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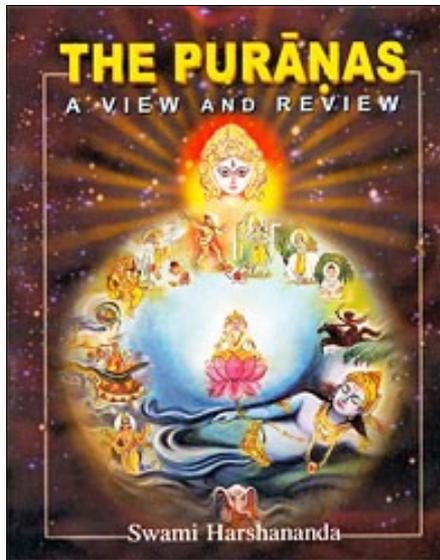
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Puranas - Ancient Indian Texts of Knowledge and Wisdom

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The Puranas are ancient and very important religious texts belonging to the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist pantheons. These consist largely of narratives about the history of the universe and its numerous epochs or cycles from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods. These texts also deal with Hindu cosmology and philosophy.



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**THE PURANAS - A VIEW AND REVIEW
BY
SWAMI HARSHANAND**

Generally speaking, the Puranas deal with the complete description of a particular deity and are usually written story form, related by one person to another. These stories and tales relate the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient nature of God and that all Hindus should completely surrender their all to Him.

The Puranas are also available in several of India's vernacular tongues and are spread among the common folk by Brahmin scholars, who read from them and tell them stories, usually during their Katha sessions. The Brahmin scholar usually travels from village to village, lives in the temple premises for a period of time and conducts these Katha sessions during this time.

Origin of the Puranas

Rishi Vyasa, the narrator of the Mahabharata, is believed to have originally compiled the Puranas. But the earliest written record of this text dates back to the time of the Gupta Empire, around the 3rd-5th Century CE. Of course, this date does not in any way indicate the date of origin of the Puranas. But experts believe the Puranas are essentially dynamic in nature and have constantly evolved and been modified over the subsequent centuries and continue so even to date.

Types of Puranas

There are 18 main Puranas, also referred to as the Mahapuranas. There is also an equal number of subsidiary or Upa-Puranas.

In this particular article, we deal with the 18 Mahapuranas, which are as follows:

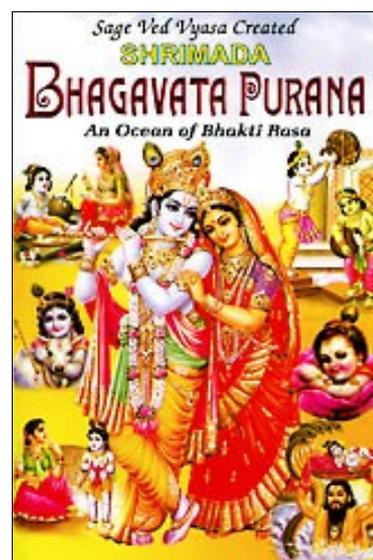
Bhagavata Purana (Bhagavatam)

Vyasa was left dissatisfied even after having written the Mahabharata. Sage Narada went to him and asked him, then, to write Srimad Bhagavatam, or the Bhagavata Purana. This is considered the most important Purana, as it describes the ten incarnations (Dashavatara) of Lord Vishnu and also gives a detailed account of Lord Krishna's life. The Bhagavata Purana is divided into twelve cantos or chapters and has a total of 18,000 verses.

Vyasa then imparted the knowledge of Bhagvatam to his son Suka Brahma Rishi. Suka then recited the same to Maharaja Parikshit, a great and wise King, in an assembly of learned saints. He had unfortunately received a curse that he would die within the following week. He then renounced his kingdom and stayed at the bank of the Ganges, in order to fast unto death.

The Bhagavatam starts with Parikshit asking Suka Brahma rishi to give him the knowledge of the right path and liberation. The sage, in response, narrated the Bhagavatam to him for the seven days, till the king breathes his last.

