Chapter Six

Asuras and Rākṣasas in Purāṇas –
Deeds and Relations: Changing Scenario
Purāṇas provide copious materials regarding the later concepts of Asura and Rākṣasa. Though Purāṇas are many in number, eighteen among them are taken as major Purāṇas. Most of the Purāṇas are not earlier than the Gupta period. Purāṇas have undergone many changes in their history. A considerable part of every Purāṇa is constituted by interpolations. However, some of the legendary materials available in them are very ancient. The narration of the concept of Asuras and Rākṣasas seen in Puranic stories is developed from epics which are much ancient than Purāṇas. In epics and Purāṇas these concepts are described with a mythical undertone which is different from that is seen in Vedic literature. Thus, before entering into the discussion of the deeds and relations of Asuras and Rākṣasas in Purāṇas, it is relevant to analyze their nature and engagements in epics which provide valuable information regarding their identity.

Rākṣasas in Vālmikirāmāyaṇa

Vālmikirāmāyaṇa contains plentiful information regarding the later concept of Rākṣasa. Although Rākṣasas in Vālmikirāmāyaṇa, are generally depicted as anti-social group of people, there can be found innumerable instances which obviously prove their identity as a separate ethnic group.
Some of the prominent Rākṣasa characters in *Rāmāyaṇa* seem to be more exaggerated from their original identity. Śūrpaṇakhā, the sister of Rākṣasa king Rāvaṇa is presented there as an ugly female of Rākṣasa clan. She came to the residing place of Rāma at her will and proposes Rāma. This incident may be viewed as a pointer to the freedom of women in the Rākṣasa community to choose their life-partner which the women of Rāma’s community do not possess. There is a detailed description about the comparison of the physique of Śūrpaṇakhā and Rāma in the *Āraṇyakaṇḍa*. Śūrpaṇakhā¹ is an ugly woman having huge abdomen, terrible eyes, unsightily in presence, hideous voice, hard accents etc. whereas Rāma is a handsome fellow with good qualities. Another Rākṣasi character Tāṭakā² is also portrayed as a Yakṣinī who has the ability to assume different forms at will and endowed with the strength of thousand elephants.³

¹ Tāṭakā is described there as the wife of intelligent Sunda, a Rākṣasa, and mother of Marica. Rāma killed her by entering her domain without asking any question. This act can be read as the form of invasion to a country by foreigners. Refer to *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*, l.24.25-27 for more details.

² Tāṭakā is being represented as a beautiful Dravidian princess who fell in love with Rāma (he too was attracted by her beauty) at the first sight in the famous Malayalam poem *Tāṭakayyenu Dravidarajamam* of Vayalar Rama Varma. Here the reason for the death of Tāṭakā is her affection towards Rāma and this is a more convincing depiction than that of *Vālmikīrāmāyaṇa*. Vayalar adapted the theme of his poem from *Kampāramāyaṇa*.

Attitude of Rākṣasas towards Vedic Tradition

Rākṣasas are said to be non-believers of sacrifice in the Bālakāṇṭha of Rāmāyaṇa. There the Rākṣasas Mārīca and Subāhu are trying to disturb the sacrifice of the sages by showering blood on the sacrificial altar.4 Interestingly, Mārīca has been described as an ascetic in Rāmāyaṇa itself;

तत्र कृष्णार्जुनर्थं जन्तमण्डलथर्षिणम्।
ददर्श नियताहारं गार्त्तं नाम राशसम्। III.35.38.

This verse is an important evidence of the asceticism prevailed among the Rākṣasas. At one place in Sundarakāṇṭha there is a description of Rākṣasas who are performing sacrifice. At the late hour of night in Laṅkā, Hanumat heard the chanting of Vedic scholars who were engaged in performing sacrifice;

षडेकोपेदेववदशोऽनुप्रवर्त्याजनाम्।
शुभ्राब्रह्मवाचनं स बिराज्यं ब्रह्मक्रसम्। V.18.2.

This description is a definite proof of the fact that Rākṣasas were well versed in asceticism, Vedas and related matters.

The forest Daṇḍaka, being their original habitat, was under the control of Rākṣasas and the coming of sages to their land must have been viewed as invasion by Rākṣasas. This may be the actual reason behind the rivalry between them. Throughout in Rāmāyaṇa,

as mentioned earlier, Rakṣasas are given the image of anti-social group of beings. But there are ample references which give accurate evidence to think that they are having a social life with highly civilized state of things.

Origin of Rakṣasa Race in Vālmīkīrāmāyaṇa

Uttarakāṇḍa of Vālmīkīrāmāyaṇa furnishes an account of the origin of Rakṣasa dynasty in detail. It was told by sage Agastya to Rāma. At the time of creation Prajāpati who was originated from water and created water generated some creatures assigned them with the duty of protecting that element (water). Hearing this some of them said 'rakṣāmaḥ' i.e. 'we shall protect it' and some others said 'yakṣāmaḥ' i.e. 'we shall worship it'. Those who have said 'rakṣāmaḥ' became Rakṣasas and those who have said 'yakṣāmaḥ' became Yakṣās. It is interesting that in the verse VII.4.11 of Rāmāyaṇa, Prajāpati asked to guard water by introducing them as 'mānavaḥ' i.e. men. From this reference it is difficult to find out the reason for treating these beings as hostile categories.

