CHAPTER VI

Historical, Social and Cultural Gleanings in Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa

For a long time the bulk of Purāṇic literature were considered as mere records of myths and legends that are fictitious and fraud. But intensive study of all the Mahāpurāṇas and some important Upapurāṇas and several studies related to it by modern scholars have revealed the real importance of this vast oceanic literature related to the political, geographical as well as cultural history of India. The Vamśānucarita portions of Purāṇas which deals with the dynastic accounts form an important part in the political history of India.

Historians have accepted the importance of the Vaṃśa and Vamśānucarita material of the Purāṇas as a source of ancient Indian social history though they assume that they are rarely faithful records of the time past. Information gathered from these portions can be taken as useful data in reconstructing the social history of ancient India. Romila Thapar divides the Vaṃśānucarita portions of Purāṇas into three sections. According to her, the first section which deals with the origin of Ikṣvāku, Ila and Soma, etc. are mere mythical records and they have nothing to do with history. The second section which, according to Pargiter, includes the history of about 64 generations starting from Ikṣāku of Sūryavaṃśa and Purūrvās of Candravaṃśa, is important as far as the social history of ancient
India is concerned. The third section in which the genealogy of the dynasties after Mahābhārata war is mentioned is also important in this regard.

Thapar classifies the information gathered from the second section of genealogy into three types. The first is the information about the geographical distribution of lineages of solar and lunar dynasties. The second is the information that pertains to the social structure. The third is that concerned the economic and political status.¹

This is true in the case of Bdp also. This Purāṇas gives a genealogical picture of the Ikṣāku dynasty which branched into two lineages; one that of Vikukṣi and the other that of Nimi. The first branch established its kingdom at Ayodhyā and the second at Videha. It is to be noted here that, like other major Purāṇas, here nothing is referred to about a third branch. At the same time the description of Chandrvaṃśa lineage shows that they had been divided into different segments and had been migrated in to various parts of India.

**Historicity of the Kaliyuga Dynasties**

*Bdp* gives short sketches of the history of eight successive dynasties which ruled Magadha since the Bhārata war. It is already

¹ *AISH*, pp. 292-294.
stated that the historicity of the Nanda dynasty recorded in $Bdp$ is proved by the Sanskrit, Pāli, Prākṛt literature and also by the epigraphic records. But in the case of Maurya dynasty, it is not much reliable. $Bdp$, like other Purāṇas, gives the list of ten Mauryas. The uprooting of the Nandas and installing Candragupta in his place by Kauṭilya agree with the historical proofs. But account of the successor of Aśoka given in the Purāṇas makes confusion as scholars observes that an impenetrable obscurity settles on the Mauryan Empire after the reign of Asoka. Romila Thapar also states: ‘There is no means of reconciling these divergent accounts except to assume that the empire was in some manner divided among the surviving sons of Aśoka.’

Social Mobility

Scholars who have studied ancient Indian social structure have suggested that change of Varṇa status was permissible in earlier period. $Bdp$ contains several instances where the Kṣatriyas had attained the Status of Brāhmaṇas. The story of Viśvāmitra is a best example for this. It is not a single incident. The Purāṇa gives a list of more than fifteen kings who have attained Brāhmin-hood through severe penance.

According to Dharmaśāstra prescriptions, a son born to a

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2 Romila Thapar, * Decline of the Mauryas*, p.
Brāhmaṇa of Śūdra womb is termed as Niśāda or Pāraśava. But the story of Kākṣīvān and Cakṣus narrated in Bdp makes it evident that the system of considering such sons as Brāhmaṇas themselves was in vague at that time.

