CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Purāṇas occupy a unique place in the religious history and literature of India. This literature as a whole enjoys no less status than that of the Vedas. Rather it is acclaimed as the ‘Fifth Veda’ (purāṇam pañcamo vedaḥ) the Veda of the laity. From the viewpoint of antiquity and sacredness purāṇas claim same status as enjoyed by the vedas. They are valuable not only for the history of philosophy and religion, but also for providing ample informations of all aspects of Hinduism. A single purāṇa can not supply all these informations but as Pargiter observes, “Taken collectively, they may be described as a popular encyclopaedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism, religious, philosophical, historical, personal, social and political.”¹

Purāṇas have been studied by scholars of west and east from various angles. Pioneering works have been done by Prof. H.H. Wilson, F.E. Pargiter, L.Rocher, G.Bonazzoli, R.C. Hazra, A.S. Gupta,

P.V. Kane and others, in this field. Our work though concerns itself to the study of curse elements in the episodes of Purāṇas, a brief discussion on the concept, characteristics and contents of the Purāṇas in general will definitely be of immense help for the subject in discussion.

1.1. Concept of Purāṇa:

The term Purāṇa as defined in the Vāyu Purāṇa, means that which lives from ancient times or that which is always new though it is old. Matsya Purāṇa describes the Purāṇa as ‘containing records of past events’. While explaining the word Purāṇa in Amarakośa, Bhanuji says “That which is new though old” and that which tells of the past and future events.” The prophetic character of Purāṇa is hinted at by Bhanuji.

Probably Bhanuji had in his mind the idea of Bhaviṣya Purāṇa while explaining the term purāṇa. But generally Purāṇa means ‘ancient tales’ or ‘Old narrative’. The earliest mention of the word is found in the Atharva Veda (AV), where it is said that the rks (verses), the Śamans (songs), the metres and the Purāṇa originated from the


4. Amarakoṣa, 1.6.5., P. 65: ‘Yadvā Purāpi navam bhavati’;
   ‘Yadvā aitāgatāvarthāvaṇātati’.

5. Ibid. An-şabde (Bhva. P.S.) + Pacādyac. Purā + an + ac.

6. AV, XI. 7.24.: Rcaḥ Śāmāni Chandāṁsi Purāṇam Yajuśā Saha/
   Ucchiśṭājajñīre Sarve divi devā diviśritaḥ.”
residue (ucchista) of the sacrifice together with the yajus (sacrificial formulae). The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad\(^7\) (BAU) on the other hand ascribes the origin of the four Vedas, Itihasa, Purana etc. to the breath of the Mahabhuta (The Great Being or Paramatman or the Supreme Soul). Chandogyopanisad\(^8\) (CU) in many places refers to Itihasa Purana as ‘Fifth Veda’. It is found that all are unanimous as to the sacred origin or divine origin of the Puranas and ascribing it a status equal to the Vedas.

It is doubtful whether the term Purana mentioned in the AV. implies any independent form of composition. It may be used in the sense of ancient story or narrative. Mtp.\(^9\) refers to a stanza where it is said that at the beginning of the creation, Brahma had recollected the Purana first of all the scriptures, before the vedas come out of his mouth. Prof. Hazra says, ‘This statement however absurd it may appear to be, will have validity, if we take the word Purana to mean not the Purana literature, but ancient stories and legends, which in every country, come into being much earlier than versified

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7. BAU 11.4.10: ‘Evarī vā āresya mahato bhūtasya niśvasițameti yadgrveto yajurvedo Sāmavedo 'tharvāṅgirasa itihasa Purānami.’

8. CU: 7.1.2., 7.1.4., 7.2.1.

9. (1) Mtp. 3.3-4: ‘Purāṇaṁ Sarvasāstrāṇāṁ Prathomam brahmaṇā Śmrtaṁ/’

   Nityanī Śabdāmayani punyanī śata koṭi pravistaram

   anantaram ca vaktrebhyo vedāstasya vinisṛtāḥ//”

(2) Vāyu: P. 1.60.61: Purāṇaṁ Sarvasāstrāṇāṁ Prathomam brahmaṇā Śmrtaṁ/

   anantaram Ca Vaktrebhyo vedāstasya vinirgatāḥ//”

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[3]
compositions.”  

