

Title

**THE
VISHNU
PURÁNA**

Introduction

*A System of Hindu Mythology and Tradition
Translated from the original Sanscrit
and
illustrated by Notes derived chiefly from other Puranas*

*by
H. H. Wilson*

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About this eBook

THE VISHNU PURANA
Introduction

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PREFACE

The literature of the Hindus has now been cultivated for many years with singular diligence, and in many of its branches with eminent success. There are some departments, however, which are yet but partially and imperfectly investigated; and we are far from being in possession of that knowledge which the authentic writings of the Hindus alone can give us of their religion, mythology, and historical traditions.

From the materials to which we have hitherto had access, it seems probable that there have been three principal forms in which the religion of the Hindus has existed, at as many different periods. The duration of those periods, the circumstances of their succession, and the precise state of the national faith at each season, it is not possible to trace with any approach to accuracy. The premises have been too imperfectly determined to authorize other than conclusions of a general and somewhat vague description, and those remain to be hereafter confirmed or corrected by more extensive and satisfactory research.

The earliest form under which the Hindu religion appears is that taught in the Vedas. The style of the language, and the purport of the composition of those works, as far as we are acquainted with them, indicate a date long anterior to that of any other class of Sanscrit writings. It is yet, however, scarcely safe to advance an opinion of the precise belief or philosophy which they inculcate. To enable us to judge of their tendency, we have only a general sketch of their arrangement and contents, with a few extracts, by Mr. Colebrooke, in the *Asiatic Researches*¹; a few incidental observations by Mr. Ellis, in the same miscellany²; and a translation of the first book of the Sanhita, or collection of the prayers of the Rig-veda, by Dr. Rosen³; and some of the Upanishads, or speculative treatises, attached to, rather than part of, the Vedas, by Rammohun Roy⁴. Of the religion taught in the Vedas, Mr. Colebrooke's opinion will probably be received as that which is best entitled to deference, as certainly no Sanscrit scholar has been equally conversant with the original works. "The real doctrine of the Indian scripture is the unity of the Deity, in whom the universe is comprehended; and the seeming polytheism which it exhibits, offers the elements and the stars and planets as gods. The three principal manifestations of the divinity, with other personified attributes and energies, and most of the other gods of Hindu mythology, are indeed mentioned, or at least indicated, in the Veda. But the worship of deified heroes is no part of the system; nor are the incarnations of deities suggested in any portion of the text which I have yet seen, though such are sometimes hinted at by the commentators⁵." Some of these statements may perhaps require modification; for without a careful examination of all the prayers of the Vedas, it would be hazardous to assert that they contain no indication whatever of hero-worship; and certainly they do appear to allude occasionally to the Avataras, or incarnations, of Vishnu. Still, however, it is true that the prevailing character of the ritual of the Vedas is the worship of the personified elements; of Agni, or fire; Indra, the firmament; Vayu, the air; Varuna, the water; of Aditya, the sun; Soma, the moon; and other elementary and planetary personages. It is also true that the worship of the Vedas is for the most part domestic worship, consisting of

¹ Vol. VIII. p. 369

² Vol. XIV. p. 37

³ Published by the Oriental Translation Fund Committee

⁴ A translation of the principal Upanishads was published under the title of *Oupnekhat, or Theologia Indica*, by Anquetil du Perron: but it was made through the medium of the Persian, and is very [p. iii] incorrect and obscure. A translation of a very different character has been some time in course of preparation by M. Poley

⁵ *As. Res.* vol. VIII. p. 473

prayers and oblations offered - in their own houses, not in temples - by individuals for individual good, and addressed to unreal presences, not to visible types. In a word, the religion of the Vedas was not idolatry.

