

CHAPTER - V

The Relative Dates of Relevant Purāṇas :-

After having analyzed the sources of Mahābhāgavata-Purāṇa we now proceed to consider the comparative dates of some twelve purāṇas in their historical order.

(1) Vāyu-Purāṇa :-

According to the opinion of Dr. Bhandarkar Vāyu-Purāṇa seems to be the oldest of all the Purāṇas and Matsya-Purāṇa appears to follow it closely in point of time. In his opinion Vāyu-Purāṇa must have been composed possibly in 300 A.D. According to a reference in Vāyu-Purāṇa 99.258 which reads : The righteous famous Adhiśīmakṛṣṇa is (ruling) now¹ (i.e. at present). Adhiśīma-Kṛṣṇa flourished in 300 A.D. His empire existed in the times of Samudragupta. Hence the history preceding him is not found in the Purāṇa under discussion. In the opinion of Baladeva Upādhyāya and Dr. Bhandarkar the Vāyu-Purāṇa is definitely very old. This Purāṇa is free from narrow sectarian bias. It is also free from the influence of Tantra. The Vāyu-Purāṇa was very popular during the 6th and 7th centuries.²

(2) Viṣṇu-Purāṇa :-

On the basis of the brief narration of the legends of Dhruva, Vena, Prthu, Prahlāda, Jāṇabharata in Viṣṇu-Purāṇa and

1 Adhiśīma-Kṛṣṇo dharmātma
Sāmpreto yam mahāyeśaḥ.

(Vāyu-Purāṇa
99.258).

2 Vide : Shastri and Dr. Padamja Hodsaraker, Joshi Pandit Mahādeva
" Bhāratiya Sanskriti Kosa ", Khanda-8, 410 Shaniwar Peth
Pune-411030, P.597.

their amplification in Śrīmad Bhāgavata it becomes evident that Viṣṇu-Purāṇa precedes Bhāgavata.

In Viṣṇupurāṇa 2.9.16 the counting of the constellations begins with constellation Kṛttikā, which is corroborated by the statement of Varāhmihira as prevalent in olden times. But in the times of Varāhmihira (approximately 550 A.D.), the counting of constellations started with constellation Āśvinī. As a result Viṣṇu-Purāṇa which establishes Kṛttikā as the initial constellation deserves to be older than 500 A.D. Similarly there are many references to the signs of the zodiac in Viṣṇupurāṇa e.g. 3.8.28, 2.8.30, 2.8.41, 42, 2.8.62-63. The first reference to the signs of the zodiac in Sanskrit works is found in yājñalkya Smṛti which was composed in the second century as a result Viṣṇupurāṇa cannot be older than second century.³

On the evidence of Vācaspati Miśra regarding Viṣṇupurāṇa's being quoted in Yoga Bhāṣya it appears proper to consider it to belong to the period preceding the first century. From the reference in Maṇi Mekhalaḥ it becomes absolutely clear that in the Tamil country in those days lectures and recitation of Purāṇas before general public was done to uplift their morality. This state of affairs was prevailing in the second century A.D. The reference to Viṣṇupurāṇa in Maṇi Mekhalaḥ indicates that it was selected on account of its importance and its popularity.

3 Vide Dr. Hazara R.C., "The Date of Viṣṇu-Purāṇa", *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Part 18, 1936-37.

Consequently the Viṣṇupurāṇa or its majority portion must have been composed in the first century A.D. According to the opinion of Baladeva Upādhyāya Viṣṇupurāṇa must have been composed in the second century before christ.

