Chapter 2

Purāṇas

Vedas, Yagna and the Oral Tradition

Vedas form the core of Hindu thoughts and occupy supreme position among Hindu religious works. They are the most ancient scriptures. Vedas lay emphasis on yagnas, which form the basic rite of Vedic religion. They contain the oldest recorded Hindu religious traditions. There were other religious traditions, though in the oral form, which are as old as the vedic religion, and which were current among the majority of our countrymen at that time.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that narration of puranas, (old traditions, in the form of stories and legends, including those concerning creation) akhyanas, upakhyanas and gathas formed part of Vedic sacrifice.

Many of the puranas, akhyanas etc contained in the Brahmana texts were inherited by the Vedic priests from their ancestors. The praise of the liberality of former princes found in the Aiteraya and other Brahmanas, especially during rajasuya and aswamedha sacrifices presupposes the priests' knowledge of genealogies and activities of kings. Vayu, Brahma and Matsya Puranas speak of anuvamsa...
slokas (verses containing genealogies of kings) sung by ancient (puratana) Brahmans.¹

With the passage of time, sometime in the beginning of the post- sutra period, the purana texts of the vedic brahmanas became the property of the band of bards and minstrels called Sutas, who were employed for reciting these mythological poems (Puranas). The sutas took up this new form of puranic lore in right earnest to popularize the vedic ideas as well as to earn their livelihood.

Each king had his own Suta who was a repository of the family annals; during occasions like sacrifices, when a huge concourse of people gathered, the Sutas recited the Puranas and edified the masses with the old stories and enlightened them on principles of moral conduct and philosophy through illustrative legends of old.

An investigation into the religious movements in ancient India will show that besides the brahmanical religion guided by Sruti (Veda) and Smriti (Law books) there were various popular systems which arose in different parts of the country. Some of the systems like Buddhism, Jainism etc were openly antagonistic to the Brahminical ideas. Some systems like Brahma, Pancharatra vaishnavam, Bhagavata vaishnavam. Pasupata Saivam had their principal deities identified from very early times with those of the Vedas, and some like Saktam

¹ The Cultural Heritage of India: Vol.2. Ch.16. p.243
and Ganapatyam, though originally non-vedic, were traced into Vedas in later times. ²

When non-vedic creeds especially Buddhism gained an accession of political power, this power was employed to promote actively the non-vedic creeds at the expense of vedic creeds. This resulted in the Vedic religion losing its hold over the Hindu society. A large section of population was crossing over to the non-vedic creeds like Buddhism.

The evolution of Puranas

To arrest this trend, corrective action came from the other popular systems, which were not totally opposed to Vedas. They moved up to fill the space vacated by Vedic religion. Now, the need to record the traditions belonging to these systems arose. As the oral traditions were varied and voluminous, Puranas were also varied and many. This resulted in the birth of various Puranas. Though the Puranas, were different from Vedas in their content, Philosophy and religious practice, they did not adopt an antagonistic posture to Vedas. They sought to project themselves as continuation or extension of Vedas.

Puranas and Itihasas (traditionally, Puranas are spoken together with Itihasas) are claimed to be fifth Veda. "Itihasa puranam ca pancamam veda ucyate" claims Bhagavata. For Vedic religion this posture amounted to continuation of its sway over the Hindu society,

² The Cultural Heritage of India: Vol.2.Ch.16 :p.247
and, for the popular non-vedic systems represented by these Puranas, it accorded legitimacy of Vedic recognition. The resultant rejuvenation of Hinduism, by fusion of Vedic religion and the other popular non-aryan systems into a broad-based Hindu religion, resulted in Non-vedic religions like Buddhism, losing out to Hinduism.

The followers of these popular systems attached little importance to brahmanical rules and scriptures and laid special emphasis on renunciation for the practice of yoga. The present form and the composite (vyamisra) character of puranas are due to them. They changed the character of their respective deities to a great extent and brought them nearer to the vedic gods. They reformed their sects and popularized the vedic ideas among all, including their followers.

*Tapas* is considered to be non-aryan and pre-Vedic practice. This seems to have been temporarily suppressed in the Vedic period, but it again assumed great importance when the Brahminism of the Veda was superseded by popular Hinduism of the epics and the Puranas. While in the itihasas, we come across references to *Yajna*, the Puranas do not seem to give any prominence to it”. On the contrary, Puranas give utmost importance to *Tapas*, its efficacy and supremacy throughout. The one and only way to please any God, according to any Purana is *Tapas*.

