

Title

**THE
VISHŪ
PURĀŅĀ**

Book Two

*A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition
Translated from the original Sanscrit
and
illustrated by Notes derived chiefly from other Puranas*

*by
H. H. Wilson*

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THE VISHNU PURANA

Book Two

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Chapter I

Descendants of Priyavrata, the eldest son of Swáyambhuva Manu: his ten sons: three adopt a religious life; the others become kings of the seven Dwípas, or isles, of the earth. Agnídhra, king of Jambu-dwípa, divides it into nine portions, which he distributes amongst his sons. Nábhi, king of the south, succeeded by Rishabha; and he by Bharata: India named after him Bhárata: his descendants reign during the Swáyambhuva Manwantara.

MAITREYA. - You have related to me, venerable preceptor, most fully, all that I was curious to hear respecting the creation of the world; but there is a part of the subject which I am desirous again to have described. You stated that Priyavrata and Uttánapáda were the sons of Swáyambhuva Manu, and you repeated the story of Dhruva, the son of Uttánapáda: you made no mention of the descendants of Priyavrata, and it is an account of his family that I beg you will kindly communicate to me.

PARÁŚARA - Priyavrata married Kámyá, the daughter of the patriarch Kardama¹, and had by her two daughters, Samrat and Kukshi, and ten sons, wise, valiant, modest, and dutiful, named Agnídhra, Agnibáhu, Vapushmat, Dyutimat, Medha, Medhatithi, Bhavya, Savala, Putra, and the tenth was Jyotishmat², illustrious by nature as by name. These were the sons of Priyavrata, famous for strength and prowess. Of these, three, or Medha, Putra, and Agnibáhu, adopted a religious life: remembering the occurrences of a prior existence, they did not covet dominion, but diligently practised the rites of devotion in due season, wholly disinterested, and looking for no reward.

Priyavrata having divided the earth into seven continents, gave them respectively to his other seven sons³. To Agnídhra he gave Jambu-dwípa; to Medhatithi he gave Plaksha-dwípa: he installed Vapushmat in the sovereignty over the Dwípa of Sálmalí; and made Jyotishmat king of Kuśa-dwípa: he appointed Dyutimat to rule over Krauncha-dwípa; Bhavya to reign over Sáka-dwípa; and Savala he nominated the monarch of the Dwípa of Pushkara.

Agnídhra, the king of Jambu-dwípa, had nine sons, equal in splendour to the patriarchs: they were named Nábhi, Kimpurusha, Harivarsha, Ilávríta, Ramya, Hirańvat, Kuru, Bhadráśwa, and Ketumála⁴, who was a prince ever active in the practice of piety.

Hear next, Maitreya, in what manner Agnidhra apportioned Jambu-dwipa amongst his nine sons. He gave to Nabhi the country called Hima, south of the Himavat, or snowy mountains.

¹ The text reads Kanyá; and the commentator has, 'he married the daughter of Kardama, whose name was Kanyá.' The copies agree in the reading, and the Váyu has the same name, Kanyá; but the Márkańdeya, which is the same in other respects as our text, has Kámyá: Kámyá also is the name elsewhere given by the Váyu to the daughter of Kardama. Kámyá, as has been noticed, appears in the Bráhma and Hari V. as the mother of Priyavrata, but erroneously; and the same authorities specify a Kámyá as the wife of that sovereign. So the commentator on the Hari V. states, 'another Kámyá is mentioned (in the text), the daughter of Kardama, the wife of Priyavrata.' The name Kanyá is therefore most probably an error of the copyists. The Bhágavata calls the wife of Priyavrata, Varhishmatí, the daughter of Viśwakarma

² These names nearly agree in the authorities which specify the descendants of Priyavrata, except in the Bhágavata: that has an almost entirely different series of names, or Ágnidhra, Idhmajihwa, Yajñabáhu, Mahávira, Hirańyaretas, Medhatithi, Ghritapriśhtha, Savana, Vitihotra, and Kavi; with one daughter, Urjjaswatí. It also calls the Manus Uttama, Tamasa, and Raivata the sons of Priyavrata by another wife.

³ According to the Bhágavata, he drove his chariot seven times round the earth, and the ruts left by the wheels became the beds of the oceans, separating it into seven Dwípas.

⁴ Even the Bhágavata concurs with the other Puráñas in this series of Priyavrata's grandsons.

The country of Hemakuta he gave to Kimpurusha; and to Harivarsha, the country of Nishadha. The region in the centre of which mount Meru is situated he conferred on Ilávrta; and to Ramya, the countries lying between it and the Níla mountain. To Hirańvat his father gave the country lying to the north of it, called Śweta; and, on the north of the Śweta mountains, the country bounded by the Śringaván range he gave to Kuru. The countries on the east of Meru he assigned to Bhadráswa; and Gandhamádana, which lay west of it, he gave to Ketumála⁵. Having installed his sons sovereigns in these several regions, the pious king Agnídhra retired to a life of penance at the holy place of pilgrimage, Sálagráma⁶.

