APPENDIX - 1

Origin and Development of the Purāṇas

The term Purāṇa in the popular language goes along with the Vedas, these two words being used in conjunction with each other. Thus, the phrase "Vedas and Purāṇas" indicate that the Purāṇas, along with the Vedas, form an ancient and inseparable part of the Indian religious literature. It, moreover, also suggests that the origin of the Purāṇas is rooted in the Vedic tradition.

The word Purāṇa means "ancient", and therefore, as a text, it means "narrative of ancient times". The etymology of the word is given by Yāska as Purāṇam, purā navam bhavati i.e. that which is new, inspite of being ancient (1). In the Purāṇas such as the Vāyu Purāṇa (2), the Padma Purāṇa (3), the Brahmanda Purāṇa (4), the word Purāṇa is meant to imply the delineation of the ancient traditions.

The AV (5) contains the earliest mention of the word. It says that the Purāṇa has originated from the residue (ucchīṣṭāt) of sacrifice, along with the jcs, the śāmans and the chandas. The Śat. Br. (6), the Gopatha Br. (7) and the Br. Up. (8) also mention this. The Br. Up. (9) states that the Purāṇas have sprung from the breath of the Mahābhūta along with the Vedas and the Itihāsas. It is noteworthy that the word Purāṇa is used in singular in all these references (except for the TA (10), where used in plural, the word seems to refer to the manifold ballads and legends. This suggests that the Purāṇas probably formed a branch of Vedic learning and not a separate variety of literature it implied later on.

Ancient histories, myths, genealogies of the kings and sages, traditions of yajña etc. forming the contents of the Purāṇa literature were recited during the intervals of the rituals of the long sacrificial sessions. The Pariplava Ākhyānas which commemorate the genealogies of the kings and their
liberality towards the sacrificial tradition, form an intrinsic part of the Asvamedha and the Rajasūya sacrifices. Thus, the Ākhyāna portion of the Vedic rituals contains the seeds of the origin of the Purāṇas, and therefore, it can be safely believed that they are as old as the Vedas themselves in the earliest form. Further, hence it is likely that they were recited narrated by the brahmin priests. However, as time passed on, this task was conferred to the Sūtas or bards, belonging to a mixed caste of brahmins and kṣatriyas. By the time of the Āpastamba Dharma-sūtras, the Purāṇas had become a specialized literature of a vast expanse, which catered to the needs of the times and incorporated the different emerging cults also.

There are several Purāṇas of which eighteen are the major ones. The ŚBP (11) mentions that the sages who knew the ancient traditions (purāvidāḥ) speak of 18 Purāṇas in all - big or small. They are Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Nārādīya, Mārkandeya, Varāha, Agni, Bhāviṣya, Brahmaviivarta, Liṅga, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa, and Bhaṅgavata, (12). Of these, the Bhaṅgavata also known as the Śrīmad Bhaṅgavata is the foremost.

Most of the Purāṇas belong to various cults wherein one or the other form of the Supreme Principle (such as Viṣṇu, Śīva, Śakti etc.) is exalted to the highest position. The ŚBP belongs to the Bhaṅgavata cult in which Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Godhead (for details, see the chapter on The Highest Reality).

The contents of a Purāṇa must have the following five subjects (cf. Amarakośa—)

(1) Sarga, ie. creation of the categories,

(2) Pratisarga, ie. re-creation/secondary creation of the categories.

(3) Vamśa, ie. genealogies of kings, sages etc.,
(4) **Manvantara** ie. cosmic cycle governed by a *Manu*.

(5) **Vamsanucarita** ie. accounts of the royal dynasties.

This scope of the *Purānas* appears to be restricted when compared to that depicted later on at the *ŚBP* II.10.1 and XII. 7.9-10. which indicates that probably it is suggestive of the ancient tradition when these topics were recited during the sacrificial rituals. The *Br. V. Pu. also* (14), like the *ŚBP*, gives ten topics that should form the contents of a *Mahāpurāṇa*. The *ŚBP* says that the *brahmārṣis* have determined the characteristics of the *Purāṇas* in accordance with the *Vedas* and scriptures (15). The learned men say that the *Purāṇas* have ten characteristics (*daśabhūlakṣaṇāḥ yuktam purāṇam tadvidah viduh*) (16).

