

## PREFACE

It is a matter of profound pleasure and pride for me that the internationally famous publishers in the field of Indology, M/s Motilal Banarsidass of Delhi are publishing the English translation of my Purāṇic Encyclopaedia, which was originally published in Malayalam, and which has already run into four editions.

The Purāṇas along with the Great Epics—the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, have for centuries, profoundly influenced Indian life and Culture. The well-known definition of a Purāṇa as a work having five characteristic features—*purāṇam pañcalakṣaṇam*—namely, primary creation, secondary creation, the genealogies, the ages of Manu, and the dynastic account hardly does justice to the full significance of these works. They are much more than that. While their genealogies and the dynastic account form the bed-rock of the political history of ancient India, they throw a flood of light on all aspects of Indian Culture—its religion, social practices, art, literature and sciences. They serve as the key to the proper understanding of the various aspects of Hinduism—its beliefs, its modes of worship, its mythology, its festivals, feasts, and fasts, its sacred shrines and places of pilgrimage, its philosophy and ethics and its theogony. Truly it has been said that a Brahmin was not really wise if he did not know the Purāṇas. The study of ancient Indian history, and culture—particularly religion—is impossible without a proper knowledge of the Purāṇas. As a matter of fact, it is virtually impossible to understand not only ancient Indian culture and life, but also the literature in modern Indian languages, as it largely draws upon the ideas and ideologies as embodied in the contents of the Purāṇas and the epics.

The literary writings in all Indian languages are indebted to the Epics and the Purāṇas in more than one way—their form, content, ideas and ideologies are all influenced to a greater or lesser extent by these ancient works. Direct and indirect allusions to Purāṇic episodes, characters, events, are frequently to be met with in the literary writings of all Indian languages. Teachers engaged in imparting instruction in the literature in modern Indian languages must therefore be conversant with the contents of the Purāṇas and Epics in order to be able to explain these allusions wherever they occur in the writings in modern Indian languages. However, it is well nigh impossible for an average teacher to go through the whole of this vast literature. Thus the need for a handy work of reference like the present Encyclopaedia is apparent.

The desire to compile a Purāṇic Dictionary that should solve many of the day to day problems of the Indian language teacher, took root in me, several years ago, but I could not arrogate to myself the capacity to fulfill this urgent need. I waited for many years, for more competent and better equipped scholars to come forward and produce a work of my dreams. But since no one appeared to quench this thirst, I plunged myself into this vast ocean of Sanskrit literature, and for thirteen years I dived deep into it, studying not only the original texts but also modern works in English, Sanskrit, Malayalam and Hindi. This took me five years, and I spent about twenty thousand rupees on books and travelling for this project. I started the compilation on 1st of January, 1955, and it took me seven years to start preparing the Press copy of my work. The first volume of my 'Purāṇic Nighaṇṭu' was released in February 1964 and the remaining four were published after an interval of six months in each case. The second edition of all the five volumes was brought out in May 1967, still under the original title 'Purāṇic Nighaṇṭu'. However, in the third revised and enlarged edition in one volume published in October, 1971, the name was changed to 'Purāṇic Encyclopaedia'.

In an endeavour like this imperfections and drawbacks are only inevitable, and I am fully conscious of the same. But as a pioneer effort, and as a much needed aid to the teaching and study of Malayalam language and literature, it will, I hope, be found useful. Scholars and general readers in Malayalam have been generous in welcoming the encyclopaedia. That four editions of the work had to be brought out within a period of seven years from 1967 to 1974 speaks eloquently for the merit, and utility of the work and I feel my labour and expense amply rewarded. I felt still more flattered when the celebrated firm of M/s Motilal Banarsidass of Delhi, who have already laid the world of Indology under a deep debt of obligation by their monumental publications in all fields of Indian Culture and history, mooted a proposal for publishing an English translation of the Malayalam original. I am deeply indebted to them for bringing my work before a much wider circle of readers. The onerous task of translating the work into English was entrusted to a committee of five scholars : 1. Mr. P. Rajaram