In the succeeding verses (VII.4.14-18) the Rakṣasa brothers Heti and Praheti are described as lords of Rakṣasas.5 Praheti

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5 तत्र हेति अहैतिको राजार्थ रक्षसतापि
choosed asceticism while Heti married Bhayā the sister of Kāla.
Vidyutkeśa a powerful Rākṣasa was born to Heti on Bhayā.⁶

Rāvaṇa as a Man

Rāvaṇa, the anti-hero of Rāmāyaṇa, is the most celebrated Rākṣasa in Indian mythology. He was the elder son of Viṣravas, a Brāhmaṇa, on Kaikāśī who belonged to the clan of Rākṣasas. On the father’s side Rāvaṇa is a Brāhmaṇa, but he came to be known as belonging to his mother’s clan. In Rāmāyaṇa, Rāvana has been described as a ten-headed twenty-handed and huge-bodied person;

विश्वदेहः दशांश्च दशमीयनिपर्च्छदनम्।
विश्वासवर्षस ज्ञार्क ज्ञानलक्षणलक्ष्यिततम्।
नान्देश्रूपंसरसाः तत्त्वज्ञानभृत्यतः।
सुभुः सुकल्यदशम्मन्तास्य नम् रत्नोपमम्। III.32.8-9.

In the above verse Rāvaṇa is said to have ten heads, twenty beautiful hands, broad chest and good teeth. Rāvaṇa is portrayed here as a courageous person (vīra). And, it is an essential quality for a hero/king.

A hymn of Atharvaveda, fascinatingly describes a ten-headed and ten-faced Brāhmaṇa;

⁶ विश्वकृति मायानिः ब्रह्मचूरुतिर्दिनि। चक्षुः।
⑦ तस्यो नान्यायाम विष्णु राजायुपरते।
पुरे पौरोज्यो अश्वो विचक्षेषणिः अन्न्या। VII.4.17.
This verse speaks of a ten-headed and ten-faced Brähmaṇa who has drunk the fruit of Soma. Devichand⁷ in his translation of *Atharvaveda*, interprets the word 'daśaśīrṣah' in this verse as 'the one who is endowed with ten qualities such as charity, character, forgiveness, heroism' etc. 'Daśasyah', in his view, indicates the ability of a person to rule ten directions. Kamil Bulke⁸ opines that the ten-headed Brähmaṇa concept in *Atharvaveda* may have influenced the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in conceiving the features of Rāvana.

Albeit Rāvana has been described as ten-headed and twenty-handed fellow, some of the verses of *Vālmīkirāmāyaṇa* clearly say that he was an ordinary man. In *Sundarakānda*, Hanūmat went to Lankā in search of Sītā he found Rāvana inside his palace sleeping with Maṇḍodari, his chief queen. The poet says;

दद्रोह स कौपिन्ययः बाहू शयनस्तिधिती
मन्दरस्वातः सुपी शतांिर्विनः। V.10.21.

Hanūmat saw the two resting hands of Rāvana which resemble like the mighty serpents sleeping in the entrails of the mount Mandara.

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This description is a plain reference to the normal features of Rāvana.

*Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, interestingly, provides evidence to think that Rāvana abducted Sītā to Laṅkā not by Puṣpaka but by taking her on his two hands. This fact is revealed through Sampāti’s speech to Aṅgada and Hanūmat, about the information that he got from his son Supārśvan. Samkhia has taken this reference as an important one. Sampāti told that his son Supārśvan was sitting on the mountain Mahendra in Vindhyā by blocking a narrow way through which Rāvana advances towards the sāgara(ocean). Then, a black complexioned man who was taking a beautiful woman in his hands, asked him politely for way. Supārśvan conceding his request gave way to him. It is only after Rāvana left the place Supārśvan identified that it was Rāvana, the king of Rākṣasas and that lady was Sītā, wife of Rāma. This depiction also can be taken as an original material that supports Rāvana that

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11 Samkhia translates the word sāgara in *Rāmāyaṇa* as lake. He presents the report of archaeological survey in support of his arguments. Thus he thinks, the use of the word sāgara in *Rāmāyaṇa* may be in the sense of a lake or a big pond. H.D. Samkhia, *Rāmāyaṇapathamangal* Translated by Matreyan, Lens Books, Pathanamthitta, 2011. p.144. M.V. Kibe pointed out that the location of Laṅkā was at the mountain Vindhyā. His observation is based on the analysis of the route of Rāvana for the abduction of Sītā as well as related incidents in *Rāmāyaṇa*. Refer to M.V. Kibe, *Further Light on Rāvana’s Laṅkā* Located in Central India from Vālmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa, ABORI*, Vol. 17, No.4 (1935-36), pp.371-384.
identity as a man with normal features. Taking Sītā on his hands
gives the real picture of abduction.¹¹

