CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Earlier Attempts in Purāṇic Studies - An Overview

The Purāṇas constitute a considerable part of the rich Sanskrit literature and their importance and relevance can be assessed in various dimensions. For a long time they were viewed only as explanatory treatises of Vedas in the form of myths and legends. But now they are accepted as texts which reflect the social and cultural life of the people of the entire subcontinent. Modern scholars have pointed out that the Purāṇic religious tradition is much different from both the Vedic and Smārta traditions. Retaining its roots and resources of ancient scriptures Purāṇic literature developed imbibing the customs and believes of the common folk. So this vast corpus of literature reflects the social and cultural life of Indian people to a great extent. Scholars of Purāṇic studies as well as historians, now-a-days accept these literary works as a source for the study of ancient and medieval social history of India. A survey of earlier and modern studies of Purāṇology will clearly reflect the changing approaches in this field.

Earlier Attempts

From the middle decades of nineteenth century onwards, Indologists all over the world were attracted to the field of Purāṇic
studies. Scholars like V.Kennedi, H.H.Wilson, F.E.Pargiter, Kirfel, Barth, Monier Williams, E.W.Hopkins, Jolly and Mayer have thrown valuable light on different aspects of Purāṇas and Purāṇic studies and have today become popular only due to their efforts. It was V.Kennedi who with his work *Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient Hindu Mythology*, published in 1831, drew the attention of the scholars to the Purāṇic Literature for the first time. In continuation to this, H.H.Wilson edited and translated *Viṣṇupurāṇa* in 1840\(^1\). The Translation of *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in French by E.Burnouf was also published in the same year.

Several Indian scholars also were engaged in editing and translating various Purāṇas. Among them the name of M.N.Dutt comes first and foremost. He has translated five Purāṇas such as *Viṣṇu* (1894), *Bhāgavata* (1895), *Mārkaṇḍeya* (1896), *Agni* (1901) and *Garuḍa* (1908). *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* was translated by another two scholars also, by K.M.Banerjee (1851) and C.C.Mukharjee (1893). Generally speaking, this period was that of editions and translations, though monographs and critical introductions were also published which give importance to the study of the nature and content of different Purāṇas.\(^2\) It is to be mentioned here that several

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\(^1\) 5 Vols., London,1864-70; reprinted, Culcutta,1972.

Scholars, especially the western Indologists like Barth, Monier Williams, and E.W. Hopkins, treated this Purāṇic literature as mere compilation of myths and legends and its place was determined by them among the religious scriptures only.

New Dimensions in Purāṇic Studies

With the publication of two works, *The Purāṇa texts of the Dynasties of the Kali age* (Oxford, 1913) and *Ancient Indian historical tradition* (Oxford, 1922) F.E. Pargiter paved a new path in the field of Purāṇic studies. While Wilson considered Purāṇas to be fiction and ‘pious frauds’ Pargiter held them as historical records. He tried to reconstruct the beginning of Indian history by correlating the genealogical information from the Vaṃśa and Vaṃśanucarita materials included in them. Another Western scholar, Professor W. Kirfel, in his work *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa* (Leiden, 1927) carried out an analytical study of the characteristic features of a Purāṇa for the first time.

R.C. Hazra has bestowed much effort in the study of Purāṇas in general and of individual Purāṇas. He concentrated his studies on the Dharmaśāstra materials incorporated in these texts. Apart from various articles he has written two books, *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs* (Dacca, 1940) *Studies in the Upapurāṇas* (2 Vols. Culcutta, 1958). In his first work, analyzing
numerous Purāṇic extracts and references found in commentaries and digests he has proved that these texts were accepted as major authorities on Smṛti matters. In his Upapurāṇa studies he has tried to determine the probable date of several of them. P.V.Kane in his magnum opus *History of Dharmaśāstras*\(^3\) has discussed almost all the aspects of Purāṇas. Chapter XXII of the book is devoted for the description of the origin and development of Purāṇa literature. In Chapter XXIII, he gives brief information of some individual Purāṇas and Upapurāṇas. However his discussion is concentrated on the Dharmaśāstra materials as found in these texts. He has examined the views of other scholars like Pargiter and R.C.Hazra.