As to the ancientness of the narrative form of the Purāṇa Hazra further testifies by saying, ‘That the Purāṇic tradition can rightly claim a much earlier beginning than the Vedas, is also shown by the fact that kings Vadhyraśva, Divodāsa, Sudāś, Somaka and others, who are known to the RV have been placed very low in the genealogical lists given in the Purāṇas.’

A.D. Pusalkar writes, “Purāṇas in the form of legendary lore existed from times of antiquity even prior to the revelation of the Vedas and this was handed down to posterity. There was no Purāṇa literature as such in those days of yore.”

In the age of the Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads and later we find reference to the existence of real purāṇa literature.

In the beginning Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa both meant history. They are mentioned in the Vedic literature, sometimes as separate word and sometimes compound word, but almost always associated with Gathās, Nārāśaṁsīs, Vākοvākyas, etc. which were all subject of studies in ancient times. In the Gopatha Brāhmaṇa of AV. there is reference to independent Itiḥāsa Veda and Purāṇa Veda. Lack of orginal

13. Gopatha Brāhmaṇa (Gp.Br.) 1.10.:

(a) ‘paricā vedān niramimat sarpavedam piśācavedamāsura vedamitiḥāsa Vedāni Purāṇavedam./ Sa khalu prācyā eva diśaḥ sarpavedam niramimat dakṣinasyāḥ piśāca vedāni pratīcyā asuravedamudicyā Itihāsavediṇi dhṛvāyāścordinhṛvāyāśca Purāṇa vedāni//
and abundant informations stand as a stumble block in the way of determining the character and contents of the ancient Purāṇas. The celebrated Sanskrit Lexicon, *Amarakośa* (C. 500 A.D.) gives a definition of purāṇa which is also found in some purāṇas as pañcalakṣaṇa,14 i.e. having five characteristics like *Sarga* (creation), *Pratisarga* (dissolution and recreation), *Vanśa* (divine genealogies), *Manvantara* (ages of Manu) and *Vanśānuca rita* (genealogies of kings). A variant reading has *bhūmyādeḥ Sanisthānam* (world geography) in place *Vanśānucri ta*. It is seen that not a single purāṇa conforms exclusively to this definition. In addition to these five characteristics other topics have been narrated in some Purāṇas, and in some, many other topics have been dealt with these five elements scarcely touched upon. This shows pañcalakṣaṇa constitute an important but at the same time an insignificant portion of the present bulk of purāṇa literature.

In order to solve this *avyāptidoṣa* or fault of insufficiency, purāṇas say that the pañcalakṣaṇa definition is meant for the Upapurāṇas (minor purāṇas) and the Mahāpurāṇa (major purāṇa) has to agree

(b) *Ibid.* 1.10: *Sa tān pañca vedān, abhyāśrāmyadabhyatapat Samatapat./
tebhyaḥ Śrāntebhyaḥ staptebhyaḥ Sarttaptebhyaḥ paricamahāvyāhṛti niramimat
Vṛdhat karat guhat mahata taditi./ Vṛdhaditi Sarpavedat, karaditi piśācavedat
guhadityasura vedat mahadithihasa Vedat taditi Purāṇa Vedat.//

14. *Amarakośa*, P. 65.5
*Sargaśca Pratisargaśca vanśao manvantarāṇi ca
bhūmyādeśaiva Sanisthānam Purāṇam Pañca lakṣaṇam* (Vanṣānuccaritaṁ
Caiva iti tṛtiya pāde Pāṭhāntaram)
to the Dasalakṣaṇa 15,16 (ten characteristics definition which includes the following additional topics, viz. Vṛti (means of lively hood), rakṣā (incarnation of gods). Mukti (final emancipation), hetu (jīva, unmanifests, and apāśraya (Brahman). Matsya Purāṇa 17 records some more topics which are to be discussed in the Purāṇas. It says besides the ten characteristics, the purāṇas deal with the glorification of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Surya, Rudra and topics like dissolution and preservation of the world, dharma (righteous conduct), artha (economics and politics), Kāma (erotics) and mokṣa (emancipation). Pusalkar says, ‘Even this comprehensive definition does not cover the entire ground traversed by the purāṇas. The Purāṇa tradition, like that of the Mahābhārata, has all along been floating and dynamic and the texts have been subjected to numerous revisions, additions, omissions and modifications.’ 18 Seeing the all-encompassing character of the

15. Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Bhāg. P). XI.7.9-10 :
“Sargosyātha Visargaśca Vṛtirakṣāntarāṇica/
Vamso Vamsanucaritam Samisthā heturapāśryah//
daśabhīrakṣāṇairuyuktam Purāṇam tadvido viduḥ/
Kecit Paricavidham brahman Mahadalpa Vyavasthayā//”

16. Des, Cat. of Mss. A.S.B.V. Intr. CXXVII :
According to MMHP Śāstri, These ten Characteristics are : Creation, details of creation, duties of sentient beings, protection of devotees, ages of Manu, dynasties of Kings and rṣis, career of individuals, dissolution of the World, cause of creation and Brahmā.

17. Mtp. 53.66-7 : 'Brahmāviṣṇvarka rudrāṇām Māhātmayan bhuvanasya ca/
Sasamihāra Pradānārī Purāṇe Pañcavarnāke// dharmaścārthaśca kāmaśca
mokṣaścaivātra kīrtyate/ Sarveśvapi Purāṇeṣu tadviruddham ca yatphalam//

Purāṇas M.M.H.P. Śastri observes, “anything old may be the subject of a Purāṇa and it covers all the aspects of life.”

1.2. Number of Purāṇas:

According to the traditional view there are 18 Mahāpurāṇas and 18 Upa-Purāṇas. The list of Mahāpurāṇas Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu (some accepts Śiva), Bhāgavata, Nārādiya, Märkaṇḍeya, Agni, Bhaveṣya, Brahma vaivarta, Varāha, Liṅga, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Gauḍa and Brahmāṇḍa.

The Upapurāṇas are more sectarian in character. They are comparatively late and of composite nature and have little historical value. The following are said to be the 18 upa-purāṇas: Sanatkumāra, Narasimha, Nanda, Śivadharma, Durvāsā, Kali, Mahesvara, Śāmba, Saura, Parāśara. Mārica and Bhārgava. Prof. Hazra has collected the names of about a hundred upa-purāṇas of which hardly fifteen have been printed. Padma purāṇa refers to the classification of Purāṇas. Skp. and Mtp. also deal with it.

20. Devi Bhāgavata, 1.3. It enumerates the purāṇas in nut shell in the following verse taking their initial letter.

"Madvyāṃ bhadvayāṃ Caiva vṛtu trayā nāmāṃ ca castraṣṭayāṃ / nālirpaghī purāṇāh kūṣkam gārudāmeva Ca".

21. ABORI, XII, P. 49n.
22. Padma Purāṇa (Pdmp.) Uttarakhaṇḍa, 263. 81-41.
23. Skp. Kedāra Khaṇḍa. 1
1.3. Formation of Purāṇa Samhīta:

Tradition has ascribed the authorship of the Purāṇas to Vedavyāsa. It is said that Vyāsa composed a Purāṇa Samhītā and taught it to his disciple Sūta Romaharṣaṇa (sometimes Lomaharṣaṇa) who in turn after having composed his own taught to his six disciples Sumati, Agnivarca, Mitrāyu, Śāṁsapāyana, Akṛtavarna and Sāvarṇi. Śāṁsapāyana, Akṛtavarna and Sāvarṇi composed three Purāṇa Samhītās. Thus these three purāṇas along with that of Romaharṣaṇa make four Purāṇa Samhītās. Vyāsa is said to be the compiler of the four Vedas, 18 purāṇas and the Mahābhārata. Viṣṇu Purāṇa (VP), Devi Bhāgavata (DB), and Brāhmapriyā Purāṇa (BNP) refer to 28 Vyāsas. Lord Hari incarnates in the self of Vyāsa in the Dvāpara age of every Mahāyuga and compiles the Purāṇa Samhītā fixing it to 4 lakh verses.

