Chapter - III

Purāṇas : Their Classification and Contents

i) Introduction :

The Purāṇas occupy a unique position in Hindu literature. As a class of literature, the Purāṇas deal with Ancient Indian religion, philosophy, history, geography, sociology, politics; and they supply the material for the study of various branches of knowledge and ancient wisdom. In other words one may describe the purāṇa as a class of literature which deals with the myths of gods, asuras, sages and kings of ancient times, contains abstracts of works in arts, sciences, medicine, grammar, dramaturgy, music astrology and other subjects, affords insight into different phases and aspects of Hinduism – its mythology, idol worship, theism, pantheism, love of god etc. In brief purāṇas constitute a popular encyclopedia of ancient and medieval Hinduism in its traits.

The Purāṇas are the vast literature computed at four lacks of ślokas respecting for Vedic authority to restate the ideals of ancient Indian culture.¹

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¹ Naradiya Purāṇa : 1.9.100

Veda pratiṣṭhāta śabdi pūrami nātraṁ sāṅgalya | Ibid., II.24.17

Ved vasisvatam aṁyeva purāṇaṁ hīṁsotama | Skanda Purāṇa Prabhasa khaṇḍa, II.90.
So far as the Purāṇas are concerned, they have been regarded as the fifth Veda. In the performance of the Mahābhūta-Ghata-Mahādāna, it is first said that 'Five + Vedas have to be put inside the golden jar at the time of the Mahādāna, and then it is quietly stated that the fifth Veda was the Purāṇa. This belief in the high scriptural authority of the Purāṇas had several implications, the most important of which was about the nature of these texts and about their authorship. All the Purāṇas are the nature of a Saṃhitā and author of all of them is Vedavyāsa. A key to this two-fold phenomenon lies in the technique of Vedic texts. The original Purāṇa Saṃhitā which developed as a special branch of study under the great teachers, Parāśarya Bādarāyaṇa Vyāsa was given the rank of Saṃhitā and derived its name from the founder teacher of that particular charaṇa who was Vedavyāsa.

Purāṇa-vidya had come into existence in the Vedic period itself as shown by the reference to Itihāsa, Purāṇa in the Vṛtya Sūkta of the Atharva Veda and by the subsequent references in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad and other places. The nucleus of Purāṇic tradition was gradually developing and this field of knowledge was being cultivated in several other branches. By the turn of the millennium, when the Bhāgavata movement; centring round Viśṇu gained new movement, need was felt for special class of literature which should become the focus of both Veda and Loukika, that is, a reconciled presentation of the older tradition with the new institutional developments in society. The Purāṇa was found to be the most convenient vehicle of this movement for more reasons than one. The first advantage was that
of language which was reinforced by all, the force of the classical Sanskrit speech. The second point was that the Purāṇas were not a closed literature like the Vedas or Upaniṣads which had completed their cycle. The elastic nature of the Purāṇic texts as reconstituted almost at every new turn of a cultural cycle, is unparalleled in the history of world literature. The enthusiasm and the inspiration, with which the compilation of the Purāṇas undertaken, were recurrent facts of a resurgent religious movement being renovated from age to age. These Purāṇas have preserved a wonderful record of these changes. Before identifying these elements in the Purāṇas, it is legitimate to understand the very nature and scope of the Purāṇas; for, the details thereof follow in forthcoming pages.

ii) The meaning of the word “Purāṇa”:

The word Purāṇa connotes simply an old narrative, or the record of old events. Ancient writers derived the term “Purāṇa” as i. पुरा भवम्, ii. पुरा नीवते, iii. पुरा अन्ति. The Vāyu Purāṇa derives the word from पुरा and the root अण् and gives the meaning of the word as ‘that which breathed in old times.’\(^1\) The word पुराणम् is formed by the addition of ‘त्यु’ termination to the indeclinable पुरा according to Pāṇini.\(^2\) He has used this word in his aphorisms more than once. Bhānuji Diksita, son of the famous grammarian Bhattoji Diksita,
has derived it from ‘Pura’ an indeclinable, with the suffix ‘yu’ (tyu) which as a rule is changed into ‘anā’. Both the word and its affix (purāṇa) are combined euphonically and becomes ‘Purāṇa’. The rule demands it to be ‘Puratana’, but since even Pāṇini has used it, it is taken to be correct by the traditional usage (nipatana). Bhānuji has offered another derivation, Pura+anā (to record) + ac = puranā which means a composition recording (events of past and future).

Yāksa has interpreted “Purāṇam” as ‘Pura navam’ i.e. new in ages gone by. It is an instance where the final letter is dropped. Hence instead of “Pura navam”, we get Purāṇa.

The etymological explanation of the term “Purāṇa” given by Yāska is पुरा नवं भवति, that through which the old becomes new again. In a sense, Purāṇa is old but retains the spirit of newness by emphasizing the essential oneness of all men irrespective of their caste and creed, a sentiment which is modern in every age. The use of the term “Purāṇa” in the sense of a religious book, dates back to the days of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, wherein Purāṇa is declared to be the fifth Veda. The word “Purāṇa” in the appears to have been

3. साधृः प्राप्ते प्रगैतिक्यवेयतः पुरूषाली तुष च।
   Ibid., IV.3.23.

4. पुराण प्रौतेन ब्रह्माण कल्पयु।
   Ibid., IV.3.105.
   इति सूत्वयोगीतनातु तु सम्बन्धः।
   अगमगो - 1.6.5. दीनानां भानुः चिकित्व|.

5. पुराण अग्नि इति पुराणम्। अण्णव शाब्दः।
   Ibid.,
mentioned first in the *Asvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* (4.6). The mention of the word *Purāṇa* in the *Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra* shows that the *Purāṇas* in the sutra period, discussed *Dharma sūtra* topics and also told stories of kings and their kingdoms. *Smṛtis* like the *Manuṣmṛti* and the *Yājñavalkya – Smṛti* refer to the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas* together. The author of the *Mahābhārata* in the *Svargārohaṇa parva*, equates the fruit of listening to the *Mahābhārata* with that of listening to the eighteen *Purāṇas*. Taking into consideration that the *Mahābhārata* text, consisting of one lakh verses, had already been composed in the fourth century B.C as is vouched for by inscriptions, one can safely assume that some *Purāṇas* must have been written by that time. A well known definition of the *Purāṇas* was given by *Amarasiṃha* of 5th century A.D, mentioning primary, *Sarga*, *Pratisarga*, *Vaṃśa*, *Manvantaras* and *Vamśānucharita* as the five topics discussed in the *Purāṇas*. It must be remembered that this definition does not cover the subjects of many extant *Purāṇas*.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* explains the word in a similar way. It is said that the *Purāṇa* is so called because it expresses ideas with regard to ancient times, and adds that one who knows this exegesis is absolved of all sins.

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6. यस्य वेदश पुराणानि विचिपापिबदनिधवा।
   *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* IV.189.