The eight Varshas, or countries, Kimpurusha and the rest, are places of perfect enjoyment, where happiness is spontaneous and uninterrupted. In them there is no vicissitude, nor the dread of decrepitude or death: there is no distinction of virtue or vice, nor difference of degree as better or worse, nor any of the effects produced in this region by the revolutions of ages.

Nábhi, who had for his portion the country of Himáhwa, had by his queen Meru the magnanimous Rishabha; and he had a hundred sons, the eldest of whom was Bharata. Rishabha having ruled with equity and wisdom, and celebrated many sacrificial rites, resigned the sovereignty of the earth to the heroic Bharata, and, retiring to the hermitage of Pulastya, adopted the life of an anchorit, practising religious penance, and performing all prescribed ceremonies, until, emaciated by his austerities, so as to be but a collection of skin and fibres, he put a pebble in his mouth, and naked went the way of all flesh⁷. The country was termed Bhárata from the time that it was relinquished to Bharata by his father, on his retiring to the woods⁸.

⁵ Of these divisions, as well as of those of the earth, and of the minor divisions of the Varshas, we have further particulars in the following chapter.

⁶ This place of pilgrimage has not been found elsewhere. The term is usually applied to a stone, an ammonite, which is supposed to be a type of Vishnú, and of which the worship is enjoined in the Uttara Khańda of the Padma P. and in the Brahma Vaivartta, authorities of no great weight or antiquity. As these stones are found chiefly in the Gandak river, the Sálagráma Tírtha was probably at the source of that stream, or at its confluence with the Ganges. Its sanctity, and that of the stone, are probably of comparatively modern origin.

⁷ 'The great road,' or 'road of heroes.' The pebble was intended either to compel perpetual silence, or to prevent his eating. The Bhágavata p. 164 adverts to the same circumstance. That work enters much more into detail on the subject of Rishabha's devotion, and particularizes circumstances not found in any other Puráńa. The most interesting of these are the scene of Rishabha's wanderings, which is said to be Konka, Venkata, Kúfaka, and southern Karnátaka, or the western part of the Peninsula; and the adoption of the Jain belief by the people of those countries. Thus it is said, "A king of the Konkas, Venkatas, and Kúfakas, named Arhat, having heard the tradition of Rishabha's practices (or his wandering about naked, and desisting from religious rites), being infatuated by necessity, under the evil influence of the Kali age, will become needlessly alarmed, and abandon his own religious duty, and will foolishly enter upon an unrighteous and heretical path. Misled by him, and bewildered by the iniquitous operation of the Kali age, disturbed also by the delusions of the deity, wicked men will, in great numbers, desert the institutes and purifications of their own ritual; will observe vows injurious and disrespectful to the gods; will desist from ablutions, mouth-washings, and purifications, and will pluck out the hair of the head; and will revile the world, the deity, sacrifices, Brahmans, and the Vedas." It is also said, that Sumati, the son of Bharata, will be irreligiously worshipped by some infidels, as a divinity. Besides the import of the term Arhat, or Jain, Rishabha is the name of the first, and Sumati of the fifth Tírthakara, or Jain saint of the present era. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the Bhágavata intends this sect; and as the Jain system was not matured until a comparatively modern date, this composition is determined to be also recent. The allusions to the extension of the Jain faith in the western parts of the Peninsula, may serve to fix the limit of its probable antiquity to the 11th or 12th century, when the Jains seem to have been flourishing in Guzerat and the Konkan. As. Res. XVII. 232.

⁸ This etymology is given in other Puráńas; but the Matsya and Váyu have a different one, deriving it from the Manu, called Bharata, or the cherisher, one who rears or cherishes progeny.

Bharata, having religiously discharged the duties of his station, consigned the kingdom to his son Sumati, a most virtuous prince; and, engaging in devout practices, abandoned his life at the holy place, Śálagráma: he was afterwards born again as a Brahman, in a distinguished family of ascetics. I shall hereafter relate to you his history.

From the illustrious Sumati was born Indradyumna: his son was Parameshthín: his son was Pratihára, who had a celebrated son, named Pratihartá: his son was Bhava, who begot Udgítha, who begot Prastára; whose son was Prithu. The son of Prithu was Nakta: his son was Gaya: his son was Nara; whose son was Virát. The valiant son of Virát was Dhímat, who begot Mahánta; whose son was Manasyu; whose son was Twashtri: his son was Víraja: his son was Rája: his son was Śatajit, who had a hundred sons, of whom Viswagiyotish was the eldest⁹. Under these princes, Bhárata-varsha (India) was divided into nine portions (to be hereafter particularized); and their descendants successively held possession of the country for seventy-one periods of the aggregate of the four ages (or for the reign of a Manu).

This was the creation of Swayambhuva Manu, by which the earth was peopled, when he presided over the first Manwantara, in the Kalpa of Varaha¹⁰.