It is not possible to conjecture when this more simple and primitive form of adoration was succeeded by the worship of images and types, representing Brahma, Vishnu, Śiva, and other imaginary beings, constituting a mythological pantheon of most ample extent; or when Rama and Krishna, who appear to have been originally real and historical characters, were elevated to the dignity of divinities. Image-worship is alluded to by Manu in several passages⁶, but with an intimation that those Brahmans who subsist by ministering in temples are an inferior and degraded class. The story of the Rāmāyan´a and Mahābhārata turns wholly upon the doctrine of incarnations, all the chief dramatis personé of the poems being impersonations of gods and demigods and celestial spirits. The ritual appears to be that of the Vedas, and it may be doubted if any allusion to image-worship occurs; but the doctrine of propitiation by penance and praise prevails throughout, and Vishnu and Śiva are the especial objects of panegyric and invocation. In these two works, then, we trace unequivocal indications of a departure from the elemental worship of the Vedas, and the origin or elaboration of legends, which form the great body of the mythological religion of the Hindus. How far they only improved upon the cosmogony and chronology of their predecessors, or in what degree the traditions of families and dynasties may originate with them, are questions that can only be determined when the Vedas and the two works in question shall have been more thoroughly examined.

The different works known by the name of Purānas are evidently derived from the same religious system as the Rāmāyan´a and Mahābhārata, or from the mytho-heroic stage of Hindu belief. They present, however, peculiarities which designate their belonging to a later period, and to an important modification in the progress of opinion. They repeat the theoretical cosmogony of the two great poems; they expand and systematize the chronological computations; and they give a more definite and connected representation of the mythological fictions, and the historical traditions. But besides these and other particulars, which may be derivable from an old, if not from a primitive era, they offer characteristic peculiarities of a more modern description, in the paramount importance which they assign to individual divinities, in the variety and purport of the rites and observances addressed to them, and in the invention of new legends illustrative of the power and graciousness of those deities, and of the efficacy of implicit devotion to them. Śiva and Vishnu, under one or other form, are almost the sole objects that claim the homage of the Hindus in the Purānas; departing from the domestic and elemental ritual of the Vedas, and exhibiting a sectarian fervour and exclusiveness not traceable in the Rāmāyan´a, and only to a qualified extent in the Mahābhārata. They are no longer authorities for Hindu belief as a whole: they are special guides for separate and sometimes conflicting branches of it, compiled for the evident purpose of promoting the preferential, or in some cases the sole, worship of Vishnu or of Śiva⁷.

That the Purānas always bore the character here given of them, may admit of reasonable doubt; that it correctly applies to them as they now are met with, the following pages will irrefragably substantiate. It is possible, however, that there may have been an earlier class of

⁶ B. III. 152, 164. B. IV. 214

⁷ Besides the three periods marked by the Vedas, Heroic Poems, and Puranas, a fourth may be dated from the influence exercised by the Tantras upon Hindu practice and belief; but we are yet too little acquainted with those works, or their origin, to speculate safely upon their consequences

