Introduction

Tradition says, there are eighteen Mahāpurāṇas. The list of the Mahāpurāṇas is given in the Purāṇa-texts such as Visnu, Mārkandeya, Varāha, Bhaviṣya, Padma, Brahmavaivarta, Bhāgavata, Matsya, Agni, Nāradiya, Skanda, Kūrma, Liṅga, Śiva and so on. As regards these 18 names there is some inconsistency. The Matsya (53.11-56), Agni (272.1-23), Nāradiya (I.92.26-23, I.92.30-Ch.109) and Skanda (VII Prabhāsakanda I.2.28-77) take Vāyu as one of the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas whereas most other texts like Visnu (III.6.19-24), Mārkandeya (137.8-11=Venk.Edn. 134.8-15), Varāha (III.69-72), Bhaviṣya (I.Brahmaparvan I.61-64), Padma (A.S.S.I.Ādikhanda 62.2-7, IV Pātālakhandā III. 90-94, VI Uttarakhandā 219.25-27, VI. 263.77-81), Brahmavaivarta (IV. 133.11-21), Bhāgavata (XII.7.23-24, 13.4-3), Kūrma (I.1.13-15), Skanda (VII.1.2.5-7), Liṅga (I.39.61-64) and Śiva (V. Umāsamhitā 44.119-122, 125-135,VII. Vāyaviya Samhitā(1).1.43-45) substitute Śiva Purāṇa for Vāyu.1 Garuda (I.215.15-20), Vāyu (II.42.1-11),

1. A. S. Gupta classifies the older Purānic list of the Purāṇas (i.e., of the Mahāpurāṇas) into the following four groups:-

Group I

Bhaviṣya (III.3.28.10-14), Brhad dharma Purāṇa (I.25.20-22) and Ekāmra (I.18-20a)² where some major Purāṇas are found

Cont'd.


This group follows the Viṣṇu P. order of the names of the Mahāpurāṇas. Of these, the latter four texts enumerate Vāyu as the fourth in the list of Mahāpurāṇas whereas the former seven texts take Śiva in place of Vāyu.

Group II


This group follows the Kūrma P. order. The only difference is that in Kūrma both Markandeya and Agni respectively occupy the 8th and 9th position, whereas in Saura, Agni occupies the 8th position and Markandeya the 9th position. Besides Saura Purāṇa mentions Vāyu in place of Śiva of other three texts of this group.

Group III

(1) Liṅga I.39.61-64, (2) Śiva V. Umāsahīta 44.119-122.

This group follows the Liṅga P. order.

Group IV


Cont'd.
to be omitted do not maintain any consistency among themselves. In course of enumerating the 18 Mahāpurāṇas the Saura Purāṇa (9.6-12) ignores Śiva, puts Vāyu as the fourth in order. The Devī-Bhāgavata (I.3.2-12) contains a verse naming the 18 Purāṇas by their first letter in which it includes Vāyu and drops Śiva Purāṇa. In order to accommodate

Each Purāṇa of this group has its own order which does not conform to any of the first three groups. Besides the latter text Devī-Bhāgavata enumerates Vāyu in place of Śiva of other three texts. (See Introduction to Vāmana Purāṇa AIKT. p.XXIX, Introduction to Kūrma Purāṇa, AIKT. pp.ii-iii; Cf. Introduction to Varāha Purāṇa, AIKT. pp.3-9.

However, the order of the Purāṇas as given in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa list has been accepted as the standard one, the number of a particular Purāṇa given in this order is often corroborated by that Purāṇa itself. - A. S. Gupta, "Purāṇa and their referencing" - Purāṇa VII.2. July 1965, p.340.

Footnote 21-22.


