

IS VIGHNEŚVARA THE SCRIBE OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA ?

By PENDYĀLA VENKATA SUBRAHMANYA ŚĀSTRĪ

WHILE Vyāsa was doing severe penance in the Himālayan grottos intent upon bringing out the *Mahābhārata*, Brahmā very much pleased with his devotion appeared to him. Approaching him in all humility Vyāsa begged 'O Lord, I desire to write the *Mahābhārata* to the edification of the world. May I know a proper scribe for it?'. 'For such a great work Vighneśvara is the only fit scribe. Better pray for him', said Brahmā and disappeared. In answer to his devotion when he presented himself to him, Vyāsa requested Vighneśvara to be his scribe. He readily gave in on condition that the dictation should be without a stop, for his style brooked no rest. Vyāsa agreed stipulating that he should catch the spirit of the verse and write, to which he gave his consent. This is narrated in the first chapter of the *Mahābhārata*.

How the several stories originally stood in the earliest publication of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* can only be gathered from Nanniah's translation, the foremost authentic record available. It is an unparalleled work done in the presence of many approving Paṇḍits with the help of Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa, a man well versed in the different languages of several countries. Hence the stories in his reduction are our best authority.

Leaving aside the omission of certain minor points as being unsuited to his times and to the then prevailing customs, and said to have existed by his predecessors Kumārīlabhaṭṭa and others, I may now turn to the point whether Vighneśvara is the scribe of the *Mahābhārata* ?

In the great work of Nanniah is not found the story that Vyāsa requested Vighneśvara to be his scribe. So that must have been interpolated in the subsequent Sanskrit editions of that Epic. For in the beginning of the work he writes 'that this admirable work was brought out by the son of Parāśara with a clear vision of the characters and deeds of the heroes of that world enrapturing Epic, truly reflected in the clean mirror of his mind. (Chapter I, Ādiparva). From the above circumstance the safe assertion can be made that the belief that Vighneśvara is the scribe of that Epic, is a later interpolation. Further, *Bhārata* is considered the fifth Veda. *Bhārata Samhitā* is 'Śruti' (what is heard). It is heard by the Śiṣyas as the Guru repeated, voiced by them along with him with exactitude even in their intonation for several days, and then indelibly got by rote unlike the reading of the written books. The same method was followed with regard to the Pañcama Veda, the *Bhārata Samhitā* is related in the Ādiparva 93rd chapter, thus: . 'The great sage Vyāsa made his disciples Sumanta, Jaimini, Pyla, his son Śuka and Vaiśampāyana repeat the four Vedas, including the *Mahābhārata* as the fifth, as evidenced by the separate *Samhitās* (compilation of the *Mahābhārata* stories) they each produced.

Clear it is from the above that Vyāsa never got his Śiṣyas read a work written by him, for obviously Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* were taught on the same lines. There are several *Vedasamhitās* and they were all evidently communicated by word of mouth and not by writing for which there was neither necessity nor possibility as in that age there seemed to be no writing in vogue as *Paleographers* allege. They further give non-existence of writing as a reason why the Vedas were called *Śrutis* (what is heard).

To add to the above, in the Mokṣa-Dharmaparva, of Śāntiparva, the statement is found that the caves in

the Himālayas are echoing and rechoing with the *recitals* of the Vedas taught by sage Vyāsa. Hence the conclusion is that the *Bhārata Samhitā* was not at first in writing. In this connection the article under the caption 'Akṣara' in the '*Āndhravigñāna Sarvasva*' may be read with advantage to confirm the opinion that Vighneśvara never wrote the *Mahābhārata*. Sri P. P. S. Sastri Sanskrit Paṇḍit, Presidency College, Madras, writes in his poem to the revised edition of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* of the Vāvilla Press, that Vighneśvara is the scribe is not found in the copies of that Epic in the South and that it was a subsequent interpolation in the northern edition.

WORSHIP OF VIGHNEŚVARA.

By the way I have to touch a little on this subject here. The Śaivas of Northern India were the devotees of Vighneśvara, the chief of the 'Gaṇa' (several groups of attendants on Śiva). It might be due to their devotion to him, that he was named the writer of the Epic in those copies which were obtained there.

It is further to be considered whether Vighneśvara was a Vedic deity at all. In none of the mantras of the Vedas, there is any reference to that deity. We now recite in all ceremonies, nuptial or obsequial, at their commencement, invoking Vighneśvara, the Mantra 'GAṆĀNĀMTVĀ GAṆĀPATIM HAVĀMAHE' I invoke you the Lord of the *Gaṇas*) found in the first Book of the *R̥gveda*, the Ṛṣi of which being Gritsnamada and the presiding deity Brahmaṇaspati. But as a matter of fact we invoke the chief of a 'Gaṇa' whose face resembles that of an elephant, but not the vedic deity.

Vighneśvara is only a Puranic deity. The versions in the several Purāṇas, the *Skanda*, the *Brahmāṇḍa*, and the *Varāha*, differ with one another. The last of the above stated Purāṇas, gives in detail that the Gaṇa of whom

Vighneśvara is the Chief, possesses the elephant-head; and hence, the worship of the elephant-headed God. A misconception (*mantralinga*) of the word 'Gaṇapati' which in the *Ṛgveda* is applied to Brahmaṇaspati, the lord of the Universe, as applicable to the head of a particular group of lesser potentiality, makes Vighneśvara steal the name 'Gaṇapati.'

One other reason to prove that the worship is of purely Puranic origin is that no codifiers of Hindu Law as Āpastamba, Bṛhadhāyana and others have anywhere in their codes laid down either in domestic or social laws, that any Karma shall be initiated with this worship.

So I wish finally to impress that the *Bhārata Saṃhitā* was at first not in writing and that Vighneśvara was not the scribe thereof.