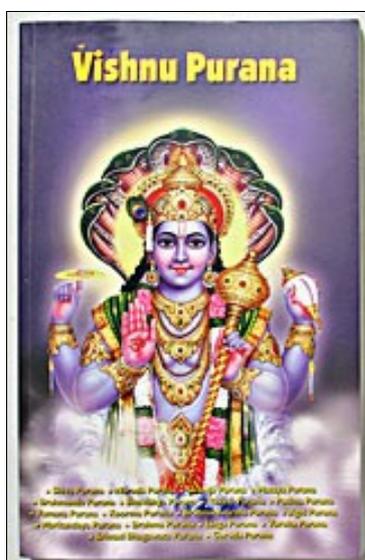
According to Skanda Purana, "Whoever makes a copy of the Bhagavatam and donates it, on a golden lion throne, on the full moon day in the month of Bhadra, will attain the supreme destination".



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**SHRIMADA BHAGAVATA PURANA -
AN OCEAN OF BHAKTI RASA
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Vishnu Purana



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**VISHNU PURANA
BY
B. K. CHATURVEDI**

The Vishnu Purana, again a very important one in the Mahapurana list, is considered a Puranaratna or gem among Puranas. Presented as a dialogue between Parashar and his disciple Maitreya, this Purana is split into six amsas or parts and 126 adyayas or chapters. The creation of myths, stories of battles fought between the Devas and the Asuras, the Dashavatara of Vishnu and genealogy of legendary kings form the basic topics of this Purana. According to the Matsya Puranas, the Vishnu Purana has 23,000 slokas or verses. But in actuality, experts have found only about 7,000 verses. This text introduces the concept of four yugas or epochs. The story of Rudra, the Samudra Manthan or the Churning of the Milky Ocean, the tale of Dhruva, an ardent devotee of Vishnu, and tales of kings Vena and Prithu feature in the first section.

The second section deals with tales of Prithu's descendants, the Prachetas, the tale of Prahlada and Hiranyakashipu (where Vishnu takes the form of the half-man half-lion Narasimha), some concepts of the universe, and tales of the many births of Jadabharata.

The third amsa of the Vishnu Purana talks about sages Vyasa and Yajnavalkya, Surya (the Sun God), Yama (the God of Death) and the major devotees, Shatadhanu and Shaivya. This section also gives details about the four varnas or classes, four ashramas or stages of life and details of many rituals. Most importantly, this section also deals with the Manvantara or the cycles of creation and destruction, of birth and death.

The fourth amsa gives an account of all the famous Kings from the solar and lunar dynasties of ancient India, as also the list of the names of kings who would rule in the present age of the Kali Yuga. In the Kali Yuga section, the text clearly elucidates the concepts of universal destruction that would eventually follow as a result of extreme violence, injustice and corruption. It states that this Yuga would witness that the only means to success would be falsehood and that corruption would become the rule of the day. It also explains the importance of the Puranas in the Hindu pantheon. The Vishnudharmottara Purana appears as an Appendix to the Vishnu Purana and is dedicated completely to the arts.

The Vishnu Purana, considered to be one of the oldest of the Puranas, is believed to date right back to the 1st Century BCE.

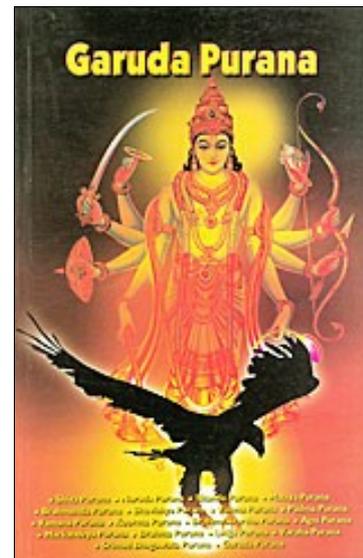
Garuda Purana

Also known as Smriti, the Garuda Purana is a Vaishnava Purana. The first part is a dialogue between Vishnu and his vahana (vehicle) Garuda, while the second talks about life after death, funeral rites and the principles of reincarnation. This Purana deals with astronomy, medicine and gemstone qualities.

The Garuda Purana has nineteen thousand slokas. Vyasa had taught the Puranas to his disciple, Romaharshana. It was this disciple who related the stories to one and all. It is believed that Suta, the son of Romaharshana, related the same to sages. But some others believe that Romaharshana, himself belonging to the Suta class, could have related the Puranas to the sages, and not his son.