Puránas, of which those we now have are but the partial and adulterated representatives. The identity of the legends in many of them, and still more the identity of the words - for in several of them long passages are literally the same - is a sufficient proof that in all such cases they must be copied either from some other similar work, or from a common and prior original. It is not unusual also for a fact to be stated upon the authority of an 'old stanza,' which is cited accordingly; shewing the existence of an earlier source of information: and in very many instances legends are alluded to, not told; evincing acquaintance with their prior narration somewhere else. The name itself, Purána, which implies 'old,' indicates the object of the compilation to be the preservation of ancient traditions, a purpose in the present condition of the Puránas very imperfectly fulfilled. Whatever weight may be attached to these considerations, there is no disputing evidence to the like effect afforded by other and unquestionable authority. The description given by Mr. Colebrooke⁸ of the contents of a Purana is taken from Sanscrit writers. The Lexicon of Amara Sinha gives as a synonyme of Purana, Pancha-lakshanam, 'that which has five characteristic topics:' and there is no difference of opinion amongst the scholiasts as to what these are. They are, as Mr. Colebrooke mentions, 1. Primary creation, or cosmogony; 2. Secondary creation, or the destruction and renovation of worlds, including chronology; 3. Genealogy of gods and patriarchs; 4. Reigns of the Manus, or periods called Manwantaras; and 5. History, or such particulars as have been preserved of the princes of the solar and lunar races, and of their descendants to modern times. Such, at any rate, were the constituent and characteristic portions of a Purana in the days of Amara Sinha, fifty-six years before the Christian era; and if the Puranas had undergone no change since his time, such we should expect to find them still. Do they conform to this description? Not exactly in any one instance: to some of them it is utterly inapplicable; to others it only partially applies. There is not one to which it belongs so entirely as to the Vishnu Purana, and it is one of the circumstances which gives to this work a more authentic character than most of its fellows can pretend to. Yet even in this instance we have a book upon the institutes of society and obsequial rites interposed between the Manwantaras and the genealogies of princes, and a life of Krishna separating the latter from an account of the end of the world, besides the insertion of various legends of a manifestly popular and sectarial character. No doubt many of the Puranas, as they now are, correspond with the view which Col. Vans Kennedy takes of their purport. "I cannot discover in them," he remarks, "any other object than that of religious instruction." The description of the earth and of the planetary system, and the lists of royal races which occur in them, he asserts to be "evidently extraneous, and not essential circumstances, as they are entirely omitted in some Puranas, and very concisely illustrated in others; while, on the contrary, in all the Puranas some or other of the leading principles, rites, and observances of the Hindu religion are fully dwelt upon, and illustrated either by suitable legends or by prescribing the ceremonies to be practised, and the prayers and invocations to be employed, in the worship of different deities⁹," Now, however accurate this description may be of the Puranas as they are, it is clear that it does not apply to what they were when they were synonymously designated as Pancha-lakshanas, or 'treatises on five topics;' not one of which five is ever specified by text or comment to be "religious instruction." In the knowledge of Amara Sinha the lists of princes were not extraneous and unessential, and their being now so considered by a writer so well acquainted with the contents of the Puranas as Col. Vans Kennedy is a decisive proof that since the days of the lexicographer they have undergone some material alteration, and that we have not at present the same works in all respects that were current under the denomination of Puranas in the century prior to Christianity.

⁸ As. Res. vol. VII. p. 202

⁹ Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient and Hindu Mythology, p.153, and note

The inference deduced from the discrepancy between the actual form and the older definition of a Purána, unfavourable to the antiquity of the extant works generally, is converted into certainty when we come to examine them in detail; for although they have no dates attached to them, yet circumstances are sometimes mentioned or alluded to, or references to authorities are made, or legends are narrated, or places are particularized, of which the comparatively recent date is indisputable, and which enforce a corresponding reduction of the antiquity of the work in which they are discovered. At the same time they may be acquitted of subservience to any but sectarial imposture. They were pious frauds for temporary purposes: they never emanated from any impossible combination of the Brahmans to fabricate for the antiquity of the entire Hindu system any claims which it cannot fully support. A very great portion of the contents of many, some portion of the contents of all, is genuine and old. The sectarial interpolation or embellishment is always sufficiently palpable to be set aside, without injury to the more authentic and primitive material; and the Puránas, although they belong especially to that stage of the Hindu religion in which faith in some one divinity was the prevailing principle, are also a valuable record of the form of Hindu belief which came next in order to that of the Vedas; which grafted hero-worship upon the simpler ritual of the latter; and which had been adopted, and was extensively, perhaps universally established in India at the time of the Greek invasion. The Hercules of the Greek writers was indubitably the Balaráma of the Hindus; and their notices of Mathurá on the Jumna, and of the kingdom of the Suraseni and the Pandéan country, evidence the prior currency of the traditions which constitute the argument of the Mahábhárata, and which are constantly repeated in the Puránas, relating to the Pan'd'ava and Yádava races, to Krishna and his contemporary heroes, and to the dynasties of the solar and lunar kings.

The theogony and cosmogony of the Puránas may probably be traced to the Vedas. They are not, as far as is yet known, described in detail in those works, but they are frequently alluded to in a strain more or less mystical and obscure, which indicates acquaintance with their existence, and which seems to have supplied the Puránas with the groundwork of their systems. The scheme of primary or elementary creation they borrow from the Sánkhyá philosophy, which is probably one of the oldest forms of speculation on man and nature amongst the Hindus. Agreeably, however, to that part of the Pauránik character which there is reason to suspect of later origin, their inculcation of the worship of a favourite deity, they combine the interposition of a creator with the independent evolution of matter in a somewhat contradictory and unintelligible style. It is evident too that their accounts of secondary creation, or the developement of the existing forms of things, and the disposition of the universe, are derived from several and different sources; and it appears very likely that they are to be accused of some of the incongruities and absurdities by which the narrative is disfigured, in consequence of having attempted to assign reality and significancy to what was merely metaphor or mysticism. There is, however, amidst the unnecessary complexity of the description, a general agreement amongst them as to the origin of things, and their final distribution; and in many of the circumstances there is a striking concurrence with the ideas which seem to have pervaded the whole of the ancient world, and which we may therefore believe to be faithfully represented in the Puránas.