Some more details are available from Yuddhākāṇḍa of
Rāmāyaṇa, regarding the humane identity of Rāvana. The context
illustrates the sorrow of his wives when he died in the battle:

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\begin{align*}
\text{ततः शति सहसा दुःखाया शाक्य रणपांसु।} \\
\text{निगौतस्तय गतेषु चितम बनलता हव।} \\
\text{बहुमानलिङ्गम् काञ्चिदे शरीर ह।} \\
\text{चरणो काञ्चिदलिङ्ग्य काञ्चिदनामेवलस्य न।} \\
\text{उत्स्माय न भुजों काञ्चिदधूपों सुपरिवर्तते।} \\
\text{हतस्य वदने दुष्टं दुष्टर्मोहपुष्पमण्ड।} \\
\text{काञ्चिदुःखुके श्रवण कृत्ता शरीर मुखमीलकृती।} \\
\text{स्नाययमि गुरू व बामेस्तुष्पोरिव प्रक्षकम्।} \\
\end{align*}
\]
VI.110.6-10.

The wives of Rāvana saw his lifeless body lying on the battle
field. One of the wives of Rāvana cried embracing his legs, someone
was crying holding his neck, and another one was taking his hand
and rolling on the ground. Again one of his wives cried placing his
head on her lap and bathed it with tears. It is interesting to note
that Vālmīki compared the face of Rāvana with a lotus flower
having snows. Lotus is a beautiful flower which is probably used
by the poets to compare any beautiful object particularly a human
face. From the comparison of Rāvana’s face with lotus flower, the

¹¹ H.D. Samkhalia having taken this instance as an important point observes that the
abduction place of Sītā was situated approximately in the Madhya Pradesh region and
there is still such type of hill ways which only a single man can cross at a time. H.D.
Samkhalia op.cit., pp.142-146.
poet has suggested that Rāvana was certainly a handsome fellow. Other characteristics of Rāvana described in the above verses also indicate that he was an ordinary human being with normal features.

Rākṣasas as Social Beings

Cultural Anthropology\(^{12}\), a branch of Anthropology highlights, the study of human cultures and societies in detail. It is not limited to the study of popular culture but concentrates the study of lower culture of a society also. It can also contribute more information into the understanding of the social history of ancient societies. The descriptions in Rāmāyaṇa that give information about the social and cultural life of Rākṣasa are worthy from Anthropological perspective. Some more instances are there in Vālmīkīrāmāyaṇa, which prove Rākṣasas were not an anti-social group but were a well civilized social group of people. In Sundarakāṇḍa, the poet says that Hanūmat saw Rāvana's Laṅkā having broad roads, well structured buildings, streets etc. In verse V.43.1-5 there the place of worship of Rākṣasas\(^{13}\) which was

\(^{12}\) तत: स विकसात्मक हनुमान ध्यानभविष्या।
बन पान मया वैकाससागर न विभाजितः॥
तस्मात् प्रसादामर्दित्वा विकसिष्टसम्पर्कं॥
इति समाप्तं हनुमानपर्वतं दृश्यमुखः॥
वैकाससात्मनायव मनुष्यांगमिवादितामुः॥
आश्रोह हरिभूष्यं हनुमानपादांवला॥
सागरस्य तु कुलस्यनिवासादमुत्॥

\(^{13}\) तत: स विकसात्मक हनुमान ध्यानभविष्या।
बन पान मया वैकाससागर न विभाजितः॥
तस्मात् प्रसादामर्दित्वा विकसिष्टसम्पर्कं॥
इति समाप्तं हनुमानपर्वतं दृश्यमुखः॥
वैकाससात्मनायव मनुष्यांगमिवादितामुः॥
आश्रोह हरिभूष्यं हनुमानपादांवला॥
सागरस्य तु कुलस्यनिवासादमुत्॥
smashed by Hanūmat is delineated. All this rationally justifies the assumption that the Rākṣasa tribe was a people of an advanced civilization.

**Food of Rākṣasas**

*Rāmāyaṇa* supplies some details of the food habits of Rākṣasas. It has already been mentioned that when Hanūmat went to Laṅkā in search of Sītā, there the Rākṣasas were in a mood of celebration following a liquor party. The text in this context narrates the food habits of Rākṣasas. In *Sundarakāṇḍa* also reference to the food habit of Rākṣasas can be read as follows;

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रेवन्दु च विशालेन्दु माणेश्वर्यमालक्ष्यं
ददरस किंगादुलिन मङिये न कुकुटस्वरस्वयम्।
वराहायोणसान्नु विधिनीचर्यलाभायुस्।
शल्पान्न मुगमुल्लफल हनुमानस्वपक्ष।
कप्तानां विविधविहंसा ज्ञाणादेश्यावेशमहिष्णुस्।
महिषादेश्यावेश पेषोवच कुतुम्निष्ठापय।
लिङ्गानुवज्ञानानु पेनान भेज्यानुवज्ञानानु।
तथामलिपुरतस्वभिर्निम्ने रागाधारभ।।V.11.15-18.
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In the above verses it is described that Hanūmat saw in Laṅkā variety of food of the Rākṣasa people. The food of Rākṣasas includes the meat of buffaloes, deer, boars, peacocks, goats,

