

Title

**THE
VISHNÚ
PURÁÑA**

The Sixth Book

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

*by
H. H. Wilson*

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About this eBook

THE VISHNU PURANA

The Sixth Book

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Chapter I

Of the dissolution of the world: the four ages: the decline of all things, and deterioration of mankind, in the Kali age.

MAITREYA. - You have narrated to me, illustrious sage, the creation of the world, the genealogies of the patriarchs, the duration of the Manwantaras, and the dynasties of princes, in detail. I am now desirous to hear from you an account of the dissolution of the world, the season of total destruction, and that which occurs at the expiration of a Kalpa¹.

PARÁŚARA. - Hear from me, Maitreya, exactly the circumstances of the end of all things, and the dissolution that occurs either at the expiration of a Kalpa, or that which takes place at the close of the life of Brahmá. A month of mortals is a day and night of the progenitors: a year of mortals is a day and night of the gods. Twice a thousand aggregates of the four ages is a day and night of Brahmá². The four ages are the Krita, Treta, Dwápara, and Kali; comprehending together twelve thousand years of the gods. There are infinite successions of these four ages, of a similar description, the first of which is always called the Krita, and the last the Kali. In the first, the Krita, is that age which is created by Brahmá; in the last, which is the Kali age, a dissolution of the world occurs.

MAITREYA. - Venerable sir, you are able to give me a description of the nature of the Kali age, in which four-footed virtue³ suffers total extinction.

PARÁŚARA. - Hear, Maitreya, an account of the nature of the Kali age, respecting which you have inquired, and which is now close at hand.

The observance of caste, order, and institutes will not prevail in the Kali age, nor will that of the ceremonial enjoined by the Sáma, Rik, and Yajur Vedas. Marriages in this age will not be conformable to the ritual, nor will the rules that connect the spiritual preceptor and his disciple be in force. The laws that regulate the conduct of husband and wife will be disregarded, and oblations to the gods with fire no longer be offered. In whatever family he may be born, a powerful and rich man will be held entitled to espouse maidens of every tribe. A regenerate man will be initiated in any way whatever, and such acts of penance as may be performed will be unattended by any results⁴. Every text will be scripture that people choose to think so⁵: all gods will be gods to them that worship them; and all orders of life will be common alike to all persons. In the Kali age, fasting, austerity, liberality, practised according to the pleasure of those by whom they are observed, will constitute righteousness. Pride of wealth will be inspired by very insignificant possessions. Pride of beauty will be prompted by

¹ Two kinds of great or universal dissolution are here intimated; one occurring at the end of a Kalpa, or day of Brahmá, to which the term Upasanhriti is applied in the text, and Átyantika laya by the commentator; and the other taking place at the end of the life of Brahmá, which is termed a great or elemental dissolution: Mahá pralaya and Prákrita pralaya.

² These measures of time are more fully detailed in the first book.

³ This is an allusion to a popular notion, originating probably with Manu: "In the Krita age the genius of truth and right stands firm on his four feet; but in the following ages he is deprived successively of one foot," &c. I. 81, 82.

⁴ 'Such an act is just what it is;' that is, it may be attended by inconvenience to the individual, but is utterly inefficacious for the expiation of sin.

⁵ Whether it is conformable or contradictory to the Vedas and the law. The passage may be rendered also, 'The doctrine or dogma of any one soever will be scripture.'

(no other personal charm than fine) hair. Gold, jewels, diamonds, clothes, will all have perished, and then hair will be the only ornament with which women can decorate themselves. Wives will desert their husbands, when they lose their property; and they only who are wealthy will be considered by women as their lords. He who gives away much money will be the master of men; and family descent will no longer be a title of supremacy. Accumulated treasures will be expended on (ostentatious) dwellings. The minds of men will be wholly occupied in acquiring wealth; and wealth will be spent solely on selfish gratifications. Women will follow their inclinations, and be ever fond of pleasure. Men will fix their desires upon riches, even though dishonestly acquired. No man will part with the smallest fraction of the smallest coin⁶, though entreated by a friend. Men of all degrees will conceit themselves to be equal with Brahmans. Cows will be held in esteem only as they supply milk⁷. The people will be almost always in dread of dearth, and apprehensive of scarcity; and will hence ever be watching the appearances of the sky: they will all live, like anchorets, upon leaves and roots and fruit, and put a period to their lives through fear of famine and want. In truth there will never be abundance in the Kali age, and men will never enjoy pleasure and happiness. They will take their food without previous ablution, and without worshipping fire, gods, or guests, or offering obsequial libations to their progenitors. The women will be fickle, short of stature, gluttonous: they will have many children, and little means: scratching their heads with both hands, they will pay no attention to the commands of their husbands or parents: they will be selfish, abject, and slatternly: they will be scolds and liars: they will be indecent and immoral in their conduct, and will ever attach themselves to dissolute men. Youths, although disregarding the rules of studentship, will study the Vedas. Householders will neither sacrifice nor practise becoming liberality. Anchorets will subsist upon food accepted from rustics; and mendicants will be influenced by regard for friends and associates⁸. Princes, instead of protecting, will plunder their subjects; and, under the pretext of levying customs, will rob merchants of their property. In the Kali age everyone who has cars and elephants and steeds will be a Rájá⁹: everyone who is feeble will be a slave. Vaiśyas will abandon agriculture and commerce, and gain a livelihood by servitude or the exercise of mechanical arts. Śúdras, seeking a subsistence by begging, and assuming the outward marks of religious mendicants, will become the impure followers of impious and heretical doctrines¹⁰.