The Pantheism of the Puránas is one of their invariable characteristics, although the particular divinity, who is all things, from whom all things proceed, and to whom all things return, be diversified according to their individual sectarial bias. They seem to have derived the notion from the Vedas: but in them the one universal Being is of a higher order than a personification

of attributes or elements, and, however imperfectly conceived, or unworthily described, is God. In the Puránas the one only Supreme Being is supposed to be manifest in the person of Śiva or Vishnu, either in the way of illusion or in sport; and one or other of these divinities is therefore also the cause of all that is, is himself all that exists. The identity of God and nature is not a new notion; it was very general in the speculations of antiquity, but it assumed a new vigour in the early ages of Christianity, and was carried to an equal pitch of extravagance by the Platonic Christians as by the Śaiva or Vaishn´ava Hindus. It seems not impossible that there was some communication between them. We know that there was an active communication between India and the Red sea in the early ages of the Christian era, and that doctrines, as well as articles of merchandise, were brought to Alexandria from the former. Epiphanius¹⁰ and Eusebius¹¹ accuse Scythianus of having imported from India, in the second century, books on magic, and heretical notions leading to Manichaeism; and it was at the same period that Ammonius instituted the sect of the new Platonists at Alexandria. The basis of his heresy was, that true philosophy derived its origin from the eastern nations: his doctrine of the identity of God and the universe is that of the Vedas and Puránas; and the practices he enjoined, as well as their object, were precisely those described in several of the Puranas under the name of Yoga. His disciples were taught "to extenuate by mortification and contemplation the bodily restraints upon the immortal spirit, so that in this life they might enjoy communion with the Supreme Being, and ascend after death to the universal Parent¹²." That these are Hindu tenets the following pages will testify; and by the admission of their Alexandrian teacher, they originated in India. The importation was perhaps not wholly unrequited; the loan may not have been left unpaid. It is not impossible that the Hindu doctrines received fresh animation from their adoption by the successors of Ammonius, and especially by the mystics, who may have prompted, as well as employed, the expressions of the Puranas. Anquetil du Perron has given¹³, in the introduction to his translation of the 'Oupnekhat,' several hymns by Synesius, a bishop of the beginning of the fifth century, which may serve as parallels to many of the hymns and prayers addressed to Vishnu in the Vishnu Purana.

But the ascription to individual and personal deities of the attributes of the one universal and spiritual Supreme Being, is an indication of a later date than the Vedas certainly, and apparently also than the Rámáyan´a, where Ráma, although an incarnation of Vishnu, commonly appears in his human character alone. There is something of the kind in the Mahábhárata in respect to Krishna, especially in the philosophical episode known as the Bhagavad Gítá. In other places the divine nature of Krishna is less decidedly affirmed; in some it is disputed or denied; and in most of the situations in which he is exhibited in action, it is as a prince and warrior, not as a divinity. He exercises no superhuman faculties in the defence of himself or his friends, or in the defeat and destruction of his foes. The Mahábhárata, however, is evidently a work of various periods, and requires to be read throughout carefully and critically before its weight as an authority can be accurately appreciated. As it is now in type¹⁴ - thanks to the public spirit of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and their secretary Mr. J. Prinsep - it will not be long before the Sanscrit scholars of the continent will accurately appreciate its value.