4. 'ma'dvayaṁ 'bha'dvayaṁ caiva 'ba'trayaṁ 'va'catusṭayaṁ/
anāpalingakūśkāṁ purāṇāṁ prthak prthak //

D.Bh.P.I.3.2

Cont'd.
these conflicting views Pargiter takes their number to be 19 by including both the Śīva and the Vāyu. Farquhar further increases the number to twenty by including the Harivamśa in addition. But there is no support from any source for increasing the traditional number of the Purāṇas. Scholars like A. D. Pusalker, Kane and Baladeva Upadhyaya are unanimous on the point that it is the Vāyu which is entitled to be regarded as one of the 18 principal Purāṇas and not the Śīva Purāṇa. As pointed out by A. S. Gupta, "Vāyaviya and Śāiva were the two names of the same Purāṇa. It was called Vāyaviya because it was originally spoken by Vāyu, and also Śāiva (or Śīva Purāṇa) because it mainly dealt with the subject of devotion to Śīva.

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'ma'dvaya - Matsya, Mārkandeya; 'bha'dvaya - Bhavisya, Bhāgavata 'ba'traya - Brahma, Brahmāṇa, Brahmavaiyarta. 'va'caṭustaya - Vāmana, Vāyu, Viṣṇu, Varāha. 'a' 'nā' 'pa' 'lim' 'ga' 'kū' and 'ska' respectively stand for Agni, Nārādiya, Padma, Liṅga, Garuḍa, Kūrma and Skanda.

5. ERE. X., p.448.


Baladeva Upadhyaya, Purāṇa Vimarsa, Ch.3, pp.97-105.
So from the point of view of the original speaker it was called Vāyavīya and from the point of its subject matter it was called Śaiva. Skanda Purāṇa V. Avantikhaṇḍha III. Revākhanda Ch.1.33 supports this view. However, the names of 18 principal Purāṇas are as follows: Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Bhājavata, Nāradīya, Mārkandeya, Āgni, Bhaviṣya, Brahmavaivarta, Liṅga, Varāha, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa and Brahmapānda.

Hazra states, "Following the tradition of the Mahāpurāṇas, orthodox opinion tries to limit the number of the Upa-purānas rigidly to 'eighteen'. The Kurma (I.1.17-20), Garuḍa (I.215.17-20), Matsya (53.53-62), Saura (9.13-14), Padma (A.S.S. IV Pāṭāla-kha, Ch.III.95-98), DeVī-Bhājavata (I.3.12-16), Brhad dharma (I.25.23-26), Skanda (V.III. Revākhanda I.46-52, VII. Prabhāsakhanda 1.2.11-15, 79-83) and Ekāmra (I.20b-23) furnish the list of Upa-purāṇas, but we do not notice any agreement.

8. Introduction to Varāha Purāṇa, AIKT.p.7.
9. Caturtham Vāyunā proktam Vāyavīyam iti smṛtam /
   Śivabhakti samayogat Śaivam tacc āparākhyayā //
   Sk.P.V. Avantī-kha. III
   Revākh. 1.33

11. Ibid., p.13; Ekāmra 20b-23 mentions Brhan-nārasimha as an Upa-purāṇa.
in these various lists. Purāṇa-texts like Bhavisya
(III.3.28.10-14) and Ekāma (I.18-20)\(^{12}\) include Narasimha
Purāṇa in the list of Mahāpurāṇas, but this inclusion does
not carry much weight since the majority of texts like Kurma,
Garuḍa, Mātsya, Padma, Skanda (V.III.1.46-52; VII.I.2.11-15;
79-83) Devī-Bhāgavata and Brhad dharma\(^{12}\) refer to Narasimha as an Upa-purāṇa.

The Narasimha Purāṇa consists of 68 chapters. At
present we find two editions of this text: (1) Narasimha
Purāṇa, Gopal Narayan & Co. Publishers 1911 and Narasimha
Purāṇa (Text with Hindi Translation), Gītā Press, Gorakhpur
Kalyāṇa Journal 45th year No.1 and (2). Out of its 68
chapters first five chapters are devoted to the description
of Sarga, Pratisarga and Vamsa; Manvantara (Ch.23), Vamśānu-
carita (Chs.21-22, 26-27, 29), cosmography (Ch.30) and
account of tīrtha (Chs.65-67) cover 10 chapters. Incarnations
of Viṣṇu viz., Mātsya, Kurma, Varāha, Narasimha, Vāmana,
Parāśurāma, Rāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin are narrated
in 18 chapters (Chs.36-54,1-6). There are fourteen different
legends in Narasimha Purāṇa and they cover 20 chapters in
all. Duty and conduct of four castes and four āśramas