Stories and anecdotes dealt briefly in Vedas have been elaborately narrated in the Puranas, and the oral traditions and local stories found
in abundance throughout the country have been recorded therein and this led on the one hand to an increasing volume of Puranic literature and on the other to a diversification of cults and deities.

It is to be observed that the Hindu society did not become static after the emergence of the puranas as it had to fight hard against the onslaught of foreign invaders such as Abhiras, Sakas, Yavanas etc and the influence of Tantric religion. In order to face these troubles, the Hindu rites and customs were also undergoing modifications to suit the needs of people. These changes and modifications were incorporated and puranas were recast with many additions of many new chapters on worship, vows, and introducing more tantric elements.3

Thus, the contents of puranas did not remain static, but continued to be dynamic incorporating new elements considered to be vital for preserving Hindu faith.

*Social Harmony and Puranas*

The harmony which The Puranas brought about harmony in the doctrines of 'Knowledge' 'action' and 'devotion' and in the vedic and non-vedic views of life and conduct. It also exerted its influence in all strata of Hindu society, with the result that the life of average Hindu of the present day presents a texture into which various ideas and practices of different times and regions have been interwoven with an

3 The Cultural Heritage of India: Vol. 2: Ch. 16: p 251
unparalleled symmetry. To a non-Hindu, the Puranic culture and religion appear as a bundle of contradictions. Yet a Hindu finds nothing difficult or inconsistent in his ideas and practices and leads his life with perfect ease and harmony. He is rarely found to be absolutely foreign to the truths of life and conduct his ancestors discovered for him. Even an illiterate Hindu, living far away from the seats of learning, is not totally ignorant of the principles and philosophical truths taught in the puranas; and as a result he has a very broad view of life and a deep sense of tolerance and accommodation, which can rarely be expected elsewhere of a person like him. The epics and puranas have brought home to the common man the wisdom of the saints of the highest order without creating any discord.⁴

**Importance of Puranas**

In the Sutra literature Puranas are mentioned as a separate class of literature. It is laid down that the kings should adopt Puranas as the basis of his jurisprudence in addition to Vedas, Vedangas and Dharmasutras. Kautilya in his ‘Artha Sastra’ prescribes use of Puranas for educating Kings.(3rd-4th century A.D.)

The *Athrva Veda* and the *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad* believed in the sacred origin of the Purana and gave it a position equal to that of the Vedas.⁵

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⁴ ibid@P269  
⁵ The Cultural Heritage of India:Vol.2: Chapter16: The Puranas:p243
Contents of Puranas

Puranas contain extensive glorification of one or more of the deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and on that basis, they are classified as Saiva Purana or Vaishnava Purana and so on. The traditions conducive to the central theme of glorification of the particular deity, the stories and anecdotes connected to the deity concerned have been compiled in the Purana. The stories and anecdotes form only a minor portion of the Puranas today. A significant portion of the purana is composed of chapters on multifarious topics dealing extensively on various topics connected with the religious and social life of an ordinary Hindu, in a comprehensive manner. The spectrum of topics dealt with is very wide. Its range includes, duties of a man in different Asramas, duties of persons belonging to different Varnas, customs in general, eatables and non-eatables, sins, penances, purification, description of hells, duties of women, results of good and bad deeds, different types of danas (donation) and dedication of wells, tanks, gardens etc., and their impact. devotional vows (vratas), Funeral rites and ceremonies, journey of soul after physical death, places of pilgrimage, various mystic practices, astrology, Astronomy, interpretation of different omens, etc.

They also contain discussions on different schools of Philosophy in the form of different Gitas and stotras to propiate different deities.

In effect, they contain selections representing Karma, Gnana and Bhakti.
Thus the Puranas represent the process of synthesis (syncretisation) of the various streams of Hinduism. They have something or other of interest to each and every individual.

The Puranas were written with the object of popularizing the religion of Vedas spreading the truths taught in the Vedas by presenting them in relation to specific personages and to the events of their lives. The main function of Puranas is presenting the spiritual truths contained in Vedas to common man in an endearing manner in a friendly way, explaining, amplifying, illustrating and enforcing them, many times in the form of stories. 'Amarakośa' describing the main characteristics of the Puranas specially points out that the commands of the Vedas are like those of a master (Prabhu Samhitā) where as the teachings of the Itihasaa and the Puranas may be compared with the advice and counsel of friends (Suhrt Samhitā).  

