

Authenticity of the Puranas

If one has to establish a hypothesis or a doctrine or a fact it should be based on some epistemological principles. Epistemology deals with the means of acquisition of knowledge. Now as we are going to rely on Puranas for the information of the extra-terrestrial nature we must also be sure they are the authoritative and authentic sources of information. Now let us view the Puranas from epistemological point.

Philosopher of every cult in India has first enumerated the epistemology. So also has done Sri Madhvacharya. He makes two broad categories: 1) Direct right knowledge 2) Acquired knowledge. The direct knowledge is of four types. The acquired knowledge is of three type's viz. through sense perception, inference and verbal testimony.

The verbal testimony is called AGAMA. This is of two types. Authored and non-authored. The latter is known as Vedas. These are famous without authors and characterised as eternal.

These are taken as the highest authority in respect of God, Deities and related matters. Vedas have been categorised under four heads by Vedavyasa viz. Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Puranas written by Vedavyasa tread the Vedic line. All those which follow the tenets of Vedas are known as Sadagamas. Through these only Bhagavan Vishnu is known. Others by which Vishnu will not be known are known as Durgamas.

These are parts of the Vedas which reveal that Vedas are eternal:

वाचा विरूप नित्यया।

नित्यया नित्यया स्तौमि ब्रह्मतत्परमं पदम्।

श्रुतिर्वाव नित्या अनित्यावाव स्मृतयः यश्चान्यावाचः ॥ इति पैङ्गीश्रुतिः । 'नित्यावेदास्समस्ताच्च शाश्वता विष्णुबुद्धिगाः' ॥ इति ब्रह्माण्डे ॥

The Vedas themselves say their purport is to declare/sing the glories of Bhagavan Vishnu:

'सर्वोत्कर्षे देवदेवस्य विष्णोः महातात्पर्यं नैवचान्यस्य सत्यम्' ॥ पैङ्गीश्रुतिः ॥

Vishnu Purana mentions that Bhagavan Vyasa has authored eighteen Puranas. There are equal number of 'Upa-Puranas' composed by his disciples. The eighteen puranas are as follows

1) Brahma 2) Padma 3) Vaishnava 4) Shaiva 5) Bhagavata 6) Naradiya 7) Markendeya 8) Agneya 9) Bhavishyat 10) Brahma-Vaivarta 11) Lainga 12) Varaha 13) Skandha 14) Vamana 15) Kaurma 16) Matsya 17) Garuda 18) Brahmanda.

It is also said that these Puranas contain eighteen vidyas viz. Shiksha, Vyakarana, Chandas, Nirukta, Jyotisha, Kalpa, (these are Vedangas), Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva (four Vedas), Mimansa, Nyaya, Purana, Dharma-Shastra, apart from this Ayurveda, Dhanurveda, Gandharva-Veda and Artha-Shastra.

The relationship between Vedas, Smritis and Puranas is as follows:

यन्नट्टुष्टं हि वेदेषु तत्सर्वं लक्ष्यते स्मृतौ।

उभयोर्यन्नट्टुष्टं हि तत्पुराणैः प्रगीयते ॥ इति बृहन्नारदीये ॥

What is not clear from the Vedas that is clarified in Smritis, that which is still unclear in

Smritis is explained in Puranas.

The word 'Purana' means though old, it is still new. Or it existed in olden days.

There is age old practice in India to listen to the Puranas. This practice is still in vogue. It is observed due to the impact of modern life, the interest in listening to Purana has been diminished. The material contained in the Puranas cater for the interests of young and old. The knowledge has been disseminated through Dramas, open theatre plays, discourses and cinemas. The whole world saw the Ramayana and Mahabharata cinemas and appreciated.

The Puranas are India's holy heritage and it is the sacred duty of all the Indians to preserve this source of precious knowledge.