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Hanūmaṇu प्रत्षङ्कलयति पार्यवायोमोऽभवत्। *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, Vol. II, V.43.1-4, p.125. The place of worship mentioned here may not be a temple as seen today. The term used to denote the worship place of Rākṣasas is 'caitya' which is closely related with Buddhism. There is a belief among the scholars that there happened interpolations in
ekaśalya (a kind of fish) etc. There were also various kinds of drinks extracted from fruits. Verses 21-24 of the same sarga describe the liquors of Rākṣasas both natural (kādambarī) and artificial (prepared with honey, grapes etc.). The liquor extracted from flowers, sugar, fruits etc. are decorated with various kinds of fragrance. It is evident from the references that Rākṣasas used to drink liquor and eat meat in the time of celebrations. In their celebrations they had the habit of eating delicious food prepared with the meat of various kinds of birds and animals. The food and liquor are kept in crystal, golden and silver pots and vessels that are beautified with gems. These descriptions give the highly civilized state of the life of Rākṣasas.14

It is an anthropologically proven fact that in ancient days, man used to eat the flesh of other animals and birds. Ayodhyākāṇḍa of Rāmāyana, says that Rāma with Sitā and Laksmana went to the hermitage of sage Bharadvāja in the time of their exile. Bharadvāja welcomed the guests with the meat of cow with wild fruits and roots as it was a custom in that time.15

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14 Rāmāyana at the time of Buddhist dominance. This may be presupposed the reason for the use of word 'catiya' in Rāmāyana.
15 The references to the social life of Rākṣasas give a vivid picture of the cultural history of those people who were erroneously identified by their enemies i.e., the followers of Vedic religion, as uncivilized people in the view of Cultural Anthropology these references can be taken as very important ones as they supply abundant information about a well civilized ethnic group in ancient India.
15 तत्त्व वदेष्य श्रुतचालर राजपुरुषस्य वैभवस्य
Uttarakāṇḍa, 52nd sarga describes that Rāma eating well cooked meat and wine with Sītā. However, the habit of drinking wine and having meat is not restricted to the community alone to which Rāma belongs.

Women of Laṅkā

The description of the women of Laṅkā in Sundarakāṇḍa is noteworthy. They are depicted there as beautiful damsels and not fearful and ugly beings. In Sundarakāṇḍa the women are depicted as lying on the floor of Rāvaṇa’s palace after a liquor party holding various musical instruments like Viṇā, Vipaṇci, Mudduka, Mṛdanga and Drṇḍima. They appear there as beautiful women with normal features of ordinary human beings.

The above descriptions are sufficient evidence to think that the Rākṣasas were neither non-human beings nor anti-social group of people. But it can be presumably suggest that, due to the social changes they had been pushed to a subhuman image in ancient Indian society by the time of Rāmāyaṇa.

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16 I., 54.17. The term 'gaub' is translated by Raviprakash as 'buffalo'. Thus the meat may be either of cow or buffalo. Cf, the Rāmāyaṇa translation of Raviprakash Arya, Vol. I, p.147f.
Asuras, Rākṣasas and Related Categories in *Mahābhārata*

By the time of epics some other categories also have been treated as equivalent to Asuras and Rākṣasas. *Mahābhārata* give ample proof in this regard. Some of these categories are malevolent in nature. The categories like Daityas, Dānavas, Piśācas, Bhūtas, Pretas, Yātudhānas, Rākṣasas, Nivātakavacas and Nāgas are included into the different classes of Asuras in *Mahābhārata*.17

Among the above said categories Rākṣasas, Piśācas etc, are considered to be cannibalistic beings and also as the enemies of mankind. Rākṣasas there are man-eating beings who used to wander at the mid-night;

रात्रि निःशोचे वायूः गलेक्षणां गृहः।
प्रवारे पुरुषाः राक्षसं धोरकमणां॥

*Mahābhārata*, III.11.4.

This type of descriptions have influenced in confirming the concept of Rākṣasas as evil-beings, cannibals etc. in the succeeding period.

Hiḍimbā and her brother Hiḍimba are mentioned as Rākṣasas in *Mahābhārata*. It may be noticed here that Baka who is popular as an Asura is referred to in the whole episode there (Chapters 143-152 in *Ādiparvan*) as a Rākṣasa.

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Brotherhood of Devas and Asuras

Anuśāsanaparvan of Mahābhārata speaks of the brotherhood of Devas and Asuras. It says;

हरं च श्रुतव वार्ष! मुखे देवासुरनुषु।
असुरा श्रातो ज्ञेष्ठा देवार्यां पराये।
Mahābhārata, XII.33.13.

Here Asuras are said to be the elder brothers of Devas. Their rivalry is also stated in the same verse.

Ādiparvan describes about the offsprings of Pulastya as;

राक्षसार्य पुललयस्य वानरः किर्तार्तव।
वर्षार्य मनुज्वाग्य। पुललस्य च धीमत।.
Mahābhārata, 1.66.7.

