

PURANIC ENCYCLOPEDIAS (SIC)

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How often one has wished, in exasperation, that it were possible to sue authors, like automobile manufacturers, for false advertising--for books published twice under the same title, lurid blurbs for tepid novellas, or "new" interpretations that are merely retreads of obscure and neglected (rightly or wrongly) nineteenth century monographs. Vettam Mani's *Purānic Encyclopedia*, subtitled *A Comprehensive Dictionary with Special Reference to the Epic and Puranic Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, 922 p. Rs. 300; translated from the 1964 Malayalam edition) is doubly damned: it is neither *Purānic* nor an Encyclopedia (like nuclear physics in Pogo's gloss: not so new, and not so clear). It is primarily Epic (as the small print in the subtitle hints) and episodic rather than encyclopedic. Most of the references are to the *Mahābhārata*, one of the few Sanskrit texts for which there already is a genuinely useful and reliable index (S. Sørensen's *An Index to the Names in the Mahabharata*, first published in 1904 and reprinted by Motilal Banarsidass in 1963). There are also many *Purānic* references, but these are submerged in the ocean of *Mahābhārata*, selected with no apparent system, and usually identified merely by work rather than by chapter and verse (*Padma Purāna*, for example, after a myth about *Gaṇapati*).

That one is grateful to have this book, and willing to pay a lot of money for it despite its enormous flaws, is a sad commentary on the state of *Puranic* studies: this is a one-eyed man in a land of the blind. What else does one have to guide one through the *Purānic* morass? V. R. R. Dikshitar's 3 volume work (*The Purāna Index*, Madras: Madras University, 1955), which is quite reliable and reasonably complete as far as it goes--but it goes only as far as five of the eighteen *Mahāpurānas* (*Bhāgavata*, *Brahmānda*, *Matsya*, *Vāyu*, and *Viṣṇu*). To flesh out the references in this work, one can browse through John Dowson (*A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*), reprinted in London in 1961, but mostly cribbed from W. J. Wilkins' *Hindu Mythology, Vedic and Puranic* (London, 1882, also reprinted in London, in 1973). Then there are the old stand-bys, Edward Moor's *The Hindu Pantheon* (London, 1810, reprinted in Delhi in 1968), T. A. Gopinatha Rao's *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Madras, 1916, reprinted Delhi, 1968), the two volumes of Rajendra Chandra Hazra's *Studies in the Upapurānas* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1958 and 1963), and Sukumari Bhatnagarji's 3 X 5 card print-out, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purānas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). That so many of these reference works date from the turn of the century, or before, and that we are grateful to have them brought back in print, is a further blot on the copy-book of present-day scholars. When I began work on the *Puranas* twenty years ago, at Harvard, my main bibliographic tool was a file of 3 by 5 cards that old Professor Clark (I think) had compiled for some undisclosed purposes of his own, and that Professor Ingalls kept in his

cluttered office in Widener Library. Would that I had it by me now, and how I envy the Harvard students who, doubtless (Harvard being what it is), use it to this day. What have we been doing all these 75 years?

Not developing the bibliographic apparatus for the study of the *Purānas*, that is for sure. Indeed, we have many excuses to cite in our defense: the lack of critical editions of the *Purānas* (though a serious attempt to rectify this lapse has been made by the All-India Kashiraj Trust in Banaras, who have published impressive editions of the *Kurma* and *Vāmana Purānas*, and plan to do them all [promises, promises...]); the difficulty in dating any of these texts; the failure of early attempts to mine them for information about *actual* history; and many others. But we can no longer avoid dealing with the *Purānas*, for scholarly fashions have shifted once again, into realms where the *Purānas* provide essential information.

