

CHAPTER - XI

Conclusion

One of the main purposes behind the composition of Purāṇas, Upapurāṇas etc. was to strengthen righteousness in the society. To a large extent they have been successful in carrying out their mission by narrating anecdotes illustrating the law of Karma. This Epic Purāṇic literature has played a leading role in the preservation and growth of Hindu civilization and culture. It becomes quite clear from the foregoing study that the Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa has very well achieved this end by linking the different anecdotes with the greatness and adoration of the great goddess.

Even though the Mahbg. refers to Vāmamārgīya Upāsana of Devī involving the utilization of Pañcamakāras and Māraṇocātānādi Śaṭkarma, still the general emphasis is on the Dakṣiṇamārgīya Upāsana of Devī. The Mahbg. has relegated Vāmamārgīya Upāsana to a secondary position as clearly stated in 46.15^{cd} - 18^{ab} and 22 and thus it has improved upon the method of Devī worship propounded in some other Śākta Purāṇas like Devībhāgavata and Śākta Tantras, in course of time.

The Mahbg. utilizes the Upaniṣadic thoughts regarding the concept of the ultimate nature of Devī as well as the Bhāgavadgītā and the epics. To some extent the Mahbg. utilizes the concepts of Pratyabhijñā philosophy also. Under the influence of Śākta Tantras and Śākta purāṇas like Devībhāgavata, Kālikāpurāṇa etc. the Mahbg. refers to the Mantras, Tantras

and Dīkṣā etc. as also to fifty-one Mahāpīṭhas (or Śaktipīṭhas) formed by the falling of the limbs of Chāyāsati among which Kāmākhyā is considered the best and is eulogized extravagantly. Moreover the Mahbg. refers to Daśamahāvidyās as also to Devī's ordaining Lord Śiva as the exponent of the Mantras, the Yantras, the procedure of adoration and sacrifice, the method of Puṣṭacaryā, the eulogy, the Kavaca, the rules of behaviour and daily practices for the aspirants which testifies to the prevalence of those practices in the society of those times. The Mahbg. has tried to strengthen and spread the said practices in its turn.

Even though the Mahbg. emphasizes the spread of Śakti cult its outlook is not at all narrow as generally observed in the case of some other sectarian Purāṇas. The Mahbg. poses a very liberal sectarian outlook in so far as it gives due respect to the other sects and the divinities of their worship.

Devī's guidance and participation in bringing about the end of Rāvaṇa were indispensable as shown in the Mahbg. The forced entering of Sītā in Laṅkā enraged Devī Who immediately abandoned Laṅkā and stopped giving protection to Rāvaṇa. Sītā's confinement in the Aśoka grove by Rāvaṇa made him lose the merit of his penance and hastened his end. This point remains hidden in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa which is expressly stated in the Mahbg. (36.62^{cd}-66;88) and explained in details in Appayya Dīkṣita's Rāmāyaṇasārassamgrahavivarāṇa.¹ As rightly

1 Vide Bhatt B.N., "An Analysis of The Rāmāyaṇasārassamgrahavivarāṇa of Appayya Dīkṣita", Journal of the Oriental Institute, Vol.XXXII, Nos.1-2, Sept.-Dec. 1982, Barode, PP.156-157.

pointed out by Dr. Pushpendra Kumar, "Ultimately Rāma was victorious over Rāvaṇa and was very much grateful to Śakti or goddess by whose grace he succeeded in realizing this extraordinary aim which earned him fame, kingdom and Sītā. In this way it depicts the over-powering influence of Śaktism over Rāma, a Vaiṣṇave deity".² Though in the other Purāṇas also we find that Rāma worshipped Durgā and then killed Rāvaṇa with her help, but the readers will be astonished to study in the Mābhg., that Kṛṣṇa also was an incarnation of Devī. Śiva once requested Devī to be the husband and himself to be the wife, and this desire, as Purāṇa-kāra says, was fulfilled by the goddess in Kṛṣṇāvatara. He himself was born as Rādhā, being the beloved of Śrīkṛṣṇa.³

As noticed correctly by Dr. Pushpendrakumar, a study of the Mābhg. shows that the author of this work lived in a society in which the most powerful sects were those of the Śaivas, Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas. The society was seriously influenced by Tantrism. Even in their conception of the forms of deities they were often guided by the Tantras. So, the author of the Mābhg. praised varṇāśrama-dharma and prescribed the study of Vedānta. He did not decry Tantrism but tried to bring about a compromise between the two systems.⁴

2 Vide Introduction to the Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi-7, 1983, P.32.

3 Ibid., P.31

4 Ibid., P.29

The foregoing chapters reveal that this Purāṇa supplies valuable social and religious data that are important for the study of the cultural history⁵ of India. It throws welcome light on the condition of society in medieval India especially in its eastern region.