Another aspect of social mobility reflected in Bdp is also worth to be mentioned here. As per Varṇadharma, a Kṣatriya only can attain the kingship. But in Bdp several Brāhmaṇa kings and Śūdra kings are seen mentioned. This shows that in early ages kingship was not confined to Kṣatriyas only. Romila Thapar observes: ‘Although dynastic status was not confined to any particular Varṇa, though who succeeded to kingship from the mid first millennium A.D. onwards often observed the formality of claiming Kṣatriya status, or at least of participating in a common Kṣatriya past as embodied in the Itihāsapurāṇa tradition.’ Several dynasties recorded in Bdp in the mid of the first millennium B.C. refer to non Kṣatriya origin. Some are especially said to be Śūdrās. It explained there that Mahānandi’s son, Mahāpadma, begot of a Śūdra women, exterminated all the Ksatriyas and became the king. It is also added that all the future kings will be born of Kṣatriya womb. The family of Rathītara was a combination of Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas. The race of Bali was perpetuated by sons born to Brāhmaṇa sage

\[\text{\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{3} ब्राह्मणगृहश्वरेश्वरकन्यामियामयिः नाम जावते।}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize{निम्नद्रे सूडकप्यायो व: पराशव उच्यते।}}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize{Manusmṛti, X, 8.}}\]
Dīrghatamas. The partial Brāhmaṇa ancestry of some ruling families as given in their genealogies would suggest that even Brāhmaṇa grantees were not averse to participating in this process.

**Description of Kali age**

The description of Kali age incorporated in the last portion of the 74th chapter Upodghātapāda is mythological and it also bares some historical hints. It gives the consequences of coming an ‘Arajaka’ period. It is described in *Bdp* as follows: ‘In the Kali age, there will be an abundance of violence, crime and treachery. The kings will turn thieves and the thieves will become kings. The kings will rob the people of their belongings. They will always engage themselves in their own protection, and not in the protection of the subjects. In that age the water and fruit of the earth will grow scarce with the result even the protectors will behave as offenders breaking all the bounds.……….. Under these conditions, there will no longer remain the Varṇāśrama order and the stability of Vārtā.’¹⁴ Pargiter states that this description portrays the unsettled condition of the country in the early part of the 4th century A.D. The observation made by another scholar, Om Prakash, on this description is worth to be mentioned here. He states: ‘the important point to be noticed in the above Purānic conception of the degeneration in the Kali-age is

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¹⁴ III, 74,vv. 201-241 (translated by Om Prakash).
that in this state of ‘Arājaka’ there is no absence of the state and the king. The state and the king continue to exist as before, but subject to wholesale perversion. The hallmark of ‘Arājaka’ is not the disappearance of the state and the king, but the lack of justice and righteousness, as all the people are given to self seeking and violence. Not only are the state and government unable to check the ‘Arājaka’, but also they finally become instrumental in its promotion. He also points out that through this the Purāṇa implies that it is not Daṇḍa itself, but Dharma or righteousness is the true ante-Arājaka principles. It is also to be noted here that in several other Purāṇas the description of Kali age is given in other contexts. In Bdp it is given in the concluding chapter of the description of royal dynasties. This shows that the main intention of the author is to highlight the importance of Dharma.

**Historical Implications of PR Legend**

The PR legend included in Bdp, along with the land reclamation myth has its importance in several dimensions. It is centered round mainly on the Kārtavīrya annihilation and the extermination of the Kṣatriyas. This story shows that in ancient India the nature of relation between the upper categories, the Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas was not so cordial. Throughout the Purāṇa, PR is

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6 In *Bhāgavata* it is given in 12th Skandha and in *Visṇupurāṇa* in the last chapter.
depicted as a protector of Brähmaṇas against the atrocities of the Kṣatriyas.

The land reclamation and land donation myth is very important as far as its historical implication is concerned. It is described in *Bdp* that on the request of the Brähmaṇas of Gokarna region, PR reclaimed the earth which lies in between Gokarna and Śūrpāra:

> अनन्तिते सरिष्णे राजः सूचमुद्रक्रमकः।
> श्राविश्वातिवेगन विक्षेप लवणार्णवेः।
> क्षिततवेन समुद्रे तु दिसामुतरपशिचमाम्।
> गत्वा स्वुपोपत्राजन्योजनानां शतद्रयम्।
> तीथे सूपारक्त नाम सर्वपापविमोचनम्।
> विश्रुतं यज्ञलोकेषु तीरे नदन्दीपलः।
> तीथे तदन्तरीकृत्य सुवो रामकर्मफुः।
> निपपात महाराज सूचवन् रामिवक्रमम्।
> यत्राभूद्रामसृष्टाया भुवो निष्णाथ पार्थिव।
> तीथे शूपारक्त ततु श्रीमल्लोकपरिन्दुतम्।
> उत्सारसिद्धा संलिंग सम्मुद्रस्ताववदानः।
> अतििष्टदस्यं बत्त्या राजस्य पार्थिव। (Bdp, III.57,vv.15b-21a)