7. पुरा नवं भवतीति पुराणम् (निष्कल 3.9)

8. यस्मात् पुरा द्रोमृहृदेत्त गुरुषं तेन तत् स्मृतम्
   निष्कलमस्य यो वेद सर्वपाणि प्रमुखते।
   (भ्रान्त पुराणम् पूर्वभागोऽ, प्रक्रिया पादः - I.173)
The *Atharva Veda* which contains the earliest mention of the word ‘*Purāṇa*’, says that the *ṛc* (verses), the *sāmans* (songs), the metres and the *Purāṇa*, originated from the residue (*uchhista*) of the sacrifice together with the *Yajus* (Sacrificial formulae). Though references in the *Atharvaveda* signify that the *Purāṇas* had assumed some independent form of composition, but it is not definite that the *Purāṇas* meant actual books at the time of the *Atharvaveda*.\(^9\) The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* shows that a definite work has intended by the term. It is in the *sūtras*, however that we find reference to the existence of real *Purāṇas*\(^10\).

On the other hand the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* ascribes the origin of the four Vedas, *Itiḥāsa* *Purāṇa* etc. The *Atharvaveda*, the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Upaniṣads* clearly state that the *Purāṇas* had attained a status of sacredness like the *Vedas* and were closely associated with *Itiḥāsa* even in the vedic times. Though the word “*Purāṇa*” was applied to a type of literature in the later days, the word ‘*Purāṇa*’ occurs in the *Ṛgveda* where it means ‘old’.

As a matter of fact, in some of the works of the Vedic and the early Buddhist literature, the *Purāṇa* has been called the fifth Veda. The way in which the *Purāṇa* has been connected with sacrifice as

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9. क्रच्छ सामानि छन्दासि पुराणेष वज्रय यह ।
उच्चिष्टनिमिति तेन दिनि देया दिनि विद्यते ॥
*Atharva-veda* XI.7.24.

10. स होवन्त अन्वये भगवोद्धिर्मि गयुरेंद्रे सामवेदावर्गनम् ।
चन्द्रस्मितिहासपुराणं पञ्चमं वेदानां वैदिकतिः ।
*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* VII.1.2.
well as with the Yajus in the Atharvaveda, the theory of the origin of the universe from sacrifice as expounded in the Puruṣa-sūkta of the Rgveda and the topics constituting the ‘Pārīplava ākhyānas’ or recurring narration in the Asvamedha sacrifice, tend to indicate that the Purāṇa, as a branch of learning, had its beginning in the Vedic period and originated in the narrative portion (Ākhyāna bhaga) of the Vedic sacrifice, which in the Brāhmaṇas, is repeatedly identified with the god “Prajāpati”. In the extant Purāṇas, there is a verse which tells us that at the beginning of creation, Brahma had remembered the Purāṇa first of all the scriptures, before the Vedas. This statement, however absurd it may appear to be, will have validity, if we take the word ‘Purāṇa’ to mean not the Purāṇa literature, but ‘ancient stories' and legends, which in every country came into being much earlier than versified compositions".11

iii) Rise of the Mahāpurāṇas:

Although it is not known to us that this original Purāṇic heritage began to give rise to different Purāṇa Samhitās, it can hardly be denied that more than one Purāṇa had come into existence long before the beginning of the Christian era. In the law books of Manu and Yāñjnavalkya and in the Taittiriya Āraṇyaka the word Purāṇa has been used in the plural number. The Mahābhārata speaks of Purāṇa proclaimed by Vāyu and the Āpastamba-dharma-sutra

cites three passages from an unspecified *Purāṇa* and one passage from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*. The self-contradicting title *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* (lit. *Purāṇa* on future ages) given to a distinct work of the *Purāṇa* literature, indicates that in Āpastambha’s time, the term ‘*Purāṇa*’ had become so thoroughly specialized as to have lost its proper meaning and had become merely the designation of a particular class of books.

It would have required the existence of a number of *Purāṇas* and manifestly they must have had their own special names to distinguish from one another, and so, convert their common title *Purāṇa* into a class of designation. Thus, we can reasonably hold that the number of the *Purāṇas* began to be multiplied long before the time of the Āpastamba, who is dated between 600 and 300 B.C.

It is not known how many *Purāṇas* were already there in Āpastamba’s time and how they went on growing in number; but we find a tradition, recorded in almost all the extant *Purāṇas* and other works, that the *Purāṇas* rather *Mahāpurāṇas* are eighteen in number. The names of these eighteen *Purāṇas* as given in the different *Purānic* works, are the same as those of the works now extant under the general title *Mahapurāṇa*. The order in which these works have been enumerated in the majority of the lists, is as follows: *Brahma, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Bhāgavata, Nārādiya, Mārkandeya, Agni, Bhaviṣya, Brahmavaivarta, Liṅga, Varāha, Skanda, Vāmana, Kūrma, Matsya, Garuḍa and Brahmāṇḍa*. There are of course, a few *Purānic* works which, in their respective lists, replace the name of Vāyu *Purāṇa* with that of the Śiva *Purāṇa*. Similarly *Devi Bhāgavata* is also called
Mahā Purāṇa replacing Bhāgavata Purāṇa; but the latter is a much later work and yet is Mahāpurāṇa.

The existence of more Purāṇas than one in Āpastambha’s time or earlier does not, however mean that the above tradition of eighteen principal Purāṇas came into vogue at such an early period. As a matter of fact, this tradition can scarcely be dated earlier than the third century A.D. There is, of course, a mention of ‘eighteen Purāṇas’ in the Mahābhārata and the Harivamśa but the passages referred to, are in all probability of later additions. Chapter IV of the Vāyu Purāṇa which contains some what peculiar list of eighteen Purāṇas, is undoubtedly an interpolation; and the list occurring in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa are of extremely doubtful authenticity. However, from the evidence of the Purāṇas, Matsya Kūrma and others, and other Sanskrit works, we can be sure that the tradition originated not later than the beginning of the third century A.D. So it can be said that by the end of the sixth century AD at the latest, the number of the Purāṇas had already been eighteen and this number was regarded as a sacred one, by the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

iv) The date of the Purāṇas:

The Kernel of the Purāṇas is very ancient and the Purāṇa Saṃhitā of VedaVyāsa might have contained it in its pure, original form. Thereafter, his pupils elaborated the manual in several volumes; but the process did not stop there. It was necessary to bring the contents especially the genealogical portions thereof, up-to-date. Hence, additions were made in it from time to time.
The *Markandeya Purāṇa* seems to have been related for the first time, in the age of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. The five Pāṇḍavas marrying Draupadi was then burning topic of the day in as much as it was a deviation from a particular pattern prevalent in the society. It was, therefore, but natural that while some criticized it, others reasoned out in its favour. The *Purāṇa* opens with a dialogue between Jaimini and the winged beings about the propriety of the five princes marrying one princess. The winged beings defended the action of the Pāṇḍavas. We find a series of a metaphysical teachings in that dialogue. In one place the speaker refers to the Viṣṇu’s three Avatāras; Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, and Vāmana, and adds “it is impossible to enumerate all the Avatāras of the Deity; but the present one is that which belongs to Mathurā.¹² This is an un-ambiguous indication that the winged beings are pointing to Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was born in Mathurā. And this prompts us to consider that at least this portion of the *Purāṇa* was related to the age of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

From the Parāśara’s instruction to Maitreyā, it is known that Parīkṣitā ruled over the country when the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was first related.¹³ Since Parīkṣitā was a successor of Yudhiṣṭhira, a book composed in his time, enjoys the great antiquity. But a mention made

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¹². वामनादीत्येवायानां न संबद्धतमिहरेतस्तहे
अवतारावेच तस्यह मायुरः सम्यत् लयम् ∥
*Mārkaṇḍeeya Purāṇa*, IV.58.