(3) Devī-Bhāgavatapurāṇa :-

Fergusson takes Devī-Bhāgavatapurāṇa to belong to the period ranging from 900 to 1350 A.D. According to the remark of Dr.R.C.Hazra the date of compilation of this work mentioned above is fully supported by its Tantric elements as well as by the non utilisation of its contents by the commentators and Nibandha writers.⁴

T.N.Ramachandren places the date of the Devī-Bhāgavata not later than the 6th century A.D. by taking the story of Nara-Nārāyaṇa's penance as given in Devī-Bhāgavata Skandha IV Adhyayas 5-10 to be the basis of the scenes of penance of these two sages in the eastern niche of the Gupta temple of Deogarh in the Jhansi district. But between the story of their penance as described in Devī-Bhāgavata and the Deogarh relief there are more points of difference than those of agreement. Hence in the opinion of Dr.Hazra this story can never be taken to be the source of the relief.⁵ As a matter of fact this story comes from a very late period and is a definitely later version, with certain striking innovations and mention of Ādi-Sakti and Tantric Bījas, then that found in Vāmanapurāṇa Chapters VI-VII with which the Devī-Bhāgavata

4 Hazra R.C., 'Studies in The Upapurāṇas,' Vol.II, Chapter-IV, P.427.

5 Ibid., P.428.

has a good number of verses in common. As the present Vāmana-Purāṇa cannot be dated earlier than 700 A.D., the Devī-Bhāgavata must have been written later than at least 750 A.D.⁶ However Dr. Hazra thinks that the Devī-Bhāgavata was compiled probably in the 11th or 12th century A.D.⁷

(4) Vāmanapurāṇa :-

As this purāṇa establishes the incarnation of Vāmana it is in its original form a Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa. But at sometime this Purāṇa was transformed as a Śaiva Purāṇa, which is its popular form in these days. Consequently the biography of Lord Śiva and goddess Pārvatī is described in details in it in rhetorical style. Vāmanapurāṇa is decorated in its descriptions by rhetorical figures of speech and is influenced especially by Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa on account of the similarity of the object of description.⁸ As a result of the influence of Kālidāsa on Vāmanapurāṇa its date of composition can be the time subsequent to Kālidāsa i.e. between 600 - 900 A.D.

(5) Kālikāpurāṇa :-

While discussing the date of the earlier Kālikāpurāṇa Dr. Hazra passes the following remarks. In his Caturvarga-Cintāmaṇi, Hemadri quotes from the Kālikāpurāṇa five lines which give a list of 18 Purāṇas including the Kālikā which is called the original Bhāgavata. So the earlier Kālikāpurāṇa which thus

6 Dr. Hazra R.C., Studies In the Upapurāṇas, Vol. II, P. 433.

7 Ibid., P. 427.

8 For detailed similarities between the two works refer to Upādhyāye Baldev, 'Purāṇa Vimarśa', Chowkhamba Vidyābhavana, Varāṇasi-1, P. 560.

laid claim to the position of Bhāgavatapurāṇa must have been written at a time when the position of the latter had already become enviable. As the Bhāgavata-purāṇa is to be assigned to the 6th century A.D. and most probably to the former half of that century, the earlier Kālikāpurāṇa could not have been written earlier than 600 A.D. Moreover the numerous quotations made from the Kālikāpurāṇa by Maṇyadeva, Lakṣmīdhara, Aparārka, Vallālasena, Hemādri and others who flourished in different parts of India show that the earlier Kālikāpurāṇa must have been written not later than 900 A.D. As already stated by Dr. Hazra the group of 18 Upapurāṇas was formed approximately between 650 and 800 A.D. and as all the lists of 18 Upapurāṇas contain the name of a 'Kālikā', 'Kālīpurāṇa', the earlier Kālikāpurāṇa should be dated not later than 700 A.D. because the Purāṇik works generally take fairly long time to attain a state of authority. It is highly probable that this work was composed sometime during the 7th century A.D. Now we shall try to determine the date of the present Kālikāpurāṇa. The extant Kālikā not only knows the Rāsis and week-days and the ten forms of Viṣṇu of which the 'Matsya', 'Kūrma', and 'Varāha', have been dealt with elaborately by Dr. Hazra in Chapters 25-35, but is remarkably indebted for many of his ideas and expressions, to Kālidasa's Kumārasaṃbhava and Māgha's Śiśupālavedha, and most probably to the Devī-Purāṇa also. As the date of the present Kālikāpurāṇa, which we have already seen was composed either in Kāmerūpa or in that part of Bengal which was very near to it, cannot be placed before 750 A.D.⁹

