. Hazra and others, and except H. H. Wilson, almost all of them are agreed at least to assign it to a period of 7th century A.D. or even earlier. There are, however, minor differences in the assignment of dates to certain chapters of the present Purāṇa and they are noted here.

5 A few samples of compounds are noted here, viz. vismayotphullalocanah (1.23 etc.), mithoniṣpādyavastuṣu (2.7), kṣarakṣatajabibhatsam (2.9), kopāmarṣavivrttākṣaḥ (2.11), ātāmravaktranayanam (2.14), nirvāṇāṅgāravarācasam (2.24).

6 1.10-11; 1.43; 3.58ff; 16.9^{cd} -11; 35.6ff etc.

7 Winternitz M., History of Indian Literature, Vol.I, p.559; vide Hazra R.C., Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs, p.8; Majumdar R.C. and Pusalkar A.D. (Ed.), The Classical Age, p.293.

It was H. H. Wilson who for the first ^{time} tried to fix the date of the MKP. He opines that the Purāṇa is later than the Mbh but it is anterior to the Brahma, Padma and Nāradiya Purāṇas and conjectures that it may be placed in the 9th or 10th century A.D.⁸ But this date was challenged by F. E. Pargiter who assigned three different periods to three layers of the MKP. Thus according to him the DM (chaps. 78-90), the latest part of the MKP was certainly complete in the 9th century and very probably in the 5th or 6th century A.D. The third (chaps. 42-77) and fifth ^{parts} ~~parts~~ (chaps. 91-133), which constituted the original Purāṇa, were very probably in existence in the 3rd century A. D. and perhaps even earlier; and the first (chaps. 1-9) and the second ^{parts} ~~parts~~ (chaps. 10-42), were composed between these two periods.⁹ Dr. R. C. Hazra remarkably agrees with F. E. Pargiter as he assigns chaps. 12-15 and 25-32, except chap. 30.8ff to 3rd century A.D. and chap. 30.8ff to the latter half of the 5th century A.D. or even earlier.¹⁰ J. N. Farquer also places

8 The Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, E.Tr., Preface, p. lviii.

9 Op.Cit., Introduction, p. XX.

10 Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs, pp.8-12.

the earlier portion of the MKP (i.e. chaps. 42-77 and 91-133) and the DM portion (chaps. 78-90) between 200 A.D. to 500 A.D.¹⁰ MM. Dr. P. V. Kane places the MKP between 300 A. D. and 600 A.D.¹² M. A. Mahendale also assigns it to a period earlier than 7th century A.D.¹³ Durgashankar Shastri puts it in the 7th century A.D. D. R. Bhandarkar also asserts that the MKP in its recast form was in existence long before 608 A.D.¹⁴

From the foregoing brief survey of the date of the MKP it is quite clear (as already noted above) that inspite of the minor individual differences about the probable dates of the three different layers of the MKP, all the scholars agree at least in assigning the present Purana to a period of 7th century A.D. or even earlier.

It may be noted here that the considerations of ^{following two} ~~some of the religious~~ points in the MKP also tend to

11 An outline of the Religious Literature of India, pp. 140, 148, 150, 152.

12 HDS, Vol.IV, Chronological Table, p. X.

13 Majumdar R.C. and Pusalkar A.D. (Ed.), The Classical Age, p. 299.

14 Vide his article on "The Date of The Markandeya-Purāna", JBBRAS, Vol.XXIII, pp.73ff.

support the above view of assigning the MKP to the beginning centuries of the christian era, e.g. the Purāṇa alludes to the concept of vyūha (4.43ff)¹⁵ which is datable to the second century A.D. Further it also alludes to Dattātreya-worship which can not have originated later than the first centuries of the christian era.¹⁶

HOME:

The problem of the place of origin of the MKP has already been discussed by F.E.Pargiter and MM. Dr. H. P. Shastri. Their views are as follows.:-

F. E. Pargiter opines that chaps. 1-77 and 91-133 of the MKP plainly emanated from western India in the middle portion of the Narmadā and Tapti valleys whereas the DM originated at Māndhātā¹⁷ on the Narmadā.¹⁸ V. R. R.

¹⁵ For details see under Viṣṇu, Chap.IV, Sec.V.

¹⁶ Kane P. V., Op.Cit., Vol.II, p.726.

¹⁷ Its another name is Māhiṣmatī and it was the capital of South Avantī. It is situated on the river Narmadā between the Vindhya and Rkṣa mountains; for details vide Law B.C., Historical Geography of Ancient India, p.322.

¹⁸ Op.Cit., Introduction, pp. viii-xiii.