Romaharshana was also the one who had knowledge of the twenty-two major avatars of Vishnu, while the rest of the world knew of only ten. The other avatars included forms such as Mohini, Narada himself, Urukrama, king Prithu and so on.

In the second section, the Garuda Purana also clearly lists the various types of punishment that would be meted out to sinning souls after their death.



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**GARUDA PURANA
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Brahma Purana

The Brahma Purana comprises 246 chapters and is divided into two parts, namely, the Poorvabhaga and the Uttarabhaga. The first part relates the story of the creation of the cosmos and enlists the leelas (miracles) of Rama and Krishna. It also deals with Gautami Mahatmyam or the glory of the Godavari River.

The second part of this Purana gives details about the Purushottama Tirtha, which is one of the holiest places of visit for Hindus, situated in Puri, in the state of Orissa. It also talks about how the knowledge of the Puranas can help enhance people's lives, irrespective of the caste or class that they are born into. This particular Purana also talks about the relevance of Yoga and its quality to unite the human soul or Jivatma with the Universal Soul or the Paramatma.

Incidentally, the Brahma Purana is the Purana where the Rajas or the relatively more negative guna (nature) is seen to prevail among people.

Padma Purana



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**PADMA PURANA
BY
DR. VINAY**

The Padma Purana, dating back between the 8th and 11th Centuries, is again a Vaishnava Purana. It is divided into five sections, namely, the Shrishti Khanda, Bhoomi Khanda, Swarga Khanda, Patala Khanda and Uttara Khanda.

In the first part, Rishi Pulastya tells Bhishma all about the true essence of religion. It also gives details about the Pushkara, a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. There are also some details about the worship of grahas or planets in this section.

The second part describes the Prithvi or the Earth in detail. This section deals with the life and times of several sages and important kings such as Prithu and Yayati, also giving factual elements of the history and geography prevalent at that period in time.

The third one describes the cosmos, with particular focus on the description of the Bharata Varsha or India. Additionally, it also gives the significance of many holy places, lists the features of the Jambudwipa and also talks about the people of ancient India.

The fourth section lists the deeds of Rama and Krishna. The 16 chapters of this Khanda are collectively referred to as the Shiva Gita.

The fifth and final part is a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. The last part again deals with the knowledge of religion. This part also contains the Rama Sahasranama (thousand names of Rama) and another version of the Vishnu Sahasranama.

Narada Purana

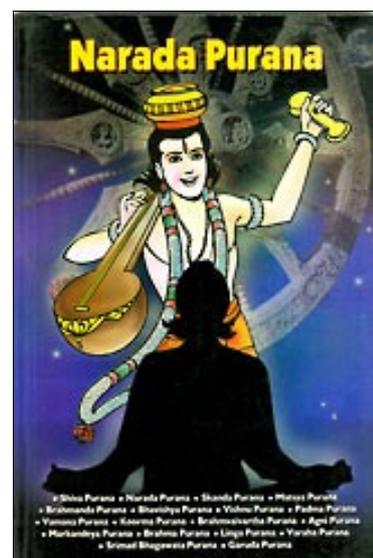
The Narada Purana, also referred to as the Naradiya Purana, enlists the various places of pilgrimage for Hindus, along with their exact location and religious significance. It is presented as a dialogue between Narada and Sanathkumara. It also deals with the dynamics of the cosmos.

This Purana is divided into two parts, the first of which, incorporates the whole of the Brihannaradiya Purana.

The story of Markandeya

The Narada Purana contains some of the most popular stories featuring in many other Mahapuranas, including the story of Markandeya. Markandeya was the son of Rishi Mrikandu and was born with the grace of Vishnu. An ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, he lives eternally and even survives the Mahapralaya (the end of the cosmic cycle).

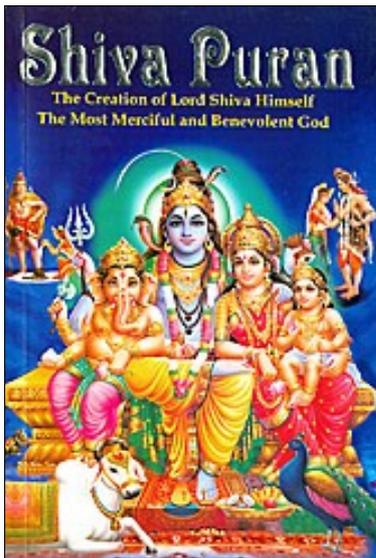
What makes this particular story different is that Markandeya, according to the Linga Purana, is popularly believed to have been saved from very early death, by the grace of Lord Shiva. But here, he is saved by Vishnu and is then granted immortality.