This region in the west coastal area is called as Paraśurāmakṣetra.⁷

This story indicates the Brähmin migration to the south through the coastal area and their settlement of the ‘Saptakoṇkaṇa’ region in the

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⁷ Vide appendix III for a map of Purāṇic India.
western coast. It is clear that this story of the origin of Paraśurāmakṣetra must have had its beginning with an oral tradition. But later it was put into writing to meet the need of a particular community, Brāhmaṇa community, in the society. The interpolation of this mythical episode took place in Bdp also in course its development. It is possible that the settlement of the Brāhmaṇical groups might have been responsible for the spread of this tradition throughout the western coast.

Scholars have interpreted this myth in various ways. Most of them believe that it represents some real geographical or historical event in the past in the western coast. Some scholars have emphasized that some kind of geological upheaval have been responsible for the development of this legend. They believe that constant upheavals on the sea coast with emergence of new land might have helped this myth a strong realistic foundation. However, though the date of origin and development of this myth is difficult to be settled. It is clear that the Brāhmaṇa community utilized this legend to establish their social and cultural supremacy in the west coast area ‘Saptakoṇkaṇa’ including Kerala.

**Brāhmaṇa-Kṣatriya Collaboration**

The study of ancient Indian social structure points out that

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during the end of later Vedic period, there was competition among Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas for domination in society. But later, there emerged alliance between them. This alliance can be seen mainly in two ways. First is in the form of marriages between them and second is in the form of Dāna and Dakṣiṇa. There are sufficient examples in Bṛdp for both these. Several sages have their wives from royal families. King Gādhi gave her daughter Satyavatī to sage Ṛcīka. Thus the wife of Jamadagni was the daughter of king Reṇu. Throughout the text one can see the kings offering Dāna to the Brāhmaṇas and in turn they give boons to have prosperity in this world and world after death.

The glory and power of Brāhmaṇa race is accepted by the Kings also. They are afraid of taking the wealth or belong from Brāhmaṇas without their permission. A good example can be cited from the Kārtavīryārjuna episode. When the minister Candragupta persuades Kārtavīryārjuna to take off the celestial cow from Jamadagni the king says that he is afraid of doing so. He asks his preceptor what to do and the latter establishes the power and greatness of the property of the Brāhmaṇa saying that a poison destroys only a person who has been aimed at as the prospective victim. But the property of Brāhmaṇa, like Araṇi wood will burn the entire family along with its roots:
Religious Rituals and Practices

Apart from the structural frame of myths and legends, the authors of the Purāṇas have used the ritualistic code framed by them for propagating Purānic religion. These ritual ideals can be classified into several categories on the basis of the original source from which they were drawn. Some of them are adapted from Vedic tradition while others have much affinity to the rituals prescribed in Smārta traditions. Still some others are taken from the Āgamic / Tantric traditions. Thus in Purānic religion one can see a synthesis of these three traditions: Vedic, Upaniṣadic and Āgamic.

The Importance of Penance

There are so many contexts which highlight the power and glory of Penance. The PR legend is the most important example for this. Śiva, Brahma, Jamadagni, and Piṭṛs advise PR to perform Tapas for different purposes. PR earns several weapons of divine power through penance. Jamadagni asks him to perform penance as a Prāyaścitta for the killing of Kārtavīrya. Again he is advised by his fore-fathers to carry out penance as an anointment for the bloodshed
that happened through the extermination of the Kṣatriyas. A large portion in the PR legend is devoted for the description of his penance. *Bdp* instructs in several occasions that performing penance makes one capable to achieve high goals. The Purāṇa states that it is more power full than Yajña or Dāna.⁹