¹⁰ Adv. Manichaeos

¹¹ Hist. Evang

¹² Mosheim, vol. I. p.173

¹³ Theologia et Philosophia Indica, Dissert. p. xxvi

¹⁴ Three volumes have been printed: the fourth and last is understood to be nearly completed

Date of the Puránas

The Puránas are also works of evidently different ages, and have been compiled under different circumstances, the precise nature of which we can but imperfectly conjecture from internal evidence, and from what we know of the history of religious opinion in India. It is highly probable, that of the present popular forms of the Hindu religion, none assumed their actual state earlier than the time of Śankara Áchárya, the great Śaiva reformer, who flourished, in all likelihood, in the eighth or ninth century. Of the Vaishn´ava teachers, Rámánuja dates in the twelfth century, Madhwáchárya in the thirteenth, and Vallabha in the sixteenth¹⁵; and the Puránas seem to have accompanied or followed their innovations, being obviously intended to advocate the doctrines they taught. This is to assign to some of them a very modern date, it is true; but I cannot think that a higher can with justice be ascribed to them. This, however, applies to some only out of the number, as I shall presently proceed to specify.

Another evidence of a comparatively modern date must be admitted in those chapters of the Puránas which, assuming a prophetic tone, foretell what dynasties of kings will reign in the Kálí age. These chapters, it is true, are found but in four of the Puránas, but they are conclusive in bringing down the date of those four to a period considerably subsequent to Christianity. It is also to be remarked, that the Váyu, Vishnu, Bhágavata, and Matsya Puránas, in which these particulars are foretold, have in all other respects the character of as great antiquity as any works of their class¹⁶.

¹⁵ As. Res. vols. XVI. and XVII. Account of Hindu Sects

¹⁶ On the history of the composition of the Puranas, as they now appear, I have hazarded some speculations in my Analysis of the Vayu Purana: Journ. Asiatic Society of Bengal, December 1832

Form of the Puránas

The invariable form of the Puranas is that of a dialogue, in which some person relates its contents in reply to the inquiries of another. This dialogue is interwoven with others, which are repeated as having been held on other occasions between different individuals, in consequence of similar questions having been asked. The immediate narrator is commonly, though not constantly, Lomaharshan´a or Romaharshan´a, the disciple of Vyása, who is supposed to communicate what was imparted to him by his preceptor, as he had heard it from some other sage. Vyása, as will be seen in the body of the work, is a generic title, meaning an 'arranger' or 'compiler.' It is in this age applied to Krishna Dwaipáyana, the son of Parásara, who is said to have taught the Vedas and Puránas 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. In this task the disciples, as they are termed, of Vyása were rather his colleagues and coadjutors, for they were already conversant with what he is fabled to have taught them; and amongst them, Lomaharshan´a represents the class of persons who were especially charged with the record of political and temporal events. He is called Súta, as if it was a proper name; but it is more correctly a title; and Lomaharshan´a was 'a Súta,' that is, a bard or panegyrist, who was created, according to our text, to celebrate the exploits of princes; and who, according to the Vayu and Padma Puránas, has a right by birth and profession to narrate the Puránas, in preference even to the Brahmans¹⁷. It is not unlikely therefore that we are to understand, by his being represented as the disciple of Vyása, the institution of some attempt, made under the direction of the latter, to collect from the heralds and annalists of his day the scattered traditions which they had imperfectly preserved; and hence the consequent appropriation of the Puránas, in a great measure, to the genealogies of regal dynasties, and descriptions of the universe. However this may be, the machinery has been but loosely adhered to, and many of the Patinas, like the Vishnu, are referred to a different narrator.

An account is given in the following work of a series of a series of Pauránik compilations, of which in their present form no vestige appears. Lomaharshan´a is said to have had six disciples, three of whom composed as many fundamental Sanhitás, whilst he himself compiled a fourth. By a Sanhitá is generally understood a 'collection' or 'compilation.' The Sanhitás of the Vedas are collections of hymns and prayers belonging to them, arranged according to the judgment of some individual sage, who is therefore looked upon as the originator and teacher of each. The Sanhitás of the Puránas, then, should be analogous compilations, attributed respectively to Mitrayu, Śánśapáyana, Akritavran´a, and Romaharshan´a: no such Pauránik Sanhitás are now known, The substance of the four is said to be collected in the Vishnu Purána, which is also, in another place, itself called a Sanhitá: but such compilations have not, as far as inquiry has yet proceeded, been discovered. The specification may be accepted as an indication of the Puránas having existed in some other form, in which they are no longer met with; although it does not appear that the arrangement was incompatible with their existence as separate works, for the Vishnu Purána, which is our authority for the four Sanhitás, gives us also the usual enumeration of the several Puránas.

