
Review

Reviewed Work(s): INDIA IN THE VEDIC AGE by P. L. Bhargava

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INDIA IN THE VEDIC AGE, by Professor Dr. P. L. Bhargava, M.A., Ph.D., Shastri, University of Rajasthan, Second Revised and enlarged edition, the Upper India Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Lucknow-1, 1971, pp. xii + 396, Price Rs. 50/-

The work under review is the second edition of Prof. Bhargava's well-known book first published in 1956, now already out of print for several years. The author has seized this opportunity to revise his work thoroughly, enlarge it where necessary, and make it up-to-date and complete within its scope by adding three new chapters to the original.

A glance through the contents is enough to show how very comprehensive the author has been in these nearly four hundred pages. He has dealt with the society in India in the Vedic Age in its various aspects such as *Social and Economic Conditions* (Ch. 12), *Political and Legal Institutions* (Ch. 13) and *Religion and Philosophy* (Ch. 14). He has also described and discussed (the Vedic) *Language and Literature* (Ch. 15). All these chapters will be found immensely useful and interesting by all who desire to have an easy entrance into the Vedic studies and Ancient Indian Culture, within or without the University.

Of similar interest are also the Introduction and the three chapters that follow it. But the most notable point which may be said to form the author's forte in these pages is his vindication of the Purāṇas and the Purāṇic traditions against the state of dubious authority to which they have been generally relegated so far. Prof. Bhargava is convinced that the Vedic and the Purāṇic traditions are in agreement and that on the basis of these it is quite possible to write a connected history of the Aryan Expansion during the Vedic Age. And this is in fact what Prof. Bhargava has done in this work.

From this point of view, the author's *Examination of Sources* (Ch. 2) is of immense interest. A brief scrutiny of the Vedic literature with the author leads us to admit that there existed in the Brāhmaṇa period some sort of historical record; and hence naturally we ask: "What was this historical record like and whether it exists now in any shape or form?" In his search for an answer to this question, the author discusses the genesis of the Purāṇas; and points out that the feature common to most of the Purāṇas is "the record of the ancient ruling dynasties". The original authors of the Purāṇas, of course, were the bards or *sūtas*. But the popularity of this literature tempted the priests - far inferior to their Vedic prototype, the Vedic *ṛṣis* - to appropriate this literature for expounding religious doctrines, with the natural result that the contents as well as the number of Purāṇas began to

multiply. The original Purāṇa works came thus to be modified and re-edited by the priests corrupting – albeit unconsciously – the original in several ways. Thanks, however, to the inferiority of these redactors, it is not at all difficult, as Prof. Bhargava remarks, to extricate the original from the later additions. And it is this circumstance which makes the Purāṇas a potentially valuable source for the history of the Vedic period.

But this valuable source could not be properly utilised in the absence of critical editions of the Purāṇas. Hence the author himself has, as far as possible, tried on the basis of collation to arrive at an approximately correct text of the genealogical accounts of the Purāṇas; and on the basis of these texts further to reconstruct the genealogies of all the important Aryan dynasties by assiduously studying the relevant texts and reducing them to a succinct account of the Ancient Aryan dynasties (Ch. 5) (tabulated on p. 126). Laudable and successful in its own way as this attempt is, it can be accepted only as a make-shift in the absence of the critical editions of the Purāṇas (like those of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*) which alone may help us to finalise our views in this field. One has, at the same time, to admit that as matters stand today, Prof. Dr. Bhargava certainly deserves credit for keeping before us an approximately correct genealogy of important Aryan dynasties that could be constructed on the basis of a critical study of the material available so far.

The most important part of the present work, however, is to be found in chapters 6–11. Admitting that the redactors of the original Purāṇa texts have committed mistakes of various kinds, Prof. Bhargava points out how similar is the case even with our modern scholars (pp. 129, 130) with our historical sense fully developed. Fortunately, however, these mistakes are found mostly in the additions and interpolations introduced by the later editors; and for correct information we can turn to the other layer, the original one comprising the record of the *sūtas*, which is found generally to agree with the Vedic evidence (Ch. 6). It is further shown that even the arrangement of the names of the kings in the various dynastic lists is substantially correct. This has been done on the basis of *synchronism*. The author is not, of course, unaware of the pitfalls of this test of synchronism, which he has clearly stated. So with a cautious application of this test of synchronism, he has shown that the Purāṇic dynastic lists may be said to be correct even as regards the arrangement of the names therein. (Ch. 7).

In Ch. 8 Prof. Bhargava has, in a general manner, specified the four Eras, which make up the Vedic age, under the names, the Era of Saptasindhu, the Era of Conquest, the Era of Expansion, and the Era of Settlement respectively; and has tabulated the important dynasties of the

Vedic Age during these eras. Then he proceeds to give an account of the famous *r̥ṣis* of that age, who with the princely families exerted a ver Δ deep influence on the political and the cultural development of the Aryans in Ancient India (Ch. 9).

Two more highly intricate problems have been tackled by the author with great confidence and erudition. After a critical examination of the various views expressed so far about the original home of the Aryans, Prof. Bhargava has suggested that very probably 'the Aryans originally lived in the valleys of the rivers Ghorband and Panjshiv to the south of the Hindu Kush range'. There is no doubt that he has succeeded in making out a strong case for his view, though, one wonders whether this may be said to have settled the problem once and for all. By way of an indirect corroboration of his view, Professor Bhargava has also discussed the *Geography, Fauna, and Flora of the Vedic Homeland* (Ch. 4), on the basis of references occurring in the Veda, which may justify the negative conclusion that no European country can be regarded as the original home of the Āryas.

The other tough problem is that of *chronology of the Vedic Age* (Ch. 10). After stating and discussing critically the various views (and methods adopted) in the field in this respect, Prof. Bhargava shows clearly how the Purāṇic literature deserves a place of honour in this respect; and after a careful scrutiny of the data offered by them concludes that the Age of the Vedic Saṁhitās may be said to have lasted for about 2000 years, from 3000 B. C. to 1000 B. C.

With the ground thus prepared Prof. Bhargava proceeds to give *History of the Vedic Age* (Ch. 10), that is to say 'an outline history of the Aryan Expansion in India during the Vedic Age'. He starts with the advent of Aryans from their original home to the land which they named Saptasindhu, under the leadership of Manu Vaivasvata and stops with the accession of Parikṣit II, which may be said to mark the end of the Saṁhitā period and the advent of the Age of the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. There is no doubt that Prof. Bhargava has exercised his independent critical insight undaunted by authorities as is clear, for example, from the way in which he has expressed his views about the correct connotation of the word Ārya (1), his defence of Jacobi against Winternitz (32), his discussion about the words Asura, Dānava, and Daitya (57), his view about the origin of the caste system (241), and about polyandry (243, n2), his discussion about the so-called immoral traits of Indra (286), his interpretation of the blessing to a bride in RV 10. 85. 46 against *Vedic Index* Vol. II p. 407 (245 n.4) and several other places. The learned author has indeed set a norm by combining fearlessness with due respect for divergent views as is clear

from the way in which he has done his best to do full justice to views not acceptable to him, pointing out at the same time their weaknesses in an inoffensive manner.

Though the work primarily belongs to the realm of history, Prof. Bhargava has made it comprehensive enough to be of immense use to all interested in the Vedic studies, and also Ancient Indian Culture. The work is beautifully printed and deserves a prominent place on the shelf of every scholar or layman alike, interested in any branch of study concerning Ancient India or the Vedic Age.

G. V. Devasthali
