

■ Chapter - III

Purāṇas : Their Classification and Contents

i) Introduction :

The *Purāṇas* occupy a unique position in Hindu literature. As a class of literature, the *Purāṇas* deal with Ancient Indian religion, philosophy, history, geography, sociology, politics; and they supply the material for the study of various branches of knowledge and ancient wisdom. In other words one may describe the *purāṇa* as a class of literature which deals with the myths of gods, asurās, sages and kings of ancient times, contains abstracts of works in arts, sciences, medicine, grammar, dramaturgy, music astrology and other subjects, affords insight into different phases and aspects of Hinduism – its mythology, idol worship, theism, pantheism, love of god etc. In brief *purāṇas* constitute a popular encyclopedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism in its traits.

The *Purāṇas* are the vast literature computed at four lacks of ślokas respecting for Vedic authority to restate the ideals of ancient Indian culture.¹

1. सर्व वेदार्थ साराणि पुराणानि ।

Nāradya Purāṇa : 1.9.100

वेदाः प्रतिष्ठिताः सर्वे पुराणे नात्र संशयः । *Ibid.*, II.24.17

वेद वन्निश्चलं मन्ये पुराणार्थं द्विजोत्तमाः ।

Skanda Purāṇa Prabhasa khaṇḍa, II.90.

So far as the *Purāṇas* are concerned, they have been regarded as the fifth Veda. In the performance of the *Mahābhūta-Ghata-Mahādāna*, It is first said that 'Five + Vedas have to be put inside the golden jar at the time of the Mahādāna, and then it is quietly stated that the fifth Veda was the *Purāṇa*. This belief in the high scriptural authority of the *Purāṇas* had several implications, the most important of which was about the nature of these texts and about their authorship. All the *Purāṇas* are the nature of a *Samhitā* and author of all of them is Vedavyāsa. A key to this two-fold phenomenon lies in the technique of Vedic texts. The original *Purāṇa Samhitā* which developed as a special branch of study under the great teachers, Parāśarya Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa was given the rank of *Samhitā* and derived its name from the founder teacher of that particular charaṇa who was Vedavyāsa.

Purāṇa-vidya had come into existence in the Vedic period itself as shown by the reference to *Itihāsa, Purāṇa* in the *Vṛtya Sūkta* of the *Atharva Veda* and by the subsequent references in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and other places. The nucleus of Purāṇic tradition was gradually developing and this field of knowledge was being cultivated in several other branches. By the turn of the millennium, when the Bhāgavata movement; centring round Viṣṇu gained new movement, need was felt for special class of literature which should become the focus of both Veda and Loukika, that is, a reconciled presentation of the older tradition with the new institutional developments in society. The *Purāṇa* was found to be the most convenient vehicle of this movement for more reasons than one. The first advantage was that

of language which was reinforced by all, the force of the classical Sanskrit speech. The second point was that the *Purāṇas* were not a closed literature like the *Vedas* or *Upaniṣads* which had completed their cycle. The elastic nature of the *Purāṇic* texts as reconstituted almost at every new turn of a cultural cycle, is unparalleled in the history of world literature. The enthusiasm and the inspiration, with which the compilation of the *Purāṇas* undertaken, were recurrent facts of a resurgent religious movement being renovated from age to age. These *Purāṇas* have preserved a wonderful record of these changes. Before identifying these elements in the *Purāṇas*, it is legitimate to understand the very nature and scope of the *Purāṇas*; for, the details thereof follow in forthcoming pages.

ii) The meaning of the word “*Purāṇa*” :

The word *Purāṇa* connotes simply an old narrative, or the record of old events. Ancient writers derived the term “*Purāṇa*” as i. पुरा भवम्, ii. पुरा नीयते, iii. पुरा अनति. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* derives the word from पुरा and the root अण् and gives the meaning of the word as ‘that which breathed in old times.’¹ The word पुराभवम् is formed by the addition of ‘*tyu*’ termination to the indeclinable पुरा according to Pāṇini.² He has used this word in his aphorisms more than once. Bhānuji Dikṣita, son of the famous grammarian Bhattoji Dikṣita,

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1. यस्मात्पुरा ह्यनतीदं पुराणं तेन हि स्मृतम् ।
निरुक्तमस्य यो वेद सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ॥ *Vāyu Purāṇa* - I.203.
 2. पूर्वकालैक सर्व जरत् पुराण नव केवलाः समानाधिकरणेन ।
अष्टाध्यायी of Pāṇini – II.1.49.

has derived it from 'Pura' an indeclinable, with the suffix 'yu' (*tyu*) which as a rule is changed into 'ana'. Both the word and its affix (*purāṇa*) are combined euphonicly and becomes 'Purāṇa'.³ The rule demands it to be 'Purātana', but since even Pāṇini has used it, it is taken to be correct by the traditional usage (*nipātana*).⁴ Bhānuji has offered another derivation, *Pura+ana* (to record) + *ac* = *purāṇa* which means a composition recording (events of past and future).⁵

Yāksa has interpreted "Purāṇam" as 'Pura navam' i.e. new in ages gone by. It is an instance where the final letter is dropped. Hence instead of "Pura navam", we get *Purāṇa*.

The etymological explanation of the term "Purāṇa" given by Yāska is पुरा नवं भवति, that through which the old becomes new again. In a sense, *Purāṇa* is old but retains the spirit of newness by emphasizing the essential oneness of all men irrespective of their caste and creed, a sentiment which is modern in every age. The use of the term "Purāṇa" in the sense of a religious book, dates back to the days of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, wherein *Purāṇa* is declared to be the fifth Veda. The word "Purāṇa" in the appears to have been

3. सायं चिरं प्राह्णे प्रगेऽव्ययेभ्यष्ट्युत्तुलौ तुट च ।

Ibid., IV.3.23.

4. पुराण प्रोक्तेन ब्राह्मण कल्पेषु ।

Ibid., IV.3.105.

इति सूत्रयोर्निपातनात् तुडभावः ।

अमरकोष - I.6.5. टीकायां भानुजी दीक्षितः ।

5. पुरा अणति इति पुराणम् । अण् शब्दे ।

Ibid.,

mentioned first in the *Aśvalāyana Gr̥hya Sūtra* (4.6). The mention of the word *Purāṇa* in the *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* shows that the *Purāṇas* in the *sutra* period, discussed *Dharma sūtra* topics and also told stories of kings and their kingdoms. *Smṛtis* like the *Manusmṛti* and the *Yāñjnavalkya – Smṛti* refer to the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas* together.⁶ The author of the *Mahābhārata* in the *Svargārohaṇa parva*, equates the fruit of listening to the *Mahābhārata* with that of listening to the eighteen *Purāṇas*. Taking into consideration that the *Mahābhārata* text, consisting of one lakh verses, had already been composed in the fourth century B.C as is vouched for by inscriptions, one can safely assume that some *Purāṇas* must have been written by that time. A well known definition of the *Purāṇas* was given by *Amarasimha* of 5th century A.D, mentioning primary, *Sarga*, *Pratisarga*, *Vaṁśa*, *Manvantaras* and *Vaṁśānucharita* as the five topics discussed in the *Purāṇas*. It must be remembered that this definition does not cover the subjects of many extant *Purāṇas*.⁷

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* explains the word in a similar way. It is said that the *Purāṇa* is so called because it expresses ideas with regard to ancient times, and adds that one who knows this exegesis is absolved of all sins”.⁸

6. यतो वेदाः पुराणानि विद्योपनिषदस्तथा ।

Yāñjnavalkya Smṛti IV.189.