¹⁷ Journ, Royal As. Soc. vol. V. p. 281

Classification of the Puránas

There is another classification of the Puránas alluded to in the Matsya Purána, and specified by the Padma Purána, but more fully. It is not undeserving of notice, as it expresses the opinion which native writers entertain of the scope of the Puránas, and of their recognising the subservience of these works to the dissemination of sectarian principles.. Thus it is said in the Uttara Khanda of the Padma, that the Puránas, as well as other works, are divided into three classes, according to the qualities which prevail in them. Thus the Vishnu, Náradíya, Bhágavata, Gáruda, Padma, and Váraha Puránas, are Sátwika, or pure, from the predominance in them of the Satwa quality, or that of goodness and purity. They are, in fact, Vaishn´ava Puránas. The Matsya, Kúrma, Linga, Śiva, Skanda, and Agni Puránas, are Támasa, or Puránas of darkness, from the prevalence of the quality of Tamas, 'ignorance,' 'gloom.' They are indisputably Śaiva Puránas. The third series, comprising the Brahmánda, Brahma-vaivartta, Márkandeya, Bhavishya, Vámana, and Brahmá Puránas, are designated as Rájasa, 'passionate,' from Rajas, the property of passion, which they are supposed to represent.. The Matsya does not specify which are the Puránas that come under these designations, but remarks that those in which the Máhátmya of Hari or Vishnu prevails are Sátwika; those in which the legends of Agni or Śiva predominate are Támasa; and those which dwell most on the stories of Brahmá are Rájasa. I have elsewhere stated¹⁸, that I considered the Rájasa Puránas to lean to the Sáкта division of the Hindus, the worshippers of Śakti, or the female principle; founding this opinion on the character of the legends which some of them contain, such as the Durgá Máhátmya, or celebrated legend on which the worship of Durgá or Kálí is especially founded, which is a principal episode of the Márkandeya. The Brahma-vaivartta also devotes the greatest portion of its chapters to the celebration of Rádhá, the mistress of Krishna, and other female divinities. Col. Vans Kennedy, however, objects to the application of the term Sáкта to this last division of the Puránas, the worship of Śakti being the especial object of a different class of works, the Tantras, and no such form of worship being particularly inculcated in the Bráhma Purána¹⁹. This last argument is of weight in regard to the particular instance specified, and the designation of Śakti may not be correctly applicable to the whole class, although it is to some of the series; for there is no incompatibility in the advocacy of a Tántrika modification of the Hindu religion by any Purána, and it has unquestionably been practised in works known as Upa-Puránas. The proper appropriation of the third class of the Puránas, according to the Padma Purána, appears to be to the worship of Krishna, not in the character in which he is represented in the Vishnu and Bhágavata Puránas, 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 Krishna, Govinda, Bála Gopála, the sojourner in Vrindávan, the companion of the cowherds and milkmaids, the lover of Rádhá, or as the juvenile master of the universe, Jagannátha. The term Rájasa, implying the animation of passion, and enjoyment of sensual delights, is applicable, not only to the character of the youthful divinity, but to those with whom his adoration in these forms seems to have originated, the Gosains of Gokul and Bengal, the followers and descendants of Vallabha and Chaitanya, the priests and proprietors of Jagannáth and Śrínáth-dwár, who lead a life of affluence and indulgence, and vindicate, both by precept and practice, the reasonableness of the Rájasa property, and the congruity of temporal enjoyment with the duties of religion²⁰.

¹⁸ As. Res. vol. XVI. p. 10

¹⁹ Asiatic Journal, March 1837, p. 241

²⁰ As. Res. vol. XVI. p. 85

The Puránas are uniformly stated to be eighteen in number. It is said that there are also eighteen Upa-Puránas, or minor Puránas; but the names of only a few of these are specified in the least exceptionable authorities, and the greater number of the works is not procurable. With regard to the eighteen Puránas, there is a peculiarity in their specification, which is proof of an interference with the integrity of the text, in some of them at least; for each of them specifies the names of the whole eighteen. Now the list could not have been complete whilst the work that gives it was unfinished, and in one only therefore, the last of the series, have we a right to look for it. As however there are more last words than one, it is evident that the names must have been inserted in all except one after the whole were completed: which of the eighteen is the exception, and truly the last, there is no clue to discover, and the specification is probably an interpolation in most, if not in all.

