The Purāṇas should be studied and utilised by scholars for throwing fresh light on the various aspects and problems of Ancient Indian History and Culture. But it is a matter of regret, that although the Purāṇas can claim preeminence among the sources of Ancient Indian History and Culture, attention of a few scholars has uptil now been drawn to this vast field of treasure. Some papers dealing with a few problems of the Purānic study, however, have been contributed to the pages of different oriental journals by different erudite scholars, but their number is not at all encouraging.

Nobody denies that writing of a synthetic history on Indian Life and Society as found in the Purāṇas is a desideratum; but in order to achieve it every attempt should be made to find out the different strata which constitute the main bulk of a Purāṇa and the period to which they belong. It is also essential to study the different recensions with their special characteristics and later developments. It may be observed in this context that the aforesaid study is indispensable in connection with the preparation of critical editions of the different Purāṇas, particularly in view of the fact that not a single Purāṇa has been critically edited uptil now.

In the following pages, I have tried to discuss the problems of the Padma-purāṇa. The Padma-purāṇa with its contents
of 55,000 ślokas is one of the most extensive of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas. This Purāṇa can legitimately claim to be the storehouse of Ancient Indian History and Culture. A product of different important sects and sectaries, it has taken long

one thousand years to assume its final shape. People from all parts of India have contributed so that it could find its present form, and its provenance is a long territory extending from Gujrat and Maharastra in Western India to Assam in Eastern India. It is widely popular and in course of time it has come down in two separate recensions e.g. (i) South Indian and (ii) North Indian (Bengal) of which the former has been printed and published on more occasions than one, while the latter still awaits the light of the day. The following pages will show that these two are widely divergent in nature, character and composition. In the first instance, I have tried to establish all the genuine and original constituent parts of the Padma-purāṇa in both these recensions. As regards the Bengal recension, I have collected and collated quite a large number of manuscripts from different parts of the globe and examined them with a view to select the original constituent parts of the Padma-purāṇa in its North Indian (Bengal) recension. Each constituent part has its own and individual problems. The dates and provenance differ. Besides these, there exists quite a large number of treatises which claim to belong to the Padma-purāṇa. No attention has yet been paid to them by any scholar. But they are not negligible. At least in some cases the treatises offer valuable suggestions which help in the matter of reconstruction
of the text of the Padma-purāṇa. They sometimes offer important suggestions with regard to the place, position and arrangements of its different constituent parts. Of these quite a large number of manuscripts, only a few which appear to us to be more important and interesting also, have been examined and their contents analysed.

It is to be noted that in this present work I have discussed the question of the text of the Padma-purāṇa without laying any emphasis on its cultural value. I could not, however, refrain from discussing its social and cultural importance and so I have devoted only one chapter to that effect, though, of course, in a very condensed form. In a work like this, I must confess that some of the conclusions are only tentative for, to quote a famous line, 'there can never be any such thing like finality in research if it is really to add to knowledge'.

As regards the printed editions of the Padma-purāṇa, I would like to mention that although its Devanāgarī recension has been printed and published on more occasions than one (i.e. the Ānandāśrama Press Edition, Venkaṭesvara Press Edition, Vengavāṣi Press Edition, Edited by one Kedarnath Bhaktivinod and one belonging to Śrī-guru-mandala (pranthamālā), none of these can claim to be critical. I have gone through all these five editions and unless otherwise stated, the Ānandāśrama Edition has been used for the sake of reference.
One thing should be noted with regard to the bibliography of books referred to here. Generally its position is just before the beginning of the body of the book. But here it has been placed just after the appendices. In this matter I have followed the principles of Professors Arundell Esdaile of the British Museum and Margaret Mann of the University of Michigan who, in their famous works 'A student's Manual of Bibliography' (pp.83-92) and 'Introduction of Cataloguing and the Classification of Books' (2nd edition, pp.12-30) respectively have placed bibliography at the end of the body of the book.

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