7. पुरा नवं भवतीति पुराणम् (निरुक्त 3.9)

8. यस्मात् पुरा ह्यभूच्चैतत् पुराणं तेन तत् स्मृतम्
निरुक्तमस्य यो वेद सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते ।

(ब्रह्माण्ड पुराणम् पूर्वभागो, प्रक्रिया पादः - I.173)

The *Atharva Veda* which contains the earliest mention of the word 'Purāṇa', says that the ṛcs (verses), the *sāmans* (songs), the metres and the *Purāṇa*, originated from the residue (*uchhista*) of the sacrifice together with the *Yajus* (Sacrificial formulae). Though references in the *Atharvaveda* signify that the *Purāṇas* had assumed some independent form of composition, but it is not definite that the *Purāṇas* meant actual books at the time of the *Atharvaveda*.⁹ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* shows that a definite work has intended by the term. It is in the *sūtras*, however that we find reference to the existence of real *Purāṇas*¹⁰

On the other hand the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* ascribes the origin of the four Vedas, *Itihāsa Purāṇa* etc. The *Atharvaveda*, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣads* clearly state that the *Purāṇas* had attained a status of sacredness like the *Vedas* and were closely associated with *Itihāsa* even in the vedic times. Though the word "Purāṇa" was applied to a type of literature in the later days, the word 'Purāṇa' occurs in the *Ṛgveda* where it means 'old'.

As a matter of fact, in some of the works of the Vedic and the early Buddhist literature, the *Purāṇa* has been called the fifth Veda. The way in which the *Purāṇa* has been connected with sacrifice as

9. ऋचः सामानि छन्दांसि पुराणं यजुषा सह ।
उच्छिष्टाञ्जिरे सर्वे दिवि देवा दिवि श्रितः ॥
Atharva-veda XI.7.24.

10. स होवाच ऋग्वेदं भगवोऽध्येमि यजुर्वेदं सामवेदमाथर्वणम् ।
चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं पञ्चमं वेदानां वेदमिति ।
Chāndogya Upaniṣad VII.1.2.

well as with the *Yajus* in the *Atharvaveda*, the theory of the origin of the universe from sacrifice as expounded in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *R̥gveda* and the topics constituting the '*Pāriplava ākhyānas*' or recurring narration in the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice, tend to indicate that the *Purāṇa*, as a branch of learning, had its beginning in the Vedic period and originated in the narrative portion (*Ākhyāna bhaga*) of the Vedic sacrifice, which in the *Brāhmaṇas*, is repeatedly identified with the god "Prajāpati". In the extant *Purāṇas*, there is a verse which tells us that at the beginning of creation, Brahma had remembered the *Purāṇa* first of all the scriptures, before the Vedas. This statement, however absurd it may appear to be, will have validity, if we take the word '*Purāṇa*' to mean not the *Purāṇa* literature, but 'ancient stories' and legends, which in every country came into being much earlier than versified compositions".¹¹

iii) Rise of the Mahāpurāṇas :

Although it is not known to us that this original *Purāṇic* heritage began to give rise to different *Purāṇa Samhitās*, it can hardly be denied that more than one *Purāṇa* had come into existence long before the beginning of the Christian era. In the law books of *Manu* and *Yāñjñavalkya* and in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* the word *Purāṇa* has been used in the plural number. The *Mahābhārata* speaks of *Purāṇa* proclaimed by *Vāyu* and the *Āpastambha-dharma-sutra*

11. *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol.II. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyar, Calcutta, 1931, p-241.

cites three passages from an unspecified *Purāṇa* and one passage from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*. The self contradicting title *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (*lit. Purāṇa* on future ages) given to a distinct work of the *Purāṇa* literature, indicates that in Āpastambha's time, the term 'Purāṇa' had become so thoroughly specialized as to have lost its proper meaning and had become merely the designation of a particular class of books.

It would have required the existence of a number of *Purāṇas* and manifestly they must have had their own special names to distinguish from one another, and so, convert their common title *Purāṇa* into a class of designation. Thus, we can reasonably hold that the number of the *Purāṇas* began to be multiplied long before the time of the Āpastamba, who is dated between 600 and 300 B.C

It is not known how many *Purāṇas* were already there in Āpastamba's time and how they went on growing in number; but we find a tradition, recorded in almost all the extant *Purāṇas* and other works, that the *Purāṇas* rather *Mahāpurāṇas* are eighteen in number. The names of these eighteen *Purāṇas* as given in the different *Purāṇic* works, are the same as those of the works now extant under the general title *Mahapurāṇa*. The order in which these works have been enumerated in the majority of the lists, is as follows : *Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Bhāgavata, Nāradiya, Mārkaṇḍeya, Agni, Bhaviṣya, Brahmavaivarta, Liṅga, Varāha, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa and Brahmāṇḍa*. There are ofcourse, a few *Purāṇic* works which, in their respective lists, replace the name of Vāyu *Purāṇa* with that of the *Śiva Purāṇa*. Similarly *Devī Bhāgavata* is also called

Mahā Purāṇa replacing *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; but the latter is a much later work and yet is *Mahāpurāṇa*.

The existence of more *Purāṇas* than one in Āpastambha's time or earlier does not, however mean that the above tradition of eighteen principal *Purāṇas* came into vogue at such an early period. As a matter of fact, this tradition can scarcely be dated earlier than the third century A.D. There is, of course, a mention of 'eighteen *Purāṇas*' in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivaṃśa* but the passages referred to, are in all probability of later additions. Chapter IV of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* which contains some what peculiar list of eighteen *Purāṇas*, is undoubtedly an interpolation; and the list occurring in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* are of extremely doubtful authenticity. However, from the evidence of the *Purāṇas*, *Matsya Kūrma* and others, and other Sanskrit works, we can be sure that the tradition originated not later than the beginning of the third century A.D. So it can be said that by the end of the sixth century AD at the latest, the number of the *Purāṇas* had already been eighteen and this number was regarded as a sacred one, by the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

iv) The date of the *Purāṇas* :

The Kernel of the *Purāṇas* is very ancient and the *Purāṇa Samhitā* of Veda Vyāsa might have contained it in its pure, original form. Thereafter, his pupils elaborated the manual in several volumes; but the process did not stop there. It was necessary to bring the contents especially the geneological portions thereof, up-to-date. Hence, additions were made in it from time to time.

The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* seems to have been related for the first time, in the age of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. The five Pāṇḍavas marrying Draupadi was then burning topic of the day in as much as it was a deviation from a particular pattern prevalent in the society. It was, therefore, but natural that while some criticized it, others reasoned out in its favour. The *Purāṇa* opens with a dialogue between Jaimini and the winged beings about the propriety of the five princes marrying one princess. The winged beings defended the action of the Pāṇḍavas. We find a series of a metaphysical teachings in that dialogue. In one place the speaker refers to the *Viṣṇu*'s three Avataras; *Varāha*, *Nṛsimha*, and *Vāmana*, and adds "it is impossible to enumerate all the Avatāras of the Deity; but the present one is that which belongs to Mathurā."¹² This is an un-ambiguous indication that the winged beings are pointing to Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was born in Mathurā. And this prompts us to consider that at least this portion of the *Purāṇa* was related to the age of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

From the Parāśara's instruction to Maitreya, it is known that Parīkṣita ruled over the country when the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was first related.¹³ Since Parīkṣita was a successor of Yudhiṣṭhira, a book composed in his time, enjoys the great antiquity. But a mention made

12. वामनादींस्तथैवान्यान् न संख्यातुमिहरेत्सहे
 अवतारोश्च तस्येह माथुरः साम्प्रतं त्वयम् ॥
Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, IV.58.