**Vratas**

*Bdp* stresses the need of observing different types of Vratas. It may be sometimes a part of penance or sometimes certain independent observances. When Jamadagni advises PR about Vratas, he stresses that they are part of the penance:

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\begin{align*}
\text{kṣattracchāpamūpurvesvam savodhòpashāntaye} & \quad 11 \\
pāyāsīrātāṃ tatprāṭvādāvatātārārṣīṃ & \quad 11 \\
\text{इत्युतः प्राइं पितां रामो मितमां वरं} & \quad 11 \\
pāyāsīrātāṃ tu tādayōyā tām मे निवेदत्तमहिः & \quad 11 \\
\text{नमद्वीरुवाच} & \\
\text{प्रतेशच नियमेषचेत कर्षयन्ते हहमालम:} & \\
\text{शाधोमुलकलाहारो द्रादशाध्य तपस्यर} & \quad 11 \ (Bdp,III,43,vv.32-34)
\end{align*}
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A vow called Upāṃśuvrata, which takes twelve years to complete, is referred to in the context of Triśaṅku episode.¹⁰ It is also explained there that Kārtavīrya achieved his greatness and fame through the observance of certain severe Vratas.

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⁹ *Bdp*, III,66,vv. 84-86.
¹⁰ For details vide, supra, p.
These have, according to Purāṇa, a great spiritual and ethical value. They discipline, purify and sublimate the mind and thoughts. Like these Vratas, different types of Homas are also seen referred to in Bdp. Vijay Nath observes that these Homas are adapted and modeled in the Vedic line.

The Pilgrimage

Like the Vratas, the institution of pilgrimage is the central of socio-religious life in Purāṇas. Like all other Purāṇas Bdp also emphasis the spiritual value of pilgrimage and it is praised as a more efficacious form of sacrifice. Like penance, pilgrimage also is given an important place in the story of PR. Several holy places like Samantapūrṇacaka were created by him. His penance in the Puṣkaratīrtha is referred in the context of Kārtavīrya annihilation. After the extermination of Kṣatriyas, PR went for a long pilgrimage as instructed by his for fathers.

Bhakti

Bhakti or devotion is one of the main themes that find wide exposition in Purāṇas. Bdp postulates that Bhakti is an essential requirement for achieving the full result of recitation of Mantra. The
Purāṇa also gives a detailed explanation of the three types of devotion and a large number of Stotras are incorporated in its body for its propagation.\(^\text{11}\)

**Ethics and Moral Ideologies**

Expositions related to ethics and morals are seen dispersed in *Bdp*. In several places in impart instructions on behavioral patterns points out the consequences of breaking them. In the story of Trīśaṅku Vasiṣṭha excommunicates him on the basis of three sins committed by him.\(^\text{12}\) Here it is implied that disobeying the father, killing of cow, eating prohibited food etc. are considered to be the violation of ethics and so they are treated as sins. In the context of the description of the encounter between PR and Gaṇeśa the author of Purāṇa reminds that he who looks at the buttocks, breasts and face of another man’s wife, his mother, sister or daughter is a base man.\(^\text{13}\) In several places *Bdp* appropriately include such ideas, which is also to be treated as mission of Purāṇas.

Thus Purāṇaic religion can be taken as a culmination of the three ways of life, that of Vedic, Upaniṣadic and Āgamic. A close analysis of the genealogy of sages and kings will make it clear that the first, especially the story of PR, is mainly intended to propagate

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11 See the narration of the incident of an antelope in chapter four, p.

12 For more details vide, supra p.

13 *Bdp*, III,41,vv. 45- 46.
the importance of penance and pilgrimage. At the same time that of kings is included with a view to impart and establish the Vedic ideas and ideologies of Dharmaśāstra matters.

