

**Epilogue
of
Mahabharata**

By

M. R. Yardi



Bharatiya Vidya
Bhavan
Pune Kendra

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

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 Nanimadhava Choudhuri¹ that Gopalakrishna was a

1. Nanimadhava Choudhari. Indian Cowherd God. JBORS. 1942. p.

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

The term *itihasapurana* which occurs in the *Chhandogya up.*¹ seems to refer to the *Mbh.*, as the *Ramayana* is named *adikavya*. The term *purana* is mentioned in the *Atharvaveda*², 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 *Gatha Narashamsis* 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

1. *Itihasapurana*h Pancamo vedanam. 7.1.24.

2. AV. 11.7.24.

(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 Manas was added to the Vulgate later and has been relegated to the Appendix I (No. I). The divine geneologies 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.¹ 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,² 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

1. II - 30.10, 36-2, 38-4S, III - 15.10; XII - 47.72. The verse III.15 has been added by Harivamshakara and the rest by Sauti.

2. Shrimati Bhattacharyaji. *The Indian Theogony*, p. 302.

demoness. The ancient surgeon, Shushruta mentions in the Uttaratantra (27.237) putana as a fatal children's disease. Dhruva¹ interprets the Putana story to mean that the benvolent God is supreme over the power harassing children. His lifting of the Govardhana mountain indicates his supercession of Indra as the foremost God.

As pointed out by Winternitz,² 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 puranas³ 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.⁴ 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.

1. Dhruva. Apana Dharma (Hindi). p. 758.

2. HIL. Vol. 1. p. 454.

3. Ruben. JAOS. Vol. 61. p. 124.

4. Ferquahar Religious Literature of India. pp. 139. 143, 144.