13. योऽयं साम्प्रतमवनीपतिः परीक्षित् ।
Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 4.21.2.

in that book about genealogies coming down to Maurya, Suriga, Kaṇva and Andhra etc.¹⁴ indicates their continuous later additions to the older ones.

The contents of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* were first related by Śukadeva to Parīkṣita. This happened thirty years after Śrī Kṛṣṇa's leaving for Vaikuntha.¹⁵ Parīkṣita's listening to the seven-day discourse was an epoch making event in the devotional history and it gained popularity.

It was then repeated after one hundred and seventy years when Gokaṛṇa related the seven-day discourse to Dhundhukari.¹⁶ Again, Sanatkumāra and his brothers repeated the same to another audience after about another century.¹⁷ If this tradition recorded in the *Padma Purāṇa* is respected, it is very probable that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* got its present shape between the recitals by Śukadeva and Gokaṛṇa. In other words the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* came into being near about the Kali era 200. However, the description of

14. एवमेते मौर्या दश भूपतयो भविष्यन्ति ।

Ibid., 4.24.32.

इत्येते शुंगा द्वादशोत्तरं वर्षशतं पृथिवीं भोक्षन्ति । *Ibid.*, 4.24.37.

ततः कण्वानेषा भूर्यास्यति । *Ibid.*, 38.

15. आकृष्णनिर्गमात् त्रिंशद्वर्षावधि गते कालौ
नवमीतो नभस्ये च कथारंभं शुकोऽकरोत् ।

Padma Purāṇa - VI. 194-97.

16. परिक्षिच्छ्रवणान्ते च कलौ वर्षशतद्वये
शुद्धे शुचो नवभ्यां च धेनुजोऽकथयत्कथां ।

Padma Purāṇa VI.194.98.

17. तस्मादपि कालौ याते त्रिंशते सडब्दके

ऊचुरुर्जे सिते पक्षे नवम्यां ब्रह्मणः सुताः । *Ibid.*, 99.

dynasties, that of Maurya for an instance,¹⁸ make the scholars opine that much matter was appended to the original one later on.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* enjoys the same antiquity. In the fifteenth chapter of this *Purāṇa*, Sūta speaks to sages; 'The son of Subhadrā and Arjuna was Abhimanyu; Abhimanyu's son was Parīkṣita; Parīkṣita's son was Janamejaya; his son was Śātanika who got through Aśvamedhadatta a successor, Adhisimhakra, in whose reign you have convened this long religious conference for three years at Puṣkara and for two years at Dṛśadvati in Kurukṣetra.'¹⁹ This shows that the *Matsya Purāṇa* too was in existence, in its original shape during the reign of Adisimha Kṛṣṇa. But like other *Purāṇas*, the present volume of the *Matsya Purāṇa* contains genealogies of rulers even of very late date. Therein we find for instance, a mention of Andhra kings.²⁰ which is a clear indication for the fact that older geneoloical lists were supplemented by newer ones from time to time.

18. नव नन्दान द्विजः कश्चित प्रपन्नानुद्धरिष्यति
तेषामभावे जगतीं मौर्या भोदयन्ति वै कलौ ।
Bhāgavata Purāṇa - 12.1.12.

19. सुभद्राया रथी पार्यादभिमन्युरजायत ।
अभिमन्योः परीक्षित्तु पुत्रः पर-पुरंजयः ।
जनमेजयः परीक्षितः पुत्रः परमधार्मिकः ।
जनमेजयाच्छतानीकस्तमाञ्जने स वीर्यवान् ।
जज्ञेऽधिसीमकृष्णाख्यः सांप्रतं यो महायशाः ।
तसिन् शासति राष्ट्रे तु युष्माभिरिदमाहृतम् ।
दुरापं दीर्घसत्रं वैत्रीणि वर्षाणि पुष्करे ।
वर्षद्वयं कुरुक्षेत्रे वर्षद्वत्या द्विजोत्तमाः ।
Matsya Purāṇa - 50. 56-67.

20. एकोनविंशतिर्द्वेते आन्ध्रा भोक्ष्यन्ति वे महीम् ।
Ibid., 272.16.

Similarly, the *Vāyu Purāṇa* is also said to have been first related in the reign of Adhisimha Kṛṣṇa.²¹ The *Āpastambha Dharma Sūtra* quotes two verses from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*. They mean to say that eighty-eight thousand sages, desirous of progeny, trod on the way lying south to Āryamān (*Dakṣiṇāyana*), were of the same number of sages who did not beget children chose the route lying north to Āryamān (*Uttarāyana*).²² The quotation of the *Purāṇic verses* by *Dharma – Sūtra* indicates two things :

(a) That the *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa* existed before the composition of *Dharma Sūtra* and (b) that the *Purāṇa* was held in high esteem in matters related to *Dharma*. The verses referred to above are found with little variations in the *Matsya Purāṇa*²³ and also in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.²⁴

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21. असीमकृष्णे विक्रान्ते राजन्येऽनुत्तमत्वेषि
प्रशासतीमां धर्मेण भूमिभूमिप - सत्तमे ।
Vāyu Purāṇa - I.10.
22. आभूतसंप्लवात्ते पुनः सर्गे बीजार्थो भवन्तीति
भविष्यत्पुराणे अष्टाशीति सहस्राणि यो
प्रजामीषिर ऋषयः दक्षिणेनार्यम्णः पंथानं
ते श्मशानानि भेजिरे ॥
अष्टाशीतिसहस्राणि ये प्रजां नेषिर ऋषयः
उत्तरेणार्थम्णः पंथानं तेऽमृतत्वं हि कल्पते ॥
Āpastamba Dharma-sutra II.24. 5-6.
23. अष्टाशीति सहस्राणि ऋषीणां गृह-मेधिनाम् -----
इत्येतैः कारणैः सिद्धाः श्मशानानीह भेजिरे -----
अष्टाशीति सहस्राणि नेषामप्युध्वरितसाम्
इत्येतैः कारणैः शुद्धास्तेऽमृतत्वं हि भेजिरे ॥
Matsya Purāṇa - 123. 101-108.
24. अष्टाशीति सहस्राणि ऋषीणां गृहमेधिनाम्
क्रियावतां प्रसंख्येषां ये श्मशानानि भेजिरे -----
अष्टाशीति सहस्राणि ऋषीणामुध्वरितसाम् -----
आभूतसंप्लवस्थानाममृतत्वं विभाव्यते ।
Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa - II.21.160-173.

The extant *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa* had undergone many changes by many hands probably due to the keen desire of the people in charge thereof to make it popular and to bring it up-to-date by adding fresh material.

What has been said above, about the references in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Vāyu Purāṇa* and the *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa*, make us opine that the *Purāṇas* present us a mixture of old and new material. This is the characteristic of the rest of the *Purāṇas* too. While some *Purāṇas* have kept their original and ancient character to a larger extent; others, especially those which emphasize sectarianism, seem to have lost much of it. The older nuclear is of course there in all the extant volumes of the *Purāṇas*; but fresh matter has also abundantly accreted around it. The *Purāṇas* in their present shape, thus constitute a work of various periods in succession. Herein lies the consensus of opinion of the scholars. The *Purāṇas* had been in formation from the time of Parīkṣita down to the Gupta period, when they probably assumed their final redaction, except, the *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa* which continued to grow even much later.

Authorship :

The *Purāṇas* are generally ascribed to Vyāsa (*aṣṭādaśa purāṇam Kṛtra Satyaratisutaḥ*), but other traditions are also found in the *Purāṇas* themselves. According to *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Parāśara obtained the boon of becoming the author of the *Purāṇa* (*Purāṇa saṁhitākartā*).