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**NARADA PURANA
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Shiva Purana



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**SHIVA PURANA
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The Shiva Purana was originally referred to as the Saiva Purana. Originally, it was believed to comprise 12 Samhitas or chapters and 100,000 slokas. After it had been reconstructed and abridged by Vedavyasa, though, it now comprises 6 samhitas and 24,000 slokas. The six sections are the Jnana samhita, Vidyeshwara samhita, Kailasa samhita, Sanathkumara samhita, Vayaviya samhita and the Dharma samhita.

This Purana talks about the emergence of the Shivalinga form of Shiva, as also that of the Rudra, who is no different from Shiva. Finally, it talks about how Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva emerge as one form, embodying the different cosmic aspects of Shrishti, Sthiti and Samhara, that is, creation, maintenance and destruction respectively.

Rudra weds Sati, the daughter of Daksha. He then loses Sati when she jumps into the Homakunda (ritual fire) prepared by her father for conducting a Yagna or sacrificial ritual. Rudra then leaves with Sati's body and heads deep into the forest for penance. Sati is reborn as Parvati. She wins him over with her own penance and they finally reunite as Shiva and Parvati.

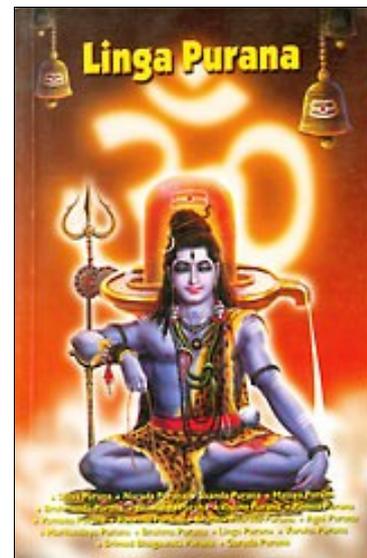
This Purana also gives details about the destruction of the demon Tarakasura and the birth of Ganesha and his brother, Karthikeya. It goes on to enlist the sacred Tirthas, the five sacred Jyotirlingas and the thousand names of Shiva.

Linga Purana

The Linga Purana is divided into four parts. The first two parts comprise descriptions regarding the origins of the Universe, the emergence of the Linga form of Shiva, the emergence of the Varaha and Narasimha avatars of Vishnu and also describe how Brahma, Vishnu and the Vedas were all born from the Linga. It also enlists the Pujavidhis (or rules of worship) to be followed for the worship of the Shivalinga.

The third part describes the seven islands, Mount Meru and many other important mountains. It also talks about Brahma assigning roles to various other deities, including Surya, the Sun God. The fourth part gives accounts of Dhruva, an ardent devotee of Shiva, as also of Andhaka's emergence as the Lord of the Ganas.

This Purana talks about the relationship between Prakriti and Purusha, the feminine and masculine aspects of the Universe, as also that of the divine union of male Linga and the female Yoni.



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**LINGA PURANA
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The emergence of the Linga

Brahma and Vishnu once had a debate about which one among them was stronger. As the debate turned into an argument, the Linga form suddenly appeared out of nowhere, appearing as a pillar of fire with no beginning and no end. Brahma took the form of a swan and flew up to see where the Linga ended. Vishnu took the form of a boar and went down. But neither of them could discover a start or end to the Linga. They then realized that a much higher power was at work here.



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TRIDEV - BRAHMA, VISHNU, MAHESHWAR

As they began to pray to this form, the sound of Aum resounded all around them and Shiva appeared from within the Linga. He told them that this was the origin of the Universe and that the primordial egg or the Anda had been created.