¹³. योज्य साम्यतमभवनीपतिः परिविष्ठः ∥
*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 4.21.2.
in that book about genealogies coming down to Maurya, Sūrīga, Kaṇva and Andhra etc.\textsuperscript{14} indicates their continuous later additions to the older ones.

The contents of the \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇa} were first related by Śukadeva to Parikṣita. This happened thirty years after Śrī Kṛṣṇa's leaving for Vaikuntha.\textsuperscript{15} Parikṣita's listening to the seven-day discourse was an epoch making event in the devotional history and it gained popularity.

It was then repeated after one hundred and seventy years when Gokarna related the seven-day discourse to Dhundhukari.\textsuperscript{16} Again, Sanatkumāra and his brothers repeated the same to another audience after about another century.\textsuperscript{17} If this tradition recorded in the \textit{Padma Purāṇa} is respected, it is very probable that the \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇa} got its present shape between the recitals by Śukadeva and Gokarna. In other words the \textit{Bhāgavata Purāṇa} came into being near about the Kali era 200. However, the description of

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 4.24.32.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 4.24.37.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 99.
dynasties, that of Maurya for an instance, make the scholars opine that much matter was appended to the original one later on.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* enjoys the same antiquity. In the fifteenth chapter of this *Purāṇa*, Śūta speaks to sages: 'The son of Subhadra and Arjuna was Abhimanyu; Abhimanyu's son was Parīkṣita; Parīkṣita's son was Janamejaya; his son was Śātanika who got through Aśvamedhadatta a successor, Adhisimhakrisna, in whose reign you have convened this long religious conference for three years at Puṣkara and for two years at Drśadvati in Kurukṣetra. This shows that the *Matsya Purāṇa* too was in existence, in its original shape during the reign of Adisimha Kṛṣṇa. But like other *Purāṇas*, the present volume of the *Matsya Purāṇa* contains genealogies of rulers even of very late date. Therein we find for instance, a mention of Andhra kings which is a clear indication for the fact that older genealogical lists were supplemented by newer ones from time to time.

18. नव नन्दन दिनेः कालित्व प्रत्यायुद्धार्यति तेवामथायेजगतीं मीयं भोदवति वै कली।

*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* - 12.1.12.

19. सुभद्राया रथी पार्यविभिमनुचिनायतः
अभिमन्योः परीशिवुत्तु पुजः पर-पुरुषथः
ज्ञमेनवस परीशिवतु पुजः परस्मार्थं
ज्ञानेश्वराचार्यस्ततत्रभवो भवेश्वरान्
ज्ञेयःदिशितःक्रुणाश्च सान्त्रं भो महायथा
तस्य शास्ति राज्ये तु सुमाभिबिरिताभितम्
दुरायं दीर्घंस्त्रैवभीति वर्षाणि पुरके
वर्षाणि कुर्षेव वर्षाणि दिनोतमः


20. एकोनविशालिति आन्नाः भोदवति वेमहीस्मो

Similarly, the *Vāyu Purāṇa* is also said to have been first related in the reign of Adhisimha Kṛṣṇa. The *Āpastambha Dharma Sūtra* quotes two verses from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*. They mean to say that eighty-eight thousand sages, desirous of progeny, trod on the way lying south to Āryamān (*Daksināyana*), were of the same number of sages who did not beget children chose the route lying north to Āryamān (*Uttarāyana*). The quotation of the Purānic verses by Dharma – Sūtra indicates two things:

(a) That the *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa* existed before the composition of Dharma Sūtra and (b) that the *Purāṇa* was held in high esteem in matters related to *Dharma*. The verses referred to above are found with little variations in the *Matsya Purāṇa* and also in the *Brahmāṇda Purāṇa*.

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21. असीमाक्षण विकाले राजनेवित्तमलिपि प्रशासतीमां धमेण भूमिभुमिभ - सतमे ।

Vāyu Purāṇa - I.10.

22. आभूतसंप्लवारे पुनः सर्ग भवस्तीति भविष्यतुरागे अदालोति सहव्याणि यो प्रजामीपिर ज्यया दलिणेनार्यमां पंथाः तें स्माराणाति भेजिरे ॥

अदालोतिसहव्याणि ये प्रजां नेपिर ज्यया
उसरेणार्यमां पंथां तेंभूततवं हि कल्याते ॥

Āpastamba Dharma-sutra II.24. 5-6.

23. अदालोति सहव्याणि श्रीवीणां गृह-मेधिनाम् ।

इत्येद् कारणः सिद्धः स्माराणाति भेजिरे ॥

अदालोति सहव्याणि नेत्रमयुधितसाम
इत्येद् कारणः दुःसाधासुतुलवं हि भेजिरे ॥

Matsya Purāṇa - 123. 101-108.

24. अदालोति सहव्याणि श्रीवीणां गृहमेधिनाम्

किययतं प्रसंस्कृताः ये स्माराणाति भेजिरे ॥

अदालोति सहव्याणि श्रीवीणामुधितसाम ॥

आभूतसंप्रत्याणमुतवं विभागते ।

The extant Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa had undergone many changes by many hands probably due to the keen desire of the people in charge thereof to make it popular and to bring it up-to-date by adding fresh material.

What has been said above, about the references in the Mārkandeya Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, Vāyu Purāṇa and the Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa, make us opine that the Purāṇas present us a mixture of old and new material. This is the characteristic of the rest of the Purāṇas too. While some Purāṇas have kept their original and ancient character to a larger extent; others, especially those which emphasize sectarianism, seem to have lost much of it. The older nuclear is of course there in all the extant volumes of the Purāṇas; but fresh matter has also abundantly accreted around it. The Purāṇas in their present shape, thus constitute a work of various periods in succession. Herein lies the consensus of opinion of the scholars. The Purāṇas had been in formation from the time of Parīkṣita down to the Gupta period, when they probably assumed their final redaction, except, the Bhaviṣyat Purāṇa which continued to grow even much later.