Dikshitar also puts forward a similar view with reference to the home of the chaps. 1-77 and 91-133.¹⁹

MM. Dr. H. P. Shastri ~~positively~~ asserts that the MKP was certainly written in the Vindhya regions where the Birds - Opening narrators of the MKP - used to live and where the heroes of Candī or DM, King Suratha and the Vaisya Samadhi worshipped Durga in the Autumn season on the banks of Narmadā.²⁰ It may be noted here that the latter point is not strictly warranted by the textual evidence, since the DM nowhere specifically speaks of the King and the Vaisya to have worshipped the Devī on the banks of Narmadā. It merely states that both of them worshipped an earthen image of the Devī (Ambā) on the sandy banks of a river (90.6).²¹

19 Vide his article on "The Purāṇas - a Study", IHQ, Vol. VIII, p.757.

20 A Descriptive catalogue of Sanskrit MSS in the collections & the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol.V, (Purāṇa MSS), Preface, p. CXIV.

21 For details see under the Devī-worship, Chap.III, Sec. I.

THE MKP AS A PURĀṆA, ITS PLACE ETC.:

A brief synopsis of the MKP is given in Appendix I of the present thesis. Let us now see how far the MKP fulfills the classical Pañca-Lakṣaṇa definition of the Purāṇas. According to the classical definition, a Purāṇa is supposed to deal with five topics (Pañcalakṣaṇa), viz. (1) Sarga or creation of the universe; (2) pratisarga or recreation after destruction; (3) vaṃśa or genealogy; (4) manvantara or the great periods of time with Manu as the primal ancestor; and (5) vaṃśānucarita or the history of the dynasties, both solar and lunar.²² But the texts that have come down to us under the title Purāṇa hardly confirm to this definition since they contain either something more or something less than the limitations set by it. It is happy to note that the MKP fulfils these Pañca-Lakṣaṇas. For example, the sarga is dealt with in chaps.42-44; the pratisarga in ch.45-49; the materials regarding the vaṃśa in chap.49. The chs.^{ap}50, 58-64,

22 cf. Sargas' ca pratisargas' ca vaṃśo manvantarāṇi ca / vaṃśānucaritaṃ caiva purāṇaṃ pañcalakṣaṇam // MKP 134.13. The same definition is also found in other purāṇas, e.g. KP 1.1.12; BrP 1.1.37-38 etc. Amarasimha (5th century A.D.) says 'purāṇaṃ pañca-lakṣaṇam', Amarakośa, 1.6.6.

66, 77, 91-97 deal with the manvantara and insert stories about the birth of the Manus. The vamsānucarita is dealt with in chs. 98; 108-133.

There are also chapters on the bhuvanakosavarnana (51-57). The chapter 55 called Kūrmaniveśa contains a list of countries and people of India arranged according to the position of the Bhāratavarṣa conceived as a tortoise looking eastwards. "This conception fits well with our present knowledge of the topography of India."²³ This arrangement is based on earlier astronomical works like ^{that} ~~the~~ Parāśara and ^(chap. 14) ~~the~~ Varāhamihira.²⁴

The Purāṇa contains reference to only the Vaiśāla dynasty that descended from Svāyambhuva Manu's son Diṣṭa. The chief princess of it were Vatsapri, Khanitra, Khaninetra, Karandhama, Avikṣit, and Marutta, (chaps. 110-133) and Rājyavardhana (chaps. 106-107). This dynasty is also given by

23 Law B.C., Historical Geography of Ancient India, Introduction, p.2.

24 Vide Appendix III, fn. 1.

six other Purāṇas viz. BrP 3.61.3-18 & 8.35.7; VP 86.3-22; LP 1.16.53; ViSP 4.1.15-19; GP 1.138.5-13; and BGP 9.2.23-26).²⁵ The MKP narrates at length the doings of these kings but only down to Rājya-
vardhana.²⁶

Besides the traditional topics of the Purāṇa, the MKP contains a good deal of information on rājadharmas (Chap. 24), varṇāśramadharmas (chap.27), sadācāra (chap.31), Varjyā-varjya (chap.32), śrāddha (chaps.27-30). It is thus a rich mine of dharmaśāstra matters, ^{and} it sheds a flood of light on ^{the} on/

25 For details vide Pargiter F.E., AIHT, pp.96-97.

26 MKP, chaps. 106-107, 110-133.

development ^{of} religious beliefs and practices in the ancient ~~medieval and modern~~ India. It is needless to say that these topics are also dealt with in other Purāṇas also.²⁷

The Dharma-śāstra material of the MKP has been drawn upon by later Dharma-śāstra writers like Aparārka in his commentary on the YS, Ballālasena in his Adbhutasāgara, and Dānasāgara, Devanabhaṭṭa in his Smṛti-candrikā, Hemādri in his caturvargacintāmaṇi, and Śrīdatta Upādhyāya in his Kṛtyācāra and others.²⁸