Moreover the Mahābhāgavata throws light on different philosophical doctrines⁶ evolved since ancient times.

Even though this Purāṇa (actually Upapurāṇa), is lacking in the characteristic features of a Purāṇa normally considered to be five, still it has got some of the ten characteristic feature⁷ noticed in Śrīmadbhāgavata.

As befits a Śāktapurāṇa, the Mahbg. tries to show the relation of Śaktism with all the important personalities of Indian History, and gives a Śākta colouring to some legends Epic as well as Purāṇic. Thus the Indra-Vṛtra episode as well as the Rāma episode, the Kṛṣṇa episode and the Kaurava-Pāṇḍava battle episode all the main and important events of Purāṇic Mythology⁸ are related with the cult of Śakti. Thus the author tried to establish harmony between the Śākta sect with other sects of Hinduism viz. Vaiṣṇavism pertaining to Rāma and Śrīkṛṣṇa as well as Śaivism. The broad-mindedness and the absence of sectarian bias⁹ on the part of the author

5 Vide Chapter X

6 Vide Chapter VI

7 Vide Chapter II

8 Vide Chapter VII

9 Vide Chapter I

of Mabhg. P. is specially noteworthy which are revealed by the thoughts of Viṣṇu establishing non difference between Himself and Śiva. No antagonism is shown between the two great gods Śiva and Viṣṇu Who are the two forms assumed by the same one great god.

Not only the author's liberal sectarian outlook is noteworthy but his attempt at the synthesis of sects is also praiseworthy.

In the wake of Devībhāgavata, Mabhg. (36.1-3;9) refers to the promulgation of the adoration of Devī in Śārādīyanavarātrī. Thus it has contributed significantly in the spread of Devī's Śārādīya Navarātrī Pūjā¹⁰ especially in eastern India.

The teaching of Yogasāra (Adhyaya 15) and the Bhagavatīgītā (Adhyayas 16-18) constitute the didactic sections in the Mabhg. which throw welcome light on the nature of the self and instruct about the means of release along with such instructions spread over the whole Purāṇa. According to the opinion of Dr. Pushpendra Kumar Bhakti¹¹ is the main tenet of Śaktism in this Purāṇa.

Even though Tantricism has left its imprint on the Mabhg., the actual Tantric material is scanty in it. However Devī assigned equal status to Āgama Śāstra as well as Veda. This is a peculiar improvement in the outlook towards the Āgamas and their evaluation.

10 Vide Chapter VIII

11 Vide Introduction to the Mahābhāgavatapurāṇa, Eastern Book Linkers, Delhi-7, 1983, P.30.

The anecdote of Sitā's birth from the womb of Mandodarī must have crept in the Mabhg. under the influence of Tibbati, Khotānī (800-900 A.D.) Rāmāyaṇas. Most probably under the influence of Tibbati Rāmāyaṇa as Tibet is in proximity of Kāmarūpa (Assam). The Mabhg. (1000-1100 A.D.) in its turn must be one of the works which must have disseminated the said anecdote in subsequent works e.g. the Kashmiri Rāmāyaṇa (end of 18th century A.D.).

From the deep influence exercised by ²Sivapurāṇa over the Mabhg.¹² it can be easily surmised that ²SVP. must have been composed before Mabhg. at least a century or two earlier. Thus the analysis of the indebtedness of the Mabhg. to ²SVP. has helped to fix the time of the composition of the latter with greater certainty i.e. a century or two earlier to that of this Purāṇa i.e. either eighth or ninth century A.D.

The Mahābhāgavata has given the iconography of the well known Daśa Mahāvidyās of the Tantras which are said to be worshipped according to the Tantric rites.