Authorship:

The Purāṇas are generally ascribed to Vyāsa (aṣṭādaśa purāṇam Kṛtra Satyaratisutaḥ), but other traditions are also found in the Purāṇas themselves. According to Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Parāśara obtained the boon of becoming the author of the Purāṇa (Purāṇa samhitākarta).
According to the *Deviśhāgāvata*, the *Saura Purāṇa* was said by Parāśara (*Parāśarapūrṇam*). According to another tradition, Ārkaṇḍeśya and the *Varāha Purāṇas* were composed by Markandeya, the *Agni* by Aṅgira, the *Liṅga* and *Brahmānda* by Daṇḍin and the *Bhaviṣya* by Mahādeva. According to some other traditions, Vāyu, Brahmānda and Viṣṇu were composed by Vyāsa. He entrusted the *Purāṇa Samhitā* to Sūta whose three disciples Kaśyapa, Sāvarṇi and Vaṁśapāyana prepared three new *Purāṇa Samhitās*. All these four samhitās had four thousand verses each. The personality of Sūta is somewhat an enigma in the *Purāṇas* and the *Mahābhārata*. The word Sūta means 'charioteer', and also a person of mixed *pratiloma* caste born of the union of Brāhmaṇa female with a Kṣatriya male. The later authors of the *Purāṇas* obviously could not believe that the great sages like Śaunaka learnt the *Purāṇas* from a person of low caste. "They therefore invented the story of his divine character."

Despite any amount of efforts that were made by the modern scholars to trace the date of *Purāṇas*, it has left no unanimous opinion or conclusion to date the *Purāṇas*. Because, the basis on which the scholars assume the period of the authorship of *Purāṇas*, is itself not sound. The language and style of various *Purāṇas* differ from one another, yet they are inaccessible to the scholars to assign any proper date. In this manner scholars' opinions render fruitless.

On the other hand if the traditional view regarding the origin of the *Purāṇas* is accepted, there would be no confusion. It means, according to the traditional view, all the *Purāṇas* are intended to
explain the import of the Vedas. Therefore they are changed by the changes in words, sequence etc. in the subject matter, at the commencement of each creation. In this sense, the Purāṇas have been regarded as non-eternal; yet they stand on par with the Vedic texts which are however regarded as non-human compositions. All the Purāṇas have been regarded as non-eternal in as much as they have been composed by the munificent Vedavyāsa, yet the import of the Purāṇas would be the same as in the previous creation. As such, the validity of the Purāṇas is in no way inferior to that of the Vedas, because both the Vedas and the Purāṇas have the same purport of showing the supremacy of the Supreme Brahman. This idea is substantiated by a statement: “उत्तिस्तपुराणाय वेदार्थमुपवृत्तवेदः”.

The Chāndogya text assigns the fifth rank to the Purāṇas after four Vedas, and celebrates them with the equal status of the Vedas.25

Thus the Chāndogya text testifies to the fact that the Purāṇas have been regarded as holy and valid as the vedic texts. In the light of the vedic texts the Purāṇas are considered to be practical amplifications of the normative prescriptions of social and individual conduct. Therefore it seems Vedavyāsa took up the task of preserving the Purāṇa tradition and entrusted it to one sect of his disciples. And,

25. ऋषीं भगवोःश्रीमि चन्दर्भं
   सामवेदमान्यवं चतुर्यंगितहस्पुरां
   पवित्रं वेदां तैः पितरं राजा देव निधि
   वस्त्रोवयुमेकां वेदविन्यां भ्राज्यविन्यां
   नश्वरं सत्तवं विद्यविचारं विद्वानिः
   – Chandogyopaniṣad - VII.1.2.
it is for this reason, the ancient Indian Society looks upon the Purānic tradition as inextricably connected with the Vedic and Smṛti literature. And, at the same time they all form an integrated whole, popularly known as the ‘Sanātana dharma’ which is declared as ‘Śruti-Smrti-Purāṇokta’; thus the traditional view of validity of Purānic texts is unambiguous, and hence unquestionable. Therefore traditional view may be regarded as more convincing than that of the modern.

v) Classification of the Purāṇas:

Indian tradition assigns some kind of holyness to the number eighteen. The eighth chapter of the Śatapatha Brāhmana speaks of the evolution of seventeen kinds of worlds from Prajāpati. Together with Prajāpati one arrives at the number eighteen. The year consists of twelve months and five seasons, amounting to that same number by adding the year (Saṃvatsara) to it. The Mahābhārata has eighteen sections. The Gītā consists of eighteen chapters. No wonder that the Purāṇas as well as the Upa-Purāṇas are also said to be eighteen in number. A verse in the Devī Bhāgavata clearly suggests the names of these eighteen purāṇas: मदयं मदयं ब्रजयम् वचनुवयम् | अनापतिनिलक्ष्मानि पुराणानि प्रस्थक्क प्रस्थक्क ||

The term ma-dvayam suggests Matsya and Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas; bha-dvayam refers to Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa; bra-trayam indicates Brahma Purāṇa, Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa and Brāhmaṇḍa Purāṇa and the expression of Vācatusṭayam is intended to refer to the Vāyu Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Vāmana Purāṇa and Varāha Purāṇa. The term a-nā-pa-liṅga, ga-ku-skāni includes Agni Purāṇa,
Nārada Purāṇa, Padma Purāṇa, Liṅga Purāṇa, Garuḍa Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa and Skanda Purāṇa.

Besides, the Purāṇas are divided into two classes: i) Mahāpurāṇa and ii) Upa-Purāṇa. Each class consists of eighteen Purāṇas. Totally they are thirty six in number.

The Mahā Purāṇas have further been sub-divided into three categories, according to their preferential treatment to Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā. The Purāṇas glorifying Viṣṇu are styled as Sāttvika, those glorifying Brahmā as Rājasa, and those glorifying Agni and Śiva as Tāmasa. According to this description the eighteen Mahāpurāṇas may be classified into Sāttvika, Rājasa and Tāmasa as Under:

**Sāttvika :** Viṣṇu, Nārādiya, Bhāgavata, Garuḍa, Padma and Varāha.

**Rājasa :** Brahamāṇḍa, Brahavaitvarta, Mārkaṇḍeya, Brahma, Vāmana and Bhaviṣya

**Tāmasa :** Matsya, Kūrma, Liṅga, Śiva, Agni and Skanda

In the list of Tāmasa Purāṇas, the Garuḍa Purāṇa mentions Āditya Purāṇa instead of Nārādiya. The Skanda Purāṇa enumerates

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26. सात्त्विके पुराणं महात्मयमित्वं हरेः ।  
राजसेषु च महात्मयः ब्रह्माणि विदुः ॥  
तदंदेवच महात्म्यं तामसेषु शिवस्य च ।  
संडकर्नेषु सारस्वातः चितरुणं । निग्रहते ॥  
Matsya Purāṇa 53. 68-69.

27. Garuḍa Purāṇa III.1.55.
ten *Purāṇas* as describing the greatness of Śiva, four of Brahma and two each of Devī and Hari.\(^{28}\)

The *Purāṇas* are not unanimous on this division. For instance, among the *Sāttvika Purāṇas*, the *Padma Purāṇa*\(^ {29}\) omits Matsya, Kūrma and Vāyu which are replaced by Nārada, Padma and Varāha, retains only the Bhāgavata, Viṣṇu and Garuḍa of the Garuḍa list. Among the Rājasa Purāṇas, the Padma Purāṇa retains only the Vāmanā Purāṇa, but leaves out Skanda, Padma, Varāha and Agni from the Rājasa list which are replaced by Brahmāṇḍa, Brahma, Brahmavaivarta, Märkaṇḍeya and Bhaviṣya. Among the Tamasa Purāṇas, Padma retains only the Liṅga Purāṇa but omits Brahmāṇḍa, Brahmavaivarta, Brahma Märkaṇḍeya and Āditya of the Garuḍa list. Instead, it includes Matsya, Kūrma, Śiva, Skanda, Agni. Thus, we find that there is confusion in this kind of classification which becomes more complicated by the statement of *Skanda Purāṇa* which assigns ten *Purāṇas* to Śiva, four to Brahma, two each to Devī and Viṣṇu.