The names that are specified are commonly the same, and are as follows: 1. Bráhma, 2. Pádma, 3. Vaishn'ava, 4. Śaiva, 5. Bhágavata, 6. Nárada, 7. Márkan'd'a, 8. Ágneya, 9. Bhavishya, 10. Brahma-vaivartta, 11. Lainga, 12. Váraha, 13. Skánda, 14. Vámana, 15. Kaurma, 16. Mátsya, 17. Gáruda, 18. Brahmánda²¹. This is from the twelfth book of the Bhágavata, and is the same as occurs in the Vishnu. In other authorities there are a few variations. The list of the K.úrma P. omits the Agni Purána, and substitutes the Váyu. The Agni leaves out the Śaiva, and inserts the Váyu. The Varáha omits the Gáruda and Brahmánda, and inserts the Váyu and Narasinha: in this last it is singular. The Márkandeya agrees with the Vishnu and Bhágavata in omitting the Váyu. The Matsya, like the Agni, leaves out the Śaiva.

Some of the Puránas, as the Agni, Matsya, Bhágavata, and Padma, also particularize the number of stanzas which each of the eighteen contains. In one or two instances they disagree, but in general they concur. The aggregate is stated at 400,000 slokas, or 1,600,000 lines. These are fabled to be but an abridgment, the whole amount being a krore, or ten millions of stanzas, or even a thousand millions. If all the fragmentary portions claiming in various parts of India to belong to the Puránas were admitted, their extent would much exceed the lesser, though it would not reach the larger enumeration. The former is, however, as I have elsewhere stated²², a quantity that an individual European scholar could scarcely expect to peruse with due care and attention, unless his whole time were devoted exclusively for many years to the task. Yet without some such labour being achieved, it was clear, from the crudity and inexactness of all that had been hitherto published on the subject, with one exception²³, that sound views on the subject of Hindu mythology and tradition were not to be expected. Circumstances, which I have already explained in the paper in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society referred to above, enabled me to avail myself of competent assistance, by which I made a minute abstract of most of the Puranas. In course of time I hope to place a

²¹ The names are put attributively, the noun substantive, Purana, being understood. Thus Vaishnavam Puranam means the Purana of Vishnu; S'aivam Puranam, the P. of S'iva; Brahmam Puranam, the P. of Brahma. It is equally correct, and more common, to use the two substantives [p. xv] in apposition, as Vishnu Purana, S'iva Purana, &c. In the original Sanscrit the nouns are compounded, as Vishnu-puranam, &c.; but it has not been customary to combine them in their European shape

²² Journ. Royal As. Soc. vol. V. p. 61

²³ I allude to the valuable work of Col. Vans Kennedy, on the Affinity between Ancient and Hindu Mythology. However much I may differ from that learned and industrious writer's conclusions, I must do him the justice to admit that he is the only author who has discussed the subject of the mythology of the Hindus on right principles, by drawing his materials from authentic sources

tolerably copious and connected analysis of the whole eighteen before Oriental scholars, and in the mean while offer a brief notice of their several contents.

In general the enumeration of the Puránas is a simple nomenclature, with the addition in some cases of the number of verses; but to these the Matsya Purána joins the mention of one or two circumstances peculiar to each, which, although scanty, are of value, as offering means of identifying the copies of the Puránas now found with those to which the Matsya refers, or of discovering a difference between the present and the past. I shall therefore prefix the passage descriptive of each Purána from the Matsya. It is necessary to remark, however, that in the comparison instituted between that description and the Purána as it exists, I necessarily refer to the copy or copies which I employed for the purpose of examination and analysis, and which were procured with some trouble and cost in Benares and Calcutta. In some instances my manuscripts have been collated with others from different parts of India, and the result has shewn, that, with regard at least to the Brahmá, Vishnu, Váyu, Matsya, Padma, Bhágavata, and Kúrma Puránas, the same works, in all essential respects, are generally current under the same appellations. Whether this is invariably the case may be doubted, and farther inquiry may possibly shew that I have been obliged to content myself with mutilated or unauthentic works²⁴. It is with this reservation, therefore, that I must be understood to speak of the concurrence or disagreement of any Purana with the notice of it which the Matsya P. has preserved.