**The Purānic Śaṅmata in Bdp**

Traditionally it is believed that Śaṅkara, the founder of Advaita Vedaṅta, established the Purānic Śaṅmata or six forms of Purānic religion, namely the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, Kausāra, Gāṇapatya and Saura. Due to the lack of proper evidences modern historians do not accept this view. According to them a conscious adoption of the lesser or folk deities like Goddess, Gāṇapathy and Skanda-Kartikeya took place in a later period, ninth or tenth century A.D, which is believed to be the date of composition of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The revival of Vedic Sūrya worship took place at about fourteenth century A.D. So the establishment of Purānic Śaṅmata cannot be attributed to Śankara. The great south Indian historian R. Champakalakshmi states that the reorganization of the Śaṅmata worship is actually the contribution of the spiritual leaders of the Vijayanagara period, between fourteenth to seventeenth centuries A.D, particularly of the Śrīṅgeri Maṭha, which is believed to be established by Śrīśaṅkara himself. Later it was
attributed to Śaṅkara himself.  

Śaiva Cult

Traditionally $Bdp$ is included in the Śaiva list of Purāṇas. There are so many mythological legends described in this text which propagate the greatness of Śiva. The destruction of Dakṣa’s sacrifice, Drinking of Hālāhala, etc. are included here. A story related to the origin of Phallus worship, according to some scholars, is also given here. PR is an ardent devotee of Śiva and he got all his divine missiles from this powerful God.

Viṣṇu - the Supreme God


The Synthesis of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Cults

One of the most important missions of the Purāṇa texts is the

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synthesis of the two divergent cults, Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava. This trend is very much clear in Bṛḍī also. A specific feature to be noted here is that here this synthesis effects through the delineation of the PR legend which cover a major part of the Upodghātapāda. PR who was highly enraged with the ill-treating of Kārtavīryārjuna decided to kill all the Kṣatriyas on the earth. Jamadagni tried to dissuade him from his decision. But Rāma was not ready to accept his words. Then the sage instructed him to go to Brahma and act according to his direction. PR went to the abode of Brahma and discussed the strategy to kill Haihaya. Brahma advises him to secure the Śrīkṛṣṇamantra from Śiva:

śrīkṛṣṇamantrasravē gṛtṛya vatsa guṇorāhāt

durlabhāvān vāyūnāḥ tejā śivakārṇāvijñayat

PR approaches and Śiva eulogizes him with great devotion. Śiva, in turn, instructs him the sacred formula of prayer. The full text of the Mantra is given in chapter thirty three of Upodghātapāda. Just like in Vedic Sūktas, the Ṛṣi, Chandas and Devata are given there as follows:

śadasivastvachyāḥ śṛḍhayā pahātārṇa upāhātām

devatā kṛṣṇā udāyatī vinivāgūśīhālātām

The sage of this Mantra is Sadāśiva, the meter Paṅkti and the deity is Kṛṣṇa. At the same, time adopting the Tantric method, it is also followed by ‘Kavaca’ called Trailokyavijaya. (Kavaca means
protective charm with mystical syllables) praying Lord Kṛṣṇa to protect different parts of the body.

**Gāṇapatya, Kaumāra and Saura Cults**

Though there are no description of the temples or method of worship of Skanda, Gāṇapati and Sūrya, in *Bdp*, it testifies the existence of cults related to these deities. The depiction of Śiva seen by PR follows thus:

\[ \text{Gāṇapati}\]

Kṛṣṇa, while pacifying Pārvatī enumerates the eight names of Gāṇapati such as Gaṇeśa, Lambodara, Gajānana, Phālacandra, Śūrpakarṇaka, Vighnanāśa, Ekadanta and Vakratuṇḍa. Further he tells Pārvatī that in all consecratory rites like Jātakarma and Garbhādhaṇa and in all other auspicious undertakings, Gaṇeśa would be worshiped first:

\[ \text{Gaṇeśa}\]

All the above mentioned facts show that prior to the final redaction of *Bdp*, the Gāṇapatiya cult was well established. The legendary story of the birth of Kāṛttikeya is given in detail in *Bdp*. Syamantaka
episode narrated in chapter 71 deals with the methods of worship of Sūrya and a Mantra devoted to him.