28. अष्टदशपुरुषोऽयो दर्मचिन्तिते शिवः ।
चतुर्भिर्महाब्रह्म ब्रह्माद्राघ्नम् देवी तथा हरि ॥
"Skanda Purāṇa Kedarakhanda, 1."

29. मात्यं कौरं तथा लेहूः शैवं स्वां तैवेच च ।
अन्यं च यज्ञाविषयं तामसानि निबोध मे ॥
"Padma Purāṇa Uttarakhanda 263, 81-84."
vi) Gist of the Purāṇas

Padma Purāṇa:

Padma Purāṇa belongs to Vaishnava group. This Purāṇa consists of five Khaṇḍas: Srṣṭi, Bhūmi, Svarga, Pātāla and Uttara. The Bhūmi Khaṇḍa contains the geography of the earth. The Pātāla Khaṇḍa contains three groups of chapters composed at different times, the first group belonging to the Ramaite sect, the second to the Vaishnavas and third to the Liṅga worshippers. And also deals with the description of the subterranean regions, the legends of the kings of solar dynasty. The Svarga Khaṇḍa contains accounts of the different regions, stories of kings and demons and has utilized the Abhijñāna Śākuntala and the Rāghuvamśa of Kālidāsa. The Srṣṭi Khaṇḍa can be divided into two parts it contains almost the chapters of Matsya and Viṣṇu Purāṇa. The date of this purāṇa may be between 750 to 950 A.D.

Garuḍa Purāṇa:

The Garuḍa Purāṇa deals with the dynasties of Kosala, Kāśi and Vaiśāli. This Purāṇa mentions Bṛhadṛathas who lived in pre-Bimbasaṁra age. It deals with the genealogies of kings in the Ācāra Khaṇḍa. This Purāṇa follows the Vāyu tradition as regards the solar dynasty, from Vaivasvata Manu onwards and the common tradition regarding the other dynasties. It omits several historical dynasties which the other Purāṇas described.

The Garuḍa Purāṇa is ranked among the Vaishnava Purāṇas for it glorifies Viṣṇu by his various names and in his various forms.
In this respect it follows the Pañcarātra school of Vaiṣṇava sampradāya which eulogizes Viṣṇu frequently by his names Hari, Nārāyaṇa. It deals with the Viṣṇubhakti. In the chapters on grammar, it gives the references to Pāṇini. The grammatical chapters of Kātyāyana in the Garuḍa Purāṇa were most probably composed in the third century A.D subjectively, the Garuḍa Purāṇa is of an encyclopedic nature.

**Nārādiya Purāṇa:**

The Nārādiya Purāṇa a Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa, consists of two parts of which, the first incorporates the entire Brāhṇa-Nārādiya Purāṇa, which was composed by the Vaiṣṇavas about the middle of the ninth century A.D. The remaining chapters of the first part are comparatively late additions, some of them contained detail information regarding the contents of the eighteen principal purāṇas. The second part though attached to the Nārādiya Purāṇa. It is really an independent work, differing in general character from the first forty one chapters of the first part and some times appearing in manuscripts as an independent text. The last forty-five chapters of this part bear signs of comparatively late date. An examination of the contents of the present Nārādiya Purāṇa shows that it was first compiled some time about the beginning of the tenth century A.D.

**Viṣṇu Purāṇa:**

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is a work belonging to the Pañcarātras, and purely Vaiṣṇava from beginning to the end. It has retained considerable faithfulness of the character of the unsectarian purāṇas. It is divided
into six parts called Amsas, each of the them consists of many chapters. In the first three sections, it deals with creation, recreation, detailed geography of the earth, and the atmosphere, description of the solar dynasties, accounts of fourteen manvantaras, names of the twenty-eight Vyāsa who lived in different ages and divided the Vedas, rise of the various Vedic schools, duties of the different castes and also contains valuable information regarding the dynasties of Kaliyuga.

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is an early work composed most probably in the last quarter of the third or the first quarter of the fourth century A.D.

**Bhāgavata Purāṇa:**

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa which is the most popular of the extant purānic works, derives special attention not only as a literacy production on account of its language style and metre, but also as a valuable record of the theological and philosophical doctrines of the Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇavas to whom it exclusively belongs. It consists of twelve skandhas, and each divided into many chapters. It consists of eighteen thousand verses in all. It contains description of the castes and four stages of life, the duties of man, *karma yoga, jñāna yoga, bhakti Yoga*. It represents the highest teaching of Paramahamsa. It clearly states that the knowledge of all system of philosophy. The creation of the Brahmā is then described and the division of time is explained. The sixth skandhas contains a variety of legends of miscellaneous description of Varāha incarnation. The seventh skandha is occupied with the legend of Prahlāda. The eighth deals with the manvantaras. Ninth skandha narrates the dynasties of Vaivasvata Manvantara.
The tenth skanda explains the characteristics of Purāṇa and eleventh describes the destruction of the Yādavas, death of Kṛṣṇa. And twelfth skandha continues the lines of the kings of the Kali age.

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa can be assigned to the 7th century A.D.

**Vāmana Mahā Purāṇa :**

The Vāmana Mahā Purāṇa occupies the fourteenth place in the list of the purāṇas. It is named after Vāmana (The dwarf) incarnation of lord Viṣṇu. It is the only Purāṇa, that gives the detailed and comprehensive account of the Avatāra, where from it obtains its designation along with large number of topics characteristic to the purāṇas. It contains ten thousand verses, consisted of four sāṁhitās, Mahēśvari, Bhagavathi, Gauri and Gaṇeśavari, containing one thousand verses each. The legends stories and episodes in the Vāmana Purāṇa are generally of the same type and nature, as are met with in other purāṇas. In the descriptions of the places of pilgrimage, it gives specially a detailed and exhaustive account of the tīrthas rivers and forests of Kurukṣetra.

As regards the date of the Vāmana Purāṇa, Fifth Century A.D., can be accepted as the upper limit. Because its author has a full impact of Kālidāsa and especially his poem the Kumāra Sambhava.

**Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa :**

The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa is divided into four parts. It gives a detailed description of Sri Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā whose supreme abode
is the Gokula. The first part—Brahma Khaṇḍa presents an account of Nārāyaṇa and Śiva emerging from the right and left sides of Kṛṣṇa and Brahma from his navel. The second part, Prakṛti-khaṇḍa describes the evolution of prakṛti according to the sāṁkhya school of thought, but affirms that it is under the control of Īśvara and his sakti. The third part, Gaṇeṣa-khaṇḍa is devoted to the birth and exploits of Gaṇeṣa. The last part Śrī Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa deals with the life of Kṛṣṇa. The meeting of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā and their union is the theme of a most remarkable and picturesque poetic description in this part.

