

THE TERM PURANA AND ITS ORIGIN

The etymology of the term Purāṇa is furnished by the Vāyu Purāṇa, (verse 203, Chap. I) which runs thus :

Yasmāt purā hi anati idam purāṇam

i.e. that which lives from very remote times. In other words it means some very ancient account or very old narrative. It also shows that the term was in use long before the Purāṇas were reduced to writing. This may be read with another stanza in the Vāyu Purāṇa itself which runs as follows :—

Prathmam sarvaśāstrāṇām purāṇam brahmaṇā
smṛtam |

Anantaram cha vaktrebhyo vedāstasya vinissṛtāḥ ||

(Vāyu I. 60)

As if to confirm this statement, in the Matsya Purāṇa it is also said that it was Brahmā who first remembered the Purāṇa and then revealed the Vedas. This means that originally there was only one Purāṇa, and according to one authority it consisted of a hundred crore of verses. The stanza in the Vāyu Purāṇa together with that in the Matsya Purāṇa gives then the clue that even long before the age of the Vedas, the Purāṇa was thought of and was in existence. This is borne out by the fact that the Vedic literature, as we understand to-day, contains mythological and mythical lore, which must have been traditionally remembered, and when the Vedas were reduced to writing, these floating legends were referred to here and there. Thus there is the justification for the statement of the Matsya and Vāyu Purāṇas that Brahmā thought of the Purāṇa before he thought of the Vedas. This need not mean and certainly did not mean that the Purāṇa as an independent literature grew up before the Vedic composition. It undoubtedly means that mythological and legendary lore existed from remote times and was handed down to posterity without