It is said here that Rākṣasas, Vānaras, Kinnaras and Yakṣas are the children of Pulastya. Though they have a common ancestor their engagements are different. It would be more reasonable to take that they were belonging to some sect of people who lived in the forest.

Duryodhana as Kali Incarnated

Interestingly the Kaurava hero Duryodhana is delinated as an incarnation of Asura Kali;¹⁸

¹⁸ Kali on another context in Mahābhārata has already been mentioned as an Asura; असुरणां सुम्भाणां ज्ञेष्ठा देवार्यां पराये। पुललस्य च धीमत।. V.74.12 cf., The Mahābhārata, Edited by V.S. Suktankan, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol.VI, Pune, 1940, p.315.
Here Duryodhana is referred to as an incarnation of Kali while his uncle Šakuni and his brother Duśśāsana and others are called as Rākṣasas. The use of the terms Asura and Rākṣasa for the persons of same family who have direct relationship hints at the evolution of these concepts.

**Hiraṇyapura - Demon's City**

There is a detailed description of the residing place of various categories of prototypes of demons in the *Udyogaparvan* of *Mahābhārata;*¹⁹

> हिरण्यपुरमिल्लेःत्त्वाः पुरवर्त महत्।
> दैत्यानां दानवानां च मायाशतविचारिणां।।
> अनलयेन प्रयक्तेन मिमांसे विश्वकर्मणा।
> मचेन मनसा कृष्टै पातानलकाश्त्रितम्।।
> अव मायाशतवाणिः विश्ववाणि महोजसः।
> दानवा निवसति सम शूरा दत्तवर्ताः पूरा।।
> नेमेश श्रेष्ठेन नाऐनेन बहुरेण चमेन वा।
> शाल्यने च रामाणेन तथेऽव मन्देन च।।
> असुरा कालखण्डवर्षः तस्माद विन्यूपदेशम्।।
> नैत्रूत्वत्ता च तातुष्कारणः बहुविदेशद्वाणः।।
> देश्त्रो भीमरूपम् वाल्क्येष्वरस्त्रकः।। *

Mahābhārata, V.97.1-7.

The city named Hiraṇyapura situated in Pātāla is described here. This city was conceived by Maya and built by Viśvakarman.

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Maya is popularly identified as the Asura architect. In this city there reside Daityas, Dānavas, Rākṣasas, Asuras, Yātudhānas, Kṛākhaṇjas, Nīvātakavacas, Nairṛtas, Nāgas etc.

The description of Asuras and Rākṣasas in epics seems to be exaggerated extension of its concept of later Vedic period. They are presented in these texts as belonging to some non-human or anti-social groups who are the enemies of mankind. Nevertheless, there are some clues in epics to think that they are human beings. Many of the references of these beings hint at the fact that they are some sect of ancient Indian forest dwellers.

The Myth of Asura and Rākṣasa in Purāṇas

In Purāṇas Asuras and Rākṣasas are portrayed with a mythical undertone. Certainly they are presented there as unpromising hostile beings that are in constant animosity with the Devas. Puranic stories contain abundant information regarding the ceaseless struggle between the Devas and Asuras. Both struggled for supremacy over each other. But, each of the stories depicts

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21 The details of war between Devas and Asuras (also mentioned as Daityas and Dānavas) are available in Śrīmadbhaṭṭagvaiapurāṇa, Edited by Sriramamurti Sastrī, Chaukhamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1993, VIII.10; The Mātasyapurāṇa, Edited by H.H. Wilson, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 1983, I.251; The Paṃkṣapāpurāṇam, Vol. I, Nag Publications, Delhi, 1984, 1.4-7; Mārkandaeyapurāṇa, Translated by M.N. Dutt, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 2005, Chapter 79.
Devas as victorious. Finally, the triumphant represented virtue and conquered became the representative of all evils.

The mythical accounts seen in Purāṇas consist of a number of stories which deal with the killing of various demons such as Vṛtra, Hiranyakaśipu, Bali, Pūtanā, Śakaṭa, Tṛṇāvarta, Agha, Kāṁsa and so on by Viṣṇu's incarnations. These Asuras or Rākṣasas who are depicted as animals, supernatural and fearful beings seem to have belonged to certain religious belief other than that of Krṣna. And, this appears to be the cause of their destruction. It may also be observed that these stories have been added with the intention to heighten the glory of Krṣna in Purāṇas. A reference seen in Brahmavaivartapurāṇa regarding Pūtanā is interesting. Pūtanā is mentioned here as a beautiful woman, and not as a fearful Rākṣasi. She introduced herself as the wife of a Brāhmaṇa. Hearing her words Yaśaodā bowed before her. This episode tells that the terrific appearance of Pūtanā could be an exaggeration added later.

Viṣṇupurāṇa refers to the war between Asuras and Devas as follows:

\[\text{वेवसुरमूढ युद्ध विवाहमन्द पूरा द्विग} \]
\[\text{तस्मिन पराजिता देवा हैवेशङ्करोमो} \] XVII.9.