9 Vide; Dr. Hazra R.C., "Studies in the Upapurāṇas", Vol. II, P. 295.

(6) Vaisṇava Bhāgavata (Śrīmad-Bhāgavata) :-

The determination of the period of composition of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata also depends on the external evidence. Hemādri has quoted the Stanza viz. "Strīśūdradvijabandhūnām" from Śrīmad-Bhāgavata in 'Vrata-Khaṇḍa' of his work 'Caturvarṇa-Cintāmaṇi'. Hemādri flourished in the 13th century A.D.

Ānand Tīrtha (alias Madhvācārya born 1199 A.D.), the promulgator of dualism has referred to the original purport of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata, in his 'Bhāgavatatātṭparyanirnaya', and considered it as the fifth Veda.

The quotation of some ślokaś from the 'Veda Stuti' (10.87) as well as from the eleventh skandh of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata in his 'Vedāntatātvasāra' by Ācārya Rāmānuja (born 1017 A.D.) establishes the precedence of Bhāgavata. In his 'prabodhasudhākara' Ādyasāṅkerācārya has composed many verses in imitation of certain verses of Śrīmad-Bhāgavata. Gauḍapādācārya, the Parame Guru of Sāṅkerācārya has quoted a Stanza from Śrīmad-Bhāgavata, "Jagrhe Paṇḍurāśm rūpam" (1.3.1) in his Pañcīkaraṇa Vyākhyāna. He has also quoted the following Stanza from Śrīmad-Bhāgavata in his commentary on Uttara-Gītā expressingly referring to Śrīmad-Bhāgavata. The said Stanza is a part of eulogy of Lord Brāhmā contained in the 10th Skandha Adhyaya 14, Stanza-4. Thus on the strength of external evidence Śrīmad-Bhāgavata must precede Gauḍapāda. The time of Sāṅkera's flourishing has been fixed at the end of the 7th century depending upon specific evidences. Hence the time of flourishing of his Parame Guru Gauḍapāda must be in the beginning of the 7th

century reasonably. Therefore Śrīmad-Bhāgavata cannot be considered later than 6th century A.D.¹⁰

(7) Liṅga-Purāṇa :-

According to the opinion of Pandit Mahādev Shastri Joshi Liṅga-Purāṇa must have been composed during 7th or 8th centuries A.D. In this respect some evidences are found from the Purāṇas themselves. In this purāṇa there is a reference to the incarnations of Buddha and Kalki. This reference proves that the date of composition of this purāṇa cannot be earlier than 7th century A.D. In the 9th Adhyāya of Liṅga Purāṇa, there is the description of the obstacles in the practice of Yoga. There is a noteworthy similarity between the above description and that found in another work viz. Vyāsa Bhāṣya. The time of Vyāsa Bhāṣya cannot be prior to the 6th century A.D. Hence it is decided that the composer of this Purāṇa must have based his yoga Viśaya on the Vyāsa Bhāṣya.¹¹

According to Baladev Upādhyāya the detailed description of the form and greatness of Pāśupata Saṃpradāya proves that the expansion of Liṅga Purāṇa took place in the tradition of Pāśupata Śaiva. The rise of Pāśupata Śaiva tradition had already taken place in the second or third century A.D. But the special amelioration of Pāśupata Śaiva tradition took place in the 7th or 8th centuries A.D. This is precisely the time of the origin of Liṅga-Purāṇa.¹²

10 Vide : Upādhyāya Baladeva, "Purāṇa Vimarśa", Chowkhamba Vidyābhevan, Vārāṇasi-1, PP.547-48.

11 Vide : Joshi Pt. Mahādeva Shastri and Kumari Padmajā Hoḍārkar, Bhāratīya Saṃskṛtī Kośa, Khanda 8, Bhāratīya Saṃskṛtī Kośa Maṇḍal, 410 Shaniwar Peth, Pūne, PP.366-67.

