

But the Brahmāṇḍa has been reckoned as also the Vāyu as the oldest Purāṇas now available. Perhaps the Brahmāṇḍa was a contemporary of the Vāyu Purāṇa.

The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa contains almost the same accounts as given in the Vāyu Purāṇa. It is divided into four books and furnishes the impression that it is one of the oldest Purāṇas. But what interests us is the Lalitopakhyānam portion of the Purāṇa which forms the fourth book and consists of more than forty chapters. At this time the popular practices and beliefs about the Śakti cult were crude and strictly local. In introducing the Lalitopakhyāna portion in the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, the compiler of the Purāṇa must have felt that what may be regarded as the most debased side of Hinduism must be put an end to, and literature dealing with Her immanence was a crying necessity. The term Lalitā means lovely, elegant, or charming.\*

The Devī worship in India can be traced to remote antiquity, and in Vedic literature the Devī who is named Umā is no other than Brahmavidyā. In other words Devī has pleasing aspects and evokes not awe or dread, but lofty spiritualism and philosophic calm. In this book of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa the Devī is elevated to a very high place, a place even worshipped by Trimūrtis. In this section we have a description of the origin of the goddess, of the construction of Śrīpuram on which was modelled the Śrichakra, the war with Bhaṇḍāsura and the final triumph of Lalitā. The Lalitā worship or Devī worship is not anything new but one accepted and approved by the Vedas. The Devī for one purpose or other manifested herself in different ways and with different names, and the manifestation of Lalitā was to get rid of Bhaṇḍāsura who was even a match for gods like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Her glory

\* Valmiki speaks of *apsaras* Rambhā as Lalitā and the commentator comments the term as Sundarī i.e. charming. But this has nothing to do with the cult.