CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Purāṇas:

The Purāṇas constitute the most important religious literature of India and stand next to the Vedas. The Purāṇas inform us about the social, religious and cultural life of the people of ancient India. It also consists of varied topics like Philosophy, History, Geography, Poetics, Dramaturgy and so on and so forth. The different morals and values propounded in the Vedas, the Upaniṣadas, the Epics and the Dharmasāstras are dealt in detail in the Purāṇas. From the standpoint of character of this vast literature we may call this branch as an encyclopaedia of ancient Indian thought just like the great epic Mahābhārata.

The Purāṇic literature is not only important for the study of the social religious and political history of India, but also for the valuable information about the constitution of its people, about the ideas and beliefs of the various tribes living at that time. The Purāṇas contain all elements of popular Hinduism-rites, ceremonies, vows, modes of worship, heaven, hell, virtues, sin and atonements, pilgrimages, reverence for gurus and brāhmaṇas and the like. The Purāṇic literature also supply us information about the ancient geography of India and also about literature, mythology.
ideas and superstitions, flora and fauna and so on. Thus the vast literature of Purāṇa is all-inclusive.

The Purāṇas are said to be the complement of the Vedas. These are the explanation of the Vedas and as such are claimed to be the fifth Veda. It is said in the Mahābhārata that the Vedas are to be amplified by Itiḥās and Purāṇa. The very profound and mystical teachings of the Vedas are not easy to be understood by common people. Hence, the Purāṇas and the Itiḥāsas were written in simple and lucid language so that the common people can also understand the philosophical and religious ideas depicted in the Vedas. Moreover, the Purāṇas are especially meant for those who are not allowed to read or listen to the Vedas. The sūdras and women are prohibited from reading or listening to the Vedas by the Dharmaśāstras. For them the Purāṇas are written as a substitute of the Vedas. Thus, the deep and real message of the Vedas is transmitted through the Purāṇas. They are ‘Veda-sammita’ or ‘Veda-sammata’ or ‘Veda-sama’, i.e., similar in intents and contents to the Vedas. According to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Purāṇas are but a śākhā of the Vedas.  

1. Purāṇa, Vol. XXV, No 1, P.88  
2. VP, 3.6.28-31
Different thinkers explain the term ‘Purāṇa’ differently. The word ‘purāṇa’ means “purāṇam ākhyānam,” i.e., old narrative. The Vācaspatiyaṁ explains the word ‘purāṇa’ as ‘purā bhavam’, and ‘purā niyate’, i.e., Purāṇa is that which remains in the past and deals with the past. The Purāṇas themselves also try to ascertain the meaning of the term. The Vāyu Purāṇa says that it is called Purāṇa because it lives in the past or it breathes in ancient times. The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa also says that it is called Purāṇa because it existed in ancient times. Similar is the meaning given by the Padma Purāṇa also. It is called Purāṇa because it desires or likes the past. Such types of descriptions are found in other Purāṇas also. According to the Amarakoṣa of Amara Sinha, the word Purāṇa stands for old narratives. In the Yājñavalkya Smṛti the word Purāṇa is used in the sense of a literary branch without any specification whatsoever. Hence though the word originally meant ancient or old narrative, yet the term Purāṇa is actually used as the designation of a class of literature dealing among other things, with old world stories and

4. Vācaspatiyaṁ, P. 4369.
5. yasmāt purā hyanatidam purāṇam tena tat smṛtam / Va.P, 1.203
6. yasmāt purā hyabhuccaitat purāṇam tena tat smṛtam / Br.P, 1.1.173
7. purā paramparāṁ vaśti purāgaṁ tena vai smṛtaṁ / PP
8. purāṅe pratana pratana purātana cirantanāḥ. Amarakoṣa, 3.2.50
9. Cf., Yājñavalkya Smṛti, 1.3
legends. The extensive Purāṇa literature includes both early and late works.

2. The Definition of Purāṇa:

The Purāṇic texts being multifaceted defy any satisfactory definition. The Purāṇas are different in nature from most of other texts. "These latter may be composed by one or more authors and have at least a nucleus which remains basically the same throughout MSS tradition down centuries. The Purāṇas are not like that. Even if they had a nucleus in the beginning and one or more specific authors, they went on changing continuously." The Purāṇas themselves give their own definition in the form of Pañcalakṣaṇa (five fold definition). According to Viṣṇu, Purāṇa, Matsya and Kūrma Purāṇa, there are five characteristics of Purāṇas in the Amarakośa the Pañcalakṣaṇa is mentioned like this.