The language in which the Vedas are written is very ancient, The Puranas were written in the language of the people of that time, what we call modern Sanskrit. They were then meant, not for scholars but for the ordinary people. The sages made use of these things to illustrate the eternal principles of religion.

It should be noted that this attempt of the followers of the above mentioned popular systems to preach their respective faiths with a view to popularizing the vedic principles of life and conduct was responsible for the rise of Puranic Hinduism as well as evolution of

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6 The Cultural Heritage of India: Vol. 2: Introduction: p-xxi
the Puranas. It will be observed that the composite dharma professed and extolled by the puranas is at variance with the orthodox views held by orthodox Brahmanas of the vedic religion.

Puranas are believed to have been written for the benefit of people who were otherwise not entitled to have access to hear Vedas. For their benefit, discourses on Puranas were arranged in Public places like temples.

Bana in his *Harsha carita* says that he went to listen to Purana pathanam in his village. This should be dated 625 A.D.\(^7\) Listening to Puranas encouraged good Character, good behaviour, Devotion, Cooperation, contentment, Selflessness, Self confidence, peace etc.,

*Puranas and Itihasas*

We can claim that *Puranas and Itihasas* are the earliest available recorded history of India. While doing so, we have to admit that the Indian definition of history is at variance from that of western scholars. For the western historians, history simply means political history, and the details of empires, wars, invasions, dynasties etc., For the Indian historians who authored the *Puranas and Itihasas* it was different.

At this point, we would like to discuss the basic difference between *Puranas and Itihasas*. In the case of Itihasas, both the Ramayana and

\(^7\) MADHAVAN. V.R:Thamizhil Talapurankal-I: P 7-9
Mahabharata were witnessed by the authors and then narrated. While Valmiki is not a character in his Ramayana, Vyasa is very much a character in his Mahabharata. The Puranas are recordings of oral tradition of tales heard by the authors and narrated.

Puranas and Itihasas were composed not for the purpose of furnishing a chronologically accurate history, but were composed rather to furnish examples and models than to record specific historical incidents in dry detail. They have to be regarded as the works of gifted seers who availed themselves of certain ancient or historical and religious traditions of their times and wove them into narratives, anecdotes, episodes and homilies, reflecting and reproducing certain attitudes towards life amongst the people at large.

Puranas have been written with the conviction that we need not tell in detail about the rule of various kings and wars fought by them without giving any guidance about good and evil; It was felt that we don’t need the history that has no moral to be followed and emulated in life: We will select only stories that benefit the soul and Dharmic life.8

The western historians had compiled only political history, whereas Puranas have recorded stories and lives of holy men, Rishis, common folk and important non political history too. Thus, we can find in the Puranas details of the cultural life, art and science apart from the political history of the relevant period.

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8GANAPATHI.R: Deivathin Kural-Vol II (Speeches of H H Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi;pp.683-4
Whereas the epics deal with the actions of heroes as mortal men and embody and illustrate both human virtues and frailties, the Puranas mainly celebrate the power and the work of various superhuman personages and deities.

**Dharma — the basis of Puranas**

"The Hindu scheme of life expressed in the formula, *dharma-arthav kama-moksha* which had originated earlier was, during this period, perfected and codified. Indian literature, art, religion and all other traditions are applied forms of Dharma. Only such of those which aims at the good and wellbeing of humanity at large and which aids the mankind in its spiritual attainment deserved to be preserved, and not useless facts of little relevance to posterity.

Thus, the Indian litterateurs and historians evaluated incidents and facts on this basis. Only those which pull up the human beings to higher realms, guide them in the pursuit of higher ideals of Dharmic living and teach them adherence to highest ideals, were selectively recorded in their works.

It is wrong to say that Puranas contain only fiction and imaginary stories. They contain Ideal types of character representing all stages of human life who became epic heroes. Not only the ideal *sannyasin* or the *rishi* but the ideal king, the loyal wife and brother, the disciplined and diligent student, the citizen active in his vocation and the peasant as the guardian of fundamental virtues and loyalties were presented in
the itihasas and puranas as examples and symbols of the variegated Indian life. The influence can not be exaggerated of such examples of human potentiality and achievement as Rama, Laksmana, Kausalya, Sita, Hanuman,,Bharata,Yudhisthira and Bhisma. The formula above-mentioned of dharma-arthaka-moksha, became more than formal when it was illustrated by the lives of countless characters described in the Puranas and Itihasas.  