From this it is indicated that Vyāsa is not a proper name, rather a tradition. Vyāsa (vi-as-ghan) means 'arranger', who arranges the unsystematic vedic and purānic materials in to a systematized whole. He devides the one Veda in to four for different purposes to be used in the sacrifices. Realising that the brahmins would be short lived and stupid in the kali age and would lack the knowledge of understanding the purport of the Vedas, compiles the Purāṇa Samhītā.

25. *VP.* 3.6.17-19; *Agni.* P. 271. 11-12.
26. *BNP,* "Sa Hari Vyāsa rūpeṇa jāyate ca Mahāyuge/ Caturlakṣa Pramāṇena dvāpare dvāpare Sadā."//
*VP.* 3.3. 7-18
*DB.* 1.3.24-25
Keeping in mind, the welfare of women, lowborn śūdras and the fallen Brāhmaṇas, who are deprived of hearing the vedas, he compiles the purāṇas for them.27 Manusmṛti also advocates the unworthiness of the above classes for reading and hearing of the vedas. Thus a substantial mass of the society was deprived of the supreme knowledge. But the people were allowed to the discourses of Purāṇa and Itiḥāsa. Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa became the means of explaining the supreme knowledge of the Vedas to these deprived mass of the society. Hence we have the popular saying ‘Itiḥāsa Purāṇāḥbhyaṁ Vedamī SamupaVṛtthayet’. Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa explain the vedas or for the perfect understanding of the vedas we have to take the aid of Itiḥāsa (Mahābhārata) and Purāṇas. By this statement it does not mean that the purāṇas exclusively give themselves to the exposition of the vedas. They, rather, in addition to the clarification of the Vedic themes record the contemporary subject matters. With what, then the Purāṇa Samhitā was formed? In other words what were the ingredients that helped Vyāsa in compiling the Purāṇa Samhitā? VP says that Vyāsa compiled the Purāṇas with the help of tales (ākhyānas), anecdotes (upākhyānas), songs (gāthās) and ancient lore (kalpa śuddhi).28

27. DB. 1.3.: “Dvāpare Dvāpare Viṣṇu Vyāsarūpeṇa Sarvadā/ Vedamekaṁ Sa bahudhā kurute hita Kāmyayā// alpāyuṣo’lpa buddhiniśca Viprān Jñātāvā Kālāvatha/ Purāṇa Samhitāṁ Purāṇī Kurute’sau yuge yuge///(20) Strīśudra dvija vandhūnāṁ na Veda Śravaṇāṁ matamī/ teṣāmeva hitārthāya Purāṇāni Kṛtāni vai///”

28. VP. III.6.15 : “ākhyānaiścāpyupākhyānairgāthābhīḥ kalpaśuddhibhīḥ/ Purāṇasamhitāṁ Cakre Purāṇārtha Viśāradaḥ///”
Ākhyanas\(^{29}\) according to Śridhara Swāmi are tales about which the teller has direct knowledge and upākhyaṇas, on the other, are heard from generations to generations. The story teller has no direct knowledge about them. The story of Rāma, Yayāti and Naciketā, hence are known as Rāmopākhyaṇa, Yayāti upākhyaṇa and Naciketopākhyaṇa etc. According to other scholars difference between the two does not arise taking into consideration their being heard and perceived, rather it is the difference of bigness and smallness. To them ākhyaṇas are long and upākhyaṇas are short. Thus in the Rāmāyaṇa the life story of Rāma is an ākhyaṇa and the story of Sugrīva is an example of upākhyaṇa which consists of a portion of the Rāmāyaṇa. In many places the term ākhyaṇa' has been used in the sense of Itiḥāsa and Purāṇa. Mahābhārata (Mbh.) is termed as ākhyaṇa and Itiḥāsa.\(^{30}\)

Gāthās are old songs found in the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads and Purāṇas. They generally have no known authors and are composed in honour of a celebrated and powerful king or in honour of his bounteousness. In the Rv. they are known as Nārāśaṁśīs. They are praise songs recited at the time of consecration ceremony of monarchs enumerating number of sacrifices performed by them.