"sargasca pratisargaśca vaṁśo manvantarāṇi ca
vaṁśānucaśrātan caiva purāṇāṁ pañcalakṣaṇāṁ //\n
The same characteristics are found in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa as—

10. Purāṇa, Vol. XXV. No. 1, P. 79
11. VP, 3.6.25. Var.P, 2.4; MP, 53.64; KP, Purva Khaṇḍa, 1.12
12. Amarakośa, 1.5, P. 33.
Hence it is required that the Purāṇas should contain these five characters, viz., Sarga, Pratisarga, Vaṁsa, Manvantara, and Vaṁśānucarita. In the Pāncalakṣaṇa, the first one is Sarga which means creation and second is Pratisarga or recreation, the third one is Vaṁśa which means genealogies of gods and sages, the fourth one is Manvantara which means the vast periods of time so called after Manu, and the last one is Vaṁśānucarita which means the history of the kings of the solar and the lunar dynasties. This definition is found in some other Purāṇas like the Matsya Purāṇa, the Varāha Purāṇa etc. But the extant Purāṇas do not conform to this definition fully. Among the existing Purāṇas some deal with many more topics while others contain less. Scholars have shown that the five characteristics occupy only a small portion of the Purāṇic literature, which has come down to us. Other religious and social topics like dāna (gifts), vrata (religious observances), tṛthā (place of pilgrimage), etc. are discussed elaborately in these works. Moreover philosophy, history, geography and many other topics are found in these Purāṇas. It seems that because of this fact the Purāṇic redactors themselves added

13. VP, 3.6.25.
14. Cf. MP, 53. 64; Var.P, 2.4
some more characteristics to these original five. Thus the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* adopted a *daśālakṣaṇa* (ten-fold characteristics) definition of the Purāṇas. The definition runs thus:

\[
\text{sarga'syaṭha vīṣargaśe ca vṛtti rakṣāntarāni ca /} \\
\text{vaṁso vaṁśyāmucaritāni sanīsthā heturāpāśrayāḥ iti} \\
\text{daśabhīrālakṣaṇārūyuktān pratīṇām tvādvad vīdhiḥ} \]^{15}

Hence, in addition to the topics like *Sarga* etc. this definition includes *vṛtti* (means of livelihood), *rakṣā* (protection i.e., incarnations of God for protection of devotees), *sanīsthā* (four kinds of laya), *hetu* and *apāśraya* (Brahman, the refuge of individual souls). Śrīdhara Śvāmin the commentator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* observes that the ten characters of *daśālakṣaṇa* are the characteristic features of the *Mahāpurāṇas*, while the five characteristics are found in case of the *Upapurāṇas* only.\(^{16}\) The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* also supports this view.\(^{17}\) R.C. Hazra also maintains that these *daśālakṣaṇas* are dealt in the *Mahāpurāṇas* while the five characteristics are predominant in the *Upapurāṇas*.\(^{18}\) Matsya Purāṇa adds that in addition to these ten characteristics, Purāṇas also deal with such topics as the glorification of *Brahman*, Viṣṇu, the Sun, etc.

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15. BP, 12.7.9-10
16. Bhāvārthadipikā on Bhāgavata, XII 7.9-10
17. BVP, 4.133
preservation and dissolution of the world, the four goals of human life, like dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa etc. But even this description is not adequate; since Purāṇas have undergone re-editions, due to the addition of fresh matter; substitution of existing and omission and modification of it.

3. Numbers of Purāṇas:

The Purāṇas are generally classified as Mahāpurāṇas and Upapurāṇas. The number of the Purāṇas in each of these classes is stated to be eighteen. But it is stated in some Purāṇas that originally there was only one Purāṇa, called Purāṇa Samhitā, which was written by Vyāsa, the son of great sage Parāśāra and also the arranger of the Vedas. According to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, after compiling the Purāṇa Samhitā Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa imparted it to his disciple Sūta Romaharsana or Lomaharsana who on his part taught this to his disciples. Afterwards three of the disciples of Romaharsana Kaśyapa, Sāvarni and Saṁsapāyana composed their own Samhitās. These four were the original Purāṇa Samhitās. They were called.

1. Lomaharsanika- the mula samhitā.

19. MP, 53.66-67
20. purāṇamekamevaśī sarvesu kalpeṣu mānada / NP, 1.12.22
21. romaharsanānāṃ mahābuddhiṁ mahāmuniḥ /
    sūtāṃ jagrāha śīṣyaṁ sa itihāsapurāṇayoh // VP, 3.4.10.
2. **Kasyapika**—the *para samhita*.

3. **Sāvarnika**—*triya-samhita*.

4. **Sāṁsapāyanika**—*anya*.

These four were regarded as the *mula* or root *samhita*.