1 Śrimadbhāgavatapurāṇa, op.cit, VI.12; VII.8; VIII.19-23; cf. Brahmavaivartapurāṇa, Translated by Shantilal Nagar, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2008, I.10, 11, 12, 16, 22, 72 etc.
2 Brahmavaivartapurāṇa, I.10.
In this verse under the leadership of Hrāda, who is one of the powerful sons of Hiranyakaśipu, Daityas defeated Devas is described. This is a very rare reference which mentions the victory of Asuras over Devas.

Amṛtamanthana\textsuperscript{23} is a common theme in Purāṇas which implies the idea of the domination of political power of Devas over Asuras. It may also be interpreted as attainment of political hegemony over an indigenous culture by their rivals. When Amṛta came out from the ocean, Viṣṇu disguised as a damsel named Mohini trickfully taken away the pot and served it among gods. Rāhu, an Asura, assumed the form of a Deva and received the Amṛta. But when Amṛta had gone into his throat Sun and Moon identified him and Viṣṇu cut off his head. This is the cause for the rivalry of Rāhu with Sun and Moon. This narrative also is an indication towards the effort of establishing hegemony by Devas over Asuras.

In the process of churning the ocean the strength of Asuras was deceitfully used by the Devas to obtain Amṛta, the divine medicine, which can give immortality. In this legend, it is worth to be noted, all the things produced out of the churning are taken away by the Devas. A perusal of the Puranic literature clearly tells
that every story in Purāṇas are biased and one sided. The brahmanical culture alone is founded in the mainstream. And the real picture of the history of those people who are subjugate by the mainstream culture, subdued, is to be sought by analyzing the mythical accounts of the above said nature.

**Asuras and Rākṣasas: Racial Elements in Purāṇas**

In Purāṇas, stories dealing with the rivalry between Devas and Asuras are aplenty. Each story contains the victory of the former over the latter. All the categories of Devas, Asuras, Rākṣasas, Daityas, Dānavas, Yakṣas, Kinnaras etc. in Purāṇas appear with a mythical undertone. In the above list, except the Devas, all the rest categories are described there as they were against the sacrificial cults of Vedas. A close observation would make it obvious that the fact mentioned above is the real cause for the rivalry between the Vedic Religion with the followers of some alien style of life.24

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24 Refer to Śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa, VIII.7-8; The Matsyasūryapurāṇa, I.249-250 etc.

24Scholars have studied about the degradation of the mythical concept of Asura. Nicholas F. Gier believes that the first form of Hindu Titanism is Asura Titanism. According to him Titanism in general is the tendency to describe the universe in human terms. Nicholas F. Gier, Hindu Titanism, *Philosophy of East and West*, Vol. 45, No.1 (Jan., 1995), pp. 73-96. He uses the term Titan to denote Asura which is an adapted theme from Greek Titanism. The concept seems to have been developed from the concept of the Vedic Human Asura.
The Concept of Origin of Species and their Relation in Purāṇas

In most of the Puranic stories Asuras and Rākṣasas are depicted as a group of malevolent beings who are the enemies of Devas. Some passages in Purāṇas inform that Asuras and Rākṣasas are descending from the clan of renowned sages. Major Purāṇas like Brahmatapurāṇa, Matsyapurāṇa, Garudaapurāṇa, Liṅgapurāṇa, Vāyupurāṇa and Kūrmapurāṇa contain certain references regarding the origin of Devas, Asuras, Rākṣasas, Yakṣas, men, birds, animals, reptiles from a common ancestor. These accounts hints at the brotherhood of all the sections referred to therein.

Devas, Daityas and Kaśyapa’s Marriage with the Daughters of Dakṣa

According to Purāṇa literature Kaśyapa and his wives (daughters of Dakṣa) are the parents of all creatures of the world. Brahmatapurāṇa contains detailed description of the progeny of Kaśyapa. He married the thirteen daughters of Dakṣa.25 From them originated the whole creatures of the world.26 These daughters of

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25 Brahmatapurāṇa speaks of fourteen wives of Kaśyapa but only the names of thirteen are given there. It is described there that 'caturdasa mahābhagah sarvāstā lokamācarah' in II, 3.2.55. cf. Brahmāndapurāṇa, Edited by Jagadish Lal Sastri, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, II, 3.2.55-57, p.65.
26 Kaśyapa and his wives are described in Purāṇas as the progenitors of various kinds of beings. Different kinds of birds, animals and serpents, trees, creepers, grass etc., are also said to have sprung from Kaśyapa, in his various wives. The references regarding this are available in Major Purāṇas. cf. Garudamahāpurāṇa, VI.51; VI.60; VI.61.
Dakṣa are considered as the mothers of the world. The names of the thirteen daughters of Dakṣa whom Kaśyapa married are;

अदितिदितिहरू, काष्ठरिच्छन्नु, स्वस्था रता।
सुरभिविना ताम्रा मुनि; क्रोधवशा तथा।
क्रोधवाहा च नागाः प्रजास्तासि निभोयत। Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, I.3.3.5.

Vāyu-purāṇa\textsuperscript{27} gives the names of fourteen wives of Kaśyapa. They are Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kāla, Ariśṭhā, Surasā, Surabhi, Vinatā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Iṛā, Kadru, Munī and Dharmajñā.