12. (See Hazra, Studies in the Upa-purāṇas, Vol.I,
p.13, Footnote 21-22.)
including the essence of Yoga are depicted in 5 chapters (Chs.57-61). Besides Ch.15 narrates the tree of 'samsāra', Ch.17 describes the efficacy of reciting the 'astāksara-mantra' (Om namo Nārāyaṇāya), Ch.35 deals with the procedure of performing hundred-thousand sacrifice (lakṣahoma) and ten million sacrifice (koṭihoma), Ch.54 the characteristic features of Kali age and Ch.68 speaks of the results of reading and reciting the Narasimha Purāṇa. The rest 5 chapters (Chs. 16, 32, 34, 56, 62) are exclusively devoted to installation of Visnu image or methods of worship of Visnu-Narasimha.

In its entirety the Narasimha-Purāṇa is not composed in verse. A few chapters and extracts written in simple prose are the following:- Narasimha Purāṇa Ch.13.7-23 (birth of Aśvins); Ch.20.1-3 (origin of Maruts) Ch.21.4-15 (names of the kings of the Solar race); Ch.22.2-13 (names of the kings of the Lunar race); Ch.23.1-36 (Manvantaras) Ch.26.1-2, 4-12 (account of the kings of the Solar race) Ch.27.1-16, Ch.29.1-12 (account of the kings of the Lunar race) Ch.30.2-4, 6-9, 11-13, 15-16 (cosmography); Ch.31.90 (Legend of Dhruva); 52.25-31 (extracts from Dūrāṇjaḍa).

The Narasimha Purāṇa, as we have it now, is not an original and independent work. Borrowing from other ancient texts is a general feature with Purāṇas. And our Narasimha is no exception to it. A careful examination of Narasimha text shows that it is more of the nature of a compilation.
Like the other Purānic works, the Narasimha Purāṇa also tries to prove its great sanctity and high antiquity by tracing its descent from Brahmā. In days of yore it is Brahmā who spoke out this Purāṇa to the sages like Bṛhgu, Marīci and others. Then it was Mārkandeya who inherited this from Bṛhgu. Third in succession was Sahasrānīka, the king of Nāga race who listened to this text from Mārkandeya. Blessed by Lord Narasimha the revered sage Vyāsa inherited it from Sahasrānīka. And finally Śūta Lomaharsana narrates it to the sages after hearing the same from Vyāsa (Nar. P. Ch. 67.19-22).

From the contents of the Narasimha Purāṇa as it is available to us, it is clear that this Purāṇa is meant exclusively for the glorification of Narasimha. This Narasimha identified with one of the forms of Nārāyana (or Visnu)13 is not only called Nārāyana, but also Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, Ananta, Govinda, Gopati, Janārdana (Nar. P. Ch. 7.36-39), Vāsudeva, Dāmodara, Madhava, Keśava, Hṛṣīkeśa and so on (Nar. P. Ch. 7.63-70). So Narasimha, though a form of Viṣṇu or Nārāyana is himself the principal god. It is

this supreme deity, Nārāyana who takes the forms of Brahmā and Rudra for the sake of creation and destruction respectively, and for the work of preservation he takes the forms of Rāma, Narasimha, Viṣṇu etc. (Nar. P. Ch. I. 31, Ch. I. 66-67, 2.1, 30.19-Viṣṇuḥ pāti jagat sarvam evambhūto yuge yuge). In creation he takes to māyā (māyām adhiṣṭhāya sṛjaty Anantah – 3.29). Though in this Purāṇa Nārāyana (or Viṣṇu) is described as four-armed, yellow-robed, having a complexion like that of a cloud and holding conch, mace, lotus and discus in his hands, he is identified with Brahman of Vedānta and Purusa of Sāmkhya. 14

14. Nar. P. Ch. I. 33-40; 3.12-13; 16.35; 64.61-64.