According to the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, the number of the *Purāṇas* is ten, which seems to be the second stage of development of the *Purāṇa* literature. It is believed that in the third and final stage we find the traditional eighteen *Purāṇas*. A list of the names of the eighteen *Purāṇas* is given by most of the *Purāṇas*, which is more or less the same. According to the *Vīṣṇu Purāṇa*, the list of the *Purāṇas* is as follows: 1. *Brāhma* 

In the *Bhāgavata* the same eighteen *Purāṇas* are mentioned in a different serial. In the *Devi bhāgavata* there is a verse which is composed by taking the first letter of the names of *Purāṇas* where also is shown:

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24. brahmāṁ pādmaṁ vaiśṇavaṁ ca sāivaṁ liṅgaṁ sagaraṇaṁ / 
   nāradīyaṁ bhāgavatamāgneyaṁ skanda saṁhitāṁ // 
   bhaviṣyaṁ brahmavaivartaṁ markandeyaṁ savāmanaṁ / 
   varāhamāṁ mātsyakaurmaṁ ca brahmāṇḍākhyamiti trisat // BP, 12.6.23-24
almost the same list with only one exception.²⁵ Here Vāyu Purāṇa is mentioned in place of Sīva Purāṇa. The list of the eighteen Purāṇas are also found in the Padma Purāṇa Pātalakhaṇḍa, Vāyu Purāṇa, Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Agni Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, Garuḍa Purāṇa and so on.²⁶ But the serial number of the Purāṇas is not the same in all these Purāṇas. Though there is controversy regarding, the serial number yet all the Purāṇas agree that the total number of the Purāṇas is neither less nor more than eighteen.

Now in the aforementioned list the name of the well-known Vāyu Purāṇa is omitted. But in some other Purāṇas the name of the Vāyu Purāṇa is included in place of the Sīva Purāṇa. There are also other variations. The Agni Purāṇa omits the Sīva and inserts the Vāyu. But the Kūrma Purāṇa includes Vāyu in place of Agni Purāṇa. Again the Varāha leaves out the Garuḍa and the Brahmanḍa including the Vāyu and the Nārasiṁha in their place. The Mārkaṇḍeya and the Bhāgavata agree with the Viṣṇu while the Matsya agrees with the Agni.²⁷ Hence, some scholars have tried to set the controversy about the Vāyu and the Sīva at res;

²⁵. madvayaṁ bhadvayaṁ caiva bratrayaṁ bacatuṣṭayaṁ
     anāpaliṅga kūskāṇi purāṇāni pracāṣate // DVP, 1.2.3
²⁶. PP, 155.86-93; Va.P, 104.3-11; Mar.P, 137.8-10; Ag.P., 272.1-23; MP, 53 64
     GP, 215 15-16.
²⁷. The Vishnu Purāṇa, H. H. Wilson, Preface, P. XIV.
taking the number of the Purāṇas as nineteen. But according to Pargiter the 
Vāyu and the Brahmāṇḍa were originally one Purāṇa. He says "But there can be little doubt that the Vāyu and Brahmāṇḍa were one originally and have become differentiated, for they agree, almost word for word, in the great bulk of their contents. The name Brahmāṇḍa then in that list must be taken to include twin, the Vāyu and the Kūrma calls it by both names the "Vāyaviya Brahmāṇḍa." In this way excepting this controversy about the Śiva and the Vāyu, there is little difference among the Purāṇas about the names of eighteen Mahāpurāṇas.

4. Divisions of Purāṇas:

Different scholars both old and new classify the Purāṇas in different ways. The modern scholars divide the Purāṇas in to two classes as ancient and later. The division is done taking consideration of the five-fold definition of the Purāṇas. The Purāṇas, which are more faithful to the Pañcalakṣaṇa definition, are regarded as ancient while those, which are not so loyal are regarded as of latter origin.

The renowned Purānic scholar Haraprasad Shastri divided Purāṇas into six classes; viz.,

1) Encyclopaedic Purāṇas. (Garuda, Agni and Nārada)

2) Those mainly dealing with *tirthas* and *vratas* (*Padma, Skanda* and *Bhaviṣya*)

3) Those, which apparently underwent two revisions (*Bṛahma, Bhāgavata* and *Brahmavaivarta*)

4) The historical Purāṇas (*Brahmāṇda* and *Vāyu*)

5) Sectarian Purāṇas (*Liṅga, Vāmana* and *Mārkaṇḍeya*)

6) Old Purāṇas revised out of existence (*Varāha, Kūrma* and *Matsya*)

But the most famous classification of the Purāṇas is found in some of the Purāṇas themselves. According to this classification, the Purāṇas are divided in accordance to the *guna* prevailing in them. In Indian philosophical circles three *guna* are recognized, viz., *sattva, rajas* and *tamas*. The Purāṇas are also classified as *Sāttvika, Rājasika* and *Tāmasika*. This classification is found in the *Matsya, Garuda* and *Padma Purāṇa*. The *Padma Purāṇa* gives the following classification of the eighteen Purāṇas:

1. *Sāttvika Purāṇa*: *Viṣṇu, Bhāgavata, Nārada, Garuda, Padma* and *Varāha.*


*Brāhma, Vāmana* and *Bhaviṣya.*

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However, slight difference is noticed regarding the division of these Purāṇas in the Purāṇas themselves. The list of the Garuḍa Purāṇa is different from the Padma Purāṇa. In the list of Garuḍa Purāṇa the Matsya, Kurma and Vāyu are included in the list of the Sāttvika Purāṇas instead of Nāradīya, Padma and Varāha. Similarly Garuḍa substituted the Liṅga and Āditya Purāṇa in place of Vāmana and Bhāvīya regards the Rājasika Purāṇas as Tāmasika. The Matsya Purāṇa classifies the Purāṇas as Sāttvika etc., without specifying these by name. According to it the Purāṇas where the Māhātmya of Viṣṇu prevails are called the Sāttvika Purāṇas. The Rājasika Purāṇas are those where the stories of Brahmā predominate and the Tāmasika Purāṇas are those in which the stories of Agni and Śiva are found. In this way division of the Purāṇas according to the deities also is found. However, from the list of the Padma Purāṇa it is clear that the Sāttvika Purāṇas are mostly Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas. But, more of the slokas of the Skanda Purāṇa only four Purāṇas are made as Vaiṣṇavite. These four Purāṇas are the Viṣṇu, Bhūgavata, Nāradīya and

30. Ibid, Uttarakhanda, 263.81-82; Vide, The Vishnu Purana, H.H. Wilson, P. XLI
31. brahmāṇḍa laṁyge brahma-vaivartakaṁ-vai mārkandaṁyai brahmamādiyakaṁ etānāhustāmasaṁiti viprāstratrah ekadesaṁ sāttviko rājasasca // GP, 31 35
32. MP, 53.67-68
Garuda. But it must be stated here that the division of the Purāṇas according to the deities like Viṣṇu, Śiva etc. is not appropriate. Though it is said that Viṣṇu is mainly extolled in the Vaiṣṇavite Purāṇas and Śiva in the Śaivite Purāṇas, but a careful study of the Purāṇas reveals the fact that Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the most prominent of all the deities of the Purāṇas. Even the Śaivite Purāṇas contain large portions where the eulogies of Lord Viṣṇu are found. Again, about the Brahmā or Rājasika Purāṇas it can be said that these Purāṇas are mostly of a miscellaneous character and extol different deities. According to H.H. Wilson the Rājasika Purāṇas actually lean to the Sākti cult. The basis of his view is according to him, the Devī Māhātmya portion of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and the Rādhā Khaṇḍa of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa. Wilson again points out that the Rājasika Purāṇas actually propagate the worship of Kṛṣṇa. In his words, of the third class of the Purāṇas, according to the Padma Purāṇa, appears to be to the worship of Kṛṣṇa, not in the character in which he is represented in the Viṣṇu and Bhāgavata Purāṇas, in which the incidents of his boyhood are only a portion of his biography, and in which the human character largely participates, at least in his riper years, but as the infant Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, Bāla Gopāla, the sojourner in Vṛndāvan, the companion of the cowherds.

33. Sk.P, Kedāraṇa, 1
34. The Vishnu Purāṇa, H.H.Wilson, Preface P. XII
and milkmaids, the lover of Radha, or as the juvenile master of the Universe, Jagannatha. "The proper appropriation ........... jagannatha."

Another noteworthy aspect of the Purāṇas is that the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu appear in most of the Purāṇas.

5. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa:

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is one of the most authoritative and sacred treatises of the vaiṣṇavas. It is also one of the earlier Purāṇas. In this Purāṇa all the five characteristics are found fully, while these characteristics are found only partly in other Purāṇas. Thus, H.H. Wilson says, "There is not one to which it belongs entirely as to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, and it is one of the circumstances which gives to this work a more authentic character than most of its fellows can pretend." 36 The Viṣṇu Purāṇa itself says -

\[
\text{sarge ca pratisarge ca vaṁśāmanvantarādīṣu} / \\
\text{kathyate bhagavān viṣṇurasēṣeṣyeva sattama} //^{37}
\]

It is true that this Purāṇa has also inserted many extraneous and sectarian matter. But this is done here with sobriety and judgement as

35. Ibid, P. XIII.
36. Ibid, P. V
37. VP, 3.6.27
not to disturb the real theme of the Purāṇa. The different legendary tales, which are few in number in comparison to other Purāṇas, are arranged in such a way that they do not distract the reader from the main objective.