Brahmanḍa Purāṇa:

The Brahmanḍa Purāṇa so called because it is dealing with the cosmic egg. (Brahmanḍa), and is virtually the same as the present Vāyu Purāṇa which has been assigned the eighteenth place in almost all the lists of eighteen purāṇas. So it is called ‘Vāyaviya Brahmanḍa’, that it is also like the Vāya Purāṇa.

The Brahmanḍa Purāṇa consists of two parts. First is divided into four parts Prakriya, Anuṣaṅga, Upodghāta and Upasamhāra and the second part deals with the Lalitopākhyāna (the story of Lalitha), is dedicated to the goddess Lalitha, a form of Durgā and teaches her worship by Tantric rites. Most probably it is not earlier than 400 A.D.

Brahma Purāṇa:

The Brahma Purāṇa is entirely a new work and consists mainly of chapters taken from the Mahābhārata, Harivamsa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa,
Märkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and the Vāyu Purāṇa. Those chapters of this work which have not been traced anywhere else, deal chiefly with the praise of the shrines and holy places in Puruṣottama-kṣetra, Konārka, Ekāmra kṣetra and Virāj kṣetra which lie in Orissa and belong respectively to the Vaiṣṇavas, Sauras, Śaivas and the Śaktas. It is probable that the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa owed its origin to those Vaiṣṇavas of Orissa who wanted to popularize Puruṣottama kṣetra as a great Vaiṣṇava holy place.

Märkaṇḍeya Purāṇa:

Ranking seventh in the list of the Mahāpurāṇas, the Märkaṇḍeya Purāṇa is one of the most important, interesting and probably one of the oldest works. It was named after the sage Märkaṇḍeya, who acquired his knowledge from Brahmā, the creator of the universe. It seems to come from an early date and to have been non-sectarian in its origin. This purāṇa consists of nine thousand verses, spread over one hundred and thirty seven chapters. There are three stages in the development of this purāṇa. First stage is represented by the chapters from 43-81 and 93-136. These chapters continue the purāṇa in its original shape. In the second stage, 1-42 chapters were composed. In these chapters, Jaimini is referred by Märkaṇḍeya to the wise birds and, in the third stage long episodically and independent narrative of the actions of the goddesses are described. On the other hand it dealt with the earlier metrical smṛti works and contains a few interesting legends of which special mention may be made of those of king Harischandra, whom Viśvāmitra made to
suffer endless sorrow and humiliation of queen Madālasā who gave instructions on self knowledge to her sons, etc.

Bhaviṣya Purāṇa:

The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is given an important of place among the major purāṇas. The Matsya Purāṇa says, “The Purāṇa in which Brahman described the greatness of the sun, and the existence of the Aghora-Kalpa” that is called the Bhaviṣya Manu. The stories being for the most part the events of a future period.’ Bhaviṣya Purāṇa consists of four parvas. Brahma, Madhyama, Pratisarga, Uttara. The Brahma Parvan contains 215 chapters. It calls itself a Dharmaśāstra in which Śrauta and Smārta Dharmas have been described. The chapters 1-2 treat of the duties of castes and Āśramas and the creation of the world. The Madhyamaparvan deals with the Maṇḍaloddhāra, the construction of the maṇḍalas like Kraunca etc., the gift making, the making of kalasa, dates and time of the rituals pertaining to gods and manes etc. Pratisarga Parvan contains thirty one chapters. It gives an account of birth of the Kauravas, the Yādavas, Pāṇḍavas, etc. It also includes the account of Śālivāhana, and Bhoja’s reign.

The fourth khaṇḍa, pratisarga parvan contains twenty-six chapters dealing with the kings of Agni, Vikrama, Paramāra Tamāra etc. The uttara parvan consists 208 chapters. It is equally with the proceeding a sort of manual of religious offices, the greater portion being appropriated to vṛtatas and remainder to the forms and circumstances in gifts are to be presented.
Matsya Purāṇa:

The Matsya Purāṇa is one of the older purāṇas, dealing with a variety of subjects. It consists of 290 chapters comprising about 10,000 verses in a simple and lucid language. It has been named after the first incarnation of lord Viṣṇu and deals, in detail with the story of that incarnation. Thus, it may be designated as Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa though it abounds in Śaivite and Śakta contents also. There are certain chapters in the Matsya Purāṇa specially dealing with the future dynasties of the Kali age. In some other chapters the genealogies of sages are also narrated and practically treat with the gotras and Pravaras. It also deals with the genealogies of kings of the Solar and Lunar dynasties. It deals with the stories of Yādavas and the descendants of Turvasu, Anu and Puru.

The Kūrma Purāṇa:

It was narrated by Lord Viṣṇu in his incarnation as the tortoise at the time of the churning of the milk ocean by Devas and Asuras, who were in quest of the immortalizing nectar. It starts with discourse on the concept of Māyā as a potent tool in the hands of the supreme beings to work out his scheme of creation. This purāṇa is divided into two parts, Pūrva and Uttara khanda each of which contains good number of chapters on Hindu customs and also it contains several topics, daily duties, establishes and non-establishes, funeral ceremony, impurity due to births and deaths, gifts, holy places, yuga dharma and with nature of Kali age, we have also a detailed description of the vedic traditions. The second part of the
Purāṇa contains metaphysical speculations and the main theme of Advaita. In short this Purāṇa has all that is conventionally expected to be found in a Purāṇa and motive throughout the text is the fundamental unity of Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Agni Purāṇa:

Agni or Āgneya Mahā Purāṇa is accorded eighth place in the list of the Mahā Purāṇas. It is so named because it originated as a composition in praise of Agni, a form of Viṣṇu. Its authorship is attributed to Vyāsa. It is narrated as usual by his disciple Sūta, and was received by him from the sage Vasiṣṭha, to whom it was communicated by Agni. It contains fourteen thousand verses. But Bhāgavata and Matsya Purāṇas speak of Agni Purāṇa consisting fifteen thousand and sixteen thousand verses respectively. The Purāṇa is divided into three hundred and eighty three chapters treating a variety of subjects. The Agni Purāṇa claims to be an epitome of all branches of Knowledge, classified into Para and Apara Vidyās. The fifty topics are discussed in the last chapter of this Purāṇa, viz. ten incarnations of Viṣṇu, summary of the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, Harivamśa, Vaiṣṇavāgama, worship, initiation, consecration of images, the Śaivāgama, iconography, architecture description of the sacred places, astrology Āyurveda, Music, Rājaśāstra, Grammar, Vedānta Philosophy, lexicography etc.

The Agni Purāṇa is a present essence of all branches of knowledge and is an encyclopedia of all that existed; Āgneya hi Purāṇesmin Sarvāḥ Vidyāḥ Pradarsitāḥ.
Skanda Purāṇa:

The Skanda Purāṇa is voluminous work consisting of a very large number of parts. Though like the other Purāṇas, the Skanda Purāṇa also was subjected to additions and alterations more than once.