**Importance of Thematic Range**

During the second phase, the scholars began to give more importance to the thematic range of these texts. Some scholars concentrated their study in analyzing the contents of individual Purāṇas while others concentrated in the study of some aspects of Purāṇic literature in general. Two works of V.R.R.Dikshit, *Some aspects of Vāyupurāṇa* (Madras 1933) and *Matsyapurāṇa - a study* deserve special mention. He tried to analyze the Purāṇas focusing on different themes like cosmogony, Philosophy, art and architecture. His another work *Purāṇa Index*, in 3 vols (Madras,

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1951-55), is one of the most celebrated treatise in this field. In 1975 *Purāṇic Encyclopedia* by Vettam Mani was published from MLBD, which is a land mark in the Study of Purāṇas. This is the English translation of the work published in Malayalam by the author with the same title earlier. Another leading work among this category is *Cultural History from Vāyupurāṇa* by D.R.Patil (Poona 1946). As a continuation, a series of studies was published among which *Matsyapurāṇa - A Study, Vamanapurāṇa, Studies in the Devībhāgavata, Liṅgapurāṇa - A study, Studies in the Skandapurāṇa* and *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* are important. Among the second category S.A.Danke’s two works *Glimpses of Purāṇic Myth and Culture* (Delhi, 1987) and the *Encyclopedia of Purāṇic Beliefs and Practices* (5 Vols, New Delhi, 1990) deserve special mention. Another two efforts in this field are *Historical and Cultural Studies in the Mahāpurāṇas* (Allahabad, 1978) by S. N. Roy and *Studies in the Mahāpurāṇas* (Calcutta, 1991) by S.C.Banergy.

**Studies Based on Regional History and Culture**

As an impact of the nationalist historical thought, the initial interest in regional history also began to develop. Like several other source, Purāṇic literature also was accepted as a body of information of regional history as they contain regional features, mythology, social life and such other details. Scholars were attracted to the field
of the study of Sthalapurāṇas and Kulapurāṇas which betray a prominent regional bias. Several of them were published and studies on them were carried out. The Sarasvatīpurāṇa was published by S.K. Dave in 1968 and Nīlamatapurāṇa was first published in 1924 from Lahore. A detailed study of this text in two Vols. named *The Nīlamatapurāṇa* by Ved Kumari was published in 1973 from Srinagar.

The contributions of Romila Thapar and R.S. Sarma in this field are also notable. They extended the scope of the Purānic studies to the realm of social history. Thapar concentrates her studies on the Vaṃśa and Vaṃśānucarita portions of Purāṇas and accepting them as a source for the study of Ancient Indian Social History. In her *Ancient Indian Social History - Some Interpretations* (Orient Longman, 1978) she discusses the importance of the Purāṇas in the field of historical cultural and social history of ancient India.

**New Approaches**

Some remarkable studies in this field with new approaches have been written recently among which *Purāṇas and Acculturation - A Historical – Anthropological Perspectiv* by Vijay Nath (Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001) and *Religious Process - The Purāṇas and the making of a Regional Tradition* by Kunal Chakrabarti (Oxford Uty. press, 2001) are notable. In the first work
mentioned above, the author tries to find out the real rationale for the origin and growth of Purāṇic literature. Kunal Chakrabarti has demonstrated how the corpus of Purāṇic literature in Bengal evolved as a result of an interaction between the orthodox Brāhmaṇical authority and the accumulation of local traditions. Some essays by Prof. R. Champakalakshmi that analyze the main features of Purāṇic religion and its influence on Śaiva Tradition are also important in this field. There are several other studies in this field. But only some prominent works, which represent different approaches, are mentioned here.

Thus the Studies in Purāṇas have a history of starting from the early half of the 18th century to the present time. Hundreds of texts and studies have been published during this period concentrating on various aspects of Purāṇic texts collectively or independently. Still further studies on this bulk of literature have much scope.