This Purāṇa is divided into six parts and begins with a dialogue between Parāṣāra and his pupil Maitreya. The first book is concerned chiefly with the creation - primary (Sarga) and secondary (Pratisarga) of the world. In the second part of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa we come across the description of the seven continents and the seven oceans. The third book of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa deals with the account of the Manus and the ages over which they ruled. The third book also contains the description of the arrangement of the Vedas and is of much importance to the history of Hindu literature and religion. The description of the duties of castes, of the obligations of different stages of life, and of the celebration of obsequial rites etc. is also found in the third book. In the fourth book a genealogical list of the kings of the solar dynasty and the lunar dynasty is found. In the fifth, it gives a detailed biography of Kṛṣṇa the divine cowherd. “This is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Purāṇa and one argument against its antiquity.” In the last, the description of the four Yugas, Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara and Kali are found. This chapter also contains philosophical discussion and detail description of the pralayas.

38. The Vishnu Purana, H.H. Wilson, P.LXVIII
Thus, the *Vishnu Purana* very faithfully follows the old traditional five characteristics. It should also be mentioned here that this Purana is completely silent about the names and descriptions of the devotional vows (vratas), fasts (upavasas), praise of the places of pilgrimage (mahaṃhātmya) and such other matters of the Vaiśnavas, which are found in other Puranas. According to some the *Vishnu Purana* has two parts, Purva Khaṇḍa and Uttara Khaṇḍa. It is also said that this Purana originally contained 23000 verses. But now we find only the Purva Khaṇḍa of this Purana consisting of six parts (amsas) and less than 10000 verses. From this it is supposed that the original *Vishnu Purana* has not come down to us.

6. The Authorship of the *Vishnu Purana*:

To ascertain the authorship of the *Vishnu Purana* we have to consider the authorship of all the Puranas as a whole. Regarding the authorship of the Puranas two traditions is prevalent – according to one the Puranas are of divine origin, while the other tradition regards them of personal origin. According to the first tradition also, some maintain that just like the Vedas—

the Purāṇas originated from the residue of sacrifice. There is also another view about this divine origin, which is found in the Upaniṣads, and which says that from the breath of the great being (Mahābhūta) all the Vedas, Itihāsas and Purāṇas came out. In the Bhavisya Purāṇa, Purāṇas are called as fifth Veda. But according to the modern scholars, this theory of divine origin is purely mythical. Second tradition holds that Vyāsa compiles all the Purāṇas including the Visnu Purāṇa. This view is found narrated in the Purāṇas themselves. Vyāsa or most popularly known Veda Vyāsa was the son of sage Parāśara and Satyavati, who is said to have divided and arranged the four Vedas. Thus we find in the Visnu Purāṇa that in the age of Dvāpara Viṣṇu himself in the person of Vyāsa divided the Vedas in to many portion in order to promote the good of mankind. This same Vyāsa composed the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas.

In the Matsya Purāṇa also it is said that it was Vyāsa who composed all the Purāṇas. In the Purāṇic encyclopaedia it is said that “Visnu Purāṇa

40. ṛcaḥ sāmāni chandāṃsi purāṇām yajusā saha /
ucchistajjajñāre sarve divi devā divikṣita // AV, 2.7.24.
41. Cf. BU, 12.4.10
42. Cf. dvāpare dvāpare viṣṇurvyāsa rūpī mahāmune /
vedamekaṁ sa bahudhā kurute jagato hitaḥ// VP, 3.3.5.
43. aṣṭādasā purāṇāni kṛtvā satyavatisutaḥ /
bhāratākhyānamakhilāṁ cakre tadupabrñhanam// MP, 53.70
is the most ancient of all the Purāṇas and has got the name Purāṇaṇaṇa (gem of Purāṇas) and Vyāsa was the composer of this Viṣṇu Purāṇa”.

But the modern scholars are of the opinion that the name Vyāsa is not a proper name but a title. H.H. Wilson in his preface to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa says “Vyāsa, as will be seen in the body of the work, is a generic title, meaning an ‘arranger’ or ‘compiler’”. He draws this conclusion from the body of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa itself as in the chapter III of the book III the description of different Vyāsas are found. In the View of Wilson, it is in this age applied to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana, the son of Parāśāra, who is said to have taught the Vedas and Purāṇas to various disciples, but who appears to have been the head of a college or school, under whom various learned men gave to the sacred literature of the Hindus the form in which it now presents itself.” It is true that a single person cannot compose the huge quantity of literal works called the Purāṇas in his short lifetime. That is why some of the modern scholars say that these Purāṇas were written by different writers in different times and the name of Vyāsa was given as the composer only because these writers tried to establish the idea that their works had a divine origin and were compiled by none other than Veda Vyāsa, the great sage. From this discussion it can be concluded that like all:

44. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa, H.H. Wilson, P. X.
45. Ibid.
other Purāṇas the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is also composed by Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa. About this Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana Vyāsa we find some reference in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* of Saṅkarācārya. There he says that the ancient Vedavyāsa named Apāntaratama has incarnated as Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana in the conjunction of Kaliyuga and Dvāparayuga.\(^{46}\) However, it is not known whether this Apāntaratama was a historical person or not.