These ten characteristics of a *Purāṇa* are determined by the *brahmārṣis* in the light of the *Vedas* and other scriptures (*vedaśastrā-nausūrataḥ*) (17). They are somewhat different in both the places at the *ŚBP* itself, (though only apparently - not substantially) :-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>ŚBP</em> II. 10.1</th>
<th><em>ŚBP</em> XII. 7.9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Sarga</td>
<td>Sarga</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Visarga</td>
<td>Visarga</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Sthāna</td>
<td>Vṛti</td>
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<td>4 Poṣana</td>
<td>Raksā</td>
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<td>5 Īti</td>
<td>Hetu</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Manvantara</td>
<td>Antarā</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Īśānukathā</td>
<td>Vaṁśa</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Nirodha</td>
<td>Saimsthā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Mukti</td>
<td>Hetu</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Āśraya</td>
<td>Apāśraya</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These characteristics can be applied to the *ŚBP* thus :-
(1) **Sarga** -- i.e. Primary creation (18). It is the projection/evolution of the categories *Mahat*, *Ahaṅkāra* etc. due to the loss of the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* of *Prakṛti*.

(2) **Visarga** -- i.e. Secondary creation (19). This refers to the evolution of beings according to their *karmas* or latent tendencies becoming manifest under the influence of Time, just as seed arises from another seed.

(3) **Sīhāna** or **Vṛtti** -- i.e. Means of sustenance (20). This term indicates the animate or the inanimate system (XII 4.13) by which the living beings adopt-their livelihood by their natural inclinations, out of desire or due to scriptural injunction - This also includes the worlds as well as the regions that form the habitat and support of the living beings.

(4) **Poṣaṇa** or **Rakṣa** -- i.e. Protection (21). This is the direct indication and inclusion of all the *avatāras* of God in various times and forms, wherein His *Līlās* have specific purpose of the protection of *Dharma*. This characteristic too is fulfilled by the *SBP*. (cf. *Avatārāvāda*).

(5) **Ūti** or **Hetu** -- refers to the karmic tendencies in attend and active form (22).

(6) **Manvantara** -- i.e. Epoch of the *Manu* (23). This refers to the joint action on the part of *Manu*, his sons, the gods, *Indra*, the seers and the partial incarnations of that particular age, for the welfare of the world.

(7) (a) **Īśānukathā** -- is the description of the Lord's incarnations as supplemented by his devotees (24-A).
(b) **Vamśa** -- i.e. the genealogies of the kings and the sages descended from *Brahmā* (24-B). The *Vamśānucarita* implies the dynastic history of the great kings and their lives who were devoted to God and the welfare of the world.
(8) **Nirodha or Samstha** - Dissolution (25). It refers to the regression of the worlds into its basic elements into the Lord under the influence of Time. The dissolution or *pralaya* is of different kinds: (a) *Naimittika* or Partial, (b) *Prakṛtika* or Total, (c) *Nitya* or Daily (as in sleep) and (d) *Atyantika* i.e. Salvation.

It is also called **Nirodha** or withdrawal of all the manifestations.

(9) **Mukti or Hetu** - Purpose or cause of creation, which forms the fundamental reason for the creative activity. It, therefore, refers to the *Jīva*, who is subject desire and *karma* arising out of avidyā. He is called *Anusāyī* or Consciousness enjoying the tendencies generated by his *karma*, and ultimately becomes free from them, and abides in Its nature.

(10) **Āśraya or Apāśraya** - Refuge or the Ultimate Support (27). The sole Refuge of the *Jīva* is *Brahman* - the substratum that exists apart from and unchanged during the changing states of waking, dreaming and sleep caused by *Māyā* - He is the support of all. He is the one that witnesses all the modifications of the body, and also that alone which remains after the cessation of all the changes.

In the context of this **Āśraya** the *SBP* (28) upholds the opinion of the great souls that the first nine characteristics of the *Purāṇa* are meant to clarify and assert this tenth *laksana* (daśamasya viśuddhyartham navānām iha lakṣaṇam). Therefore, we find the references to this throughout the *SBP* directly, indirectly, through discussions, sermons and hymns, etc. the different systems of philosophy such as the *Sāmkhya*, the *Yoga* etc. are harmoniously blended to achieve this very aim, and establish the Lord *Krṣṇa* as the Supreme Lord or the Āśraya.

[The Br. V. Pu. re-arranges the list as:

(1) **Srṣṭi,**
(2) **Viṣṛṭi,**
(3) **Sthiti,**
(4) **Pālana,**
(5) **Karma-vāsanā,**
(6) **Manvantara,**
(7) **Pralaya - varṇana,**
(8) **Mokṣa-nirūpaṇa,**
(9) **Hari-kīrtana,** and
(10) **Deva-kīrtana.**]
The Devi Bhāgavata's claims of being the Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa is nullified by Prof. Hazra (29). He notes that in the case of the acceptance of this claim of the Devi Bhāgavata, the SBP (called Viṣṇu Bhāgavata) must be called "Super-Purāṇa", and not an Upa-purāṇa due to its excellence and catholic outlook, as well as its lyrical quality and literary beauty.

