CHAPTER II

The word 'Purāṇa' means 'old'. There are eighteen great purāṇas. They are broadly divided into three viz. Satvika, Tāmasa and Rājasa. The main object of the compilation of the Purāṇas is to preserve old traditions, which come down from remote antiquity. They are derived from the same religious system as the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and present peculiarities, which point to their belonging to a later period, and to an important modification in the progress of opinion. They are popular sectarian compilations of different periods, of mythology, philosophy, history, geography, and the sacred law and intended, as they are now used, for the purpose of religious instruction. The definition of a Purāṇa is that a Purāṇa should treat of five subjects, namely primary creation, secondary creation, genealogies of gods and
patriarchs, reigns of various Manus and the history of ancient
dynasties. This definition, however, is totally inapplicable to
some of the Purāṇas, while it applies only partially to others.

Śrīti says that Purāṇas are commentaries on Vedas. From all these statements it can be gathered that purāṇas have
a hoary past. The great Sanskrit scholar Raṅgacārya has
defined purāṇas as pura nava. (Pura = old; nava = new) meaning things which are as good as new through existing
from olden times. Though there are large partitions of wide
imagination dealing with the human side in the purāṇas many
truth about the universe can be grasped from them. All the
purāṇas contain praises of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Mahesvara. In
most of the purāṇas of old and new traditions and interpolations are seen. The purāṇas in original were in
existence before Christ.
Akhyānaiscā pyūpā khyānair
Gāthā bhīh kalpa śuddhibhīh ī
Purāṇasarāhhitāṁ cakre
Purāṇārtha viśāradāḥ ī

aṣṭādaśa purāṇāni
kṛvā satyavasūtaḥ ī
bhārata khyāna makhilāṁ
cakre tadupa bṛihanaṁ ī

From the above it can be gathered that is was vyōsa who composed all the purāṇas. Bāna who lived in the seventh century AD. Speaks about vāyu purāṇa. Kumārila Bhaṭṭa who lived in the eighth century and Sankarācāya who lived in the
ninth century speak about the purāṇas. Purāṇas must have therefore taken their present forms before the sixth or seventh century AD. There are eighteen major purāṇas and another eighteen minor ones. The major purāṇas contain over four lakhs of slokas. All the purāṇas are in verses like Mahābhārata. But none of them is as good as Mahābhārata as a piece of literature. Still the purāṇas splendidly reflect the culture of Bhārata. The purāṇas are the bases of the bulk of Indian thinking on matters social, cultural, religious and political. Even the Indian art has taken form from the purāṇas.

The purāṇas are classified into three, those pertaining to Brahma, those pertaining to Viṣṇu and those to Śiva.

Accomplished in the purport of the Purāṇas, Vyāsa compiled a purāṇika samhitā, consisting of historical and legendary traditions, prayers and hymns and sacred chronology. He had a distinguished disciple, called Sīta
Romaharsana and to him the great Muni communicated the Puranâs. Sûta had six scholars: Sumati, Agnivacas, Mitrayu, Akrtavarṇa, (called Kâsyapa) and Sâvarṇi. The last three composed three fundamental Saṁhitas, and Romaharsana himself compiled a fourth called Romaharsanika. The substance of these four saṁhitas is embodied in the (Viṣṇu) Purâṇa.

The geographical material of the Puranâs is mostly contained in their first two books or ‘lakṣanâs’, which deal with cosmogony and cosmography. They include, among other related matters, the origin of the universe and the earth, the oceans and the continents, mountain systems of the world, regions and their people and astronomical geography. Incidental references to the geography of different lands, particularly those of Bhārata, occur throughout the Puranâs in the historical accounts contained in them. One has to put all
the isolated facts together to get a picture of the lands and their people to which they refer or which they intended to describe.

1. Brahma Purāṇa

The main object of this Purāṇa is the promotion of the worship of Kṛṣṇa and Jagannātha. The early chapters of this work give a description of the creation, a short account of the Manvantaras and the history of dynasties down to the time of Kṛṣṇa. This is followed by a brief description of the universe. About one third of the entire Purāṇa relates to the holiness of the Puruṣottama Kṣetra (Orissa) with its temples and sacred groves dedicated to the Sun to Śiva and to Jagannātha.
2. Padma Purāṇa

Padma Purāṇa is a voluminous work divided into the five books or khandas. The first two books, the Sṛṣṭi Khandā and the Bhūmi Khaṇḍa deal with the creation and the description of the earth respectively. The early chapters of Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa deal with cosmogony in the same style and often in the same words as the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. However, dealing with the virtues of the puṣkara lake (near Ajmer) as a place of pilgrimage is an additional characteristic of this purāṇa.