According to the *Devībhāgavata*, the *Saura Purāṇa* was said by Parāśara (*Parāśaraproktam*). According to another tradition, *Mārkaṇḍeya* and the *Varāha Purāṇas* were composed by Mārkaṇḍeya, the *Agni* by Aṅgira, the *Liṅga* and *Brahmāṇḍa* by Daṇḍin and the *Bhaviṣya* by Mahādeva. According to some other traditions, Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Viṣṇu were composed by Vyāsa. He entrusted the *Purāṇa Samhitā* to Sūta whose three disciples Kaśyapa, Sāvarni and Vaṁśapāyana prepared three new *Purāṇa Samhitās*. All these four samhitās had four thousand verses each. The personality of Sūta is somewhat an enigma in the *Purāṇas* and the *Mahābhārata*. The word Sūta means 'charioteer', and also a person of mixed *pratiloma* caste born of the union of *Brāhmaṇa* female with a *Kṣatriya* male. The later authors of the *Purāṇas* obviously could not believe that the great sages like Śaunaka learnt the *Purāṇas* from a person of low caste. "They therefore invented the story of his divine character."

Despite any amount of efforts that were made by the modern scholars to trace the date of *Purāṇas*, it has left no unanimous opinion or conclusion to date the *Purāṇas*. Because, the basis on which the scholars assume the period of the authorship of *Purāṇas*, is itself not sound. The language and style of various *Purāṇas* differ from one another, yet they are inaccessible to the scholars to assign any proper date. In this manner scholars' opinions render fruitless.

On the other hand if the traditional view regarding the origin of the *Purāṇas* is accepted, there would be no confusion. It means, according to the traditional view, all the *Purāṇas* are intended to

explain the import of the Vedas. Therefore they are changed by the changes in words, sequence etc. in the subject matter, at the commencement of each creation. In this sense, the *Purāṇas* have been regarded as non-eternal; yet they stand on par with the Vedic texts which are however regarded as non-human compositions. All the *Purāṇas* have been regarded as non eternal in as much as they have been composed by the munificent Vedavyāsa, yet the import of the *Purāṇas* would be the same as in the previous creation. As such, the validity of the *Purāṇas* is in no way inferior to that of the Vedas, because both the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas* have the same purport of showing the supremacy of the Supreme Brahman. This idea is substantiated by a statement : “इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदार्थमुपबृंहयेत्”.

The *Chāndogya* text assigns the fifth rank to the *Purāṇas* after four Vedas, and celebrates them with the equal status of the Vedas.²⁵ Thus the *Chāndogya* text testifies to the fact that the *Purāṇas* have been regarded as holy and valid as the vedic texts. In the light of the vedic texts the *Purāṇas* are considered to be practical amplifications of the normative prescriptions of social and individual conduct. Therefore it seems Vedavyāsa took up the task of preserving the *Purāṇa* tradition and entrusted it to one sect of his disciples. And,

25. ऋग्वेदं भगवोऽध्येमि यजुर्वेदं
 सामवेदमाथर्वणं चतुर्थमितिहासपुराणं
 पञ्चमं वेदानां वेदं पित्र्यं राशीं दैवं निधिं
 वाकोवाक्यमेकायनं वेदविद्यां ब्रह्मविद्यां भूतविद्यां
 नक्षत्र विद्यां सपदिबजनविद्यामेतद्भगवोऽध्येमि ।
 – *Chandogyopaniṣad* - VII.1.2.

it is for this reason, the ancient Indian Society looks upon the Purāṇic tradition as inextricably connected with the *Vedic* and *Smṛti* literature. And, at the same time they all form an integrated whole, popularly known as the '*Sanātana dharma*' which is declared as '*Śruti-Smṛti-Purāṇokta*'; thus the traditional view of validity of Purāṇic texts is unambiguous, and hence unquestionable. Therefore traditional view may be regarded as more convincing than that of the modern.

v) Classification of the Purāṇas :

Indian tradition assigns some kind of holyness to the number eighteen. The eighth chapter of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* speaks of the evolution of seventeen kinds of worlds from Prajāpati. Together with Prajāpati one arrives at the number eighteen. The year consists of twelve months and five seasons, amounting to that same number by adding the year (Samvatsara) to it. The *Mahābhārata* has eighteen sections. The *Gītā* consists of eighteen chapters. No wonder that the *Purāṇas* as well as the *Upa-Purāṇas* are also said to be eighteen in number. A verse in the *Devī Bhāgavata* clearly suggests the names of these eighteen purāṇas : मद्रयं भद्रयं ब्रत्रयम् वचतुष्टयम् । अनापलिङ्गकूस्कानि पुराणानि पृथक् पृथक् ॥

The term *ma-dvayam* suggests *Matsya* and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas*; *bha-dvayam* refers to *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; *bra-trayam* indicates *Brahma Purāṇa*, *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and *Brāhmaṇḍa Purāṇa* and the expression of *Vācatuṣṭayam* is intended to refer to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Vāmana Purāṇa* and *Varāha Purāṇa*. The term *a-nā-pa-liṅga, ga-ku-skāni* includes *Agni Purāṇa*,

Nārada Purāṇa, Padma Purāṇa, Liṅga Purāṇa, Garuḍa Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa and Skanda Purāṇa.

Besides, the Purāṇas are divided into two classes : i) *Mahāpurāṇa* and ii) *Upa-Purāṇa*. Each class consists of eighteen *Purāṇas*. Totally they are thirty six in number.

The *Mahā Purāṇas* have further been sub-divided into three categories, according to their preferential treatment to Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā. The *Purāṇas* glorifying Viṣṇu are styled as *Sāttvika*, those glorifying Brahmā as *Rājasa*, and those glorifying Agni and Śiva as *Tāmasa*.²⁶ According to this description the eighteen *Mahāpurāṇas* may be classified into *Sāttvika, Rājasa* and *Tāmasa* as Under :

Sāttvika : Viṣṇu, Nāradiya, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma and Varāha.

Rājasa : Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Brahma, Vāmana and Bhaviṣya

Tāmasa : Matsya, Kūrma, Liṅga, Śiva, Agni and Skanda

In the list of *Tāmasa Purāṇas* , the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* mentions *Āditya Purāṇa* instead of *Nāradiya*.²⁷ The *Skanda Purāṇa* enumerates

26. सात्विकेषु पुराणेषु माहात्म्यमधिकं हरेः ।
राजसेषु च माहात्म्यधिकं ब्रह्मणो विदुः ॥
तद्दग्नेश्च माहात्म्यं तामसेषु शिवस्य च ।
संङ्कीर्णेषु सारस्वत्याः पितृणां च निगद्यते ॥
Matsya Purāṇa 53. 68-69.

27. *Garuḍa Purāṇa* III.1.55.

ten *Purāṇas* as describing the greatness of Śiva, four of Brahma and two each of Devī and Hari.²⁸

The *Purāṇas* are not unanimous on this division. For instance, among the *Sāttvika Purāṇas*, the *Padma Purāṇa*²⁹ omits *Matsya*, *Kūrma* and *Vāyu* which are replaced by *Nārada*, *Padma* and *Varāha*, retains only the *Bhāgavata*, *Viṣṇu* and *Garuḍa* of the *Garuḍa* list. Among the *Rājasa Purāṇas*, the *Padma Purāṇa* retains only the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, but leaves out *Skanda*, *Padma*, *Varāha* and *Agni* from the *Rājasa* list which are replaced by *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Brahma*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Mārkaṇḍeya* and *Bhaviṣya*. Among the *Tāmasa Purāṇas*, *Padma* retains only the *Liṅga Purāṇa* but omits *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Brahma Mārkaṇḍeya* and *Āditya* of the *Garuḍa* list. Instead, it includes *Matsya*, *Kūrma*, *Śiva*, *Skanda*, *Agni*. Thus, we find that there is confusion in this kind of classification which becomes more complicated by the statement of *Skanda Purāṇa* which assigns ten *Purāṇas* to Śiva, four to Brahma, two each to Devī and Viṣṇu.