The Skanda Purāṇa does not contain dynastic list, yet it is an important source of Ancient Indian History and Chronology. It refers to some important remarkable personalities as well as few famous epochs of Indian History. This Purāṇa throws an interesting as well as important light on the history of the south, extending beyond the Vindhyās upto Simhala as is evidenced by the graphic account of southern Indian. It supplies valuable information on the science of Government, variously styled Daṇḍaniti, Rājadharma, Rājaniti, Nitiśāstra, Mantra śāstra etc.

The Skanda Purāṇa is divided into six Samhitās and fifty khanḍas. The division and sub-divisions of this Purāṇa show that the Purāṇa grew up into a huge bulk with addition of parts which could never come from the same hand or belong to the same age.

During the epic and Purānic periods, the Skanda Purāṇa was highly popular and favourite. And Skanda was very favourite deity whom purānic poets regarded not only as a god of war but also a god of wisdom. The fact that a voluminous and important Purāṇa came to be named after him indirectly testifies to his immense popularity. In size, Skanda Purāṇa is second only to the Mahābhārata.
The Śiva Mahā Purāṇa is a highly adored Purāṇa and a master peace of encyclopedic interest. It contains stories about the birth of Pārvati, Gaṇeṣa, Skanda and their marriages. It has been amplified from time to time, and most probably it was consolidated in its present form in the eighth century. This Purāṇa is a voluminous work dealing with the Śaiva Philosophy myths and rituals, and contains many of the principal characteristics of a Mahā Purāṇa. It contains seven saṁhitās and it is divided into many chapters. The Introductory chapters give the importance of the Śiva Purāṇa. Also it contains cosmogony and cosmology of the world according to the Shiva mythology. And story of Nārada, his victory, his arrogance on his achievements, his desire to marry a princess etc. are narrated. It deals mainly with the accounts of the battle fought by Śiva against the various asuras. Incarnations of Śiva are described and the installation and importance of twelve Jyotirliṅgas are described. Various Narakas have been described and philosophical aspects of Śaivism are also narrated.

The Upa-Purāṇas:

The long standing tradition, current in all provinces of India, limits the number of the Mahāpurāṇas to eighteen, but the Purāṇa literature certainly extends beyond this traditional number. The class of works designated as Upapurāṇa consists of a large number. As to the origin of the Upa-Purāṇas, the Kūrma Purāṇa (i.1.16), the Skanda Purāṇa (Sūta Saṁhitā), etc. record a tradition that the
sages proclaimed the Upa-purāṇas after listening to the eighteen Purāṇas from Vyāsa.

The Upapurāṇas are also eighteen in number. They may be broadly divided into following groups in accordance with the religious views. They are Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas, Śaṅkta Upapurāṇas, Śaiva Upapurāṇas, Saura Upapurāṇas, Gāṇapatya Upapurāṇas and Non-Sectarian.

**The Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas:**

The most important among the Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas are the Viṣṇudharma, Viṣṇudharmottara, Nārasiṃha, Brhamaradiya and Kriyā-yoga Śāra of which the first four are Pañcarātras works, and the last belongs to the Bhāgavatas. The Viṣṇudharama and the Viṣṇudharmottara were originally known as Śāstras and it was much later than they came to be recognized as Upapurāṇas because of their purānic characters.

The Viṣṇudharma Upapurāṇa which has been mentioned as a Śāstra in the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is a voluminous work dealing mainly with Vaiṣṇava Philosophy and rituals. It contains few chapters on political administration, some on the duties of women and good number of myths and legends.

The Viṣṇudharmottara Upapurāṇa which is the most important and interesting in the whole range of the Upapurāṇa literature, is an extensive and encyclopedic work, not only containing stories, myths and legends but also dealing with the cosmology, cosmogony,
astrology, astronomy, division of time, specification of unfavourable planets and stars, manners, customs rules about devotional vows and funeral ceremonies, law, politics, anatomy, pathology, treatment of diseases of human beings, image making, sculpture painting, architecture and so on. It also contains some of the contents of early works like the Mahābhārata the Bhagavadgītā the Upaniṣads, Smṛti works. It gives us valuable information regarding the various types of works which enriched Sanskrit literature before the time of its composition. It is a matter of great regret that many of the works utilized and referred to in the Viṣṇudarmottara have been lost for ever.

The Nārasiṁha Purāṇa is a work of the Pañcarātras with Bhagavata inclination and is one of the oldest of the extant Upapurāṇas. It glorifies Nṛsiṁha, a form of Viṣṇu and takes him to be identical with Nārāyaṇa. It deals with five characteristic topics and has a few chapters on manners, customs, methods and praise of Nārasiṁha worship. It is familiar with the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, mentions the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Varāha Purāṇa, and utilizes the Vāyu Purāṇa in its story of the birth of twin god, Aśvins.

The Braḥnnaradiya Upapurāṇa which is included only in the lists of Upapurāṇas given in two Purāṇas, the Ekāmra and the Brhadharma. It also is a work of Pañcarātras and describes the Vaiṣṇava festivals and ceremonies illustrated by various legends. Some chapters of it are devoted to the glorification of the Ganges, the duties of the castes and orders, funeral sacrifices and expiation. It is pre-eminently a work on devotion to Viṣṇu.
The Kriyā-Yoga-Sāra which is inclined in the list of Upapurāṇas given in Brahddharma Purāṇa, conceives of Mahāviṣṇu as identical with Parmātman, and recommends the study of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. It advocates Bhakti, lays special stress on Dāsya Bhakti, and describes Kriyā-Yoga, which consists of worship of Gaṅgā, Viṣṇu, donation, devotion to Brāhmaṇas etc. It records valuable information on the state of religion, Buddhism and other non-vedic and anti-vedic religious systems etc. Besides the Vaiṣṇava Upapurāṇas mentioned above, there are few others such as Bhārgava Purāṇa, Dharma Purāṇa, Puruṣottama Purāṇa, Ādi Purāṇa and Kalki Purāṇa.

Sākta Upa-purāṇas :

Among the Upa-purāṇas dealing with Sakti worship the following have come down to us : Devi Purāṇa, Kālikā Purāṇa, Mahā Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Bhagavatī Purāṇa, Caṇḍi Purāṇa and Sati Purāṇa, of these the first four are most important.

The Devīpurāṇa was one of the most important of Sākta Upapurāṇas and deals mainly with the exploits and worship of Devī, though being the primordial and pre-eminent energy. It contains various interesting stories and records important information about the incarnations of Devī, Saivism Vaiṣṇavism, Brahmanism etc.

The Kālikā Purāṇa which is regarded as one of the most authoritative work deals with the exploits and worship of Kali, who is primarily Yoga Nidrā and Māyā of Viṣṇu and narrates many interesting stories. It contains valuable materials for the study of the social, religious and political history. The Mahābhāgavata which is
distinct from the Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa advocates Śaktism with a Śaiva tendency. The Devībhāgavata claims to be the real Bhāgavata Purāṇa and includes the Vaiṣṇavabhāgavata, among the Upapurāṇas. It lays special stress on Bhakti as a means of realizing Devi and takes Snāna to be the same as Bhakti in its highest status. It holds the Vedas in high esteem and decries the Tantras whenever they go against the Vedas.