Śakti Worship Mentioned in Bdp

*Bdp* mentions a number of cults, which we have to presume were widely prevalent at the time of the composition of the Purāṇa. They are: The Vedic Mantras, Viṣṇumantras, Durgāmantras, Gāṇapatyamantras, Sārasvatīmantras, Śaivamantras, Lakshmī mantras, Arkamantras, Girijāmantras, Syāmāmantras and Lalitā mantras. This multiplicity of cults shows beyond doubt the use of these cults in preference or along with one. The Vedic system of worship and prayer had become decadent and a number of new cults, each of which claimed to be rooted in the Vedic Mantras, sprang up. Excepting a few, most of the cults mentioned above, centre round the category of the Śakti cult. According to *Bdp*, however, the cult of Lalitā was the most efficacious. The main centres of Śakti worship referred to in this Purāṇa are Śrīpura (Sri nagar) and Kaśī.

Rādhā - Kṛṣṇa Cult

Another peculiar aspect seen in *Bdp* is the importance of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult. The exposition of this cult is seen in three contexts in this text and all are related to PR. In the Kavacamantra which was instructed by Śiva to *PR*, Kṛṣṇa is eulogized as Rādhikeśa - राधिकेश्वर स्वाहोति कण्ठे मे पातु सर्वदा. Again the eulogy of Kṛṣṇa which
PR learned from Agastya is called ‘Kṛṣṇapremāṁśta.’ The name itself gives an indication of Premabhakti, which developed in relation with the development of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult. The author explicitly expresses this idea saying:

इति तेजम्भितं राम स्तोत्रं प्रेममृताभिधम्।
कृष्ण्यत्व विपुमन्त्र राज्याकार्त्त्व विस्विदम्।

A more clear and elaborate reference of this Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult is seen in the 42nd chapter of Upodghātapāda, where the scuffle between PR and Gañēṣa in which the former smashes the tusk of the latter is described. Due to Śiva’s inaction against PR, Pārvatī became angry and she started to leave Kailāsa. Then Śiva meditates Lord Kṛṣṇa and seeks his help to handle the situation. Kṛṣṇa comes there with Rādhā and settles everything.

Through this story, Bdp explicitly propagates the synthesis of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults, which was accepted as the mission of the Purāṇas. Through Rādhā’s verses this Purāṇa declares the identity of Śiva and Viṣṇu as well as Rādhā and Pārvatī. Rādhā says:

प्रकृति: पुरुषस्वभावप्रामाण्याश्रयविद्यधी।
dhā mārgo prakāśoṁ praprajñevidasmin cakrtha tathā।
तव चाहामायोदेभं भदो नेतापि कस्यचन।
viṣṇुसवमहेश्वरस्वमिभवो द्विपुणृतम्।
शिवस्व तदये विषुभवत्या रूपमास्मितः।
मम रूपं समास्थय विष्णुश्च हृदये श्रवः। (Bdp,III, 43, vv. 48, 49)
It is to be noted here that if the date of *Bdp.* is accepted as 5th century A.D. the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa references seen in the text seems to be inter-polatory in nature. Because the name of Rādhā is not mentioned even in *Bhp.* *Bhp* only refers to a Gopī, who was favorite to Kṛṣṇa along with whom he wandered in the forest. It is in the works of Viṣṇusvāmin and Jayadeva that this favorite Gopī gets the name Rādhā. Nimbārka, Vallabha and Chaitanya depict her as the wedded wife of Kṛṣṇa. Later in the sect called Rādhā-Vallabhi, which was founded at the end of 16th century A.D. Rādhā becomes the queen of the world and Kṛṣṇa only her agent.\textsuperscript{15} The influence of Śāktism is very clear in this concept.

Chapter 32 and 33 of *Bdp* are very important as they depict the religious condition of the period when different sects of Indian religion had reached a compromise. Brahma’s sending of PR to Śiva to receive the knowledge of weaponry, Siva’s granting PR the perfect missile effective of world conquest, as well as the protective armor and the 108 names of Lord Kṛṣṇa are the instances for this point.

Though, thus, all these cults and traditions are found in *Bdp* the author of the great Purāṇa incorporates all these elements effectively in it mainly making use of the PR legend, the description

\textsuperscript{15} Champakalaksmi, *op.cit.*, pp.165ff.
of which is a unique one in it. All other episodes are mostly taken from the Vāyupurāṇa. But PR legend, with all its expansion and interfusions of different episodes, is the unique contribution of Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa.

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