29. Śridhar Swāmi on ākhyaṇa and Upākhyaṇa:

"Svāṁ dṛṣṭārtha kathanam Prāhurākhyāṇakam buddhāḥ/ Śrutasyārthasya Kathanamupākhyānam Pracakṣate//"

30. (a) Mbh. Udyoga P. 136.18: 'Jaya nametihāsoyam'
(b) Ibid, Ādi,2.3.7.: "anāśrityedamākhyānam kathā bhūvi na Vidyate."
(c) Ibid. Ādi. 2.389: "idam kavivaraiṁ sarvairākhyānamupajīvate."
These have been quoted in the purāṇas while descriptions of the kings have been made. These old songs carry reference to historical facts and personages and help immensely in the formation of the subject matter of history and purāṇas.

Kalpaśuddhi is another ingredient which helps in the composition of Purāṇa Samhitā. There is much difference of opinion regarding the meaning of this term. Sometimes ‘kalpajokti’ is found in place of kalpaśuddhi. ‘Kalpajokti’ means the account of incidents which originates in different ages. Śrīdhara Swāmī takes it for Śrāddha kalpa. Ptd. Madhusudan Ojha and M.M. Giridhar Śarmā Caturvedi take it for subjects of Dharmaśāstra. They take kalpa to mean an ancilliary of the Veda. All the Sūtras, Sadācāra (righteous conducts) and Samskaras (sacraments) are included under this. And by Śuddhi they mean six purifications, viz. Mala śuddhi, Sparśa śuddhi, agha śuddhi, ena śuddhi and manaś śudhi. But purāṇas seem to be silent on this topic.31

The aim of noting down the four above elements of the Purāṇa Samhitā is to say that the Purāṇa literature with daśalakṣaṇa in addition to these tales, anecdotes, old praise songs and important incidents of different ages helped in the formation and growth of purāṇa literature. For ākhyāna, upākhyāna etc. now the words myth, legend, episode, tale etc. are employed. Purāṇas are replete with ancient legends and episodes of various types. There are references

to legends of Viśvāmitra, Vaśīṣṭha, Purūravā and Urvaśī, Śunaśepa, Vṛtra so on and so forth in the vedic literature. They have been mentioned as a way of reference without any detailed narration. Perhaps there was no need of such elaboration because vedic people knew about them very closely. In course of time when people started forgetting them, need for remembering and preserving them arose and hence in later Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads, Bṛhaddevatā, Nītīmanjari, Epics and Purāṇas we find vedic legends in high road of gradual growth to perfection.

The entire Indian literature can be divided into two traditions, i.e. the Great tradition, consisting of Veda Trayi and the Little tradition, consisting of the AV; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (Sp.Br), Mahābhārata (Mbh.) and the Purāṇas. The Little tradition is very extensive and mostly belongs to the folk. It is the literature of the mass. It is, therefore, natural that it reflects the folk minds, their beliefs etc. But at the same time purāṇa literature preserve the vedic religion, philosophy; explains the vedic legends and episodes to suit its purposes. As purāṇas deal with varieties of subjects like cosmogony, philosophy, worship of different deities and their respective sects, tīrthas, vratas, jñāna, karma, bhakti, art, music, architecture, Dharmaśāstras etc. old episodes have been worked upon and new episodes have been fabricated for the glorification and enforcement of the subjects concerned.

With these great mass of legends and episodes like Mbh., the purāṇa literature assumed this present huge form. Purāṇas are a
store house of episodes. Out of these varieties of episodes curse episodes occupy a large portion. They play an important role in giving a sizable shape to the purāṇas. That they had exercised tremendous influence on the peoples mind is evident from the curse of Durvāsas to Indra, Śukra’s curse to king yayāti to be affected by old age, Durvāsa’s curse to Śāmba to have leprosy, curse of Nāgamother kadru to the Nāgas, Sage Agastya’s curse to king Nahuṣa to be a serpent, Dakṣa’s curse to Soma to suffer from consumption, Chāyā’s curse to yama, Viṣṇu’s ten incarnations due to the curse of Śukra, Aṇi-māṇḍavya’s curse to yama to be a śūdra etc. In the foregoing passages the definition, origin and development of the concept ‘curse’ would be shown.