This Purāṇa exhibits the middle stage of the development of some five primary Mahā (Śakti) pīṭhas mentioned in the Kālikāpurāṇa to 51 Mahā (Śakti) pīṭhas on account of the falling of the limbs of Chāyāsetī. Devīgītā mentions the number of Śaktipīṭhas to be 72. Whereas Devībhāgavata refers to 108 Śaktipīṭhas, specifying the Pīṭhasthāna and its presiding deity. Tantracūdāmaṇi has given the details of the place of falling of Setī's limb, the specific limb fallen,

the name of the female deity and the name of Her male counterpart as regards 51 Pīṭhas. In spite of Devībhāgavata's specifying more than double number of Pīṭhas than the Mābhg., its chronological precedence over the latter cannot be questioned on other grounds.

The treatment of the subject matter in this Mābhg.P. is very systematic excepting a few discrepancies as shown in the chapter IX.

Above all one of the Upapurāṇas viz. the Brhaddharma-purāṇa enlists the Mahābhāgavata as a Mahāpurāṇa and has not only thoroughly utilized the language and contents¹³ of the

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- 13 Some such instances of utilizing the language and contents of Mābhg. by Brhaddharma are as follows. (1) Consulting of Devī for Rāvaṇavādhopāya Br. Adhyāya 18 = Mābhg. Adhyāya 36 and 37 (up to st.15). (2) Hanumāna's seeing Devī in Her temple in Lankā Br.20.12-20 = Mābhg. 39.15^{cd} - 22 and reminding Devī about Her decision to quit Lankā on his entering it Mābhg. 39. 23-26 and Devī's accepting his request and quitting it 39. 27-28 = Br.20. 21-62.^d (3) Devī's creating the three Puruṣa's from three Guṇas and instructing them to practise penance by a voice from the air, Their doing so, Devī's putting them to test and accepting Mheṣa, firm in His trance as Her resort, rejecting the other two. Br. 31. 6-34 = Mābhg. 3. 26^{cd} - 32^{ab} and 36^{cd} - 49. (4) The origin of eleven Rudras who were put under the control of Dakṣa by Brāhmā. Br. 32. 35, 39-42 = Mābhg.5. 33-40. (5) Satī's introducing the ten Mahāvidyās to Śiva. Br. 36. 128 - 130 = Mābhg. 8.65 - 71^{ab}. (6) Satī's ordaining that Śiva would proclaim the scriptures throwing light on Devī's worship. Br. 36. 135 - 140 = Mābhg. 8.74^{cd} - 77. (7) Śiva's keeping Satī's dead body on His head and dancing and Viṣṇu's cutting off Her limbs and their falling on the ground and turning into Sakti (Mahā)pīṭhas. Br. 40. 17-35 = Mābhg. 11. 51-60^{ab} and 76.80.

Mabhg. but it has plagiarized a large number of verses from the latter.¹⁴

This emphasizes the importance of the Mabhg.

The foregoing arguments reveal that the study of the Mabhg.P. enlightens us about the philosophical, mythological, social, religious and cultural state of affairs prevailing in North-eastern India in mediaeval times.

14 e.g. (1) Br.22. 4-5^{ab}, 5^{cd}-6,7,8,11^{ab} = Mabhg. 45.6-9, 11^{ab}. (2) Satī's selecting Śiva as Her husband by putting the garland on the ground uttering 'Śivāya namaḥ' is imitated by Br. 33.22-27^{ab} from Mabhg. 4.45-51. (3) The dialogue between Satī and Śiva regarding attending Dakṣa's sacrifice contains many verses taken verbatim from Mabhg. e.g. Br.36. 24^{ab}, 25, 26, 28-30. Satī's arguments in Br. 36. 34,35 = Mabhg. 8. 38-42. (4) Śiva's taunting Satī. Br. 36.63^{cd} = Mabhg. 8.43^{cd}. (5) Before abandoning body, Satī told Dakṣa about Her intention to quit Her body produced by him immediately. Br. 36. 68 = Mabhg.9.81. Many such verbatim similarities can be traced between the two Purāṇas exhibiting imitation on the part of Brhaddharma from the Mabhg. Vide also chapter I under the topic "The Importance of the Mabhg.", PP.7-8.