The Bhūmi Khaṇḍa defers any description of the earth until its close, filling up 127 chapters with legends of a very mixed character, some ancient and common to other Purāṇas, but the greater part, peculiar to itself, illustrative of the tīrthās or essential places of pilgrimage.

The Padma specifies the Jains, both by name and their practices; and talks of the Mlecchas (bārbarians, most probably
Muslims) flourishing in India. Wilson places its composition between the 12th and the 15th or the 16th century A.D.

3. **Visnu Purāṇa**

   Viṣṇu Purāṇa is perhaps the only one purāṇa which conforms to the definition of a Purāṇa almost exactly. Its five books present in proper sequence the material essential to a Purāṇa. The first two books as usual, deal with the creation and the description of the earth and the astronomical details. The geographical matter in this Purāṇa is rather succinct and condensed and omits the details found in the other purāṇas.

4. **Vāyu Purāṇa**

   It is divided into four padas, viz. Prakṛiya, Upodghata, Anuṣaṅga and Upasainhāra a classification peculiar to this Purāṇa. Its another peculiarity is the presence of an index or
heads of chapters as found in the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa.

The prakriya portion contains a few chapters only and treats chiefly of elemental creation. The Upodghata continues the subject of creation and describes the various kalpās or periods during which the world has existed.

The geographical section of this Purāṇa is more complete and detailed than that found in any other Purāṇas.

5. Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Usually it is placed fifth in all the lists, but the Padma Purāṇa ranks it as the eighteenth, and calls it the essence of all the rest. It is the most popular Purāṇa and is held in the highest esteem by the Vaiṣṇavās. The Padma Purāṇa devotes a chapter to the māhātmya of this Purāṇa.
6. Nārada or Naradiya Purāṇa

The Nāradiya Purāṇa is said to have been communicated by Nārada to the Rṣis at Naimiśaranya on the banks of the Gomati river. The concluding passage “let not this Purāṇa be recited in the presence of the ‘killers of cows’ and ‘contemners of the gods’ shows that it was written after the advent of Muslims in India. Wilson and Pargiter consider it a compilation of the 16th or 17th century. There is very little material on cosmogony and cosmography in this Purāṇa and the geographical content too is insignificant.

7. Mārkanda or Mārkanḍeya Purāṇa

It is that Purāṇa in which ‘commencing with the story of the birds that were acquainted with right and wrong, everything is narrated by Mārkanḍeya’. The birds were of celestial origin. They were born on the field of kurukṣetra.
and lived in the Vindhya mountain. The Purāṇa provides a sort of supplement to the Mahābhārata filling in the blanks left in some of its narrations. Wilson assigns it to the 9th or 10th century A.D.

The account of the creation and description of the earth is much the same as in other Purāṇas, although it has some characteristic features. The first such feature is the Nava khāṇḍa (Ch.57) of the Purāṇa which in fact contains the strictly geographical information given in some other major Purāṇas. But the Mārkandeya has also another section (Ch. 58) called Kūrma-vibhāga or the Kūrma-nivasa, containing a list of the countries and peoples of Bhārata arranged according to the position of the country conceived as a tortoise (Kūrma) resting on water and looking eastward. This arrangement is based on earlier astronomical works like those of Parasara and
Varāhamihira. Most of these countries and people have been mentioned in the Nava khāṇḍa section but the kūrmavibhāga contains valuable topographical information not given in the other Purāṇas. On the whole, the pattern of this Purāṇa is similar to those of the Matsya, Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Vāmana Purāṇas.

8. Agnipurāṇa

The early chapters of this Purāṇa describe the Avatārās; while in the chapters dealing with the narratives of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, it follows the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. The chapters describing the earth and the universe are the same as in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa while the Mahātmyās or the legends of holy places particularly of Gaya are added to them. There are also chapters on mysticism, medicines, rhetoric, Prosody,
Grammar, etc. The geographical account is exactly the same as in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

9. Bhavisya Purāṇa

This is the first Purāṇa which gives an account of the dynasties of the Kali age. The Matsya, vayu and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas, which preceded this Purāṇa, appear subsequently to have incorporated into their accounts of the above dynastic material obtained from it.

The first portion of the Purāṇa deals with the creation followed by the traditional account of the earth and its contents. The geographical section follows the same pattern as that of the earlier Purāṇas. There is some curious matter in the last chapters relating to the Magas, the silent worshipers of the Sun from Śakadāna, which supports the conclusion that the
compiler had adopted the Persian Magha and connected the fire worshipers of Iran with those of India.

