PREFACE

Myths are an indispensable part of civilization. Every civilization has its own mythology. Some of the myths are unique and some others are common to many civilizations. They comprise the beliefs, practices, thoughts, culture, religion etc. of the respective civilization. The myths of Asura and Rakṣas (or Rakṣasa) dealt with in Vedas and Purāṇas bear unique position in the social, cultural and religious history of early India. Hence, a clear understanding of them is essential for a better comprehension of India’s ancient past. The present study entitled 'Asuras and Rakṣasas in Vedic and Puranic Literature – An Anthropological Perspective' is intended as an investigation into the various issues related with the development of the concepts of Asura and Rakṣasa through the ages. Anthropology studies any field related with human culture. It tries to study the human culture with the help of various disciplines. Therefore the present study is carried out with the help of the tools provided by Anthropology in general.

Being the first literary composition, the primary reference to Asura and Rakṣasa can be found in Rgveda itself. In early Vedic period both the Asura and Rakṣas were not considered as evil-beings. By the period of Purāṇa literature they are described representing evil-forces. A perusal of early Vedic literature would make it clear that there both the categories of Asura and Rakṣas are signifying particular sects of people or ethnic groups.

The first chapter 'Introduction' has two parts. The first portion, as an introduction, explains the nature, relevance and scope of the study and the tools used in the present work. It mainly discusses the different sects of people come into sight in the Vedic literature. A discussion on the marginalized sections that appear in Vedic literature such as Asura, Rakṣasa and other related categories of non-Aryan group is also made in this portion. 'Origin Development of the Concept of Asura and Rakṣasa', second chapter in this study, analyses various aspects related with the origin and development of the Asura and Rakṣasa concept in India in relation with the civilization of ancient Iran, Assyria etc. It also examines the
degradation occurred in the status of them. The third chapter ‘Implications of the Myths Related to Asuras and Rākṣasas’ analyses the related categories of Asura and Rākṣasa like Dāsas, Dasyus and Pāṇis. The analysis of these Rgvedic categories helps to know the real nature of the concept of Asura and Rākṣasa. An attempt for the identification of Asuras in Vedas has been made in ‘Identification of Asuras in Vedas’ which is given as the fourth chapter. The references to Human Asuras in Rgveda provide ample information to the ethnicity of the concept. An interrogation of the concept of Rakṣas, who are described as a group of enemies of Vedic religion, tells that they were belonged to certain indigenous ethnic groups. Various issues concerning this topic have been discussed in the fifth chapter ‘Rākṣasas in Vedas: Identity and Engagements’. The changing state of affairs of the Asuras and Rākṣasas in Purāṇas are discussed in the sixth chapter named 'Asuras and Rākṣasas in Purāṇas- Deeds and Relations: Changing Scenario'. Various indigenous sects in different parts of India claim to have the legacy of Asura and Rākṣasa. Thus, the last chapter ‘Asuras and Rākṣasas and Indian Social Realm’ analyses the impact of the myth of Asura and Rākṣasa on Indian society. In the final portion ‘Conclusion’ the main observations of the research are highlighted. This is followed with a comprehensive bibliography.

Many aspects of the topic dealt with in this thesis need further inquiry. However, maximum effort has been taken to make an in-depth examination of the problem. It is my supervising teacher Dr. P.V. Narayanan who directed me to get into the topic effectively. I earnestly acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. P.V. Narayanan, Associate Professor of Sanskrit Sahitya, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit (SSUS), Kalady, whose inspiring guidance and incessant encouragement enabled me to make this study possible. I would also express my sincere thanks to Dr. Dharmaraj Adat, Professor and Head, Department of Sanskrit Sahitya, SSUS, Kalady for the advice and help rendered by him for the completion of this work. I am also thankful to Dr. P.C. Muraleemadhavan who was the Head of the Department during the first two years of my research work. My thanks are due to all other faculty members of the Department of Sanskrit Sahitya for the benefit of discussion I had with them. The authorities of the University also deserve thanks
for providing me necessary facilities for completing the work. I record my thanks to the University Grants Commission, New Delhi whose Research Fellowship helped me to remain as full time research student. I am indebted to the Department of Education, Government of Kerala for permitting me to continue my research work after my appointment as a teacher in the Department. Thanks are due to my friends for their suggestions and comments. Finally, I would like to state that it was my beloved father P. Velayudhan who inspired me for doing Ph.D programme. He left this world last year while this work was nearing completion. On this occasion, I intensely do remember his love and care toward me and I pay my tribute to him for leading me to the line of academic research.

Kalady
18-03-2014

VANAJA. V. S