**Date of the SBP**

The scholars are not unanimous about the date of the SBP. Prof. Hazra (30) opines that the extant text of the SBP belongs to the earlier part of the sixth century A.D.; however, he says that an earlier text of the SBP existed which was much different from the present one. Dr. Siddeshvara Bhattacharya (31) notes: "... Śrīmad Bhāgavata has three phases of development. In its earliest form it consists of very old material; it was given the shape of a Mahāpurāṇa, and this is the second phase, in the early Christian era; and its last and final phase represents the contribution of the Tamil saints. Viewed from this point of view, the extant Śrīmad Bhāgavata may be said to be contemporaneous with the Tamil saints (the Alvars)". Probably the internal evidence (SBP II. 9. & III) refer to this three-phase development of the text of the South India. Moreover, it is evident the association of the SBP and the Bhakti movement of the Alvars (cf. SBP XI. 5.38-40).

Therefore, Swami Tapasyananda notes (32), "... the Bhāgavata, as it exists today has been thoroughly revised by some unknown savant of South India imbued with the devotional favour of the Alvars... It is perhaps a distant echo of this that we hear in the Māhātmya portion in the story that the damsel Bhakti, born in the Dravida country and meeting with many distortions during her travel through Karnataka and Maharashtra, at last reached Vrīndavana where she grew to full maturity".

Further, of the above ten subjects of a Mahāpurāṇa, Apāsraya forms the primary theme of the SBP and Bhakti for Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is its essence. In this
delineation, the text of the ŚBP shows a great familiarity with the Affy^r movement that took place in the south of India between the 5th and the 8th centuries A.D. Hence, Prof. Hazra (33) assigns the ŚBP to the 6th century A.D. An opinion attributing the authorship of the ŚBP to Bopadeva in the 13th century A.D. becomes nullified by the reference to the Vaiṣṇava Bhāgavata by Alberuni (1030 centuries A.D.) Prof. B.N. Krishnamurti Sarma's mention of Gaudapāda's (7th C.A.D.) reference in his commentary on the Uttaragītā II.46 of the identical line from the ŚBP X.14.4 supports the view of the authorship of the ŚBP to the first half of the 6th century A.D. Mr. N. Raghunathan refers to the omission of Rādhā in the ŚBP and holds the same period for the composition of the ŚBP.

However, most significant thing to be noted is the total absence of any reference of the ŚBP by RāmānujaCārya. Most of the scholars opine that this is probably due to the doctrinal reasons naturally, he being the propagandist of the Pañcarātra Āgama preferred the Viṣṇu Purāṇa to the ŚBP.

Origin of the ŚBP

The essence of the ŚBP constitutes in the delineation of the glorification of Lord Kṛṣṇa and His teachings in order to cultivate devotion to Him. This purpose is reflected in the narration about the origin of the ŚBP in the text itself (34).

Veda Vyāsa re-edited the Vedas, composed the MBh and entrusted these to five of his worthy disciples (35). However, as this great task which he had carried out for their preservation did not give him satisfaction, Vyāsa experienced depression and dissatisfaction. Once while he was brooding over the cause of this unrest on the banks of Sarasvati, Nārada arrived there and sensing the air of grief around the great sage, asked him the reason for it. Vyāsa expressed his inability to analyze the cause for this feeling; therefore, he
seeked Nārada’s help for the same. Nārada explained, “You have not adequately described the unsullied glory of the Supreme Lord. I consider as imperfect all those philosophies which fail to please the Lord because of their lack of devotional exuberance, which alone can give full satisfaction to Him” (36) :-

\[
\text{Bhavatā anuditaprayāyam yaśo bhagavatopamalam} \\
\text{Yena eva asau na tuṣyeta manye tad-darśanam khilam}
\]

“You have not expounded the greatness of Vāsudeva with that exhaustiveness with which you have treated the Vedic rites and the fourfold end of human life, consisting of Dharma etc” (37) :-

\[
\text{Yathā dharmādayah ca arthaḥ munivarya-anukīrtitaḥ} \\
\text{Na tatha Vāsudevasya mahimā hi anuvartitaḥ}
\]

“Therefore, reveal for the benefit of the common man, who is subject to the guṇas of Prakṛti and thereby has forgotten his higher nature, the spiritual activities of the Supreme Being through His cosmic manifestations (38).