Oppressed by famine and taxation, men will desert their native lands, and go to those countries which are fit for coarser grains¹¹. The path of the Vedas being obliterated, and men having deviated into heresy, iniquity will flourish, and the duration of life will therefore decrease. In consequence of horrible penances not enjoined by scripture, and of the vices of the rulers, children will die in their infancy. Women will bear children at the age of five, six, or seven years; and men beget them when they are eight, nine, or ten. A man will be grey

⁶ He will not part with the half of the half of half a Paña; that is, with ten Cowries; a Paña being equal to eighty Cowries, or small shells. Five Pañas are equal to one Ana, or the sixteenth of a Rupee; and, at two shillings the Rupee, ten Cowries are equal to about one-seventh of a farthing.

⁷ They will be valued for their individual use only, not from any notion of their generic sanctity.

⁸ The Bhágavata has, "Religious students will be regardless of vows and purification; householders will beg, not give alms; anchorets will dwell in villages; and mendicants will be desirous of riches."

⁹ That is, princes and warriors will be so no longer by virtue of their birth and caste.

¹⁰ Most of the mendicant orders admit members without distinction of caste; but probably Buddhists especially are here intended. The Bhágavata repeatedly alludes to the diffusion of heretical doctrines and practices, the substitution of outward signs and marks for devotion, and the abandonment of the worship of Vishnú. The Śaiva mendicant orders are probably those especially in view. The same probably are intended by our text in the subsequent allusion to unauthorized austerities, and sectarial marks.

¹¹ 'Gavedhuka (Coix barbata) and other bad sorts of grain;' Another reading is, 'Countries growing wheat, barley, and the like.' But to place wheat and barley amongst inferior grains, and to rank them lower than rice, is a classification that could have occurred to a native of Bengal alone.

when he is twelve; and no one will exceed twenty years of life¹². Men will possess little sense, vigour, or virtue, and will therefore perish in a very brief period. In proportion as heresy extends, so, Maitreya, shall the progress of the Kali age be estimated by the wise. In proportion as the number of the pious, who adhere to the lessons of the Vedas, diminishes - as the efforts of individuals who cultivate virtue relax - as the first of males becomes no longer the object of sacrifices - as respect for the teachers of the Vedas declines - and as regard is acknowledged for the disseminators of heresy - so may wise men note the augmented influence of the Kali age¹³.

In the Kali age, Maitreya, men, corrupted by unbelievers, will refrain from adoring Vishnu, the lord of sacrifice, the creator and lord of all; and will say, "Of what authority are the Vedas? what are gods or Brahmans? What need is there of purification with water?" Then will the clouds yield scanty rain: then will the corn be light in ear, and the grain will be poor, and of little sap: garments will be mostly made of the fibres of the San¹⁴: the principal of trees will be the Sami¹⁵: the prevailing caste will be the S'udra: millet will be the more common grain: the milk in use will be chiefly that of goats: unguents will be made of Usira grass. The mother and father-in-law will be venerated in place of parents; and a man's friends will be his brother-in-law, or one who has a wanton wife. Men will say, "Who has a father? Who has a mother? each one is born according to his deeds:" and therefore they will look upon a wife's or husband's parents as their own. Endowed with little sense, men, subject to all the infirmities of mind, speech, and body, will daily commit sins; and everything that is calculated to afflict beings, vicious, impure, and wretched, will be generated in the Kali age. Then shall some places follow a separate duty¹⁶, devoid of holy study, oblations to fire, and invocations of the gods¹⁷. Then, in the Kali age, shall a man acquire by a trifling exertion as much eminence in virtue as is the result of arduous penance in the Krita age, or age of purity¹⁸.

¹² The Váyu says three and twenty; the Bhágavata, from twenty to thirty.

¹³ The complaints of the prevalence of heterodox doctrines, and neglect of the practices of the Vedas, which recur in the Bhágavata and our text, indicate a period of change in the condition of the Hindu religion, which it would be important to verify. If reference is made to Buddhism, to which in some respects the allusions especially apply, it would probably denote a period not long subsequent to the Christian era; but it is more likely to be of a later date, or in the eighth and ninth centuries, when Śankara is said to have reformed a variety of corrupt practices, and given rise to others. See As. Res. vol. XVI. p. 1a.

¹⁴ *Crotolaria juncea*.

¹⁵ The silk cotton, *Bombax heptaphylla*.

¹⁶ The expression Kwachil-loka, 'a certain place,' is explained by the commentator, Kíkāta, &c.; confirming the inference that Buddhism is especially aimed at in the previous passages; for Kíkāta, or south Behar, is the scene of Śákya's earliest and most successful labours.

¹⁷ Several of the Puráñas contain allusions to the degeneracy of the Kali age, but none afford more copious details. The description in the Bhágavata is much shorter; that of the Váyu is much the same, and employs many of the same verses and illustrations.

¹⁸ This might be suspected of being said ironically, referring to what had been just observed of places where a religion prevailed that required neither study nor sacrifice. The commentator, however, understands it literally, and asserts that allusion is here made to the Vaishnáva faith, in which devotion to Vishnú or Krishná, and the mere repetition of his name, are equally efficacious in the Kali age with the penances and sacrifices of the preceding ages: therefore he concludes the Kali, by this one property, is the best of all the ages. This interpretation is confirmed by the following chapter.