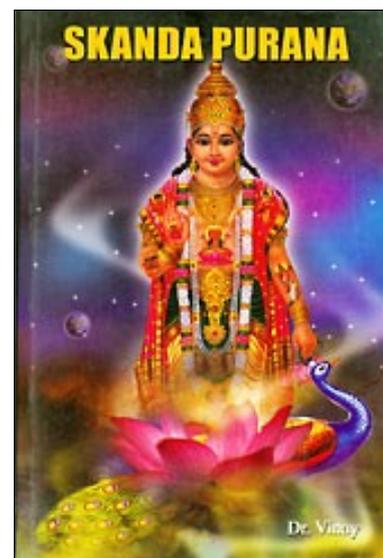
Shiva taught Brahma the sacred Gayathri Mantra and told Brahma and Vishnu how they could work together as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the world.

Skanda Purana

The Skanda Purana is devoted to Skanda or Karthikeya, the son of Shiva and Parvati. It also describes many legends about both Shiva and Parvati, talking about the holy places of worship associated with them. It is divided into six samhitas, each of which is again split into several Khandas.

Though opinions on this Purana are divided, it is believed that the Skanda Purana is made up of the following sections: Sanathkumara samhita, Suta samhita, Samkari samhita, Vaishnavi samhita, Brahmi samhita and Saura samhita. This Purana also includes Madhavacharya's commentary on the Suta samhita.

The Skanda Purana deals with popular narratives such as Daksha's sacrifice; the Samudra Manthan episode; the birth of Parvati and her marriage to Shiva; the birth of Skanda; the slaying of Tarakasura; Parvati destroying demons Shumbha, Nishumbha and finally Mahisha; details on Vishnukund; the legend of Padmavati; a description of the types of Naraka or Hell; the stories of Vishwamitra and Trishanku; a description of the Navadurgas; and finally, an account of the Jyotirlingas.



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**SKANDA PURANA
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Birth of Skanda

Shiva and Parvati get married and are enjoying their conjugal life. Once, a small quantity of Shiva's sperms falls to the ground, generating too much heat in the world, resulting in many parts of the world burning in the heat. Instructed by Vishnu, Agni approaches Parvati in the guise of a hermit and begs her for alms.

As she gives him the sperms, he eats them up. Enraged, Parvati curses him that it would create a severe burning sensation in him, which would come down, only if he could implant them in another woman's body. Soon, Agni implants the sperms in the bodies of the six Kritikas, who become pregnant and give rise to six foetuses, which they deposit in the Himalayas. Ganga (the Ganges) carries them to a secure and secluded place, where they grow up to become six young boys.

Parvati happens to see the children and proceeds to embrace them, when they transform into a handsome lad with six faces. Hence, Skanda is also called Shanmukha, the one with six faces. Kartikeya and Murugan are the other names of Skanda.

The slaying of Tarakasura



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KARTIKEYA - SON OF SHIVA AND PARVATI

Brahma gives the evil Tarakasura the boon that only a child, and no one else, would be able to slay him. Taraka becomes even more arrogant and starts troubling the Devas and the people of the world. This is when Skanda (Kartikeya) steps in to slay the demon. Kartikeya or Muruga marries Devasana at this time, due to which he is also called Devasenapati.

He leads the Devas' army, mounted on an elephant. Taraka severely injures even the mighty Devas. Vishnu asks Kartikeya to kill Taraka before it is too late. Kartikeya loses consciousness for a while, but soon regains it and continues to fight against the demon. He first bows in reverence to his divine parents and then directs his Shakti in the direction of the demon, instantly slaying him.

Agni Purana

The Agni Purana contains descriptions of the Dashavataras (ten incarnations) of Sri Maha Vishnu, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It also gives details about the Prithvi or the Earth and the Nakshatras or the stars. Additionally, it gives information about astrology, cosmology, temple architecture, consecration of the idol in a temple, ritual worship, martial arts, warfare, history, law, property rights, literature, grammar and medicine. Legend has it that the Agni Purana was recited to Rishi Vasishta by Agni, the God of Fire.

This text that dates back to the 8th to the 11th Centuries, comprises 383 chapters. The Athagnipurana Parisistam is an appendix of sorts that has another six chapters.

Some of these chapters also talk about the right way of worship and Puja Vidhis associated with particular deities, as also sacred places of pilgrimage and holy rivers in India. It also relates to the follower details of the Dwipas and Manvantaras and stipulates the requirements to atone for each of the follower's sins.

The Agni Purana dedicates a section to the significance of the Gayathri Mantra, the one chant that is considered the most sacred among Hindus. It also talks about dream and sign interpretation and what certain dreams and/or signs can imply in a person's life.

