

Epilogue of Mahabharata

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HARIVAMSHA AND THE PURANAS

The Harivamsha exhibits the C-style except for twelve adhyayas including the Ushasvapna which belongs to the Beta style. Harivamshakara has appended it to the epic as a supplement (khila). It is, however, doubtful if the Harivamsha can be called a supplement of the epic as it was appended to the epic eight centuries after Vaishampayana and nearly three centuries after Suta and Sauti. Moreover the accounts of Krishna's early life in Gokula as given in Harivamsha and the Brahma, Vishnu, Bhagavata and the Brahmavivarta puranas are not only different, but also inconsistent and mutually contradictory (Pusalkar, p. 61). In view of this the historical basis of Krishna's early life among the cowherds in Gokula is very much open to doubt. It is also to be noted that the Critical Edition of the Mbh. does not mention Nanda and Yashoda, the foster parents of Gopala Krishna: if Krishna had spent a happy childhood in Gokula as stated in the Harivamsha, it is strange that Krishna never bothered to visit his foster-parents, who are said to have brought him up with loving care. There is no mention of such a visit in the Mbh. This seems to support the view of Nanimadhaba Choudhuri that Gopalakrishna was a

deity of the Abhira origin, who later came to be identified with the epic hero, Vasudeva Krishna.

The term itihāsapurāṇa which occurs in the Chhandogya upanishad seems to refer to the Mbh., as the Ramayana is named adikavya. The term purāṇa is mentioned in the Atharvaveda, but it is very much doubtful whether it had assumed the independent form as in Vayu Purana. Perhaps the term refers to the dialogue hymns of the Rigveda, which Oldenberg styled as akhyanas, or dramatic tableaux as held by Max Muller and Levy or as ancient ballads as described by Winternitz or the Gāthā Nārashamsis of the Brahmanas which were recited or acted in sacrificial sessions and on the other festive occasions. Doubtless there seems to have been floating material of ballads, legends and folktales, which were dramatised at sacrificial sessions or domestic festivals, which later came to be incorporated by the bards or minstrels in the epics and the puranas. There is no evidence at present to support the view of Pusalkar (p. 4) that earlier versions of the puranas existed in the period of the Bharata or Ramayana war.

Dr. Vaidya in his Critical Notes (p. 755) states that the Harivamsha was given the form of a purana text at a later stage and in support quotes the summary of Harivamsha given in Agnipurana (adhy. xii) where it starts from adhyaya XX. However, according to the statistical study the first twenty adhyayas also exhibit the C-style and so formed part of Harivamsha right from the beginning. But, there is not the least doubt that the Harivamsha satisfies the characteristics of a purana as stated in the classical definition of the term by Amarasimha (5th century A. D.), which is also described in some puranas as panchalakshana. These five characteristics are stated to be creation (sarga), dissolution (pratisarga), geneologies

(vamsha), ages of Manu (manvantara) and geneologies of kings (vamshanucarita). Vaidya has shown how these five characteristics are present in the Harivamsha. The first adhyaya (23-39) deals with creation, while the second adhyaya (1-6, 48) contains an account of dissolution and recreation. The seventh adhyaya (1-47) contains a full description of only the six past Manus and the Vaivasvata Manu. The description of the Seven future Manus was added to the Vulgate later and has been relegated to the Appendix I (No. I). The divine genealogies have been given in the ninth adhyaya (1-9,35) and the incarnations of Vishnu are given in adhyayas 35 and 45. The geneology of the Ikshvaku kings is given in adhyayas 9 and 10 and that of Yadu in adhyayas 20 and 99. The Harivamsha is the only purana which is in complete agreement with the pancalakshana definition.

Dr. Dandekar (p. 92) has pointed out some references in the Mbh. pertaining to the early life of Krishna in Gokul. In his tirade against Krishna on the occasion of the Rajasuya sacrifice, Cedi king Shishupala derisively refers to his childhood feats such as killing of Putana, bull and the horse and the lifting of the Govardhan mountain. In the Mbh. V. 128, Sauti mentions his killing of the bull-demon Arishta, the ass-demon Dhenuka and the demon Chanura, which goes to confirm Dandekar's statement quoted above.