Śaiva Upapurāṇas:

The Upapurāṇas that belong to the Śiva worshippers are – Śiva Purāṇa, Saura Purāṇa, Śivadharma Purāṇa, Śiva Dharmottara, Śivarahasya, Ekāmra Purāṇa, Parāśara Upapurāṇa, Vasiṣṭha Upapurāṇa and Vikhyāda Purāṇa. The Śiva Purāṇa is a voluminous work dealing with Śaiva Philosophy, myth and rituals and contains very little of the principal characteristics of a Mahā Purāṇa. According to the Bengal tradition as known from the Bengal manuscripts, the Śiva Purāṇa consists of two parts, the first having the same text as that of the Sanat Kumāra Samhitā and the second consisting of thirty six chapters.

The present Saura Purāṇa is a work of the Pāṣupatas. It glorifies Śiva and Pārvatī and shows how the Pāṣupatas tried hard to retain their own position as well as their numerical strength against the spread of Buddhism, Jainism and other heretical systems and especially of Vaiṣṇavism. In three of its chapters, it contains amusing stories denouncing the system of Madhvacārya which was gaining ground to the great disadvantage of the Śiva worshippers.
The Śivadharmottara Purāṇa also belongs to pro-Vedic Pāṣupatas. It consists twelve chapters, in which Skanda speaks to Agastī on the following topics; various duties of Śiva worshippers, imparting of knowledge, making donations to worthy recipients, sins and the suffering of sinners, rebirths, attainment of knowledge of Śiva etc.

The Ekāmra Purāṇa, which is a fairly big work on the praise of Ekārma Kṣetra, in Orissa, calls itself a samhitā of six thousand verses and has Sanat Kumāra as the speaker. It belongs to the Āgamic Pāṣupatas, refers to a Śiva Samhitā, the Āgamas and the Śiva Tantras etc.

The Saura Upapurāṇas:

The Sāmba Purāṇa is a Saura Purāṇa which deals with the reformed cult of the sun by way of narrating the interesting story of Sāmbha's establishing an image of the sum at Sāmbhpura in Mitravana. It contains number of subsidiary stories of interest and
The Ganapatya Upapurāṇas:

The comparatively late origin of the Ganapatya sect must have been responsible for the fact that there is no early Purānic work dealing exclusively with the praise and worship of Gaṇapati. The only two Upapurāṇas belong to this sect, they are – Mudgala Purāṇa and Gaṇeṣa Purāṇa. The Madgala Purāṇa deals with the nine incarnations of Gaṇeṣa; Vakra tūṇḍa, Eka-danta, Mahodara, Gajānana, Lambodara etc. It speaks about the thirty two forms of Gaṇapati. The Gaṇeṣa Purāṇa narrates interesting stories for the glorification of Gaṇeṣa and contains important materials for the study of the sect as well as its deity.

The non-sectarian Upapurāṇas:

The Purānic works of this type are the Bhaviṣyottara and the Brhaddharma Purāṇa. The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa is really a distinct work and independent Upapurāṇa. It deals with five characteristics of Purāṇa festivals donations, sociological and religious ideas. The Brhaddharma Purāṇa is an interesting work. It names the thirty six castes with their respective professions, accounts their origin; it describes many popular rites and festivals and contains valuable materials for the reconstruction of the social and religious history of Bengal.
The Characteristics of the Purāṇa:

The characteristics of the Purāṇas have been mentioned in the famous Sanskrit lexicon Amarakośa, that a Purāṇa is to deal with following five characters:

Sarga: Creation, or evolution of the universe from its natural cause.

Pratisarga: Recreation of the world from its constituent elements, in which it is merged at the close of each aeon-kalpa or a day in the life of Brhama, the creator.

Vamsa: Geneologies of the different deities, demons, patriarchs, sages and kings, especially of the last two.

Manvantara: Cosmic cycles each of which is ruled over by a Manu, the first father of Mankind.

Vamśānucarita: accounts of royal dynasties.30

The root of all these characteristics can be traced to the ākhyāṇas (tales), Upākhyāṇas (anecdotes), gathās (metrical songs or proverbial sayings current in ancient society) and Kalpoktis (Sayings that had come down through ages) which the Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa and Viṣṇu Purāṇas say, they were utilized by the ancient sage Vyāsa in compiling the original Purāṇa Saṁhitā.

30. सर्वक नित्यर्गच्छ वंशो मनवत्तापि च।
   ब्रह्माण्डैवतसिंह च च पुराण पञ्चत्ताम्॥
   Kūrma Purāṇa - I.1.12.
   Varāha Purāṇa - II.4.
   Matsya Purāṇa - 53.65.
The *Pañchalakṣaṇa* definition was intended merely for the *Upapurāṇa*; and the *Mahāpurāṇa* has *Daśalakṣaṇa* (having ten characteristics) definition, which includes some more topics. The ten characteristics according to Bhāgavata Purāṇa31:

*Visarga*: The Creation of individual Souls.

*Vṛtti*: Sustenance of Human life.

*Sarga*: Creation.

*Raksa*: The Protection given by the lord to the people through his avatāras.

*Antara*: Manvantara.

*Vamsa*: Races.

*Vamsāṇucarita*: Description of races.

*Samstha*: Corresponds to the ‘Pratisarga of the five lakṣaṇas’

*Hetu*: The individual soul who with his Karma determines and influences the cosmic creation or deluge.32

*Apāśraya*: This is the epithet of Brahman, the highest reality.

He is beyond Māyā always a witness.33

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The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* mentions the main features of the *Mahāpurāṇas*. Though a number of lakṣaṇas were mentioned, they did not cover-up all the topics of the *Purāṇas*. Newer and newer matters are introduced in the *Purāṇas*, which could not be classified under five or ten Lakṣaṇas. The *Matsya Purāṇa* says that besides the ten characteristics, the *Purāṇas* deal with the glorification of Brahma, Viṣṇu, Sūrya and Rudra, as also with the dissolution and preservation of the world and with dharma (righteous conduct), artha (economic and polity), Kāma (erotic) and mokṣa (emancipation). Ācara – dharmas, some principles of state crafts, glorification of certain Vṛtas and Tirthās, all these are found in almost every *Purāṇa*. So the lakṣaṇas only give a clue to the contents of the *Purāṇas* and do not permeate the entire gamut.

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34. सूर्द्रापापि विषूद्धिच्च स्तितिलोचनाय वालनं ||
 कर्मणां वासनानादात्मकः मौनाचः क्रमेण च ||
 वर्णनं प्रत्ययानाम भोक्तयं च निरुपयम् ||
 उदकीत्तं हरेरेव देववानाम पुष्कर्क्क पुष्कर्क्क च||
 दशाधिकं न्यायं नष्ठं परिकीर्तितम् ||

*Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* 132.35.37.

35. ब्रह्मविषिकमयवर्काणां माहत्मयं पुनःसयं च ||
 सन्धाप्रदानां च पुराणेण पञ्चविके ||
 धर्मविशारदं कामश्च मोहश्च वात्र कीर्तिति ||
 सर्वेष्यं पुराणेन तस्यतः च वल्लभम् ||