Democracy has finally trickled down into the study of Sanskrit texts; we are no longer interested primarily in the political and literary elite (the kings whose histories we failed to extract from the dynastic lists, the great poets who would have died rather than compose mere *ślokas*), but in hoi polloi, for whom the *Purānas* are the ancient and medieval Indian equivalent of the *Reader's Digest*. For the study of folklore, of local customs, of grass-roots belief, the *Purānas* are peerless, and nobody knows what is in them. It appears that a new translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is published every 37 minutes, but who has even begun to mine the oceanic *Skanda Purāna*, the glorious scrap-bag and crow's nest of Indian mythology, rightly called by the Tamils the *Scrap Purāna* (*Kanta Purāna*)? Surely the time is right. As increasing attention is paid to regional collections of myths and folktales in vernaculars (such as the work of David Shulman in Tamil, and A. K. Ramanujan in Kannada, and Peter Claus in Tulu), one is more and more tolerant of the dateless, crude *Purānas*--which are truly ancient and elegant if placed in the company of the folk Epics rather than of *Kalidasa*; all things are relative. More important, one needs the link that the *Purānas* provide between the so-called *Little Tradition* (more usefully designated as vernacular) and *Great Tradition* (the Sanskrit classics). The *Purānas* are capable of yielding profound and exciting answers, if we ask them the right questions.

To ask these questions, we have to get at them. Vettam Mani's book may now be the only poker game in town (or one of two, if we count Dikshitar, as we ought to do), but that is no reason to keep us from starting a new game of our own. It is donkey work, perhaps, but extraordinarily rewarding donkey work that is required: someone must skim through the *Purānas*, or at least through their more detailed tables of contents (such as is provided in the Bombay edition of the *Skanda Purāna*), summarize their contents and prepare a truly encyclopedic index. This is not as ghastly a task as it might appear; many of the *Purānas* have now been translated into serviceable, if unlovely, English; the daunting exceptions among the so-called *Mahāpurānas* are the *Bhaviṣya*, *Brahmā*, *Brahmānda*, *Padma*, *Varāha*, *Vāyu*, and *Skanda* (ah yes, the *Skanda*); but then one must admit an equal need for the rather arbitrarily second-rated *Upapurānas* such as the *Bṛhaddharma*, *Devī*, *Kālikā*, and *Mahābhāgavata* (though some of these have been admirably summarized by Hazra). For the purposes we have in mind, a critical edition is a luxury that we simply cannot afford; we need access to what there *is*, not to what we wish were there. What there is remains a largely unexplored

territory that holds the key to the present interests of South Asian anthropologists, sociologists, historians of religion, folklorists, psychologists, students of law and medicine, and all-purpose aficionados.

PUBLISHING IN PUSHTO, BALUCHI, BRAHUI AND  
OTHER MINOR LANGUAGES OF PAKISTAN

- PART TWO : BALUCHI -

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A maxim in law states that what is not apparent is presumed not to exist. Until quite recently, this could have served as an adequate account of Baluchi publishing. The language was not reduced to writing (in the Persian script) until the late 19th or early 20th Century. Prior to this, if a Baluch was literate, he was so in Urdu, Persian, Arabic or some other tongue. Even afterwards, little was done with the written form until Pakistan became independent, and the body of Baluchi literature is still extremely limited--mostly folk songs, folk tales, heroic ballads.

Baluchi, of course, is the language of the Baluch people. The latter name means simply *nomad* or *wanderer* and Baluchistan is the *place of the Baluch*, an area which includes the easternmost provinces of Iran, Baluchistan and Sistan, and thus is bounded in the west by the Iranian province of Kerman, in the north by the Helmand Valley of Afghanistan, in the east by Punjab and Sind, and to the south by the Arabian Sea. There are also pockets of Baluch in Sind and the Punjab, in India, Oman, East Africa, and even the Merv area of Soviet Turkmeniya. The Baluch have primarily been herdsmen, in an approximate ratio in Pak Baluchistan of 75 % nomadic herdsmen to 25% sedentary inhabitants. Moreover, many Baluch who have settled outside their homeland have lost their cultural identity.

