The idea of Puruṣottama as a philosophic concept was greatly modified in the Post-Gītā period. The Vaiṣṇava sects naturally found in the idea of Puruṣottama the fulfillment of their emotional approach to the Divine. The doctrine is much stressed in the Pañcarātra school. In the history of Vaiṣṇavism the Pañcarātra school ( also known as Sāttvata, Ekāntika ) occupies a unique and very important place. It forms an important part of the Hindu Āgama religion. Apart from the information given by F. Otto Schrader about this religion no attempt has been made to undertake a critical study of the Pañcarātra which is now practically extinct. It is very difficult to say why the name 'Pañcarātra' is given to this school. About the origin of the word there are different views. The word 'Pañcarātra' is an old one and is mentioned for the first time in the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa where Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa is said to have conceived the idea of Puruṣameda, which was otherwise called Pañcarātra sattra ( i.e. sacrifice continued for five days ) as a means of obtaining superiority.

1 Sat. Br. xiii. 6.1
over all beings. According to some schools, the Pañcarātra cult might have started as a part of the sacrificial cult of the Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa. Another explanation put forth is that the name Pañcarātra refers to five principal subjects treated in that system. The Nārada Pañcarātra says that five kinds of rātra (disciplines) are discussed here, and hence the name. They are Tattva (Ontology), Muktiprada (Liberation), Bhaktiprada (Devotion), Yadgīka (Yoga) and Vaiḍēśika (Science). There is also a suggestion that the sect took its name from its central dōgma which was the pāncarātra sattrā of Nārāyaṇa interpreted philosophically as the five-fold manifestation of God by means of His Para, Vyūha, Viśhava, Aṣṭārvādyān and Aca forms. The earliest available record of the Pañcarātra thought is contained in the Nārāyanīya section of the Śānti Parva of the Mahābhārata. Apart from the Nārāyanīya we find an exposition of the Pañcarātra doctrine in a voluminous literature variously named as Pañcarātra Upaniṣad, Pañcarātra Tantras, Pañcarātra Āgamas, but popularly known as Pañcarātra Śāṁhitās a major portion of which seems to be lost.

The highest reality in the Pañcarātra school, is Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Person. He is the highest divinity and all other divinities are subordinate to him. Thus the Padma Śāṁhitā describes the Supreme reality as "beginningless, changeless, undifferentiated, the ruler, self-luminous, spotless, infinite, indestructible, tranquil, invisible, capable of evolving the world, unchangeable, full of consciousness and bliss, omnipresent, supreme; devoid of past and future, the Lord called Vāsudeva, the source of all beings, Ísvara, the Supreme Person of a stainless nature, eternal, without
waves, without disturbance, boundless, beyond the gunās, with gunās, the giver of all desires. This idea of God is further clarified and elaborated in almost all the samhitās of the Pāñcarātra school.

The central dogma of the Pāñcarātra school is that God as the divine Person manifests Himself in five-fold forms viz. Para, Vyūha, Vībhava, Antaryāmin and Arcā. The highest form of God is called Para. It is eternal and is the form of God as He is in Himself. It is sometimes referred to as 'the best of the puruṣas' and 'the Highest Light', seen by the Brāhmaṇas in meditation. God as Para is sometimes identified with and sometimes distinguished from Vyūha Vāsudeva. When the two are distinguished the Vyūha Vāsudeva is said to have sprung from the Para Vāsudeva. The Padma Tantra describes Para Vāsudeva as dividing himself and becoming with one half the Vyūha Vāsudeva and with the other Nārāyaṇa, the creator of the primeval waters. The Para is adorned with nine chief ornaments and weapons which symbolically represent the principles of the Universe.

Vyūha means the disintegration of the one Divinity into different aspects. Viṣṇu as the Supreme Person manifests Himself four different forms of Vāsudeva, Sankaraṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. It seems that the whole Pāñcarātra scheme is associated with the name of ŚrīKṛṣṇa and some of the members of his family. There is a series of emanations one from another, like one lamp lit from another. From Vāsudeva proceeds Sankaraṇa, from

---

1 Padma Samhitā, 1.5. 29-34.
3 Ibid. p. 53.
4 Padma Tantra i.3.16ff.
5 Pārāśa Prakāśa i.2.3. cf. Padma Tantra ii.1.
Samkarsana, Pradyumna, from Pradyumna, Aniruddha. This is as much to say that from the Self is born Prakti, from Prakrti, the Mind, from Mind, consciousness. This is how the four Vyuhas came to be endowed with a cosmological significance. In the Laksmi Tantra all these vyuhas said to proceed from Laksmi.\(^1\) The Vighendra Samhita, however, maintains that they come from Vasudeva.\(^2\) The Pancaratra thinkers were very much particular in safeguarding and preserving the purity and unchanged nature of the Supreme Being. From that point of view, it is a process of emanation in which the Supreme Person remains unaffected in all the five-fold manifestations.

Closely connected with the doctrine of Vyuhas is the next manifestation of God named as Vibhava.\(^3\) Vibhava is the revelation or descent of God in earthly form and primarily means an incarnation (avatara). Sometimes God descends to the empirical world through human birth in order to fulfil the yearning of His devotees.