28. अष्टादशपुराणेषु दशभिर्गीयते शिवः ।
चतुर्भिर्भगवान् ब्रह्माद्धाभ्यां देवी तथा हरिः ॥
Skanda Purāṇa Kedarakhaṇḍa, 1.

29. मात्स्यं कौर्म्यं तथा लैङ्गं शैवं स्कान्दं तथैव च ।
आग्नेयं च षडैतानि तामसानि निबोध मे ॥
वैष्णवं नारदीयं च तथा भागवतं शुभं ।
गारुडं च तथा पद्मं वराहं शुभदर्शने
सात्विकानि पुराणानि विज्ञेयानि शुभानि वै ॥
ब्रह्माण्डं ब्रह्मवैवर्तं मार्काण्डेयं तथैव च ।
भविष्यं वामनं ब्राह्मं गजसानि निबोध मे ॥
Padma Purāṇa Uttarakhaṇḍa 263, 81-84.

vi) Gist of the Purāṇas

Padma Purāṇa :

Padma Purāṇa belongs to Vaiṣṇava group. This *Purāṇa* consists five Khaṇḍas: *Sṛṣṭi*, *Bhūmi*, *Svarga*, *Pātāla* and *Uttara*. The *Bhūmi Khaṇḍa* contains the geography of the earth. The *Pātāla Khaṇḍa* contains three groups of chapters composed at different times, the first group belonging to the Ramaite sect, the second to the Vaiṣṇavas and third to the Liṅga worshippers. And also deals with the description of the subterranean regions, the legends of the kings of solar dynasty. The *Svarga Khaṇḍa* contains accounts of the different regions, stories of kings and demons and has utilized the *Abhijñāna Shākuntala* and the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa. The *Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* can be divided into two parts it contains almost the chapters of *Matsya* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. The date of this purāṇa may be between 750 to 950 A.D.

Garuḍa Purāṇa :

The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* deals with the dynasties of Kosala, Kāśi and Vaiśālī. This Purāṇa mentions Br̥hadrathas who lived in pre-Bimbasāra age. It deals with the genealogies of kings in the *Ācāra Khaṇḍa*. This Purāṇa follows the Vāyu tradition as regards the solar dynasty, from Vaivasvata Manu onwards and the common tradition regarding the other dynasties. It omits several historical dynasties which the other Purāṇas described.

The *Garuḍa Purāṇa* is ranked among the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas for it glorifies Viṣṇu by his various names and in his various forms.

In this respect it follows the Pañcarātra school of *Vaiṣṇava sampradāya* which eulogizes Viṣṇu frequently by his names Hari, Nārāyaṇa. It deals with the *Viṣṇubhakti*. In the chapters on grammar, it gives the references to Pāṇini. The grammatical chapters of Kātyāyana in the Garuḍa Purāṇa were most probably composed in the third century A.D. subjectively, the Garuḍa Purāṇa is of an encyclopedic nature.

Nārādiya Purāṇa :

The *Nārādiya Purāṇa* a *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa*, consists of two parts of which, the first incorporates the entire *Br̥han-Nārādiya Purāṇa*, which was composed by the Vaiṣṇavas about the middle of the ninth century A.D. The remaining chapters of the first part are comparatively late additions, some of them contained detail information regarding the contents of the eighteen principal purāṇas. The second part though attached to the *Nārādiya Purāṇa*. It is really an independent work, differing in general character from the first forty one chapters of the first part and some times appearing in manuscripts as an independent text. The last forty-five chapters of this part bear signs of comparatively late date. An examination of the contents of the present *Nārādiya Purāṇa* shows that it was first compiled some time about the beginning of the tenth century A.D.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa :

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is a work belonging to the Pañcarātras, and purely Vaiṣṇava from beginning to the end. It has retained considerable faithfulness of the character of the unsectarian purāṇas. It is divided

into six parts called *Aṁsas*, each of the them consists of many chapters. In the first three sections, it deals with creation, recreation, detailed geography of the earth, and the atmosphere, description of the solar dynasties, accounts of fourteen manvantaras, names of the twenty-eight Vyāsa who lived in different ages and divided the Vedas, rise of the various Vedic schools, duties of the different castes and also contains valuable information regarding the dynasties of *Kaliyuga*.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is an early work composed most probably in the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth century A.D.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa :

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* which is the most popular of the extant purāṇic works, derives special attention not only as a literary production on account of its language style and metre, but also as a valuable record of the theological and philosophical doctrines of the *Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas* to whom it exclusively belongs. It consists of twelve skandhas, and each divided into many chapters. It consists of eighteen thousand verses in all. It contains description of the castes and four stages of life, the duties of man, *karma yoga*, *jñāna yoga*, *bhakti Yoga*. It represents the highest teaching of Paramahansa. It clearly states that the knowledge of all system of philosophy. The creation of the *Brahmā* is then described and the division of time is explained. The sixth skandhas contains a variety of legends of miscellaneous description of *Varāha* incarnation. The seventh skandha is occupied with the legend of *Prahlāda*. The eighth deals with the manvantaras. Ninth skandha narrates the dynasties of *Vaivasvata Manvantara*.

The tenth skanda explains the characteristics of Purāṇa and eleventh describes the destruction of the Yādavas, death of Kṛṣṇa. And twelfth skandha continues the lines of the kings of the Kali age.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* can be assigned to the 7th century A.D.

Vāmana Mahā Purāṇa :

The *Vāmana Mahā Purāṇa* occupies the fourteenth place in the list of the purāṇas. It is named after Vāmana (The dwarf) incarnation of lord Viṣṇu. It is the only Purāṇa, that gives the detailed and comprehensive account of the Avatāra, where from it obtains its designation along with large number of topics characteristic to the purāṇas. It contains ten thousand verses, consisted of four saṁhitās, Maheśvari, Bhagavathi, Gauri and Gaṇeśavari, containing one thousand verses each. The legends stories and episodes in the *Vāmana Purāṇa* are generally of the same type and nature, as are met with in other purāṇas. In the descriptions of the places of pilgrimage, it gives specially a detailed and exhaustive account of the tirthas rivers and forests of *Kurukṣetra*.

As regards the date of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Fifth Century A.D., can be accepted as the upper limit. Because its author has a full impact of Kālidāsa and especially his poem the *Kumāra Sambhava*.

Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa :

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* is divided into four parts. It gives a detailed description of Sri Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā whose supreme abode

is the Gokula. The first part-*Brahma Khaṇḍa* presents an account of Nārāyaṇa and Śiva emerging from the right and left sides of Kṛṣṇa and Brahma from his navel. The second part, *Prakṛti-khaṇḍa* describes the evolution of prakṛti according to the sāmkhya school of thought, but affirms that it is under the control of Īśvara and his śakti. The third part, *Gaṇeṣa-khaṇḍa* is devoted to the birth and exploits of Gaṇeṣa. The last part *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa* deals with the life of Kṛṣṇa. The meeting of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and their union is the theme of a most remarkable and picturesque poetic description in this part.

Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa :

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* so called because it is dealing with the cosmic egg. (*Brahmāṇḍa*), and is virtually the same as the present Vāyu Purāṇa which has been assigned the eighteenth place in almost all the lists of eighteen purāṇas. So it is called 'Vāyaviya Brahmāṇḍa', that it is also like the *Vāya Purāṇa*.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* consists of two parts. First is divided into four parts *Prakriya*, *Anusaṅga*, *Upodghāta* and *Upasaṁhāra* and the second part deals with the Lalitopākhyāna (the story of Lalitha), is dedicated to the goddess Lalitha, a form of Durgā and teaches her worship by Tāntric rites. Most probably it is not earlier than 400 A.D.

Brahma Purāṇa :

The *Brahma Purāṇa* is entirely a new work and consists mainly of chapters taken from the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivamśa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and the *Vāyu Purāṇa*. Those chapters of this work which have not been traced anywhere else, deal chiefly with the praise of the shrines and holy places in Puruṣottama-kṣetra, Konārka, Ekāmra kṣetra and Virāj kṣetra which lie in Orissa and belong respectively to the Vaiṣṇavas, Sauras, Śaivas and the Śaktas. It is probable that the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa owed its origin to those Vaiṣṇavas of Orissa who wanted to popularize Puruṣottama kṣetra as a great Vaiṣṇava holy place.

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa :

Ranking seventh in the list of the Mahāpurāṇas, the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is one of the most important, interesting and probably one of the oldest works. It was named after the sage Mārkaṇḍeya, who acquired his knowledge from Brahmā, the creator of the universe. It seems to come from an early date and to have been non-sectarian in its origin. This purāṇa consists of nine thousand verses, spread over one hundred and thirty seven chapters. There are three stages in the development of this purāṇa. First stage is represented by the chapters from 43-81 and 93-136. These chapters continue the purāṇa in its original shape. In the second stage, 1-42 chapters were composed. In these chapters, Jaimini is referred by Mārkaṇḍeya to the wise birds and, in the third stage long episodically and independent narrative of the actions of the goddesses are described. On the other hand it dealt with the earlier metrical smṛti works and contains a few interesting legends of which special mention may be made of those of king Harischandra, whom Viśvāmitra made to

suffer endless sorrow and humiliation of queen Madālasā who gave instructions on self knowledge to her sons, etc.

Bhaviṣya Purāṇa :

The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* is given an important of place among the major purāṇas. The *Matsya Purāṇa* says, “The Purāṇa in which Brahman described the greatness of the sun, and the existence of the Aghora-Kalpa” that is called the *Bhaviṣya Manu*. The stories being for the most part the events of a future period.’ *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* consists of four parvas. Brahma, Madhyama, Pratisarga, Uttara. The Brahma Parvan contains 215 chapters. It calls itself a *Dharmaśāstra* in which Śrauta and Smārta Dharmas have been described. The chapters 1-2 treat of the duties of castes and Āśramas and the creation of the world. The Madhyamaparvan deals with the Maṇḍaloddhāra, the construction of the maṇḍalas like Krauñca etc., the gift making, the making of kalasa, dates and time of the rituals pertaining to gods and manes etc. Pratisarga Parvan contains thirty one chapters. It gives an account of birth of the Kauravas, the Yādavas, Pāṇḍavas, etc. It also includes the account of Śālivāhana, and Bhoja’s reign.

The fourth khaṇḍa, pratisarga parvan contains twenty-six chapters dealing with the kings of Agni, Vikrama, Paramāra Tamāra etc. The uttara parvan consists 208 chapters. It is equally with the proceeding a sort of manual of religious offices, the greater portion being appropriated to vṛtas and remainder to the forms and circumstances in gifts are to be presented.

Matsya Purāṇa :

The *Matsya Purāṇa* is one of the older purāṇas, dealing with a variety of subjects. It consists of 290 chapters comprising about 10,000 verses in a simple and lucid language. It has been named after the first incarnation of lord Viṣṇu and deals, in detail with the story of that incarnation. Thus, it may be designated as Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa though it abounds in Śaivite and Śakta contents also. There are certain chapters in the *Matsya Purāṇa* specially dealing with the future dynasties of the Kali age. In some other chapters the genealogies of sages are also narrated and practically treat with the gotras and Pravaras. It also deals with the genealogies of kings of the Solar and Lunar dynasties. It deals with the stories of Yādavas and the descendants of Turvasu, Anu and Puru.

The Kūrma Purāṇa :

It was narrated by Lord Viṣṇu in his incarnation as the tortoise at the time of the churning of the milk ocean by Devas and Asuras, who were in quest of the immortalizing nectar. It starts with discourse on the concept of Māyā as a potent tool in the hands of the supreme beings to work out his scheme of creation. This purāṇa is divided into two parts, Pūrva and Uttara khaṇḍa each of which contains good number of chapters on Hindu customs and also it contains several topics, daily duties, establishes and non-establishes, funeral ceremony, impurity due to births and deaths, gifts, holy places, yuga dharma and with nature of Kali age, we have also a detailed description of the vedic traditions. The second part of the

Purāṇa contains metaphysical speculations and the main theme of Advaita. In short this Purāṇa has all that is conventionally expected to be found in a Purāṇa and motive throughout the text is the fundamental unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Agni Purāṇa :

Agni or Āgneya Mahā Purāṇa is accorded eighth place in the list of the Mahā Purāṇas. It is so named because it originated as a composition in praise of Agni, a form of Viṣṇu. Its authorship is attributed to Vyāsa. It is narrated as usual by his disciple Sūta, and was received by him from the sage Vasiṣṭha, to whom it was communicated by Agni. It contains fourteen thousand verses. But Bhāgavata and Matsya Purāṇas speak of *Agni Purāṇa* consisting fifteen thousand and sixteen thousand verses respectively. The *Purāṇa* is divided into three hundred and eighty three chapters treating a variety of subjects. The *Agni Purāṇa* claims to be an epitome of all branches of Knowledge, classified into Parā and Aparā Vidyās. The fifty topics are discussed in the last chapter of this Purāṇa, viz. ten incarnations of Viṣṇu, summary of the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, Harivamśa, Vaiṣṇavāgama, worship, initiation, consecration of images, the Śaivāgama, iconography, architecture description of the sacred places, astrology Āyurveda, Music, Rājasāstra, Grammar, Vedānta Philosophy, lexicography etc.

The Agni Purāṇa is a present essence of all branches of knowledge and is an encyclopedia of all that existed; *Āgneya hi Purāṇesmin Sarvaḥ Vidyāḥ Pradarsitāḥ.*

Skanda Purāṇa :

The *Skanda Purāṇa* is voluminous work consisting of a very large number of parts. Though like the other Purāṇas, the *Skanda Purāṇa* also was subjected to additions and alterations more than once.

The *Skanda Purāṇa* does not contain dynastic list, yet it is an important source of Ancient Indian History and Chronology. It refers to some important remarkable personalities as well as few famous epochs of Indian History. This Purāṇa throws an interesting as well as important light on the history of the south, extending beyond the Vindhyaś upto Simhala as is evidenced by the graphic account of southern Indian. It supplies valuable information on the science of Government, variously styled Daṇḍanīti, Rājadharmā, Rājanīti, Nītiśāstra, Mantra śāstra etc.

The *Skanda Purāṇa* is divided into six Saṁhitās and fifty khaṇḍas. The division and sub-divisions of this Purāṇa show that the Purāṇa grew up into a huge bulk with addition of parts which could never come from the same hand or belong to the same age.

During the epic and Purāṇic periods, the *Skanda Purāṇa* was highly popular and favourite. And Skanda was very favourite deity whom purāṇic poets regarded not only as a god of war but also a god of wisdom. The fact that a voluminous and important Purāṇa came to be named after him indirectly testifies to his immense popularity. In size, *Skanda Purāṇa* is second only to the Mahābhārata.