It may be noted that some of the verses of the MKP regarding social, religious and mythological data etc. are either identical and verbatim or approximate to those of the MBh, Rām, BG, Pāraskara and certain other Gṛhya-sūtras, VDS, MS, YS, Śrāddha-sūtra of Kātyāyana etc. It also appears that in certain places the views of the MKP are similar to those of some of the Gṛhyasūtras, the Dharma-śāstras or the Smṛtis. This has been shown in the course

27 For the concordance of the contents of different Purāṇas, vide Tandan Yashpal, A concordance of Purāṇa-contents; MM. Dr. P.V.Kane has also given a table showing which Dharmasāstra topics are dealt with in which Purāṇa, Op.Cit., Vol.I, pp.164ff.

28. For details vide Hazra R.C., Op.Cit., pp.266-269.

of the present thesis at proper places.

Incidentally the classificatory nomenclature of the Purāṇas may be briefly alluded to. The Mahā-Purāṇas have been sub-divided into sātṭvika, rājasa and tāmasa according to their preferential treatment to Viṣṇu, Siva and other deities. Thus in the MP 53.68-69, the Purāṇas glorifying Hari are styled as sātṭvika, those glorifying Brahmā as rājasa and those glorifying Agni and Siva both as tāmasa, whereas those glorifying Sarasvatī and manes as saṅkīrṇa.²⁹

The PP-distribution is as under:-³⁰

- (1) Sātṭvika - Viṣṇu, Nāradiya, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma and Varāha;
- (2) Tāmasa - Matsya, Kūrma, Liṅga, Śiva, Agni and Skanda;
- (3) Rājasa - Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Brahma, Vāmana and Bhaviṣya.

²⁹ Sātṭvikeṣu purāṇeṣu mātmyādhikam hareḥ / rājaseṣu ca mātmyādhikam brahmaṇo viduḥ // Tadvadāgnes' ca mātmyam tāmasaṣu śivasya ca / saṅkīrṇeṣu sarasvatyaḥ pitṛnām ca nigadyate // MP 53.68-69.

³⁰ Mātsyam kaurmam tathā laṅgam saivam skādam tathaiva ca // Agneyam ca śaḍetāni tāmasāni nibodha me / Vaiṣṇavam nāradiyam ca tathā bhāgavatam subham // Garuḍam ca tathā padmam varāham subhadarsane / sātṭvikāni purāṇāni vijñeyāni subhāni vai // Brahmāṇḍam brahmavaivartam mārkaṇḍeyam tathaiva ca / bhaviṣyam vāmanam brahman rājasaṇi nibodha me // PP, Uttarakhaṇḍa, 263.81-84.

The SKP enumerates ten Purāṇas as describing the greatness of Śiva, four of Brahmā and two each of Devī and Hari.³¹

MM. Dr. Haraprasad Shastri divides the eighteen Mahā-Purāṇas into six groups according to their character:-

- (1) Encyclopaedia of literature:- Garuḍa, Agni, Nārada;
- (2) Tīrtha and Vrata:- Skanda, Padma and Bhaviṣya;
- (3) With two revisions apparent:- Brahma, Bhāgavata and Brahmavaivarta;
- (4) Historical:- Brahmāṇḍa, lost Vāyu and Viṣṇu.
- (5) Sectarian:- Linga, Vāmana and Mārkaṇḍeya;
- (6) Old Purāṇas revised out of existence:- Varāha, Kūrma and Matsya.³²

It may be noted here that the MKP is comparatively free from the sectarian element which so often predominates in the other Purāṇas. Among the deities, Indra and

³¹ Aṣṭādaṣapurāṇeṣu daṣabhir giyate śivah / caturbhiḥ bhāgavān brahmā dvābhyāṁ devī tathā hariḥ // SKP, Kedārahanda, 1.

³² The Mahā-Purāṇas, JBORS, XIV, pp.330-337.

Brahmā are mentioned oftēnest; next stand Viṣṇu and Śiva; then Dattātreya, Sun and Agni; and last Dharma and others. Indra is mentioned most often in the first and fifth parts, and Brahmā in the third and fifth parts; while Viṣṇu and Śiva do not show any particular preponderance. Dattātreya is mentioned in second section. If the Devī-Māhātmya is put aside, the Sun is the deity that receives the most special adoration, and his story is related twice, first briefly in chaps. 74 and 75 and afterwards with fullness in chaps. 99-107. To this may be added the cognate worship of Agni in chaps. 96 and 97.

From the above it would be quite clear that the MKP occupies an important place in the Purāṇic literature and it plays an important role in the study of ancient Indian culture from several points of view.