²⁴ Upon examining the translations of different passages from the Puranas, given by Col. Vans Kennedy in the work mentioned in a former note, and comparing them with the text of the manuscripts I have consulted, I find such an agreement as to warrant the belief that there is no essential difference between the copies in his possession and in mine. The varieties which occur in the MSS. of the East India Company's Library will be noticed in the text

1. The Brahma Purána

"That, the whole of which was formerly repeated by Brahmá to Maríchi, is called the Bráhma Purána, and contains ten thousand stanzas." In all the lists of the Puránas, the Bráhma is placed at the head of the series, and is thence sometimes also entitled the Ádi or 'first' Purána. It is also designated as the Saura, as it is in great part appropriated to the worship of Súrya, 'the sun.' There are, however, works bearing these names which belong to the class of Upa-Puránas, and which are not to be confounded with the Bráhma. It is usually said, as above, to contain ten thousand slokas; but the number actually occurring is between seven and eight thousand. There is a supplementary or concluding section called the Brahmottara Purána, and which is different from a portion of the Skánda called the Brahmottara Khanda, which contains about three thousand stanzas more; but there is every reason to conclude that this is a distinct and unconnected work.

The immediate narrator of the Brahmá Purána is Lomaharshan´a, who communicates it to the Rishis or sages assembled at Naimisháran´ya, as it was originally revealed by Brahmá, not to Maríchi, as the Matsya affirms, but to Daksha, another of the patriarchs: hence its denomination of the Brahmá Purána.

The early chapters of this work give a description of the creation, an account of the Manwantaras, and the history of the solar and lunar dynasties to the time of Krishna, in a summary manner, and in words which are common to it and several other Puránas: a brief description of the universe succeeds; and then come a number of chapters relating to the holiness of Orissa, with its temples and sacred groves dedicated to the sun, to Śiva, and Jagannáth, the latter especially. These chapters are characteristic of this Purána, and shew its main object to be the promotion of the worship of Krishna as Jagannáth²⁵. To these particulars succeeds a life of Krishna, which is word for word the same as that of the Vishnu Purána; and the compilation terminates with a particular detail of the mode in which Yoga, or contemplative devotion, the object of which is still Vishnu, is to be performed. There is little in this which corresponds with the definition of a Pancha-lakshana Purána; and the mention of the temples of Orissa, the date of the original construction of which is recorded²⁶, shews that it could not have been compiled earlier than the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

The Uttara Khanda of the Bráhma P. bears still more entirely the character of a Máhátmya, or local legend, being intended to celebrate the sanctity of the Balajā river, conjectured to be the same as the Banás in Marwar. There is no clue to its date, but it is clearly modern, grafting personages and fictions of its own invention on a few hints from older authorities²⁷.

²⁵ Vans Kennedy objects to this character of the Brahma P., and observes that it contains only two short descriptions of pagodas, the one of Konaditya, the other of Jagannath. In that case, his copy must differ considerably from those I have met with; for in them the description of Purushottama Kshetra, the holy land of Orissa, runs through forty chapters, or one-third of the work. The description, it is true, is interspersed, in the usual rambling strain of the Puranas, with a variety of legends, some ancient, some modern; but they are intended to illustrate some local circumstance, and are therefore not incompatible with the main design, the celebration of the glories of Purushottama Kshetra. The specification of the temple of Jagannath, however, is of itself sufficient, in my opinion, to determine the character and era of the compilation

²⁶ See Account of Orissa proper, or Cuttack, by A. Stirling, Esq.: Asiatic Res. vol. XV. p. 305

²⁷ See Analysis of the Brahma Purana: Journ. Royal As. Soc, vol. V. p. 65