The fourth manifestation of God is called Arca.\(^4\) God as the divine Person appears in invisible form wherever He is worshipped. Arca means the presence of God for the purposes of daily worship.

The fifth manifestation of God as the divine Person is the Antaryamin. As God remains as inner ruler of all souls (niyanta sarva-dehinam) He is called Antaryamin.\(^5\) The conception of God residing in the soul but not identical with it is a very old conception based on some famous Upanisadic texts.

---

1 Laksmi Tantra, ii, 27-35.
2 Vighendra Samhita, ii, 15
3 Schrader, p. 42
4 Schrader, p. 49
5 Visvaksena Samhitā, p. 122
It should be noted in this connection that in the Panca-rātra philosophy there are numerous references to the transcendent or rather impersonal aspect of the Divine. In many places the Supreme Being is described as homogeneous, attributeless (nirguna), unknowable and unmanifest. Thus the Ahirbudhyā Samhitā describes the Ultimate Reality as the weavless sea. It is absolutely self-realised and complete in itself, and cannot be defined by any expression such as 'this' or such.

The Jayākhya Samhitā equally reveals this Advaitic tendency. It describes Brahman as supreme existence which is all-pervasive. All things are but reflections of it and it is the essence of all. In some places of the Lakṣmā Tantra the supreme Reality is conceived as "one undifferentiated consciousness, tranquil, free from rising and setting". Even the Nārada Pañcarātra which is much more theistic than any other Pañcarātra Samhitās, and which has come very much under the influence of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa could not keep out the Advaitic elements in so far as it depicts the Ultimate Reality as attributeless, desireless and unattached.

In spite of this Advaitic tendency we must remember that this is not the main theme of the Panca-rātra philosophy. The central doctrine of the Panca-rātra philosophers is that God as the Supreme Person manifests in diverse forms gross and subtle. Indeed the concept of divine personality is the pivot round which all other categories of the Panca-rātra philosophy revolve. The theistic importance of the system lies in the fact that it recognises the principle of grace. It does not support the doctrine of

1 Jayākhya Samhitā iv. 116-117; also iv. 111-115.
2 Lakṣmā Tantra ii.9.
3 Nārada Pañcarātra, i. 5.6.
4 Beṅwalker, Indian Philosophy, vol. vii, p.5.
maya. Although it sometimes uses some Advaitic concepts such as attributeless 
(nirguna), unattached (nirlepa) etc, it does not interpret them in the 
way in which the Advaitins explain them. Its occultism is large upon 
its surface in manifestation of one Divinity into four aspects.

Now let us come to the Puranas. The idea of divine personality 
is expounded in greater detail in the Puranas also. The Puranas occupy a 
unique place in the sacred literature of the Hindus, being regarded as next 
in importance to the Vedas. They are closely akin to the Epics and the 
Saptis both in form and substance. "The Puranas are of inestimable value for 
the history of philosophy and religion, and are a veritable store-house for 
getting insight into all aspects and phases of Hinduism." 1 "Taken collectively", 
Fargiter remarks, "they may be described as a popular encyclopaedia of ancient 
and medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical, historical, personal, social 
and political." 2

There are eighteen Puranas according to the traditional view. They 
have great philosophical importance since they treat of the nature of Brahman, 
Prakrti, Purusa, creation and dissolution of the world, bondage, liberation, 
virtues, vices, and the means of liberation. Their philosophy is mainly 
theistic, although it contains in some places the elements of pantheism and 
pure monism. The Vaishnava Puranas which preach the cults of Narayana or 
Visnu or Krishna are purely theistic inasmuch as they conceive the ultimate 
reality as the Supreme Person. The Saiva Puranas which preach the cult of

1 Puwalkar, Studies in Epics and Puranas, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1955, 
Introduction p. xliv.
Śiva, Rudra or Pāśupati are theistic with a blend of pure monism. The Ṛṣikandeyya Purāṇa which preaches the cult of sakti is pantheistic with a blend of theism and monism. Although different trends of thought are blended together in the Purāṇas, they are not ultimately inconsistent with one another. They are keeping with the theism of the Śvetāsvatara Upanisad and the Bhagavadgītā.

The opening verse of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is an adoration of Viṣṇu, the Lord of the Universe. The Supreme Being is not indeterminate, impersonal and absolutely devoid of all distinctions and qualifications. He is the divine Person with divine attributes and designated by various names such as Pundarikākṣa, Viśvavāhana, Hṛṣīkeśa, Mahāpuruṣa, Purvaja, and so on. God is called Pundarikākṣa because He is the Supreme Person having eyes like a lotus: or 'Pundarīka' means supreme glory, and 'ākṣa' imperishable. The word 'Viśvavāhana' signifies that God is the creator of the universe or the cause of the existence of all things. He is the Mahāpuruṣa, the great or supreme spirit. He is 'Hṛṣīkeśa', inasmuch as He is the Lord of the senses. He is called 'Purvaja' because He existed before creation of the world. Another significant epithet of the Lord is 'Viṣṇu'. In the Purāṇas this word is commonly derived from the root 'Viṣ' which means 'to enter' or 'to pervade'. This meaning agrees with the text of the Vedas: 'Having created that (world) He entered into it.' Or, in other words, the Lord is so called because He is undistinguished by space, time or causality. The divine Person is also designated by another word