The result of this advice was the ŚBP, and hence the author proclaims, “In other works the Supreme Lord Hari, who destroys all the evils of the Kali age, has not been praised in all His parts, but in this narrative the Bhagavan has been glorified in every word of it” (39).

**Place of the Origin of the ŚBP**

The question regarding the place of origin of the ŚBP is inter-related with the authorship of the text. As noted earlier the ŚBP is closely connected with the Bhakti movement of the Alvars of the South. The internal evidence available from the ŚBP itself point to the fact that the unknown seer who wrote this great devotional text belonged to South India :-
(1) The *Mahatmya* portion of the *SBP* (1.48) metaphorically refers to *Bhakti* as a damsel who born in the Dravid country, meeting with several distortions during her travel through Karnataka and Maharashtra, finally reached Vrindavan where she grew to a full maturity: \[ Utpanna Dravide sāham vṛddhim \]

Karnātake gata I Kvaciekvacīn-Mahārāstre Gurjare jīrnatām gata II

This probably is a suggestion also of the existence of earlier editions of the text before this version was accepted as final.

(2) "Men of the Kṛṣṇa and other ages desire to be born in the so-called degenerate age of Kali. For, in Kali are surely born many devotees of Lord Narayana in several parts of the Dravid country through which holy rivers like the Tamraparni, the Kṛttabha, the Payasvini and the Cauvery flow. Those who drink the water of these rivers become pure in heart and develop devotion to Vasudeva" (40).

(3) The style of the *SBP*, specially in the different *Gītas*, resemble very closely to that of the Tamil *Kavya*. The *Gopi-gīta* is an illustration of this (41), wherein the choice of the rhythm, arrangement of words with specific letters and musical quality support this view.

(4) The description of decorations in the cities mentioned in the text is steppe-typed, including the ones situated on the banks of the Sarasvati and in Dwaraka; for e.g., there is mention of the plantain trees, the areca palms and its flowers and such flora which is found in abundance in the southern regions of India (42).

(5) The description of Balarama’s pilgrimage exhibits the author’s thorough knowledge of the important places of South India, and somewhat casual references to those of the North (43).

The above points are clearly indicative of the southern hand behind the composition of the present text of the *SBP*.
FOOT NOTES

1 Nirukta 3.4.19 - Purāṇam purā navam bhavati!
2 Vāyu Purāṇa 1.203 - Yasmat purā ha anaśīdam purāṇam tena tat smṛtam
3 Padma Purāṇa 5.2.53 - Purā paramparāṃ vaṣṭi purāṇam tena tat smṛtam
4 Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa 1.1.173 - Yasmat purā hi abhūt ca etat purāṇam tena tat smṛtam

5 AV XI. 7.24 ; XV. 6.12. 6 Sat. Br. 11.5.6.8.
7 Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 2.10. 8 Br. Up. 2.4.11.
9 Ibid. 10 TA . 2.9.
13 Amarakośa 1.6.5. (Also cf. Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.6.25)
14 Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa - 4.131 8-10.
15 ŚBP XII. 7.8. 16 ŚBP XII. 7.10 ab.
17 ŚBP XII. 7.8. 18 ŚBP II. 10.3 ab.; XII. 7.11.
21 ŚBP II. 10.4.; XII. 7.14. 22 ŚBP II. 10.4 d.
23 ŚBP II. 10.4 c.; XII. 7.15. 24-A ŚBP II. 10.5.
24-B ŚBP XII. 7.16. 25 ŚBP II. 10.6 ab.; XII. 7.17.
26 ŚBP II. 10.6 cd.; XII. 7.18. 27 ŚBP II. 10.7.; XII. 7.19-20.
28 ŚBP II. 10.2. 29 Cultural Heritage of India by Prof. Hazra. (cf. Śrimad Bhagavata - Introduction Ed. and tr. by Swami Tapasyananda).
30 Ibid.
31 The Philosophy of the Śrimad Bhagavata by Dr. Siddheshvara Bhattacharya.
32 Śrimad Bhagavata - Tr. and ed. by Swami Tapasyanada (Introduction).
33 Cultural Heritage of India by Prof. Hazra.
34 ŚBP I. 4 & 5. 35 ŚBP I. 4.19-22.
36 ŚBP I. 5.8. 37 ŚBP I. 5.9.
38 ŚBP I. 5.16 cd. 39 ŚBP XII. 2.63.
40 ŚBP XI. 5.38-40. 41 ŚBP X. 31.
42 ŚBP X. 79.

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