12 Vide : Upādhyāya Baladeva, "Purāṇa Vimarśa", P.557.

(8) The Devī-Purāṇa :-

The analysis of contents of the present Devī-Purāṇa will show how important, this work is from various points of view, especially for the history of Śāktism. But unfortunately, it does not contain the whole of the original Devī-Purāṇa which must have been a much bigger work. We have already mentioned that in Chapter I of the present Devī-Purāṇa. Vasiṣṭha speaks of four Pādas of the Devī-Purāṇa and gives the contents of all these Pādas. This statement of Vasiṣṭha is corroborated by Bhagīratha who in his commentary on Kumāresambhava on the basis of the story of the birth of Kārttikeya as given in the Devī-Purāṇa, and thus proves that the Devī-Purāṇa with the contents of at least its fourth Pāda, was known to him. But in the present text of the Devī-P. We find only those topics which have been mentioned (in Chapter I), as the subject matters of the first two Pādas or rather the second one, and at least three of the complete MSS. of the Devī-P. end with the verse 'etac cābhyudayaṃ Pādamaṃ Śatais tribhir narottamaih etc. Hence it is evident that the present Devī-P. does not represent the bigger and entire work that was known under the same title in earlier days but contains only a portion ending with the Trailokyābhyudaya-Pāda and dealing with the first incarnation of Devī. This fragmentary condition of our present Devī-P. is due most probably to the repeated revisions and abridgments to which this purāṇa, like many other works of its class, was subjected from early days. The Devī-P. itself records a tradition that this 'Sāstra' was revealed by Śiva to Brahmā in ten lac^{kh} (of ślokaś) and by Brahmā to Indra in one lac^{kh} (of ślokaś).

It then reached Agastya, and Agastya narrated it to King Nṛpavāhana. That, inspite of all its exaggerations, this tradition is not totally false, but is based on some amount of truth, is shown by (i) the absence of the third and fourth Pādas and most probably of the major portion of the first also, from the present Devī-P. (ii) the abrupt beginning of the Purāṇa, the sudden mention of Nṛpavāhana and citrāṅgada in Devī-P. 1.63-66 without any previous introduction, and the abruptness of some of the introduction, ~~and the abruptness of some of the introduction.~~ (iii) a comparison of some of the extracts quoted in the Nibandhas from the Devī-P. with their parallels in the present Devī and (iv) the loss of some of the chapters from the extant work. The above tradition as well as the probable loss sustained by our extant Devī-P. shows that changes made in the present Devī-P. are far more of the character of consideration than of expansion by additions. So, inspite of these repeated changes the major portion of the present contents of this purāṇa can generally lay claim to an early date, if not to that of its first composition. The close interrelation among the chapters, also points to the general integrity of the Purāṇa, so, at least the great majority of the chapters must be taken as contemporaneous. The Devī-P. calls itself a 'Purāṇa' or a 'Śāstra' and never an 'Upapurāṇa', but it has not been included in any of the comparatively early lists of eighteen Purāṇas or Upapurāṇas contained in the different Purāṇic and non-purāṇic works, most probably because of its abounding in Tantric elements. Yet it is certainly not a very late work. It has been profusely drawn upon by a large number of Nibandhakāras both early and late e.g. Gopālabhṭṭa quotes numerous verses from Devī-P. Chapters 51, 61, and 118 in his Haribhaktivilāsa. Gadādhara from Chapters 22, 24,