1 Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Translated by H. Wilson, Edited by Fitzedward Hall, London, 1864 Vol.I, p.2
2 Cfr. Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, 2564, 2567.
3 Tat tattvād tadevaṁ bhūvāvāt.
4 deseśkālaśvarupato vyavachchedābhāvat.
namely, Nārāyaṇa. The waters are called 'nārāḥ', and 'ayana' means place of abiding. Nārāyaṇa means, therefore, the reality whose place of abiding is the deep. ¹ He is called Vāsudeva inasmuch as He causes all things to dwell in Him, and also He abides in all.² He is Acyuta meaning unchangeable and imperishable.³

In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa the Supreme Being is conceived as endowed with three great and essential powers namely, Samvid, Hlādini and Sandhini.⁴ Through Samvid or the principle of Knowledge God knows and makes man know.⁵ Through Hlādini or the principle of joy He Himself feels joys of life.⁶ Through Sandhini or the principle of creative life, He lives in His mundane and supermundane activities and makes man live too in and through His deeds.⁷

Viṣṇu Purāṇa expressly refers to the three hypostases of the One Divinity. It is said that in the capacity of Brahmā, the Supreme Person creates the universe; in that of Rudra, He destroys it; and in that of Viṣṇu He preserves it.⁸ Thus the same reality endowed with three attributes is the cause of the creation, existence and destruction of this world. God as Trinity is the alpha and omega, be-all and end-all of all things. He is the smallest of the small, the greatest of the greatest. He is unchangeable, imperishable Puruṣottama,⁹ who is one with true wisdom, eternal and incorrupt.¹⁰ He is the unborn, imperishable and undecaying,¹¹ who can

¹ cf. Manu, i.10 : Āpo nārāḥ ti proktā āpo vai nārāsūnāvah.
² V.P., vi.5
³ V.P. i.2. Wilson, P.14.
⁴ Hlādini Sandhini Sāmvid taye kā sarvasamārya
⁵ taye vetti vedayati ca
⁶ taye hlādate hlādayati ca
⁷ taye asti bhūvyayati ca, āhroti kāreyati ca.
⁸ V.P. 1.2. Wilson, p.13
⁹ V.P. i.2. Wilson, p.16
¹⁰ V.P. i.2. Wilson, p.16
¹¹ V.P. i.2. Wilson, p.17.
describe Him, asks the author of the Visudd Purana, who is not to be apprehended by the senses, who is best of all things, the supreme soul self-existent. He is Brahman in the sense that He is the Lord of the world, ever pure and free from defects. He is the supreme Person, pervading all things indiscr ete and discrete, gross and subtle, material and spiritual.

It should be noted here that in some places of the Visudd Purana the emphasis is laid upon the indeterminate and impersonal aspect of the supreme Being. We are told that Visudd is undifferentiated pure consciousness. He is predicateless (aviséśa) and devoid of differences (abhedin). He is inconceivable and indescribable. He can be realised only through integral experience or intuition. This is the element of Absolutism in the Visudd Purana which is not different from pure monism of the Advaita Vedanta. But if we take this Purana as a whole we find that the main current of thought that runs through it is theistic and not absolutist. Of course the word māyā occurs in some places of this treatise. According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman is indeterminate, impersonal and devoid of creative activities. So there remains the problem of the origin of the world, and the Advaitist erects a mysterious principle called māyā to explain the world as illusion. But māyā in the Visudd Purana is not a principle of illusion. It is the power of Visudd whereby He creates and sustains the world. The world of sense experience is not doubt an actual world. And Visudd is 'Jaganmaya', permeating the world, 'from Keru to atom'. So He is known through the constitution of the universe, 'arthaśvarupena', 'by the nature of things'.

---

1 V.P. i.2, Wilson p. 17
2 V.P. i.2, Wilson, p.18
3 V.P. i. 9.50
4 V.P. vi.5.71-74, 79, 82, 84 ; i.2.5 ; i.15. 57-58.
5 V.P. vi. 5.71-74, 79, 82, 84 ; i.2.5 ; i.15. 57-58.
The *Visṇu Purāṇa* is held in great esteem by the theistic Vedāntists and quoted by them in support of their views. Rāmānuja profusely quotes from it verses in support of his doctrine of qualified monism (*Viśiṣṭādvaita*). The philosophy of *Visṇu Purāṇa* is a mixture of Sāṅkhya dualism and Vedāntic monism and theism.

The conception of God as the divine Person as expounded in the *Visṇu Purāṇa* is further developed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This work, written sometimes about 900 A.D., has had a profound influence upon Vaishnavism. Its purpose is the glorification of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme personality and it exalts the ideal of bhakti with a wealth of emotional fervour that gives it great creative power. Most of the later important sects of Vaishnavism are based on this work. It is no wonder that the famous Advaita Vedāntist, Madhusūdāna Sarasvatī, immediately after having explained the nature of impersonal Brahman forgot that he was an Advaitin when he said that all beings ran after the Supreme on the sands of Yamunā.