The Baluch social organization is, like that of Pathans, along tribal lines, though the Baluch tribes apparently are more loosely organized and much less exclusive. The Baluch tribal chieftains, *khans* or *sardars*, wield great power among their people and, though the previous government in Pakistan made a great fanfare over the abolishment of the *sardari system*, it is alive and flourishing because there is nothing to take its place. The Baluch have their tribal code of conduct, prominent features of which are conceptions of chivalry and retribution, and which often lead to blood feuds. Interestingly, the former concept has the effect of freeing Baluch women from many of the constraints that hedge in their more sedentary sisters, a feature to be seen also among those Pathans who are still nomadic.

Baluchistan--the word itself has only been used for about two centuries-- is by far the largest province in Pakistan in area and by far the smallest in population. Topographically and climatically it is probably also the most inclement, consisting of deserts, mountains, sand and stones, extremes of temperature, great distances, sparse population, and scanty cultural and natural resources (though great subsoil mineral wealth is suspected). The British were not disposed to give much attention to Baluchistan; they arrived on the scene relatively late in their subcontinental history and were already preoccupied elsewhere. Their

first interest was to secure lines of communication during their Afghan adventures, and until late in the history of the Raj they were content to leave it as a buffer zone, exercising suzerainty but not rule.

A Baluch author, writing in English,\* says that tribalism and feudalism "... have pitted one tribe against another tribe, one chief against another chief...the enmity of both individuals and tribes decimated the vigour and vitality of the race...the fighting mood was chronic... ." The same author refers to his people as a semi-civilized race, adding that until recent years the "Baluchi language had no written literature...Baluch glory...found its climax through the display of sword and shield rather than in letters." The total number of Baluchi speakers is estimated at less than two million, and of these 1,200,000 live in Pak Baluchistan. Again, of these 1,200,000, the literate must be bilingual at least and will often be trilingual or even quadrilingual--all of which has telling implications for the development of the Baluchi language. But it is estimated that only 11% are literate, which means there is a potential readership of approximately 132,000; and of this number it could not be expected that all would be interested in a particular title. The potential scope of Baluchi publishing is thus slender indeed. Moreover, Baluchi is more closely akin to Urdu and Persian than is Pushto; and this would tend to diffuse an impetus towards development, as both Urdu and Persian obviously already possess rich bodies of literature.

Christian missionaries made the first efforts in Baluchi publishing; the Gospels and the Psalms were done in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mansel Longworth Dames published pioneering studies and collections of Baluchi literature in the early 20th Century. But the Baluchi Academy in Quetta (established 1961) has done much more than any other institution, having issued 42 Baluchi titles, plus a few in other languages and several bilingual works. Through 1969 the Library of Congress Office in Karachi had acquired only 11 Baluchi titles, but during the ten year period 1969-79, we added 37 more. Subject areas of interest to Baluchi authors have been poetry, folk literature, history, short stories, and miscellaneous essays, and we received one Baluchi novel. Our sources of Baluchi publications (on the publishing level) are, first, the Baluchi Academy, Quetta; the Border Publicity Organization, a propaganda arm of Pakistan's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting; and the provincial Information Department. For commercial publishing, the Bolan Book Corporation and Kalat Publishers, both in Quetta, and Nadkar Publications, Karachi, are the only three houses known to this office. As of mid-1979, the LC office was acquiring 7 Baluchi serials: *Baluchi*, a literary annual; *Labzank*, a literary monthly; *Mistag*, an irregular political and literary journal; *Ulus*, a federal government (BPO) propaganda monthly; and *Zamanah*, a political monthly. All are published at Quetta, except *Labzank* which comes from Karachi.

The University of Baluchistan (founded 1970) has started an Honours program in Baluchi Studies, but it does not yet go beyond the undergraduate level; and the languages of instruction, otherwise, in the University are necessarily English and Urdu.

\*The editors have just learned of Alvin Moore's retirement.

\*Baluch, Mohammad Sardar Khan, *Literary History of the Baluchis: the Classical Period, 1450-1650*. Quetta, Baluchi Academy, vol. 1, 1977-