27, 59, 61 and 96 in his Kālasāra etc. Some of the verses of the Devī-P. which were derived by Raghunandana from 'Vācaspatimiśra', 'Kṛtyamahārṇava', 'Kṛtya-cintāmaṇi', 'Navya-Vardhamāna', 'Durgā-bhakti-taranginī (of Vidyāpati)', 'Naiyatā-Kālikā-Kalpataru' and 'Kāmadhenu' (1000 - 1100 A.D.) are found in Devī-P. Chapters 21, 24 and 59. Hence the date of the present Devī-P. which was known far and wide in the eleventh century, can never be placed later than 850 A.D. The Devī-P. cannot possibly be later than 700 A.D.¹³

(9) Skanda-Purāṇa :-

This skanda-purāṇa is so much amplified that there is a great scope for connecting the different episodes and as a result it has become very difficult to decide its exact date. Dr. Haraprasada Shastri has found a MS. of skanda purāṇa in the royal Nepal library which is written in the style prevalent in the 7th century A.D.¹⁴ After having weighed all the evidences, it becomes quite evident that the time of skanda purāṇa cannot be earlier than 7th century A.D. nor can it be later than 9th century A.D.¹⁵

(10) Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa :-

According to the statement in the Bharatīya Saṁskṛti Kōśa Ādya Śaṅkarācārya has quoted from the Brahmavaivarta purāṇa

13 Vide : Studies in the Upapurāṇas, Vol. II by R.C. Hazra. Published by - The Principal Sanskrit College, 1, Bankim Chatterjee Street, Calcutta. P.85.

14 Catalogue of Nepal Palm-leaf MSS. P.52.

15 Vide : Upādhyāya Baladeva "Purāṇa Vimarśa" Chowkhamba Vidyābhavana, Vārāṇasi-1, P.560.

in his commentary on *Viṣṇusahasṭraṇāma*. Accordingly this purāṇa must have been composed before Ādya Śaṅkerācāry.¹⁶

According to *Purāṇa Vimarśa* by Baladev Upādhyāya the detailed description of the adoration, and religious rite pertaining to goddess Rādhā do not permit us to place this purāṇa before ninth or tenth centuries A.D. Many scholars place this purāṇa in the 15th century A.D. Keeping in view the influence of Rādhāvallabhi Sāṃpradāya on this purāṇa. The portion of this purāṇa which refers to the Mlechhas indicates that this purāṇa must have been composed after the advent of the Muslims. This time of composition of Brahmapaivarta pertains to the popular Brahma-Vaivarta-Purāṇa. The original Brahma-Vaivarta-Purāṇa no doubt belonged to more ancient period.¹⁷

(11) Śiva-Purāṇa :-

Śiva-Purāṇa is popular in Tāṃildesh from ancient times. Terumalnātha has translated some of its parts in Tāṃil language, probably in the 16th century A.D. In the description of India by Alberuni there is a reference to the Śiva-P. (11th century A.D.). On the evidence of the above two references, it becomes clear that the Śiva-P. must have been composed before 1030 A.D. For internal evidence we can depend on Kailāsa Saṃhitā of this Purāṇa in which there is a reference to the doctrines of Pratyabhijñā

16 Vide : "Bhāratīya Saṃskṛti Kośa", Part-6, Bhāratīya Saṃskṛti Kośa Maṇḍala, 410, Shaniwar Peth, Pune 411030, P.

17 For more details vide : An article on this subject which appeared in "Purāṇam" (Khaṇḍa-3, Part-I, January 1961). Page 92-101, in which the evidences in support of being more ancient composition of the original Brahma-Vaivarta are found. Vide : "Purāṇa Vimarśa", Page No.556.