The *Bhāgavata* opens with the statement that the reality is the "Most High who is Truth, the light of whose countenance dispels the mists of illusion". According to this system, the supreme religion consists in "the devotion to personal God that transcends the senses". Like *Visṇu Purāṇa* it asserts that God is designated by various names. God is determinate and indeterminate at once. He is determinate in His nature in the sense that He is the divine Person. He is also indeterminate inasmuch

---

1 Bh. F. 1.1
2 Bh. F. 1.2,12
3 Bh. F.1.2
as His nature cannot be conceived in terms of anything in the universe. In the first chapter of the second Book of the Bhāgavata the Highest Reality is depicted as a personal God pervading the whole Universe. The Sun is said to be His organ of vision; the night and day are His eyelids; the water is His palate; the taste is His tongue; the Vedas are His crown; the god of Death is the row of His teeth; virtue is His breast and sin is His back; the Great Patriarch is His organ of generation; the rivers are His naval; the trees are His hairs; the wind of unending course is His heart; the moon is His mind; the power of science is His greatness; and so on. This chapter echoes the sense of Puruṣasūkta of the RgVeda where the Divine is conceived as the all-embracing personality permeating all things and beings of the universe. Again, in another place of the Bhāgavata the Supreme Being is represented as the divine Person beyond whom nothing higher exists. As the sun illuminates its own orbit as well as the outer world. So the universal form of the Lord manifests itself and exhibits all inner and outer objects. There is nothing in this world separate from the Great God (Paramāvāra), who is identical with actions and the instruments thereof. He is the past, present and future. He is the excellent soul of all, inexplicable by sound, devoid of grief and fear. God creates the world by His māyā sākti, consisting of three guṇas. Underlying the varied creations of māyā, He exists as the one abiding principle of reality. God in the Bhāgavata is said to have possessed of two powers, material (avidyā sākti) and spiritual (vidyāsākti). The former is the power of creating and sustaining the universe, while the latter is identical with His own nature as eternal pure bliss, and as omniscient and omnipotent.

1 Bh. P. i.2
2 Bh. P. ii.4
3 Bh. P. ii.4
4 Bh. P. ii.4
It is argued by some that God as conceived in the Bhāgavata is pure formless consciousness and absolutely devoid of all duality and distinctions. Thus Dasgupta observes: "That God in His own true nature is pure consciousness and absolutely devoid of all duality and distinctions is emphasised again and again in numerous passages in the Bhāgavata".\(^1\) Such a statement flatly contradicts the opening verse of the Bhāgavata and also many other passages which depict the ultimate reality as the Supreme Person. There are, however, some confusing passages in the Bhāgavata which represent the ultimate reality as indeterminate and impersonal.\(^2\) In one of such passages the reality is described as Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavān. Even here we cannot argue that the reality, according to the Bhāgavata, is pure undifferentiated consciousness. Śrīdhara in commenting upon this passage points out that the wise men who have realised the ultimate reality designate it by various names. Thus the Vedāntins call it Brahman, the worshippers of Hiranyagarbha describe it as Paramātman and the sāttvatas conceive of it as Bhagavān.\(^3\) Hence, according to Śrīdhara, when the supreme Being is described as Brahman and Paramātman it does not represent the view of the Bhāgavata (also called sāttvata) religion. The commentator Viśvanātha, however, goes further than Śrīdhara. He maintains that the concept of Bhagavān is higher than the other two concepts and worshippers of such a reality are superior to those of Brahman and Paramātman.\(^4\) He quotes passages from the Bhagavadgītā\(^5\) to justify his interpretation.

---

1 Dr. S.N. Dasgupta, Indian Philosophy, London 1955, Vol. IV, p. 12-13
2 arupaya cidadānānaḥ, 1.3.30.
3 Aupanīsadaīḥ Brahmeti, hiranyagarbhaiḥ Paramātmeti, sāttvātaiḥ Bhagavānīti ādhyaye abhiddhiyate - Śrīdhara's commentary on the Bhāgavata, 1.2.12. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Edited with Bengali translation by Śrī Ramanarayana Vidyaratna, 1292 B.S., Vol.I, p.30
4 Ibid, p.30
5 Iv. 46,47.
Indeed, the meaning of the so-called confusing passages of the Bhāgavata should not be understood in isolation from other passages of this Purāṇa; rather they should be interpreted with reference to the Bhāgavata as a whole. And all such apparent contradictions disappear when we remember that the Bhāgavata is primarily a treatise on devotion, and bhakti or devotion is possible only in respect of a Deity who is personal and endowed with an infinite number of auspicious attributes.