7. The Date of the Purāṇas

The date of Purāṇas is shrouded in mystery. It is very difficult to say how and when these Purāṇas were first originated. It is true that the Purāṇas are of a hoary past. There are references of Purāṇas together with Itihāsas in the Vedic literature itself. The oldest record of the term Purāṇa is found in the *Atharvaveda*. The *Chāndogya Upanishad*, the *Bṛhadāranyakopanishad*, the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* etc. also contain references of the Purāṇas. In the *Atharvaveda* it is said that the Purāṇas originated from the residue of the sacrifice.\(^{47}\) According to the *Bṛhadāranyakopanishad*, Purāṇas are originated from the breath of the

\(^{46}\) tathāhyāpāntaratamā nāma vedācāryaḥ ............. kṛṣṇadvaipāyana-ah
sambabhūveti smaranti. BSS, 3.3.32

\(^{47}\) AV, 2.7.24
Mahābhūta.48 The Chāndogyopaniṣad again describes the Purāṇas as the Pañcama Veda (fifth Veda).49 Padma Purāṇa even says that the Purāṇas are the earliest of all the scriptures.50 That means, according to this Purāṇa they are earlier than the Vedas also. However it is accepted by all, that the Purāṇas as they are found now are post Vedic. But the implication of this statement of the Padma Purāṇa may be that the Purāṇic tales are of pre-Vedic origin. So many references of the Purāṇas are found in the Kautilya’s Arthasastra51 and the Manu Smṛti.52 Thus, though the Purāṇas appear to have a very ancient origin, but from the character and tendencies of the extant Purāṇas it is certain that the majority of them are comparatively late work. Hence, the question of the exact date of the Purāṇas remains a vexed one.

8. The Date of Viṣṇu Purāṇa:

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is not an exception in this regard and it is not easy to ascertain a date or period when this Purāṇa was actually composed. Traditionally like all other Purāṇas this Purāṇa being a work of Vyāsa is

48. BU, 12.4.10
49. CU, 7.1.2
50. purāṇaṁ sarvasāstrāṇāṁ prathamaṁ brahmaṁ śrītāṁ / PP, 1.1.45.
52. Manu Smṛti, 8.39,136
regarded as of a very ancient time. But the modern scholars try to ascertain the date of this Purāṇa from the internal as well as external evidences and assign a more recent date to this Purāṇa. In this regard the opinion of Dr. R.C. Hazra is noteworthy. "The fact that unlike other Purāṇas, the Viṣṇu is written in generally correct easy flowing and elegant Sanskrit and has the character of a unified work, tend to indicate that the original text of this Purāṇa was composed early than the beginning of the Christian era, but later than the period of the first origin of the present Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Mārkaṇḍeya."  

Different scholars have endeavoured to ascertain the date of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa by different methods depending on the evidences found in the Purāṇa itself as also on the evidence found outside this Purāṇa. According to Dr. Farquhar, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa resembles Harivamśa in its literary style. Harivamśa has been written in about 400 A.D. Hence the Viṣṇu Purāṇa must also have been written in that period. Pargiter again assigns much later date to this Purāṇa. In his view, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa has been written in one period unlike some other Purāṇas such as Vāyu, Brāhma etc. which, contain matter of different times. He also opines that

54. Vide, *Viṣṇu Purāṇ Kan Bhūrat*, Dr. Sarvananda Pathak, P. 12
this Purāṇa was written in about 5th century A.D. Winternitz also thinks that this Purāṇa could not have been written after 5th century A.D. Vaidya on the basis of some internal evidences wants to place the Viṣṇu Purāṇa not earlier than 9th century A.D. He says that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa mentions a Yavana dynasty called Kailakila. These Kailakilas are none other than Kaimkilas, who ruled in Andhra between 575 to 900 A.D.

The fourth section of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa contains the genealogies of the royal families who were supposed to rule India in a future time. These lists record names of the dynasties up to a modern period. Though these lists are not accurate even then they can help us in approximating the date of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa to some extent. Hence let us consider these genealogies in some detail.

Like some other Purāṇas the genealogy of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa starts with the family of Manu. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa then enumerates different kingdoms and families of which reference is also found in the Mahābhārata and some other Purāṇas. The historical authenticity of these kings cannot be established without doubt. Continuing this narrative until the reign of Parīkṣit the Viṣṇu Purāṇa states that Parīkṣit was the king.