⁹ The Agni, Kúrma, Márkańdeya, Linga, and Váyu Puráńas agree with the Vishnú in these genealogical details. The Bhágavata has some additions and variations of nomenclature, but is not essentially different. It ends, however, with Śatajit, and cites a stanza which would seem to make Viraja the last of the descendants of Priyavrata.

¹⁰ The descendants of Priyavrata were the kings of the earth in the first or Swáyambhuva Manwantara. Those of Uttánapáda, his brother, are placed rather incongruously in the second or Swáročisha Manwantara: whilst, with still more palpable inconsistency, Daksha, a descendant of Uttánapáda, gives his daughter to Kaśyapa in the seventh or Vaivaswata Manwantara. It seems probable that the patriarchal genealogies are older than the chronological system of Manwantaras and Kalpas, and have been rather clumsily distributed amongst the different periods.

Chapter II

Description of the earth. The seven Dwípas and seven seas. Jambu-dwípa. Mount Meru: its extent and boundaries. Extent of Ilávrita. Groves, lakes, and branches of Meru. Cities of the gods. Rivers. The forms of Vishnú worshipped in different Varshas.

MAITREYA. - You have related to me, Brahman, the creation of Swáyambhuva; I am now desirous to hear from you a description of the earth: how many are its oceans and islands, its kingdoms and its mountains, its forests and rivers and the cities of the gods, its dimensions, its contents, its nature, and its form.

PARÁŚARA. - You shall hear, Maitreya, a brief account of the earth from me: a full detail I could not give you in a century.

The seven great insular continents are Jambu, Plaksha, Sálmalí, Kuśa, Krauncha, Śáka, and Pushkara: and they are surrounded severally by seven great seas; the sea of salt water (Lavaña), of sugar-cane juice (Ikshu), of wine (Surá), of clarified butter (Sarpí), of curds (Dadhi), of milk (Dugdha), and of fresh water (Jala)¹¹.

Jambu-dwípa is in the centre of all these: and in the centre of this continent is the golden mountain Meru. The height of Meru is eighty-four thousand Yojanas; and its depth below the surface of the earth is sixteen thousand. Its diameter at the summit is thirty-two thousand Yojanas; and at its base, sixteen thousand: so that this mountain is like the seed-cup of the lotus of the earth¹².

The boundary mountains (of the earth) are Himaván, Hemakúta, and Nishadha, which lie

¹¹ The geography of the Puráñas occurs in most of these works; and in all the main features, the seven Dwípas, seven seas, the divisions of Jambu-dwípa, the situation and extent of Meru, and the subdivisions of Bhárata, is the same. The Agni and Bráhma are word for word the same with our text; and the Kúrma, Linga, Matsya, Márkañdeya, and Váyu present many passages common to them and the Vishnú, or to one another. The Váyu, as usual, enters most fully into particulars. The Bhágavata differs in its nomenclature of the subordinate details from all, and is followed by the Padma. The others either omit the subject, or advert to it but briefly. The Mahábhárata, Bhíshma Parva, has an account essentially the same, and many of the stanzas are common to it and different Puráñas. It does not follow the same order, and has some peculiarities; one of which is calling Jambu-dwípa, Sudarśana, such being the name of the Jambu-tree: it is said also to consist of two portions, called Pippala and Śaśa, which are reflected in the lunar orb, as in a mirror.

¹² The shape of Meru, according to this description, is that of an inverted cone; and by the comparison to the seed-cup its form should be circular: but there seems to be some uncertainty upon this subject amongst the Pauráñics. The Padma compares its form to the bell-shaped flower of the Dhatura. The Váyu represents it as having four sides of different colours; or, white on the east, yellow on the south, black on the west, and red on the north; but notices also various opinions of the outline of the mountain, which, according to Atri, had a hundred angles; to Bhrigu, a thousand: Sávarni calls it octangular; Bháguri, quadrangular; and Varsháyani says it has a thousand angles: Gálava makes it saucer-shaped; Garga, twisted, like braided hair; and others maintain that it is circular. The Linga makes its eastern face of the colour of the ruby; its southern, that of the lotus; its western, golden; and its northern, coral. The Matsya has the same colours as the Váyu, and both contain this line: 'Four-coloured, golden, four-cornered lofty:' but the Váyu compares its summit, in one place, to a saucer; and observes that its circumference must be thrice its diameter. The Matsya also, rather incompatibly, says the measurement is that of a circular form, but it is considered quadrangular. According to the Buddhists of Ceylon, Meru is said to be of the same diameter throughout. Those of Nepal conceive it to be shaped like a drum. A translation of the description of Meru and its surrounding mountains, contained in the Brahmánda, which is the same exactly as that in the Váyu, occurs in the As. Researches, VIII. 343. There are some differences in Col. Wilford's version from that which my MSS. would authorize, but they are not in general of much importance. Some, no doubt, depend upon variations in the readings of the different copies: of others, I must question the accuracy.