Talking of Puranas and Itihasas, Nehru writes that they teach adherence to truth and the pledged word, whatever the consequences, faithfulness unto death and even beyond, courage, good works and sacrifice for common good.... It became a living element in their (People) lives ever pulling them up from the drudgery and ugliness of their everyday existence to higher realms, ever pointing towards the path of endeavour and right living, even though the ideal might be far-off and difficult to reach.  

Puranas also give details of various dynasties like Solar dynasty, Lunar Dynasty etc giving names of Kings in chronological order; but the stories of kings’ lives that do not deserve to be emulated find only a passing reference in a sentence or two or only names are mentioned. How can we say that things that do not happen now and which are not possible for people today can not happen or will be impossible for all  

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9 The Cultural Heritage of India.:AIYAR. Dr.C.P.RAMASWAMI , Introduction pp-xxii-xxiii .

10 NEHRU.Jawaharlal: The Discovery of India: p100
times to come or could not have happened in the past? The history of scientific inventions proves that what was impossible at a given time has become possible after the invention; like flying in the air, traveling under water in the sea etc.

Puranas commence with a dialogue between Siva and Parvathi or Siva and Vishnu one of them narrating the story to the other. The story told by one Godhead to other is then narrated to a rishi or king by another rishi. Ultimately the story is recited by Vyasa to his son Suka who in turn recites them to rishis of Naimisa forest.

**Impact of Puranas on Indian Society**

Various scholars have found that the Puranas play very crucial role in Indian culture. "Puranas are important documents for the study and reconstruction of the history of Hindu India." In a more practical way they have contributed to the continuity of Hinduism through the ages, and are indispensable for a correct understanding of Hinduism today. As a matter of fact, every Hindu is influenced by the puranas and his activities are guided by them.” We all know that a Hindu is

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11 V.R.RAMACHANDRA DIKSHITAR: The Puranas. Their Historic Value .PO 2, 1937-38,77-83: "The Puranas are altogether an encyclopaedia of information and therefore very useful in writing a history of Indian culture and civilization. By culture and civilization we mean a history of Indian polity,of Indian society, a history of religion and philosophy, legal history, a history of arts and crafts, architecture and iconography"(p.80)

12 M.M.MALAVIYA, Presidential Address, AJOC 10(1940)1941.xvii: “The Puranas are encyclopaedia of ancient and medieval Hindu culture and religion, and we can hardly get the proper perspective for solving the problems of present day Hinduism without their proper study.”Cf K.M.Munshi: The Classical Age(Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.1938)forward p. XX

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really born in the atmosphere of the Puranas, and he lives and breathes
and has his being in the bosom of the Puranas, so to say, during the
formative period of his mind and personality.\textsuperscript{13,14}

Puranas are the most respectfully studied religious works in India for
centuries. They have shown the people, the easiest way of attaining
peace and perfection in life. These contain and present its readers with
solutions to the problems one confronts in his religious and social life,
though in the form of myths and stories. They have rendered greatest
service in bringing about racial and religious unification of the diverse
people of India and maintaining social harmony. They have treated
every religious faith of the soil with respect and synthetic attitude and
 accorded them a place in the puranic pantheism by accommodating
their deity and its principles by reconciling with Sankhya and
Vedanta. It is only through these works that the Vedic ideas and ideals
of religion and society have survived upto the present day and got due
recognition among people of India and worldwide.\textsuperscript{15}

The puranas afford us great insight into all phases and aspects of
Hinduism as well as into the inner spirit of the Hindu social system
with its adaptability in all ages and under all circumstances, however
unfavourable.

Mukhopadhyaya(ed.'Kurma'Pref.p.iv):"The Vedas are studied by the antiquarian, the Upanishads
by the philosopher: but every orthodox Hindu must have some knowledge of the Puranas, directly or
vicariously, to shape his conduct and to perform the duties essential to his worldly and spiritual
welfare"
\textsuperscript{14} L.ROCHER.The Puranas:pp12-13
\textsuperscript{15} The Cultural Heritage of India:Vol.2:Ch.16:p 268
The aim of the Purana is to inculcate that the basis of the world is the moral order, that this vast universe has its ultimate and unified basis in God, and the Goal of human endeavour is to realize Godhead through righteousness and spiritual endeavour.