In the Nāradiya Purāṇa the Ultimate Reality is designated as Nārāyaṇa. If seen in the theological perspective He may be said to create from Himself Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the protector and Rudra the destroyer. This Ultimate Reality is also called Mahāviṣṇu. It is through His characteristic power that the universe is created. This sakti or power is said to be both of the type of existence and non-existence, both vidyā and avidyā. When the universe is seen as dissociated from Mahāviṣṇu, the vision is due to avidyā ingrained in us; when, on the other hand, the consciousness of the knower and the known disappears and only the consciousness of unity pervades, it is due to vidyā. And just as God permeates or pervades the universe, so also does His Śakti. Just as the quality of heat exists in and through fire, even so the Śakti of the Lord can never be dissociated from Him.

The Nāradiya Purāṇa emphatically asserts that Mahāviṣṇu is the infinite, eternal, pure self (Paramātmā) devoid of sattva, rajas and tamas. He is possessed of infinite knowledge, power, strength, sovereignty, heroism

1 N.P. 1.3.4  
2 N.P. 1.3.9  
3 N.P. 1.3.7  
4 N.P. 1.3.7-9  
5 N.P. 1.3.12  
6 N.P. 1.3.13
and glory. He is the supreme light of consciousness, and the embodiment of existence, consciousness and bliss. He lives in all creatures as their controller. He has unmanifest and manifest forms. He is both transcendant and immanent in relation to the world. This Highest Principle has been called Vāsudeva. Vāsudeva as the Supreme Person is endowed with all auspicious quantities, devoid of imperfections, the moral governor of the world, kind to His devotees, and the ultimate goal of human life. Thus the Nārādiya Purāṇa arrives at an exalted conception of the divine personality. It appears that the conception of God in this Purāṇa is developed under influence of Pāncharātra religion in which the emphasis is laid upon the divine Person.

Much the same idea dominates the Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa. According to the Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa is the highest Reality. He is described as infinite, eternal, immutable, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. He is the Supreme Self and Witness. He is the uncaused, non-spatial and non-temporal ground of the world. He is the first Cause of the world, the essence and the Lord of all. He is the repository of all virtues, the embodiment of asceticism and yoga. He is desireless, self-contented and perfect, and yet engaged in the sport of creation. He is a friend of the distressed, kind and affectionate to His devotees. The Brahma vaivarta Purāṇa preaches the devotion and worship of Hari. One who is kind to all creatures and views the world as full of Hari is the best and wisest devotee. Thus the Brahma vaivarta Purāṇa ends with a theistic note common to other Purāṇas.

1 N.P.1.3. 28, 31.
The Agni Purāṇa preaches the cult of Viṣṇu and regards Him as Para Brahman, the Lord, the creator and moral governor of the world. It advocates the duality of Purusa and Prakṛti with the Lord as their inner controller. Its ontology is a blend of the Sānkhya dualism and the Upanisadic monism. God as the divine Person is endowed with virtue, knowledge, detachment, auspicious qualities, and sovereignty. He is beyond Prakṛti and Purusa. He is formless and formed, partless and with parts, and all-knowing and known. He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. He is the supervisor of the Law of Karma and He associates actions with fruits. He is described as calm, non-phenomenal (nirabhāsa) and stainless. These are the elements of theism in the Agni Purāṇa.

The references to Agni Purāṇa clearly indicate that the devotion to Viṣṇu as the divine Person is an important item in the religious programme, and thus the cult of Viṣṇu commands great popularity. This popularity is not merely confined to the devotional religion, it has also permeated the domain of philosophy. In the cosmological account of the Agni Purāṇa all the creative processes are assigned to Viṣṇu. He has replaced the Supreme Reality (Brahman) of the Upanisadic systems of philosophy. Thus it may be inferred that during the period when the Agni Purāṇa was finalised, Viṣṇu had attained such a position of eminence that other deities were more or less subordinate to Him. The theory of incarnation according to which the Supreme Being is described as descending on the earth in one form or the other for the redemption of human beings, revolve round Viṣṇu and this establishes His superiority over other deities.

1 A.P. xxv. 38-40; xxv. 49-50; xxiv. 34-37, 41, 56-57; xxvii. 9-12, 34.
2 A.P. xxv. 1-3, 11-15; xvii. 1-2; xxix. 1, 34-42
3 A.P. xvii. 1-2 ff.
In the Agni Purāṇa there is an effort at synthesising the conceptions of the Personal God and the impersonal Absolute. Like some other Purāṇas it conceives Viṣṇu as both saguṇa and aгуṇa, personal and impersonal refuting thereby independent existence of any other reality known as nirguṇa Brahman of the absolutists. The so-called nirguṇa Brahman, as it is suggested in this Purāṇa, is one of the aspects of the Supreme Being (Viṣṇu) who comprehends within Himself, avyakta and vyakta, unmanifest and manifest, indeterminate and determinate.