Scope and Significance of the Present Study

One such area of study that has still scope is that of the Vaṃśa and Vaṃśānucarita sections of the Purāṇas. Some general studies in this area have already come out as shown above. But studies concentrating on the sections mentioned above based on Brahmapurāṇa (Bdp) have not done hitherto. Though these sections in this text are indebted to a great extent to other major
Purāṇas, especially Vāyupurāṇa (Vap), it has restructured and remolded them adapting episodes and incidents from the two epics, Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata (Mbh). It has included myths and stories from popular traditions also. An analysis of these episodes on the basis of historical, social, cultural and religious aspects has considerable scope for study.

The study is carried out mainly focusing on the socio-religious aspects reflected in the Vamsa and Vaṃśānucarita portions. It analyses how these genealogical accounts are used as tools to propagate the vision and the mission of the Purāṇa texts by incorporating the concepts of Dāna, Tīrtha, Vrata, Pūjā, etc. and several behavioral ethics deep rooted in Dharmaśatra texts.

**Chapters of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. First chapter is an introduction in which a survey of earlier attempts in the field of Purāṇic studies is carried out. Different approaches of western as well as Indian scholars in this field are summarized there. The scope and relevance of the present study are also discussed in this context.

Chapter II, Development of Purāṇas - Changing Scenario in Nature and Content, is devoted for a detailed study of the different categories of Purāṇa texts, varying in their content and format. The changing patterns like Mahāpurāṇas, Upapurāṇas, Kulapurāṇas,
Sthalapurāṇas and Jainapurāṇas are analyzed here. Synthetic nature of the Purāṇic texts with the four different literary units, Ākhyāna, Upākhyāna, Gāthā and Kalpa, is traced out. The expansion of the definition of Purāṇa from Pañcalakṣaṇa to Daśalakṣaṇa and shifting their angle to the encyclopedic nature are also discussed.

In chapter III, *Textual material and Content of Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, a detailed study of the text according to the five characteristics of Purāṇa is attempted. Textual material, the identity of Vap and Bdp, date and place of composition of Bdp, editions and other details are discussed first in the chapter. A brief explanation of Lalitopākhyāna, an appended portion to the extant Bdp, is also given here. Geographical details, art and science, astrological materials and topics related to Dharmaśāstra, which are seen narrated in the text, are also examined.

Chapter IV is named Genealogical data of Sages and the Paraśurāma Myth. The succession list of the sages like Bhṛgu, Aṅgiras, Atri and Vasiṣṭha given in the Vaṃśa portions of Bdp is discussed first. The mythological account of the origin of all mobile and immobile beings from Kaśyapa, the son of Marīci, as narrated in the text is summarized here. The legend of Paraśurāma and its various dimensions with several episodes such as the Kṣatriya annihilation myth and the land reclamation myth included in it are put in focus in
this chapter.

In Chapter V, *Genealogical Accounts of Royal dynasties in Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, a detailed study of the Vaṃśanucarita portions of *Bdp* is carried out. The genealogies of two lineages, Solar and Lunar, originated from Ikṣvāku and Aila respectively, are presented in detail as narrated in the text. The succession lists of the kings of the dynasties of post Bhārata war mentioned in the text are also subjected for study.

The VI chapter is *Historical Social and Cultural gleanings in Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. The reliability of the genealogical materials in *Bdp* as a source of social history of ancient India is discussed first. The importance of Paraśurāma myth as a tool to establish the synthesis of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava cults and the exposition of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult is specially subjected to evaluation here. The role of *Bdp* in the formation of different types of rituals like Vratas, Śrāddhas, Dānas, Tīrthasnaṇa and temple worship which are the main ideological mechanisms used to frame the belief oriented system of the composite Purānic religion is also examined.

Chapter VII is in the form of conclusion. A general evaluation of the topics discussed in the thesis and new findings are given here. A selected bibliography is given at the end.

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