*Encyclopaedic Character of Puranas:*

The Encyclopaedic character of Puranas is not universal but is peculiar to three of them, the *Matsya, Agni* and *Garuda*. Apart from dealing with the usual purana topics, contain chapters on astronomy, astrology, superstitions, omens and portents, medical science, treatment of children suffering under the influence of unfavourable planets, treatment of cows, horses and elephants, knowledge of snakes, treatment of snake- bite, knowledge of precious stones, coronation and duties of kings, politics, science of war, archery, use of other arms, agriculture, gardening, metrics, grammar, lexicography, dramaturgy, poetics, music, dance, architecture, sculpting images of deities, and so on. In dealing with the topics mentioned, these puranas sometimes give summaries of ancient Sanskrit texts or even entire chapters from other standard works, preserving summaries and fragments of ancient works, some of which have been lost for ever.\(^\text{16}\)

They were devised as vehicles of a liberal education for the masses.

\(^{16}\) The Cultural Heritage of India:Vol.2:Ch.16:p 267
Accounts of ancient Indian history, up to the Gupta times, i.e. roughly up to the end of the 5th century A.D. are part of their avowed theme.

**Purana Lakshanam**

It is not possible to adopt a single definition as a standard definition of Puranas, as Puranas represent different phases and aspects of life of people belonging to different ages in different parts of India. Their heterogeneous nature has to be properly understood for an objective appreciation of the Puranas we have inherited.

*Amarakosa* lays down that Puranas should have five characteristics, namely *sarga* (primary creation), *pratisarga* (dissolution), *vamsa* (genealogies of gods, Kings and sages), *manvantaras* (The periods of different Manus) and *vamsanucarita* (Histories of various dynasties) This is confirmed in other works like *Kurma Purana*. But all the five characteristics are very rarely found in any of the Mahapuranas.

*Bhagavata* exhibits two lists enumerating ten characteristics of Puranas.

In 2.10.1 the characteristics listed are Sarga, Visarga, sthana, posana, Manvantara, uti, isanukatha, nirodha, mukti and apasraya.

In 12.7.9 the characteristics listed are Sarga, Visarga, vrntti, raksana, Manvantara, vamsa, vamsanucarita, samstha, hetu and apasraya
The Brahmanda (4.131/133.6-9) explicitly assigns Pancalaksna to upapuranas and assigns Dasa laksnas or ten characteristics to Mahapuranas.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{verbatim}
śrṣtis cāpi visṛṣtis cā sthitis teśam ca pālanam
karmanāṁ vāsana varta manūnāṁ cakramena ca
varnanāṁ pralayanam ca mōkṣasya ca nirūpanam
uktīrṇam harē r eva vēdānāṁ ca prthak prthak
daśādhikām laksanām ca mahatām parīkritām
\end{verbatim}

Sanskrit Puranas have three classification i.e. Mahapuranas numbering 18, Upa puranas numbering 18, and Ati puranas numbering 18. The Mahapuranas are of general nature, Upapuranas eulogise individual Gods and Atipuranas is of later age and speak about vows(vratas), Tirtha, and divine places(sthalams).

The following are the Mahapuranas, together with their extent: Brahma Purana 10,000 verses, Padma 55,000 verses, Vishnu 23,000 verses, Siva 24,000 verses, Bhagavata 18,000 verses, Naradiya 25,000 verses, Markandeya 9,000 verses, Agneya 14,400 verses, Bhavishya 14,500 verses, Brhma Vaivarta 18,000 verses, Linga 11,000 verses, Varaha 24,000 verses, Skanda, the biggest, 81,100 verses Yamana 10,000 verses,Kurma 17,000 verses,Matsya 14,000 verses, Garuda Purana,19,000 verses and Brahma Purana 12,000 verses- totaling to four lakhs of verses.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} L.ROCHER The Puranas:p27
\textsuperscript{18} V.Raghavan.Dr. Article The Puranas in Sanskrit literature :p36
They have been further classified: Purana of Agni -1; Agneya Purana, Purana of Surya- 1; Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Purana of Brahma-2; Brahma and Padma Purana, Purana of Vishnu – 4; Vishnu, Naradiya, Bhagavata and Garuda Puranas, Purana of Siva -10; All the rest.


Upapuranas' importance as records of social and religious history of India from the Gupta period can not be overlooked. A number of lists of Upapuranas containing different names are available, which makes the number of Upapuranas more than eighteen. An examination of multitude of Sanskrit works has yielded information on a hundred Upapuranas, including those mentioned in different lists. But it can hardly be denied that there were many other Upapuranic works which have been lost altogether without leaving any trace of their existence. 20

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20 ibid; pp 271/272
Puras in Tamil

Scholars are of the opinion that though originally all Puranas were written in Sanskrit, they were not written in one place. They owe their origin to different parts of the country, since the traditions recorded in them were current then in different parts of the country. Subsequently these Puranas were written in different Indian languages. Later on some puranas came to be originally written in other Indian languages also.