The Skanda Purāṇa is of great philosophical importance. It contains the Bhramagītā which discusses the nature of Brahman and His relation to the individual self and the world. The Skanda Purāṇa advocates the cult of Śiva and identifies Him with Brahman. Śiva is characterised by infinite, eternal, being, consciousness and bliss. He is self-proved, self-existent, perfect and excellent. He is devoid of all plurality and beyond all appearance. He is the witness (sākṣī), the inner self (pratyagatman) of all creatures. He is distinct from empirical selves (bhokta), empirical objects (bhogya), and experience (bhoga). The world is created by Śiva associated with Śakti. Śakti is the power of Śiva, conscious and blissful, non-different from Him. She is the supreme wisdom (prajñā) which is the foundation of the universe. She is not an independent principle, like another self. Śakti cannot exist without Śiva and Śiva cannot exist without Śakti. Śiva without Śakti is absolutely powerless to act¹. The power of consciousness (cicchakti) is the essence of Śiva and it assumes three forms namely, the power of will (icchāsakti), the power of knowledge (jñāna śakti), and the power of action (kriyāsakti).

¹ S.P. i. 8.21; iv. 13.3.
In some places of the Skanda Purāṇa, however, the reality is represented as indeterminate and impersonal. We are told that Brahman is predicateless, formless, incomprehensible and indescribable. Brahman limited by avidyā or māyā with the excess of pure sattva is Ṛiśvara, the creator and ordainer of the world. The same Brahman limited by avidyā or māyā with the excess of impure sattva is the individual self (jīva). The undifferentiated Brahman appears to be the multiple world-appearance owing to His imaginary relation to the cosmic nescience. Thus the Skanda Purāṇa speaks with a double voice in depicting the ultimate reality. Some texts describe it determinate and personal, while others try to represent it indeterminate and impersonal. No attempt has been made by the author of this Purāṇa to synthesise these two opposite conceptions. The needed synthesis may be attempted in the light of Śrī Krishna's teaching in the Bhagavadgītā (Ch 15) as we have already considered it before.

The Vāmana Purāṇa may be said to be the supreme document of synthesis between Śaiva and Vaisnavā religion. The writer has gone to the extent of declaring the unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu, and this became the theme of other Purāṇas. He puts the following in the month of Śiva Himself: "If you cut me into twain with an edge-saw, even then you will find the eternal presence of Viṣṇu in my form."¹ In another place Viṣṇu tells the gods who were in search of Śiva: "Śiva is present here in the form of a Linga, where you may worship Him."² Still in another place of the same Purāṇa Śiva imparts the following teaching to His followers: "In your zealous devotion to Śiva and out of conceited ignorance, you have spoken ill of Viṣṇu which is not

---

¹ V.M.P. 67:37
² V.M.P. 62:21
proper. 1 "Vistū and myself are one and the same; there is no distinction between us. It is one essence exists in a twofold form. 2 Thus the Vāmana Purāṇa represents the spirit of broad-minded tolerance in the history of Indian Philosophy.

The concept of divine personality in the Matsya Purāṇa is similar to that in the other Purānas. In many places of the Matsya Purāṇa Vīṣṇu and Śiva are described in terms of Brahman of the Upaniṣads. Vīṣṇu is conceived as stainless, 3 universal soul, 4 unchanging, 5 creator of the world, 6 eternal, 7 unmanifest, 8 source of the Universe, 9 endless soul, 10 tranquil, subtle, 11 unborn, 12 and undecaying. 13 Vīṣṇu is said to be Acyuta, because He never swerves from His place; 14 Sanātana, because He continues the creation of the creatures by fame, prosperity and the supreme corpus; 15 Ananta, because other gods are unable to realise His end; 16 Akeśara, because His is the undecaying nature; 17 His another epithet namely Vāsudeva 18 brings out His omnipresence and all-pervasiveness. In the Matsya Purāṇa Vīṣṇu is also described as Jagad-yoni 19 and Jagannāy or meaning that He is antecedent in time, and the beginning, sustenance and end of everything. He is designated as adhibhuta, adhiyajna and adhidaiva. He is both movable and non-movable 21, without a beginning and yet the beginning of the Universe, and also without the middle and the end. 22 Thus He is independent of space, time and cause. He is eternity without a beginning and end. All plurality emerges from Him and sinks in Him. This compares well with the description of the determinant Brahman in the Upaniṣads.

---

1 V.M.P. 67.26
2 V.M.P. 67.28
3 M.P. 24.36
4 M.P. 69.17; 85.5
5 M.P. 71.6
6 M.P. 154.336
7 M.P. 161.29; 170.23,25
8 M.P. 166.21
9 M.P. 170.24
10 M.P. 172.3
11 M.P. 166.21
12 M.P. 24.33
13 M.P. 7.23
14 M.P. 218.35
15 M.P. 248.36-37
16 M.P. 248.37-38
17 M.P. 248.38-39
18 M.P. 248.40, 46
19 M.P. 245.29. cf. Janmādīyasya yatah, Brahmasūtra, i.1.2.
20 M.P. 245.72
21 M.P. 164. 25 ff.
22 M.P. 245. 17 ff.
In the Matsya Purāṇa Śiva occupies a pre-eminence place. He is described as the Universal soul, multiform, unborn, eternal, and indescribable. His eight forms are referred to in the Matsya Purāṇa. These are: earth, water, light, wind, space, sacrificer, the sun, and the moon. The presiding deities of these eight forms are as follows: Sarva is the presiding deity of the earth, Pasupa of fire, Ugra of the sacrificer, Rudra of the sun, Bhava of the water, Isána of the wind, Mahādeva of the moon and Bhūma of the space. Many are the names and epithets of Śiva described in the Matsya Purāṇa. One of his epithets is sthāpa which he seems to have acquired on account of his standing as a post motionless till the dissolution of the world. Among his other epithets mention may be made of Vedātman, Vedaśirādhārin, Anangāri, Purasūdana etc.