Most of these exploits are of a legendary nature, symbolising, as suggested by shrimati Bhattacharyaji, the defeat of the various cults of the theriomorphic deities prevalent among the pastoral people, perhaps with the totemic worship of the ass, the bull, the snake and the elephant. Putana has been variously described as a nurse, a bird or a terrible

demoness. The ancient surgeon, Shushruta mentions in the Uttaratantra (27.237) putana as a fatal children's disease. Dhruva interprets the Putana story to mean that the benevolent God is supreme over the power harassing children. His lifting of the Govardhana mountain indicates his supercession of India as the foremost God.

As pointed out by Winternitz, the Harivamsha is absolutely and entirely a purana which is also shown by the numerous, often literally identical coincidences with passages in several of the most important puranas, such as Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Bhagavata and especially Vayupurana. Harivamsha mentions the Vayu Purana and so if there are similarities between the two, the Harivamsha has borrowed from the Vayu. Ruben, after making a comparative study of Harivamsha with Brahma, Vishnu, Bhagavata, and Brahma-vaivarta puranas has concluded that the Brahma purana has borrowed its Krishna story from Harivamsha and not the other way round. As pointed out by Pande many scholars are agreed that the Harivamsha contains an ancient account of Gopalkrishna's life. Raichudhari considers that it is a standard work for the study of Krishna's early life. Ferqunhar observes that Harivamsha gives a more reliable account of Krishna's early life than Vishnu Purana. These views of eminent scholars go to establish that Harivamsha is a very old purana only next to Vayu. Since according to our present knowledge, all the puranas with the exception of Vayu were composed after the Mbh., if there are any parallel passages between them, we can safely say that the puranas, with the exception of Vayu, have borrowed them from the epic.

Gopalakrishna Problem

It is only Harivamsha which deals with the life and history of the cowherd child - god Krishna in Gokula exhaustively. As pointed out by Dandekar, this cowherd god Krishna originated among the nomadic community of the Abhiras, who followed the profession of cowherds. Vaishampayana neither mentions the Abhiras nor alludes to the childhood feats and pranks of Krishna in the cow-settlement at Gokula. Suta mentions the Abhiras for the first time in the Mbh. and states that when Arjuna was escorting the Vrishni widows and orphans to Hastinapur after the death of Krishna, some Abhira warriors waylaid them and decamped with their treasures and beauties. Harivamsha (IX-36) states that the tribe of the Abhiras was located in West Rajaputana, where the river Sarasvati disappeared. This location finds support in the Peryplus of the Erythrean sea, a Greek record of the commercial geography of the first century B.C. Patanjali too mentions Abhiras and says that they were associated with the Shudras. According to D. R. Bhandarkar, the Abhiras were of foreign origin, as both the Mbh. and the Vishnu Purana brand them as dasyus and mleccchas. This argument is, however, untenable, as the terms dasyu and mlecccha are commonly used in the epic to denote the aboriginal tribes and those outside the Aryan fold.

As regards the Gopalakrishna problem, some scholars doubt the identity of the Mbh. hero and the expounder of the Gita with the favourite of the cowherd lasses in Gokula. Winternitz, to quote one of them, holds that it is more likely that there were two or several traditional Krishnas, who were merged into one deity at a later date. There is sufficient evidence to show, that the Gopalakrishna element was added by

Harivamshakara. In his tirade against Krishna in the Rajasuya sacrifice, Shishupala, the king of Cedi, called Krishna a cowherd, but he was silent about his relation with the gopis. The passage containing the word gopijanavallabha, which suggests Krishna's dalliance with the gopis and which Garb thought to be a part of the original epic, does not occur in the Critical Edition. The compound gopijanapriya which occurs in the Chitrashala edition is also now shown to be a star passage, but this also suggests that Krishna was a favourite of the gopis, Krishna's relations with the gopis do not figure in the contemporary Buddhist Jatakas, but are found only in Harivamsha and later puranas.

In the Harivamsha, Krishna is said to have taken part as a grown up boy in dances with the gopis, which are described as rasa or hallisha (HV.63). In tribal culture it is usual for young boys and girls to take part in communal dances, in which there is not even a hint of flirting or love-making. Even playwright Bhasa (3rd Century A. D.) in his play Balacharita tells the story of Krishna's youth, in which hallisha sport is said to be an innocent dance. In the Brahmapurana (189.20) occurs for the first time the story of a gopi, who after hearing the sound of Krishna's flute, was unable to leave and go to him because of the presence of elders and began to pine for him. This finds further elaboration in the Vishnu and other puranas. The dances are now represented as proceeding from a deep sensual love of sprightly love-lorn maidens for Krishna in the Bhagavata Purana and as gross carnality in the Brahmavaivarta Purana (Pusalkar). As regards his intimacy with Radha, neither the Harivamsha nor the Bhagavata Purana mentions it. The name Radha occurs for the first time in the Brahmavaivarta Purana, which belongs to the ninth century A. D. and so the Radha motif is a much later development in the Bhagavata religion. Only in the Padma and

Patala Puranas the place of an innocent tribal dance is taken up by playful amorous sports of Krishna with Radhaa and other gopis, with a strong element of devotional love.