philosophy in Adhyayas 16th and 17th. Therein there is a clear reference to the Śivasūtras and a Vārtika relating to it. Śivasūtra is a work of Vasugupta. Vasugupta must have flourished in the 9th century A.D. There are Vārtikas on Śivasūtra by Bhāskara and Varadarāja. These Vārtikas must have been composed in the middle of the 9th century. According to Baladeva Upādhyāya the time of Śiva-P. must be the 10th century A.D. In his opinion out of the two Purāṇas the Vāyu and the Śiva, the Vāyu must be more ancient mahā-Purāṇa, while the Śiva-P. is modern and following the Tantra system.¹⁸

From the strong influence exercised by Śivapurāṇa over Mabhg. as seen in Chapter IV, it can be easily surmised that SVP. must have been composed before Mabhg. at least a century or two earlier. Thus the analysis of the indebtedness of Mabhg. to SVP. has helped to fix the time of the composition of the latter with certainty i.e. a century or two earlier to that of the Mabhg.

(12) Mahābhāgavata-Purāṇa :-

It has already been mentioned that the Brhaddharma-P. has included the name of the Mahābhāgavata in its lists of eighteen 'Mahat Purāṇas'. That the Mahābhāgavata mentioned in the Brhaddharma-P. is the same as the extant one, is shown definitely by the fact that the author of the Brhaddharma-P. has not only derived many of his stories from present Mahābhāgavata, but has

18 Vide : " Bhāratīya Sanskr̥ti Kośa " Part-9, PP.326, 327.

plagiarised a large number of verses from the latter. As a matter of fact, a comparison between these two Upapurāṇas shows that the author of the Brhaddharma-P. thoroughly utilised the language and contents of the Mahābhāgavata in his work. Hence the Mahābhāgavata must have preceded the Brhaddharma-P. by a fairly long time, otherwise it could not have been regarded as an authoritative Mahat Purāṇa by the author of the latter. We shall see afterwards that the Brhaddharma-P. was composed not later than the middle of the fourteenth century A.D. Hence the Mahābhāgavata cannot be dated later than the twelfth century A.D. Its Śaiva tendency like that of the earlier Kālikā-P. and its silence about the present Kālikā-P. which is remarkably inclined towards Vaiṣṇavism tend to show that it was written about the tenth or eleventh century A.D.¹⁹

The Mahābhāgavata calls itself Purāṇa as well as Mahāpurāṇa but never 'Upapurāṇa', and this claim has been supported by the Brhaddharma-purāṇa which includes its name among those of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas. It knows the names of rāśis and week days, and mentions the Tulasī plant as well as Rādhā, the beloved of Kṛṣṇa. However, the Mahbg. is certainly not a very modern work. In his report, P.12 Dr.R.G.Bhandarkar mentions a complete MS. of the Mahbg. which is found in the Bombay Presidency. In the collection of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, there is a MS. of the Mahbg. which is dated Śaka 1697. Śrītirthasvāmin, who was most probably a court poet of Mahārājā Kṛṣṇa-

19 Vide : Hazra R.C., " Studies in the Upapurāṇas Vol.II ", P. 346.

candra of Nadia (Bengal), wrote a philosophical treatise entitled *yathārtha-mañjarī*; in the middle of the eighteenth century. In this work he ascribes to the Mābhg. three lines ' jñānāt Sañjāyate muktiḥ ' etc. which are the same as Mābhg. 15.63^b-64. In the introductory portion of his *Śāradā-maṅgalakāvya* Śiva candra Sena, who lived a little later than Bharatacandra (a vernacular poet of Bengal), refers to the Mābhg. (as describing the autumnal worship of Durgā. In the Dacca University collection there is a MS. (No.1470) of the Mābhg. which is dated 1729 Śaka and which, in its last leaf, contains a saṅkalpa-mantra for the study of Mābhg. In this collection there is another MS. (No.4150) which contains a metrical Bengali translation of the *Bhagavatī-Gītā* constituting Chapters 15-19 of the Mābhg.²⁰

20 Vide : Dr. Pushpendra Kumar, Introduction to The *Mahābhāgavata-Purāṇa*, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi, 1983, PP. 27-28.