55. Cf. Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, P. 50
57. VP, 4.24.16
58. Viṣṇu Purāṇa Kā Bhārat, P. 12
during whose rule the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was written. Remarking about the list of these kings Wilson says “In the details immediately preceding, the Purāṇas generally concur, deriving them probably from the same source, the Ādi Parvan of the *Mahābhārata* and employing very frequently the same words.”⁵⁹ After Parīkṣita the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* has adopted a style that is of prophecy and commences the enumeration of the kings who will reign in future periods. This portion is of more importance to our purpose. Twenty-seven princes after Parīkṣita are enumerated. Then the kings of Ikṣvāku dynasty are described terminating with Sumitra. Then, a description of the kings of Magadha starting from Vṛhadhratha is given who, it is said, will rule for a thousand years. Then five kings of the house of Pradyota will rule for one hundred and thirty years. Then the dynasty of Śīśunāga is described whose rule would continue for three hundred and sixty two years. H.H. Wilson claims the date of these princes as six centuries B.C., which he established with the help of the *Matsya* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and Buddhist tradition.

Next the nine Nandas are mentioned. The most important name of the list appears to be that of Candragupta whose accession to the throne can be calculated as B.C. 315.⁶⁰ This is more or less correct from the

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⁵⁹. *The Vishnu Purāṇa*, H.H. Wilson, P. 368 n
⁶⁰. Ibid, P. 376n
historical point of view. His grandson was Asoka mentioned as Asokavardhana here. The Mauryas are said to be ruling the country for 35 years. After that the Sunga dynasty would possess the sovereignty for 12 years. Then the four Kanvas would rule for 45 years. The Kanvas would be succeeded by the Andhrabhṛtya dynasty. The thirty Andhrabhṛtyas would reign for 456 years. Hance, from the text it can be said that the Andhra kings established their reign in Magadha about 20 years B.C., which would agree with Pliny’s notice of them.61

The succession of races following the Andhras is confused and different dynasties are mentioned extending through 1390 years and 800 years. After that the Kailakila Yavanas mentioned earlier will be the kings. But all these descriptions of dates cannot be taken as accurate. However, H.H. Wilson has endeavoured to verify these dates with the help of Chinese and Buddhist records. Considering different proofs and descriptions of different dynasties Wilson concludes that the approximate date of the compilation of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is likely to be 954 A.D.62

But there are some external evidences, which show that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa was written before 9th century A.D. Rāmānuja who flourished in the 11th century A.D. has quoted verses from the Viṣṇu Purāṇa in his

61. Ibid, P. 380n
commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*. Saṅkarācārya also quoted some verses from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* without mentioning its name. For example in *Brahmasūtra Saṅkarabhāṣya* 1.3.28 he quoted a verse from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.\(^{63}\) Again in 1.3.30 he quoted two more verses from the same chapter.\(^{64}\) The date of Saṅkarācārya is even now a disputed one. But it is true that he could not be later than 9th century A.D. Hence the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* cannot be later than Saṅkarācārya. Alberuni, an Arabian traveler who lived at about 1030 A.D. quoted from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

Dr. R.C. Hazara has also tried to ascertain the date of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* with the help of astrological data found in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. He says that in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* the counting of the asterisms starts from Kṛttikā and ends in Bharaṇī. This was the older system, which has been changed by Varāhamihira. Varāhamihira started the counting of the stars from Asvini to Revati. The time of Varāhamihira is accepted as 550 A.D. Hence Dr. Hazra concludes that as the system of counting the stars from Kṛttikā was not in vogue after 550 A.D. the date of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* cannot be later than 550 A.D. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* description of the signs of the zodiac is found. Dr. Hazra argues that from this it is clear that during

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63. नामा रूपानि च भूतानिङ्गि क्र्त्यानिङ्गि च प्रपाणिकानां/ 
vedaśābdebhya evādau devādīnām cakārāḥ saḥ// VP, 1.5.62

64. Ibid, 1.5.60,63
that times the signs of the zodiac were fully known to the people whereas in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti Zodiacal signs were not known fully. The time of the Yājñavalkya Smṛti is thought to be the 2nd century A.D. Hence Dr Hazra opines that the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, which was acquainted with the rising of the zodiacal signs, cannot be written before 2nd century A.D. In this way the time of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa can be assumed as between 200 to 400 A.D. There is no other ground to specify the date more accurately at this stage.