Whatever studies have been undertaken so far in this regard have confirmed that the puranas have borrowed from the Mbh. F. Otto Schrader in Apocryphal Brahmapurana has shown that adhyayas 235-244 in this purana have been borrowed from different adhyayas of the Shantiparva, though many readings of the purana disagree with those of the latter. G. P. Dixit has compared the story of Yayati as found in the Mbh. and the Mastyapurana principally from the metrical point of view and his conclusion is that the metres of the Matsya purana belong to a later period than those of the epic. M. V. Vaidya, after comparing the Tirthayatra in the Aranyakaparva and Padmapurana has concluded that the latter has borrowed from the Bengali version of the Northern Recension of that parva. This shows that the Padmapurana is posterior to Harivamsha. As regards, Hopkin's view that the description of the different Sabhas in the epic to be late, it seems that the Mbh. is the source book of the puranas in this case. Only Hildenberg, after examining the relation of the Mbh. cosmology with that given in the Padma purana and other puranas had concluded that the Mbh. account is based on the Padmapurana. Belwalkar, however, after giving quotations from both the texts has proved that the Padmapurana is also posterior to the Mbh. Thus according to our present knowledge all the Puranas except Vayu were composed after the Mbh.

The puranic tradition has been floating and dynamic and has undergone numerous additions and revisions from time

to time by priestly bards. The existing puranas number eighteen, but only a few of them contain the five elements referred to above. The same process which transformed the Bharata into dharmashastra had also been at work here except that they seem to have been composed for sectarian purposes and that religious instruction was not their principal aim. In justification of this transformation, some of the mahapuranas themselves suggested that they should be dashlakshana i. e. possess ten characteristics. Thus the Bhagavata Purana adds five additional topics, namely means of livelihood (vritti), incarnations (raksha), emancipation (mukti), the Self (hetu) and the refuge or Brahman (apaashraya). As pointed out by Harihara Shastri the Matsya Purana says that the additional topics are righteous conduct (dharma), economic pursuits (artha), polity (rajaniti), erotics (kama) and liberation (moksha). As observed by Pusalkar, even these comprehensive definitions do not cover the entire gamut traversed by the Puranas. As a result of this development, there was a tendency to dismiss the puranas as priestly products until the publication of Pargiter's *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (1918). With this a new development of puranic studies has been started. It should now be possible to disentangle the two threads by undertaking statistical studies of puranas and build up a history of the past dynasties of kings by checking the results of these studies with the epigraphic and numismatic evidence during those times.

Now the question arises why Harivamsha does not find a mention in the eighteen puranas. As Pusalkar has pointed out (p. 25) the list of Mahapuranas is given in almost all puranas except for a couple of changes and runs as follows: Vayu, Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Bhagavata, Naradiya, Markandeya, Agni, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Varaha, Linga, Skanda, Vamana, Kurma, Matsya, Garuda and Brahmanda. Some Puranas read Shiva instead of Vayu and Devi Bhagavata instead

of Bhagavata. In order to accommodate these conflicting views, Pargiter takes their number to be nineteen by including Shiva and Vayu. But as observed by Pusalkar, there is absolutely no reason for increasing the traditional number. This seems to be the correct view as Vayu is more ancient than Shiva which is mentioned in the Harivamsha only. As regards the claim of Devi Bhagavata, the puranas which describe the greatness of Shiva and Vishnu are entitled to be called Mahapuranas, as they had attained supremacy over other gods in the time of the Mbh. Perhaps Harivamsha has not been included among the Mahapuranas, as it has been always considered as a supplement of the Mbh.

As only Vayu Purana is mentioned in the Vaishampayana text, it is clear that this purana or its earlier version, if any, existed before the second century B. C. Pusalkar rightly says the extant puranas can be assigned to the early centuries of the christian era. In order to determine the ages of the Puranas and the Smritis, it is necessary to bring out the Critical Editions of those puranas and apply statistical tests to determine whether each of them has a uniform-style or it exhibits different styles indicating their growth in subsequent periods.