The identity between Visuṣṭi and Śiva is much emphasised in the Matsya Purāṇa. It is said that Visuṣṭi resides in the heart of Śiva and Śiva in that of Visuṣṭi and there is no distinction between the two. This identity between Śiva and Visuṣṭi can be explained on the ground that Visuṣṭi represents one of the solar aspects and that Sūrya and Rudra are connected with each other from the Rgvedic period. The germs of this identity thus date back to the hoary period of the Rgveda. The Matsya Purāṇa shares this spirit of tolerance with some other Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata.

We have still to discuss one more important Purāṇa among the principal Purāṇas of the Hindus. It is known as the Mārkandeya Purāṇa. This Purāṇa begins with the concept of divine Person called Nārāyanaya.

---

1 M.P. 60.15  2 M.P. 47.135  3 M.P. 47.139
4 M.P. 47.144  5 M.P. 47.163  6 M.P. 265. 38 ff
7 M.P. cf. 182.4 ; 182.4 ; 154.184  8 M.P. 60.22
9 M.P. 55.14  10 M.P. 54.4  11 M.P. 61.2
12 M.P. 69.32
13 P.V. Kane, Dharmasastra Vol.II, Pt.2, p.725 ; S.G.Kantawala, Natural History from the Matsya Purāṇa, M.S. University of Baroda, 1964, p.186.
Nārāyaṇa as the supreme Person is said to exist in four forms. The first form is called Vāsudeva which is indescribable (anirdeśya), bright (sukla), covered with garland of flames, ever-existent, etc. He is the highest goal of the Yogins. He is both far and near. He transcends the gunas or qualities and is devoid of egoism. The second form is called Śeṣa, which supports the world and possesses the quality of darkness. The third form is called Pradyumna which is full of goodness, and which preserves the world and establishes dharma. As the fourth form, which lies on the serpent-bed has the qualities of passion and creates beings. It is further stated that the third form of Nārāyaṇa incarnates himself whenever dharma declines and adharma rises up. In this connection incarnations of God such as Varāha (Boar), Nṛsiṁha (Man-lion), Vāmana (Dwarf) and Kṛṣṇa are referred to.

In the Mārkandeya Purāṇa we find an exposition of the Pāñcarātra doctrine of Vyūhas. Obviously this Purāṇa exhibits the influence of the latter upon it. There is, however, difference between the Pāñcarātra account of Vyūhas and the analysis of it given by this Purāṇa. In the Pāñcarātra Vyūha is the form of God confined to the spiritual world and has nothing to do with the physical world. In the Mārkandeya Purāṇa, however, a direct relation is posited between some elements of the vyūha and the empirical world. Further, in the Pāñcarātra religion Vyūha consists of four forms namely, Vāsudeva, Sankaraṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. But in this Purāṇa the four elements are described as Vāsudeva, Śeṣa, Pradyumna and the reality lying on a serpent-bed with the quality of passion and creativity. Moreover,

1 Ṣ.K.P. 4.44  2 M.K.P. 4.45.7  3 M.K.P. 4.48
4 Ṣ.K.P. 4.49  5 M.K.P. 4.50  6 M.K.P. 4.53
7 Ṣ.K.P. 4.51 ff.
in the Pāñcarātra religion Vibhava (incarnation) is one of the five forms of God while according to this Purāṇa, Pradyumna descends to the earth as an incarnation whenever virtue declines and vice prevails.

The Mārkandeya Purāṇa contains a very important section which is styled as Debī Māhātmya and which later on became famous as 'Saptasati'. This portion is very important for understanding the personality of the Divine Mother and is in a sense the gospel of the Mother-worship ped in India. The thirteen chapters of the Devī Māhātmya are considered to be the sacred scripture of Saktism.

Mythologically, the Goddess is said to be Visnū's Yoganidrā, whose origin as such is not stated, the presumption, however, being that She is beginningless. Philosophically She is stated to be Prakṛti and Māyā of the Sānkhyā and Vedānta respectively. She is also described in terms which are applicable to Brahman of the Upaniṣads. The Debī Māhātmya refers in many places to various names and epithets as well as certain functions of the Divine Mother and also presents various aspects of Her personality. Some of her names like Ambikā, Durgā, Kātyāyani, Kāli, Bhadrakāli, etc. are traceable to the later Vedic texts. The name Durgā has been interpreted to mean that She is the Goddess who saves human beings from all sorts of misery and afflictions. She has certain Universal epithets, viz. Visvātmikā, Akṣhīśvarī, Īśvarī, Mahēśvarī, Parmēśvarī, Viśveśvarī, Jagannayā etc. One noticeable thing about the Divine Mother

