

We are disinclined to believe that they were absolute fabrications. What could be the meaning—what the objects of the authors in such a case? They are not tales such as are those of *Rasselas* and the vicar of Wakefield. There is no plot—no finish—no humor—no wit in them. What object could the authors propose to themselves when they took up their pens to compose such voluminous unpoetical *poems*—for the *Purāṇas* are poetry, if mere versification can entitle a work to such a dignified appellation.

On a question beset with so many difficulties even a possible theory may be entertained. We incline to the belief that the *Purāṇas* were composed in detached pieces by various persons, who exercised their poetical genius, or rather their powers of versification, after the manner of bards in Anglo-Saxon times, on the events of the day, or on past events reported by tradition. These they embellished, or rather distorted, as taste or interest dictated. In this manner were the historical portions composed. The ethical and theological sections were, after the fashion of Vishṇusarma's *Hitopadesa*, often illustrated by tales without the slightest element of truth in them. Such appears to have been the story of the *sati*, or dutiful wife, who herself carried her loathsomely diseased and perfectly unprincipled husband to a harlot, his mistress, thinking that the duty of a wife was to please her husband in everything.

In respect of chronology the bards thought it but a moderate exaggeration to turn an unit into a million. This idea is found to influence all their numerical descriptions. Whether it be the equipments of an army, or the furniture of a palace, or gifts made at a wedding or a solemn sacrifice, the animals and chariots are more than