Śiva Purāṇa :

The *Śiva Mahā Purāṇa* is a highly adored Purāṇa and a master piece of encyclopedic interest. It contains stories about the birth of Pārvati, Gaṇeśa, Skanda and their marriages. It has been amplified from time to time, and most probably it was consolidated in its present form in the eighth century. This *Purāṇa* is a voluminous work dealing with the Śaiva Philosophy myths and rituals, and contains many of the principal characteristics of a Mahā Purāṇa. It contains seven samhitās and it is divided into many chapters. The Introductory chapters give the importance of the Śiva Purāṇa. Also it contains cosmogony and cosmology of the world according to the Shiva mythology. And story of Nārada, his victory, his arrogance on his achievements, his desire to marry a princess etc. are narrated. It deals mainly with the accounts of the battle fought by Śiva against the various asuras. Incarnations of Śiva are described and the installation and importance of twelve Jyotirlingas are described. Various Narakas have been described and philosophical aspects of Śaivism are also narrated.

The Upa-Purāṇas :

The long standing tradition, current in all provinces of India, limits the number of the Mahāpurāṇas to eighteen, but the *Purāṇa* literature certainly extends beyond this traditional number. The class of works designated as *Upapurāṇa* consists of a large number. As to the origin of the *Upa-Purāṇas*, the *Kūrma Purāṇa* (i.1.16), the *Skanda Purāṇa* (Sūta Samhitā), etc. record a tradition that the

sages proclaimed the Upa-purāṇas after listening to the eighteen *Purāṇas* from Vyāsa.

The Upapurāṇas are also eighteen in number. They may be broadly divided into following groups in accordance with the religious views. They are *Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas*, *Śakta Upapurāṇas*, *Śaiva Upapurāṇas*, *Saura Upapurāṇas*, *Gāṇapatya Upapurāṇas* and *Non-Sectarian*.

The Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas :

The most important among the *Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas* are the *Viṣṇudharma*, *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Nārasimha*, *Bṛhamaradiya* and *Kriyā-yoga Sāra* of which the first four are *Pañcarātras* works, and the last belongs to the *Bhāgavatas*. The *Viṣṇudharama* and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* were originally known as *Śāstras* and it was much later than they came to be recognized as *Upapurāṇas* because of their purāṇic characters.

The *Viṣṇudharma Upapurāṇa* which has been mentioned as a *Śāstra* in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* is a voluminous work dealing mainly with Vaiṣṇava Philosophy and rituals. It contains few chapters on political administration, some on the duties of women and good number of myths and legends.

The *Viṣṇudharmottora Upapurāṇa* which is the most important and interesting in the whole range of the *Upapurāṇa* literature, is an extensive and encyclopedic work, not only containing stories, myths and legends but also dealing with the cosmology, cosmogony,

astrology, astronomy, division of time, specification of unfavourable planets and stars, manners, customs rules about devotional vows and funeral ceremonies, law, politics, anatomy, pathology, treatment of diseases of human beings, image making, sculpture painting, architecture and so on. It also contains some of the contents of early works like the Mahābhārata the Bhagvadgītā the Upaniṣads, Smṛti works. It gives us valuable information regarding the various types of works which enriched Sanskrit literature before the time of its composition. It is a matter of great regret that many of the works utilized and referred to in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* have been lost for ever.

The *Nārasimha Purāṇa* is a work of the Pañcarātras with *Bhagavata* inclination and is one of the oldest of the extant Upapurāṇas. It glorifies Nṛsimha, a form of Viṣṇu and takes him to be identical with Nārāyaṇa. It deals with five characteristic topics and has a few chapters on manners, customs, methods and praise of Nārasimha worship. It is familiar with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, mentions the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Varāha Purāṇa*, and utilizes the *Vāyu Purāṇa* in its story of the birth of twin god, Aśvins.

The *Brahnnaradiya Upapurāṇa* which is included only in the lists of *Upapurāṇas* given in two Purāṇas, the *Ekāmra* and the *Bṛhaddharma*. It also is a work of *Pañcarātras* and describes the Vaiṣṇava festivals and ceremonies illustrated by various legends. Some chapters of it are devoted to the glorification of the Ganges, the duties of the castes and orders, funeral sacrifices and expiation. It is pre-eminently a work on devotion to Viṣṇu.

The *Kriyā-Yoga-Sāra* which is inclined in the list of *Upapurāṇas* given in *Brahddharma Purāṇa*, conceives of Mahāviṣṇu as identical with Parmātman, and recommends the study of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It advocates *Bhakti*, lays special stress on *Dāsya Bhakti*, and describes *Kriyā-Yoga*, which consists of worship of Gaṅgā, Viṣṇu, donation, devotion to Brāhmaṇas etc. It records valuable information on the state of religion, Buddhism and other non-vedic and anti-vedic religious systems etc. Besides the Vaiṣṇava *Upapurāṇas* mentioned above, there are few others such as *Bhārgava Purāṇa*, *Dharma Purāṇa*, *Puruṣottama Purāṇa*, *Ādi Purāṇa* and *Kalki Purāṇa*.

Śakta Upa-purāṇas :

Among the *Upa-purāṇas* dealing with Śakti worship the following have come down to us : *Devī Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Mahā Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Bhagavati Purāṇa*, *Caṇḍī Purāṇa* and *Sati Purāṇa*, of these the first four are most important.

The *Devīpurāṇa* was one of the most important of *Śakta Upapurāṇas* and deals mainly with the exploits and worship of Devī, though being the primordial and pre-eminent energy. It contains various interesting stories and records important information about the incarnations of Devī, Śaivism Vaiṣṇavism, Brahmanism etc.

The *Kālikā Purāṇa* which is regarded as one of the most authoritative work deals with the exploits and worship of Kali, who is primarily Yoga Nidrā and Māyā of Viṣṇu and narrates many interesting stories. It contains valuable materials for the study of the social, religious and political history. The *Mahābhāgavata* which is

distinct from the *Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* advocates Śaktism with a Śaiva tendency. The *Devībhāgavata* claims to be the real *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and includes the *Vaiṣṇavabhāgavata*, among the *Upapurāṇas*. It lays special stress on *Bhakti* as a means of realizing *Devī* and takes *Snāna* to be the same as *Bhakti* in its highest status. It holds the Vedas in high esteem and decries the Tantras whenever they go against the Vedas.

Śaiva Upapurāṇas :

The *Upapurāṇas* that belong to the Śiva worshippers are – *Śiva Purāṇa Saura Purāṇa*, *Śivadharmā Purāṇa*, *Śiva Dharmottara*, *Śivarahasya*, *Ekāmra Purāṇa*, *Parāśara Upapurāṇa*, *Vasiṣṭha Upapurāṇa* and *Vikhyāda Purāṇa*. The *Śiva Purāṇa* is a voluminous work dealing with Śaiva Philosophy, myth and rituals and contains very little of the principal characteristics of a *Mahā Purāṇa*. According to the Bengal tradition as known from the Bengal manuscripts, the *Śiva Purāṇa* consists of two parts, the first having the same text as that of the *Sanat Kumāra Samhitā* and the second consisting of thirty six chapters.

The present *Saura Purāṇa* is a work of the Pāśupatas. It glorifies Śiva and Pārvati and shows how the Pāśupatas tried hard to retain their own position as well as their numerical strength against the spread of Buddhism, Jainism and other heretical systems and especially of Vaiṣṇavism. In three of its chapters, it contains amusing stories denouncing the system of Madhvācārya which was gaining ground to the great disadvantage of the Śiva worshippers.