The word Puranam was in use in Tamil, much before the Puranam literature came into existence. It is first found in ‘Manimekalai’ in Camaya k kanakkar Tan tiram ketta kaatai –

"Kāṭal koṇtu katal vaṇan puranam ōtinan

(Mañ, 27:98-99).

Here katal vaṇan puranam means ‘Vishnu Puranam’. We also understand that the practice of reading Puranas was in vogue even before Cilappatikaram days.

Aravōr Palliyu maranōm pataiyum
Pura nilai k köttattu p punniya t tanamum
Tiravor uraikkun ceyal ciran toru pāl

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Tolkappiyam, the earliest Tamil grammar book mentions Tonmai (ancient) as one of the eight characteristics of poetry. The Tamil Puranas fit in the definition of Tonmai.

Tamil Grammar book, Yapparunkala Virutti, contains definition of the genre Vilambanam which is similar to Purana.

Panniru Pattiyal makes a mention of Todar nilai ceyyul which is elaborated by later Grammarians to include Kappiyam, Perunkappiyam and Puranam.

In Tamil literature we have the classification of Perilakkiyam and Cirrilakkiyam from 12th century onwards.

The poetic works composed on people of higher class of society in Venpa,Aciriyappa or Viruttappa meters of larger number of stanzas are called Perilakkiyam.

The poetic works on deities, rich people and common people in simple meters of smaller size are known as Cirrilakkiyam, which is also known as Prapantam. Prapantam means “closely bound” and is a
class of literature.. Prapantam also means an anthology as in the case of “Nalayira Tivya Prapantam”

Various prosody works have given different number of Prapantam types ranging from 45 to 331. But the number accepted by most of the scholars is 96 as mentioned in *Prapanta Marapiyayal*, the grammar book belonging to 16th century which includes Puranam as the 96th category of Prabantam. The following 14 categories are popular prapantam categories:

1. Arru p patai
2. Antati
3. Malai
4. Patikam
5. Kovai
6. Ula
7. Parani
8. Kalampakam
9. Pillai t tamil
10. Tootu
11. Catakam
12. Matal
13. Pallu
14. Kuravañci

In Tamil we find that the Purana literature has recorded remarkable growth. We find the following categories of Puranas in Tamil---
1. Original Sanskrit Puranas translated or trans-created in Tamil like Bhagavatam,
2. Puranas that narrate Siva Punyam, Siva Dharmam which form part of Mahapuranas, e.g. Upadesa Kandam, Kasi Kandam, Siva Dharmottaram, are parts of Mahapuranas and translations from Sanskrit and
3. Original Tamil Puranas containing the stories of devotees like Tirus tondar Puranam (Periya Puranam) Cekkizhar Puranam, Tiruvatavur Adigal Puranam,
4. Original Tamil Puranas written about various places of religious significance: Tala Puranam e.g. Koyil puranam, Kanci p puranam
5. Original Tamil Puranas detailing the deeds (lilas) of God like Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam
6. Puranas in the Itihasa format narrate the story of any one God and they are a part of Mahapurana. Examples are Vinayaka Puranam, Kanda Puranam, 21

**Puranas and Mahatmyams**

The term *Mahatmyam* applies to those texts which are composed with the specific purpose of proclaiming the ”greatness” of a variety of things: a place, an auspicious time, a deity, a ritual activity such as *tirthayatra* (pilgrimage) etc.

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21 V.R.MADHAVAN: Thamizhil Talapuranankal-I:pp19-22
Some of the Puranas have a number of *Mahatmyams*, forming parts thereof. While Puranas are recorded oral traditions of a broad nature, the traditions pertaining to certain places, temples etc were recorded in what is known as *Mahatmyams*, which are composed with the specific purpose of proclaiming the” greatness” of a place,

The mahatmyams are considered to be original works which only secondarily have been attached to one of the major puranas. Conversely a number of books that go under the name purana, are in fact mahatmyams. There are also instances where some Puranas were originally written in other languages. Tiru tondar Puranam also known as Periya Puranam written in Tamil is a shining example of this category. Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam is also an original Tamil work but has to be treated as a Talapuranam.

Talapuranamm in Tamil in many cases are translations of Sthala Mahatmyamms about the same sthala, originally written in Samskrit. We will be taking up these two for further study in the following chapters.