1 M.K.P. Ch. 78-90  2 M.K.P. 79.53 etc.  3 M.K.P. 81.18 etc.
4 M.K.P. 85.23 etc.  5 M.K.P. 84.5 etc.  6 M.K.P. 80.8 etc.
7 M.K.P. Durgā bhavasāgaranurājasangā, 81.11; Durgā naśini 86.29
8 M.K.P. 83.33  9 M.K.P. 83.37  10 M.K.P. 78.60 etc.
11 M.K.P. 78.58; 81.33  12 M.K.P. 78.62 etc.  13 M.K.P. 88.33
is that She is conceived in Her benign as well as terrific form. Thus She is called both Saumaya and Kāthā, Aś彬aṃsya and Ati Kāthā. Some of her epithets like Laksāṇa, Nārāyaṇī, Viṣṇumāya etc. are of a Vaishnavite character, while certain others like Gaurī, Pārvatī, Śiva, Śivātiti, Tryambakā etc. are of a Saivite character. Among her philosophic attributes mention may be made of the following ones: Gauḍārāṇa, Uruvā, Prakṛti, Mahāmyā, Mahāvidyā, Pārasmāvidyā, Śūra etc. We are told that all sciences (vidyās) are the portion of the Divine Mother, so is the whole world. In fact, the whole world has been filled by her.

She has also certain ritualistic attributes viz. Śivadhā, Śvāhā, Vasaktā, Svarātmā, Tridhāmātraṅgā, Śabdātmā, etc. She is also associated with certain abstract qualities and virtues, e.g. Buddhi, cetana, Dhṛti, Hṛi, Jāti, Kānti, Khyāti, Mārkaṇḍa, Puṣkha, Śiddhi, Śanti, Siddhi, Smṛti, Śī, etc.

She is also identified with Kalā and Kaṭhā which constitute the measures of time.

Besides, the Debi Mahātāya in various places refers to the role of the Divine Mother in the cosmos. Although no special function is attributed to Her in this connection, yet Her cosmic as well as beneficent functions can be inferred from the various panegyrics (stutis) offered by

1 M.K.P. 78.62 2 M.K.P. 82.6 3 M.K.P. 82.11
4 M.K.P. 82.11 5 M.K.P. 82.10 etc. 6 M.K.P. 88.7 etc.
7 M.K.P. 82.6 8 M.K.P. 81.11 etc. 9 M.K.P. 82.40
10 M.K.P. 79.17 etc. 11 M.K.P. 85.27 etc. 12 M.K.P. 80.18
13 M.K.P. 83.10 14 M.K.P. 88.21 15 M.K.P. 78.59; 81.7
16 M.K.P. 78.2 etc. 17 M.K.P. 78.58; 83.21
18 M.K.P. 81.7 19 M.K.P. 82.10
20 M.K.P. 81.26 21 M.K.P. 78.54; 81.8; 88.21; 78.55; 81.10
22 M.K.P. 78.60; 81.13; 82.27; 82.81; 82.25; 82.10; 82.31; 82.20
23 M.K.P. 88.5
the different gods. She is, here mainly depicted as the creative of the
Universe and as the saviour of the world from evil. She is the cause of
the creation, preservation and dissolution of the Universe. She causes
infatuation or the error in the minds of all, but at the same time, when
invoked, She bestows knowledge, and when gratified She bestows prosperity,
enjoyment, heaven and liberation. She is said to be the supreme way
for salvation of those who seek refuge and also of the afflicted.

In the Debi Māhātmya our attention is drawn to the fact that
Sakti considered as the Goddess, is eternal and all-pervading, and that the
visible world is only Her form. In spite of her eternal character and
imperishable form, Sakti in Her grosser shape is often said to be born
whenever She makes Her appearance to accomplish those things over which
no body has any control. What deserves our special notice is the fact
that the all-embracing personality of Sakti has been fully recognised in
the Debi Māhātmya and expressed in clear terms. It is further stated
that no language is adequate enough to express the glory of one that caused
the trinity of gods. Sakti is depicted as the Ultimate cause of the world
and rightly described as the Primordial Substance. She is the ultimate

1 M.K.P. 78.43 ; 53, 56, 57 etc.
2 M.K.P. 89.34 ; bhuktinuktipredārini, 88.6 ;
   svargāpavargadā, 88.7 ; bhogasvargāpavargadā, 90.3 ;
   muktihetu, 81.9
3 M.K.P. 83.11 etc.
4 M.K.P. 78.47
5 M.K.P. 78.48
6 M.K.P. 78.63
7 M.K.P. 78.65
8 M.K.P. 81.7
principle of the world in a female form viewed from philosophical and mythological points of view. It seems that the Debi Sukta of the RigVeda wherein mention is made of the world-mother as eternal and infinite cause to influence the writer of the Markandeya Purana. It is also suggested to us that this Purana might have been written to amplify the Tantrika conception of the supreme reality which is conceived in terms of the world-mother. But it is very difficult to decide whether this Purana is a commentary on the Debi Sukta or a Tantrika treatise. The question of affiliation of this Purana is a question of acute scholarship. But I have to confess that I am not able to discuss it as I am not a historian.