9. Importance of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa:

According to some modern scholars Purāṇas are important not only for the understanding of the religious and philosophical works but also for valuable information about the society and people of ancient India, about the ideas and beliefs of the various tribes living in its different parts and also about its geography, literature, mythology, flora and fauna and so on. In a verse of Purānārṇava it is mentioned that both Sruti and Smṛti are the two eyes of the Bhagavata puruṣa i.e. Viṣṇu and the Purāṇas comprise the heart of that puruṣa.66

65. Vide, Viṣṇu Purāṇa Kā Bhārat, ṚP, 14,15
66. sruti smṛti ubhe netre purāṇaṁ hṛdayam smṛtaṁ/ Purānārṇava, 27
The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which is one of the earliest Purāṇas, is very important from the philosophical point of view. It has been looked upon as a highly authoritative work from the viewpoint of religion and society also. The *Vaiṣṇava* philosophers like Rāmānuja and others regard it with high esteem. This Purāṇa is said to base on the *Pāñcarātra* system of philosophy. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is important to understand the Advaitic concepts. The teachings of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are fascinating because they are in the dialogue form, as is the case with many of the Upaniṣads. If the teaching of the Vedas is like the commands of a Master (*prabhu sammiṁ*), that of the Purāṇas is like the counsel of a friend (*suḥṛt sammiṁ*). Conforming to this mode, the philosophical teaching of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are cast in friendly and intimate terms, which consequently possess a charm all their own. Though the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is in the group of *Vaiṣṇava* Purāṇas yet Viṣṇu of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is not a cult God, but the supreme being. Viṣṇu is *Hiranyagarbha* i.e. Brahmā. Viṣṇu is the root of the word Viṣṇu, which implies "He by whose energy the whole world is pervaded."67 It is the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* where all the five topics of the Purāṇas are applied most completely. Thus, in the concluding book of this text, Parāśāra the narrator says to Maitreya: "I have now related to you the

67. Cf. yasmād viṣvaṁśaṁ marsyaṁ tasya sāktyā mahātmanah//
    tasmāt sa procyate viṣṇurviśerdhītoḥ pravesañāt// VP, 3.1.45
primary and secondary creations, genealogy, epochs of Manu and the history of dynasties."68 This Visṇu Purāṇa, says our text, is destructive of all sins, is the most excellent of all sacred teachings, and is what clearly sets forth the supreme goal of a man.69 This Purāṇa is most revered by the Vaiṣṇavas. As philosophy the system of Vaiṣṇavism grew and developed on the triple foundations of the Čhāndogya Upaniṣad, the BrahmaUpaniṣad, and the Bhagavadgītā. The Purāṇas, especially the Visṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa provide the religious as well as philosophical foundation to the system. The excellence of the Visṇu Purāṇa lies in its ability to convey the highest truth through stories and anecdotes in an extremely easy and interesting manner.

10. Scope and Purpose of the Present Study:

The foregoing discussion undoubtedly proves that the Visṇu Purāṇa is very much important from the standpoint of religion and philosophy. As a matter of fact the philosophical importance of this Purāṇa cannot be overestimated. This is evident from the high status given to it by many scholars.

68. sargaśca pratisargaśca vaṁśo manvantaraṁ ca /
vaṁśānucaritaṁ caiva bhavato gadaṁ mayā // Ibid, 6.8.2
69. purāṇam vaiṣṇavaṁcaitat sarva kilviṣanāśanaṁ /
viṣiṣṭam sarva śāstrebrhyaḥ purusārthopapādaṁ // Ibid, 6.8.3
both ancient and modern. But inspite of its importance, so far as the
philosophy of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is concerned, a truly philosophical study
of the same is found lacking. It is true that there are a few works, which
deal with this Purāṇa. Among these works the name of The Philosophy of
the Ethical Religion of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa by Satya Swarup Saraswati is
noteworthy. Another treatise on this Purāṇa is Viṣṇu Purāṇ Kā Bhāran by
Dr. Sarvananda Pathak, which deals elaborately on different aspects of this
Purāṇa like social, political, philosophical etc. Surendranath Dasgupta in
his A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. III discusses some philosophical
points pertaining to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Another small but important book
on this Purāṇa was written by Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan entitled Advaita
the Viṣṇu Purāṇa which discusses the philosophy of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa
from the point of view of Advaita Vedānta.

However, all these works mentioned above deal with some aspects
of the philosophy of this Purāṇa. A comprehensive interpretation of the
profound philosophical teachings of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa has not been fully
done by these scholars. Hence, for a proper understanding of the
philosophy of this Purāṇa a detailed and systematic study is felt necessary.
Accordingly, the present study has been undertaken in order to bring out
the special features of the philosophy of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. An attempt is
also made here to show the influence of this Purāṇa on the later scholars.
especially in the field of Vaiṣṇavism. The different interpretations of this Purāṇa are also shown wherever possible. This will serve the purpose of a comparative study as the Purāṇa.