

SILVER JUBILEE PUBLICATION SERIES-14

LEGENDS IN - PURĀNAS

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Preface

The origin and publication of this small book lie in the warm invitation extended by Dr. K.K. Mishra, Director, Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, Delhi, to contribute a monograph on "Purāṇas" on the occasion of the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee Year of the Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan in October, 1995.

Legends in Purāṇas owe their origin to Vedic literature as well as to post-Vedic literature. These legends had attracted me since long and I had worked upon some of them. The time at my disposal to select the theme of the monograph and then work on the chosen theme was extremely short. I, therefore, hit upon a plan to put together some of my earlier studies, which were mainly in the area of Vedic and Purāṇic correlative studies. In a way there were *upabṛñhanic* studies. I have tried to revise and recast my earlier studies - earlier essays-, as much as I could within a short span of time with my indifferent health.

In this monograph Chapter I is a newly written chapter, while Chapter II : Legend of Purūravas and Urvaśī in the Bhāgavata-Purāna" is an unpublished paper. Chapter II - to Chapter XI deal with legends which inherit the Vedic legacy and are rooted in Vedic literature. Chapter XII : "Aṇi - Māṇḍavya - Legend" deals with a legend having its origin in the Mahābhārata and it is utilised by Purāṇas in their own way. Naturally this legend is not a study in Vedico-Purāṇic correlative aspects, as the ones in the preceding chapters.

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N.B. : As the Abbreviations used in this monograph are well known, its list is not given.

Chapter - I

Introduction

Purāṇas form a rich department of the Sanskrit literature and reach back to great antiquity¹ and are rooted in Vedic literature. "In the Purāṇas themselves ...the number of existing Purāṇas composed by Vyāsa" is unanimously given as eighteen.² They are : 1. Brahma-Purāṇa, 2. Padma-Purāṇa, 3. Viṣṇu-Purāṇa 4. Vāyu-Purāṇa, 5. Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, 6. Nārada-Purāṇa, 7. Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, 8. Agni-Purāṇa, 9. Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa, 10. Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa, 11. Liṅga-Purāṇa, 12. Varāha-Purāṇa, 13. Skanda-Purāṇa, 14. Vāmana-Purāṇa, 15. Kūrma-Purāṇa, 16. Matsya-Purāṇa, 17. Garuḍa-Purāṇa and 18. Brahmāṇḍa-Purāṇa. These Purāṇas are said to be *Mahāpurāṇas* (great/major Purāṇas). There are also other texts known as *Upapurāṇas* (secondary/minor Purāṇas). They are said to be eighteen in number, but they outnumber this number. There is a controversy regarding the Vāyu-Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa as to their being *mahāpurāṇas* with reference to the Śivapurāṇa and the Devī-Bhāgavata-Purāṇa and there is a general consensus of opinion that the Vāyu-Purāṇa and the Śrīmad-Bhāgavata-Purāṇa are *Mahāpurāṇas*.³

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1. Winternitz M., A History of Indian Literature, (Calcutta), Vol.I, (translation by Mrs. S. Ketkar) 1927 p.518.
 2. Winternitz M., *op.cit*, pp.530-531.
 3. *Vide* Pusalker A.D., Studies in Epics and Purāṇas (Bombay), p.41; Hazra R.C., The Devī-Purāṇa, New Indian Antiquary (Bombay), Vol.V, pp.1-20.

Chapter - V

Brahmā - Sarasvatī Legend

The Brahmā-Sarasvatī legend is broadcast in Sanskrit literature and is traceable to the Vedic literature and it is re-told with additions and alterations in several Purāṇas.¹

Part - I

Summary of the Legend

In the MP (= Matsyapurāṇa) which is one of the earliest Purāṇas, the legend is narrated in the context of the primal creation (*ādisarga*). On the epoch-making event of the creation Brahmā meditated on Sāvitrī and whilst he was engrossed in *japa*, his body was cut in twain. One half of the body became the female and the other half became the male. This female half was reckoned as his daughter, as she was born of his body (*aṅgajā*) and she came to be variously known as Śatarūpā, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī and Brahmāṇī. Being mad at Śatarūpā's peerless beauty, he gazed at her libidiously in all directions² and finally he married her, the blameless one, who gave birth to Manu Svāyambhuva *alias* Virāj and other sons.

The MP has a second half of this legend and it

1. Vide Chitrav Shastri Siddheshvar, *Prācīnacārītrakośa* (Hindi), Poona, 1964, p.527.
2. As a consequence of gazing at her in all directions Brahmā came to have five faces. His fifth head was covered in his matted hair and was lopped off by Śiva (MP.3.40; 183.86).



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