The work is supposed to have been communicated by Kṛṣṇa to Yudhiṣṭhira, at a great assemblage of holy persons at the coronation of the latter after the conclusion of the great Mahābhārata war.

10. **Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa**

This is divided into four Khāṇḍas or books, viz. the Brahma, the Prakṛti, the Gaṇeśa and the Kṛṣṇa Janma Khāṇḍas, the latter throughout enhancing the interest and importance of the work, the great mass of which is taken up by the detailed and lengthy descriptions of Vrindāvana and Gokula.
The geographical section is identical with the corresponding account obtained in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Agni Purāṇa.

11. Linga Purāṇa

This work, like the other Purāṇas gives description of the universe and of the royal dynasties up to the time of Kiṃc, but it mainly concentrates on the narration of legends, enjoining of rites and recitation of prayers designed to do honor of Śiva in his various forms.

12. Varāha Purāṇa

A considerable portion of this Purāṇa is devoted to descriptions of various tīrthas or places of Vaiṣṇava pilgrimage. The description of Madhura is replete with various particulars concerning the shrines of that city, constituting the Madhura Māhātmya.
13. Skanda Purāṇa

All scholars agree that the Skanda Purāṇa does not exist as a complete work, and that only fragments in the form of Samhitās, Khaṇḍas and Māhāmyas found in various parts of the country constitutes portions of this Purāṇa. The most celebrated of these is the Kāśi Khaṇḍa (in 15,000 stanzas), which gives a detailed description of the temples of Śiva in or adjacent to Vāraṇāśī. The story of Agastya probably presents in the form of a legend, an account of the propagation of Hinduism in South India. The Utkala Khaṇḍa similarly highlights the holiness of Orissa and Puruṣottamakṣetra or Jagannātha, and Bhuvaneśwara. Other khandas, e.g., Brahmottara Khaṇḍa, Reva Khaṇḍa, Himavat Khaṇḍa, etc. emphasize the sanctity of local temples or group of temples in certain regions.
This Purāṇa contains, like Mārkaṇḍeya, Brahma, Matsya and Vāyu; the longest lists of countries and people of India.

14. Vāmana Purāṇa

Besides giving the usual description of the creation of the universe, this Purāṇa explains the sanctity of certain regions particularly the Kedāreswara and Badarikāśrama in the Himalayas and the Holiness of Sthānutirtha, i.e., pools at Tāneswara and Kurukṣetra between the Yamuna and the Sutlej.

The geographical section of the Purāṇa follows the same pattern and contains lists of Janapadas and other features similar to those given in the Matsya, Vayu, Mārkaṇḍeya and Brahmanda Purāṇas. The Vāmana Purāṇa however shows a tendency to present the descriptions of features and people independently. It also furnishes further information, for
instance about the Turuškas and Andhras, which is not found in any other Purāṇas except the Garuda.

15. Kurma Purāṇa

The list of Janapadas follows the shorter version of the Viṣṇu Purāṇa but contains a fuller list of rivers after vāyu. This Purāṇa does not probably date back to a time earlier than that of Alberuni (c.1030 A.D.).

16. Matsya Purāṇa

After the usual dialogue between Sūta and the Ṛṣis, this Purāṇa opens with an account of the Matsya or the 'fish avatāra' of Viṣṇu in which he preserves a king named Satyavrata. Manu as well as the seeds of all things in a boat from the waters of that inundation which in the season of a pralaya over spreads the world. The contents of this Purāṇa
much material found also in works like the Mahābhārata, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Padma Purāṇa.

17. Garuda Purāṇa

It contains a brief account of the creation, but a greater part of it is occupied with the descriptions of vratas or religious observances, holy days, of sacred places dedicated to the Sun, etc. It also contains treatises on Astrology, Palmistry and precious stones and medicine (Preta Kalpa). The Purāṇa exhibits considerable freedom in its geographical section and, along with the Vāmana Purāṇa, adds further details to those contained in the Mārkandeya, the Vāyu and the Matsya. This appears to be one of the latest Purāṇas in point of time.
18. Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa

This Purāṇa, like the Skanda, is not available as such but is in the form of Khandas and Māhātmyas derived from it. The facility with which any tract may be attributed to the non-existent original, and the advantage that has been taken of its absence to compile a variety of unauthorized fragments, have given to the Brahmāṇḍa. Skanda and Padma Purāṇās a doubtful character. The geographical section of this Purāṇa appears to be a late copy (about 1030 A.D.) of Vayu with slight alterations and modifications introduced by the copyists.
CHAPTER II

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