The names of thirteen wives of Kaśyapa are enumerated in Matsya-purāṇa also.\textsuperscript{28} Some of the names of them are different from that are seen in other Purāṇas. In Matsya-purāṇa the names of the wives of Kaśyapa are Aditi, Diti, Danu, Ariśṭhā, Surasā, Surabhi, Vinitā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Iṛā, Kadru, Viśvā and Munī.

Kṛma-purāṇa\textsuperscript{29} also mentions the thirteen daughters of Dakṣa who became the wives of Kaśyapa. They are Aditi, Diti, Danu, Ariśṭhā, Surasā, Surabhi, Vinatā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Iṛā, Kadru, Munī and Dharmajñā.

Thus the number and names of the wives of the Kaśyapa differ in Purāṇas. But the names Aditi, Diti, Danu, and Vinata are

\textsuperscript{27} Refer to The Vāyu-purāṇa, Nag Publishers, Delhi, 2004, Uttarārdhā, V.54-55.
\textsuperscript{28} The Matsya-purāṇa I.6.1-2, p.25.
\textsuperscript{29} Kṛma-purāṇa, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2008, 16.17-18, p.91.
common in all Purānas. They are popularly identified as the mothers of Devas and Daityas.

**Birth of Asuras and Rākṣasas in the Clan of Kaśyapa**

The description of the clans of sages is a common theme in Purāṇas. It is an amazing factor that the different kinds of beings both benevolent and malevolent are said to have sprung from renowned sages. Sages are also described as demolishing Daityas for helping the Devas in defeating their malevolent enemies.

**Ādityas- Vedic Asuras**

Aditi, the first wife of Kaśyapa, is considered as the mother of the twelve Ādityas. They are⁶⁰

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\text{धातायमा च मिर्यथ बर्णणोशो भगरत्था।}
\text{इन्द्रो विवर्तानुष्ठ च पर्ज्ञो दशम स्मृत।}
\text{तत्ततबंकातं ततो विषुर्जयन्यो जयंयत:।} \quad \text{Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, 11.3.2.67-68.}
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Some of the above mentioned solar deities are closely related with the Rgvedic concept of Asura. Mitra and Varuṇa are referred to as powerful Asuras in Vedic literature. Indra is also mentions as an Asura in Vedic literature.

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⁶⁰ Brahmananda purana, p.65.
The names of some Ādityas in Kūrmapurāṇa differ from that of Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa. According to Kūrmapurāṇa the sons of Aditi are:

अंशो धाता भगवद्वत्ता विक्षिप्तं च व्रहणोदयं।
विवश्च विद्यमान पृथ्वी हृद्याक्षरं च। Kūrmapurāṇa, I.16.18-19.

The twelve Ādityas mentioned there are; Amśa, Dhatā, Bhaga, Tvaṣṭr, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Vivasvant, Savitṛ, Pūṣan, Amśumant and Viṣṇu.

Daityas and Dānavas

It is known from the Purāṇa literature that Diti's children are known as Daityas and that of Danu as Dānavas. The powerful Asuras Hiranyākṣa and Hiranyakaśipu were the sons of Diti. They had a sister named Simhikā. Hiranyakaśipu had five sons namely Śambara, Śakuni, Kālanābha, Mahānābha, and Sutasantāpana. They had been powerful and unassailable even by Devas. Their sons and grandsons along with their clans are collectively called Daityas.

Matsyapurāṇa speaks of the progeny of Hiranyākṣa. According to this Purāṇa the sons of Hiranyākṣa were Uluka,

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31 Kūrmapurāṇa, p.91.
32 The same names of Ādityas of Agnipurāṇa are given in Kūrmapurāṇa also. See Agnimahāpurāṇam, edited by Maitreyee Deshpande, Vol. I, New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Delhi, 2009, Chapter, IX.2·3a, p.74.
33 Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, p.2.3.5.12.
Sakuni, Bhūtasantāpana and Mahānābha. Their clans consist of 77 crores of Daityas. The powerful Anuhrāda, Hrāda, Prahlāda\textsuperscript{35} and Samhrāda were the sons of Hiraṇyakaśipu. In the family of Hiraṇyakaśipu, Virocana was born as the son of Prahlāda. Virocana had 100 children. Bali and Bāṇa were prominent among them. All these were most vigourous Asura kings. Sakuni and Pūtānā were the daughters of Bali\textsuperscript{36}

**Yakṣas and Rākṣasas**

In epics and Purāṇas Yakṣas and Rākṣasas are considered as belonging to the same category of beings and they are mentioned together. Independent references to both are also available there. It has already been noted that Rākṣasas, Yakṣas, Manusyas, Kinnaras etc. are referred to as the children of Pulastya. Thus in this way also their brotherhood can be seen in Purāṇa literature.