The *Śivadharmā Purāṇa*, which is a Śāstra according to itself as well as to the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, came to be recognized as an *Upapurāṇa* and was included in all the lists of eighteen *Upapurāṇas*. It is a short treatise of twelve chapters, in which Nandikeśvara reports to Sanatkumāra what Śiva said to Pārvati, and Kārtikeya on the following topics, origin and worship of the phallic emblem of Śiva, construction of temples, making gifts for his pleasure, etc. It decries the Vedic rites as being highly expensive and tiresome and extols various acts of service to Śiva.

The *Śivadharmottara Purāṇa* also belongs to pro-Vedic Pāśupatas. It consists twelve chapters, in which Skanda speaks to Agasti on the following topics; various duties of Śiva worshippers, imparting of knowledge, making donations to worthy recipients, sins and the suffering of sinners, rebirths, attainment of knowledge of Śiva etc.

The *Ekāmra Purāṇa*, which is a fairly big work on the praise of *Ekārma Kṣetra*, in Orissa, calls itself a *saṁhitā* of six thousand verses and has *Sanat Kumāra* as the speaker. It belongs to the *Āgamic Pāśupatas*, refers to a *Śiva Saṁhitā*, the *Āgamas* and the *Śiva Tantras* etc.

The Saura Upapurāṇas :

The *Sāmba Purāṇa* is a *Saura Purāṇa* which deals with the reformed cult of the sun by way of narrating the interesting story of Sāmbha's establishing an image of the sun at Sāmbhpura in *Mitravana*. It contains number of subsidiary stories of interest and

dealing with creation details of the Solar System, eclipses, geography of the earth etc.

The Gāṇapatya Upapurāṇas :

The comparatively late origin of the *Gāṇapatya* sect must have been responsible for the fact that there is no early Purāṇic work dealing exclusively with the praise and worship of *Gaṇapati*. The only two *Upapurāṇas* belong to this sect, they are – *Mudgala Purāṇa* and *Gaṇeṣa Purāṇa*. The *Madgala Purāṇa* deals with the nine incarnations of Gaṇeṣa; *Vakra tuṇḍa*, *Eka-danta*, *Mahodara*, *Gajānana*, *Lambodara* etc. It speaks about the thirty two forms of Gaṇapati. The *Gaṇeṣa Purāṇa* narrates interesting stories for the glorification of Gaṇeṣa and contains important materials for the study of the sect as well as its deity.

The non-sectarian Upapurāṇas :

The *Purāṇic* works of this type are the *Bhaviṣyottara* and the *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*. The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* is really a distinct work and independent *Upapurāṇa*. It deals with five characteristics of *Purāṇa* festivals donations, sociological and religious ideas. The *Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa* is an interesting work. It names the thirty six castes with their respective professions, accounts their origin; it describes many popular rites and festivals and contains valuable materials for the reconstruction of the social and religious history of Bengal.

The Characteristics of the Purāṇa :

The characteristics of the *Purāṇas* have been mentioned in the famous Sanskrit lexicon Amarakośa, that a *Purāṇa* is to deal with following five characters :

Sarga : Creation, or evolution of the universe from its natural cause.

Pratisarga : Recreation of the world from its constituent elements, in which it is merged at the close of each aeon-kalpa or a day in the life of Brhama, the creator.

Vamśa : Geneologies of the different deities, demons, patriarchs, sages and kings, especially of the last two.

Manvantara : Cosmic cycles each of which is ruled over by a Manu, the first father of Mankind.

Vamśānucarita : accounts of royal dynasties.³⁰

The root of all these characteristics can be traced to the ākhyānas (tales), Upākhyānas (anecdotes), gathās (metrical songs or proverbial sayings current in ancient society) and Kalpuktis (Sayings that had come down through ages) which the Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Viṣṇu Purāṇas say, they were utilized by the ancient sage Vyāsa in compiling the original Purāṇa Samhitā.

30. सर्गश्च प्रतिसर्गश्च वंशो मन्वन्तराणि च ।
वंश्यानुचरितं चैव पुराणं पञ्चलक्षणम् ॥
Kūrma Purāṇa - I.1.12.
Varāha Purāṇa - II.4.
Matsya Purāṇa - 53.65.

The *Pañchalakṣaṇa* definition was intended merely for the *Upapurāṇa*; and the *Mahāpurāṇa* has *Daśalakṣaṇa* (having ten characteristics) definition, which includes some more topics. The ten characteristics according to *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*³¹ :

Visarga : The Creation of individual Souls.

Vṛtti : Sustenance of Human life.

Sarga : Creation.

Raksa : The Protection given by the lord to the people through his *avatāras*.

Antara : *Manvantara*.

Vamśa : Races.

Vamśānucarita : Description of races.

Samstha : Corresponds to the '*Pratisarga* of the five *lakṣaṇas*'

Hetu : The individual soul who with his *Karma* determines and influences the cosmic creation or deluge.³²

Apāśraya : This is the epithet of *Brahman*, the highest reality. He is beyond *Māyā* always a witness.³³

31. सर्गोऽस्याथ विसर्गश्च वृत्ती रक्षान्तराणि च ।
वंशो वंशानुचरितं संस्था हेतुरपाश्रयः ॥
दशभिर्लक्षणैर्युक्तं पुराणं तद्विदो विदुः ।
केचित्पञ्चविधं ब्रह्मन् महदल्पव्यवस्थया ॥

Bhāgavata Purāṇa - XI.7. 9-10.

32. हेतुर्जीवोऽस्य सर्गादिर विद्याकर्मकारकः ।
तं चानुशायिनं प्राहुष्याकृतमुतापरे ॥

Ibid., XII.7.18.

33. व्यतिरेकान्वयो यस्य जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्तिषु अयामयेषु
तद ब्रह्म जीववृत्तिस्वपाश्रयः ॥ *Ibid.*, XII.7.19.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* mentions the main features of the *Mahāpurāṇas*.³⁴ Though a number of lakṣaṇas were mentioned, they did not cover-up all the topics of the *Purāṇas*. Newer and newer matters are introduced in the *Purāṇas*, which could not be classified under five or ten Lakṣaṇas. The *Matsya Purāṇa* says that besides the ten characteristics, the *purāṇas* deal with the glorification of Brahma, Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Rudra, as also with the dissolution and preservation of the world and with *dharma* (righteous conduct), *artha* (economic and polity), *Kāma* (erotic) and *mokṣa* (emancipation).³⁵ Ācara – dharmas, some principles of state crafts, glorification of certain Vṛtas and Tirthās, all these are found in almost every *Purāṇa*. So the lakṣaṇas only give a clue to the contents of the *Purāṇas* and do not permeate the entire gamut.



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34. सृष्टिश्चापि विसृष्टिश्च स्थितिस्तेषाञ्च पालनम् ।
 कर्मणां वासनावार्तामनूनाञ्च क्रमेण च ॥
 वर्णनं प्रलयानाञ्च मोक्षस्य च निरूपणम् ।
 उदकीर्तित हरेरेव देवानाञ्च पृथक् पृथक् ॥
 दशाधिकं लक्षणञ्च महतां परिकीर्तितम् ॥
Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa 132.35.37.
35. ब्रह्ममविष्णवर्करुद्राणां माहात्म्यं भुवनस्य च ।
 ससंहारप्रदानां च पुराणे पञ्चवर्णके ॥
 धर्मश्चार्थश्च कामश्च मोक्षश्चैवात्र कीर्त्यते ।
 सर्वेष्वपि पुराणेषु तहिरुद्धं च यत्फलम् ॥
Matsya Purāṇa - 53. 66-7.