

SYNOPSIS OF THE THESIS
 "ANCIENT INDIAN SOCIETY, RELIGION AND MYTHOLOGY
 AS DEPICTED IN THE MĀRKANDEYA - PURĀṆA."

(A CRITICAL STUDY)"

STATEMENT NO. 1

HOW THE PRESENT THESIS TENDS TO
THE GENERAL ADVANCEMENT OF
KNOWLEDGE

'The Purāṇas are like the real 'Bible' for the common people, and Purāṇic-readings in temples etc. are popular even now. They occupy "a unique position in the sacred and secular literature of the Hindus, being regarded as next in importance only to the Vedas."¹ They afford

1 Pusalkar A.D., Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas, Introduction, p. Xliii.

us far greater insight into all aspects and phases of Hinduism, and are useful for a historical study of Indian Society in general as well as for comparative studies in the fields of religion, philosophy, mythology and legendology. / "Taken collectively they may be described as a popular encyclopaedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical, historical, personal, social and political.² We get a complete picture of the mind, heart, spirit, and body of India from the intelligent and comprehensive study of the Purāṇas.³

The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa (= MKP), which is one of the eighteen Mahā-Purāṇas, has already been studied by Prof. F.E.Pargiter who has offered an English translation with a critical introduction discussing the following topics:- (1) Composition (2) The place of origin (3) The date of the Purāṇa, and (4) Other matters of interest.⁴ He has also

2 Pargiter F.E., an article on the "Purāṇas", ERE, Vol.X, p. 448.

3 Banerjea A.K., an article on the "Purāṇas", Prabuddha Bhārata, Vol.LIX, February, 1954, No.2, p.65.

4 The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, E.Tr., Introduction, pp. IV-XXII.

discussed at length critically the geographical, ethnic and floral data of the Purāṇa, and hence little is left to be done on these problems. Yet many other problems have still to be worked out. Besides, his treatment requires revision in many places, particularly in the regular interpretation of certain verses of the Purāṇa.

Dr. D. R. Patil had an idea of reconstructing the Kulturgeschichte of Indian Society from the Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Mārkaṇḍeya and Matsya Purāṇas, but he had to abandon the long project on account of the exigencies of time and merely concentrate on the Vāyu-Purāṇa. Since then, there is yet no study of the MKP from a cultural point of view, except some stray articles of Dr. V. S. Agrawala dealing with some of the topics viz. (1) The Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa, Eka Adhyāyana (two articles on the same in 'Gītā-Sandeha') (2) A Cultural Commentary on the Sarasvatī Stotra (Purāṇa, Vol.I, No.2, February 1960, Vasanta-Pañcamī Number, pp. 139-145), and (3) Padminī Vidyā of the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa (Ibid., pp. 188-197), and one article of Swāmī Prajñānanda dealing with the 'Analysis of Music in the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa' (The

Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, Vol. XXIX, 1958, parts I-IV, pp. 130-138). Yet there is lot of scope for detailed work on this Purāṇa as is proposed to be done in the present thesis. Further a study of the MKP is justified not only because "it is one of the oldest in Purāṇa literature,"⁵ but also of its rich cultural data. And moreover, in view of the paucity of cultural studies of the Purāṇas, there seems to be a long-felt need for an intensive study of the MKP from a cultural point of view, where the data on the social, religious and mythological (among other) aspects can be critically discussed at length. Above all, the Devī-māhātmya section of this Purāṇa is considered as the 'Bible' by the followers of the Devī-cult which is as important an aspect of Hinduism as Vaiṣṇavism and Saivism. Besides, in the polytheistic religion of the Hindus the Devī-worship is a very important form.

It is on these among other considerations that I have made an humble attempt to offer a study of the MKP on

5 Majumdar R.C. and Pusalkar A.D. (Ed.), The Classical Age, p. 293.

the lines suggested above. I have given it the title viz. "Ancient Indian Society, Religion and Mythology as depicted in the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa (a critical study)". I may further humbly point out that this study satisfies a long-felt need of the cultural study of the MKP which, it is hoped, will be very useful for the study of the general culture of the Purāṇas. Moreover, the religion of Devī, which is very important in this respect, has been studied here by dealing with its most important source (viz. the Devī-māhātmya) which was not done so far and has been overdue. Besides, my work has succeeded at least in some places to improve upon Prof. Pargiter in the textual interpretation of the MKP. It is in these and similar aspects that my work should be considered as an advancement over the earlier knowledge on the MKP.

STATEMENT NO. 2SOURCES, INDEBTEDNESS AND ORIGINALITY

In the preparation of the present thesis, I fully drew upon all the available literature in print in many languages like English, Hindi, Gujarati etc. An acknowledgement has been made in proper places and a complete bibliography is also given.

I studied the text of the MKP and the relevant literature and have tried to express my personal views which can be called original in as much as they establish certain relationships of facts which has not been done so far, e.g. the chapter on 'Popular Superstitions' in the MKP which gives many new things hitherto not discussed. Moreover, I have been able to confirm some of the older conclusions such as the earlier and later parts of the MKP its home and date etc. as discussed by Prof. Pargiter.