Yakṣas and Rākṣasas are described as two brothers born to Khaśa by Kaśyapa in *Brahmāndapurāṇa*.\textsuperscript{37} According to the story they look ugly and were having uncivilized life. When they were born the elder one tried to eat up his mother out of hungry, and then the younger one tried to protect her from his brother. Due to

\textsuperscript{35} In *Agnipurāṇa* the name of Prahlāda is mentioned as Prahrāda. The other names remain the same. See *Agnipurāṇa*, X IX.7, p.74.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, 2.3.7.38-62, pp.881-443.
their nature of behaviour their father named them after their actions which are appropriate to the root-meaning. Thus the elder one became to be known as 'Yakṣa' as he tried 'to devour' his own mother and the younger one became famous as 'Rākṣasa' as he tried 'to protect' his mother. Here the root 'rakṣa' bears a positive meaning. The function of Rākṣasa here is to guard. Hopkins\(^{36}\) has discussed the confusing growth of the word Rakṣas in history. He studied the debate regarding the development of Rakṣas as to whether the injurer became the guardian (of treasure) or the guardian became the injurer. He opts the first interpretation by considering the primary concept of Rakṣas which is related with harmful spirits, nocturnal power etc.

There are some changes in the names of the mothers of Yakṣas and Rākṣasas in other Purāṇas. Garuḍapurāṇa\(^{39}\) considers Khagā as their mother while in Matsyapurāṇa\(^{40}\) it is Viśvā from whom the race of Yakṣas and Rākṣasas originated. Agnipurāṇa\(^{41}\) considers Khasā as the mother of Yakṣas and Rākṣasas where Kūrmapurāṇa\(^{42}\) gives the name Muni as the mother of Yakṣas,

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\(^{36}\) For a detailed discussion refer to E.W Hopkins, Epic Mythology, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986, p.38.

\(^{39}\) The Garuḍamahāpurāṇa, Translated by M.N. Dutt, New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Delhi, 2001, VI.54, p.20.

\(^{40}\) Matsyapurāṇa, 1.6.46, p.29.

\(^{41}\) Agnipurāṇa, IX.18, p.75.

\(^{42}\) Kūrmapurāṇa, 1.18.13, p.114.
Rākṣasas and Apsaras. There is also an anecdote that she gave birth to Rākṣasas out of anger. This description appears to be the result of the intention of the author to portray Rākṣasas as cruel beings.

**Description of Different Categories of Rākṣasas**

*Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* gives a detailed account on a number of generations of Rākṣasas. Some of the Rākṣasas mentioned there are famous in epic and Purāṇa literature. They were descended from Kaśyapa in his wife Khaśā. In this way Khaśā is the mother of Rākṣasa race. A large group of Rākṣasas born of Khaśa's daughters are also described there. The names of some important Rākṣasas born on Khaśā are included in the gaṇa of Śiva. They include Bhīma, Sumālin, Madhu, Trīṣiras, Akampana etc. These Rākṣasas are familiar to the epic literature also.

The different groups of Rākṣasas born from the seven daughters of Khaśā are identified by their mothers' name. They are Ālambeyya from Ālambā, Autkaceyya from Utkacā, Autkāṛṣṭeya from Utkṛṣṭā, Śaiveya from Śivā, Nairṛṭa from Niṛṛtī and Kāpipeya from Kapilā.

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43 In Agnipurāṇa Muni is the mother of Apsaras and Arīthā is the mother of Gandharvas. See Agnimahāpurāṇa XIX.18, p.75.
Ālambeya and Autkaceya Rākṣasas are ferocious and cruel in nature while Autkārṣṭeya and Śaiveya Rākṣasas are said to be the most excellent group of Rākṣasas. Nairṛta Rākṣasas who belonged to the group of Deva- Rākṣasas are originated from Tryambaka who is one of the excellent leaders of Gaṇa. Their leader is named Virūpaka who is endowed with yogic power. Another group of Rākṣasas named Daitya- Rākṣasas known as Kāpileyas are considered to have sprung from the famous Daitya king Kumbha. Yakṣarākṣasas were born to a powerful Yakṣa called Kapila in Keśini, one of the daughters of Khaśā. The Rākṣasas such as Hārakas, Bhīṣakas, Reravākas, Piśācas, Vāhacas and Trāsakas are identified as Bhūmirākṣasas who can assume different sizes and shapes.44

The categorization of mythical concepts follows some criteria. Vijay Nath45 in her *Purāṇas and Acculturation- A Historico Anthropological Perspective* points out that the criteria for the differentiation of mythical categories is related to the physical features, level of linguistic articulation and behaviuoral pattern. The description of Asuras, Rākṣasas, Daityas, Dānavas etc. in epics

44 *Brahmaṇḍapurāṇa*, 2.3.7.137-156, p.71f.
45 For more details see Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation- A Historico Anthropological Perspective*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, p.102f.
and Purāṇas clearly shows a process of marginalization they have undergone.

The description of the children of Kaśyapa who comprise various species such as divine, semi-divine, human, subhuman, birds, animals, serpents, trees, creepers etc. is interesting. The depiction of the origin of birds, animals, trees, creepers etc. from human beings seems to be mere fanciful accounts. As regards to the names of birds, animals and others the tenable view is that they are the totems of certain sects of people of ancient days. The fanciful accounts added in these texts may reasonably be viewed as a part of the legitimizing process of the mainstream culture.