The Agni Purana states that one who keeps this text in his house and reads from it regularly is beyond Samsara (material life) and attains mukti or liberation without effort. He is also granted long-lasting health and happiness and is released from suffering, ill-health and recurring nightmares.



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**AGNI PURANA
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Matsya Purana



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**MATSYA PURANA
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The Matsya Purana talks mainly about the Matsya avatara (the first fish avatara) of Vishnu. This Purana contains a comprehensive description about both that particular avatara and the story of Manu. According to legend, the king of ancient Dravida, Satyavrata, was a great devotee of Vishnu. He later on came to be known as Manu.

The story of Manu

Manu was once washing his hands in a river, when a fish came up to him and pleaded with him to save its life. The kind king took it and put it in a jar, which it outgrew all too soon. The king then bought a tank to keep the fish safe. But the fish kept growing, till finally, the king took it to the mighty ocean.

But the fish continued to grow and then finally revealed its true identity - this fish was actually Lord Vishnu. The Lord told Manu that there would be a pralaya or deluge within the next seven days, which would destroy all life on Earth. Manu was instructed to collect all medicinal herbs, all varieties of seeds, all animals, the seven saints and the serpent king

Vasuki.

Accordingly, Manu built a huge boat to house his family, a variety of animals and 9 types of seeds, which he could use to repopulate the Earth after the pralaya. Vishnu appeared as a horned fish and Shesha, the serpent, took the form of a rope. Manu used these to fasten the boat to the horn of the fish. Post the deluge, Manu's boat was safely seated on top of the Malaya Mountains.

This is why Manu is considered the progenitor of mankind and the Brahmin king to rule the Earth. This story is also similar to the story of Noah's Ark from Judeo-Christianity.

Varaha Purana

The Varaha Purana describes in detail the Varaha avatara, the third manifestation, of Sri Maha Vishnu. It also narrates the story about how Prithvi was rescued by the Lord.

According to the Narada Purana, this particular Purana has 217 or 218 adhyayas or chapters and is divided into the Poorvabhaga and the Uttarabhaga. The Uttarabhaga is described in the Narada Purana and Pulastya is supposedly the main interlocutor.

However, according to some other experts, this text has four sections, each with different characteristics and interlocutors. In the first section, Suta narrates tales from the Purana and Prithvi and Varaha are the interlocutors. The second section deals with Suta narrating Prithvi's tale to Sanathkumara. In the third section, also called the Dharma samhita, Suta relates the conversation between Janamejaya and Vaishampayana. In the fourth and final section, Suta talks about the dialogue between Sanathkumara and Brahma.

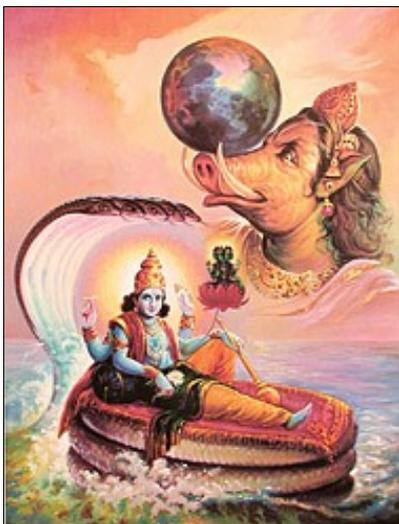


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This Purana also deals with the types of Vratas (ritual fasts) to be undertaken and several aspects of the Shradha ritual, that is, paying respects to one's ancestors in an annual function every year. It talks about calculating the right time for the Shradha, Pujavidhis, the type of Brahmin Pandits to invite and so on and so forth.

The Varaha Avatara



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VARAHA AVATAR

The Varaha Avatara was taken by Vishnu in order to defeat and destroy Hiranyaksha, a demon who had taken siege of the Prithvi or the Earth, and had carried it to the very bottom of the cosmic ocean. Varaha appeared as being anthropomorphic, having a boar's head on a human male body. Varaha and Hiranyaksha battled for a thousand years, after which the Lord won and carried the Earth out of the ocean, holding it between his fangs. He then placed the Earth in its own place in the Universe and married Bhoodevi or Mother Earth.

The Varaha avatara symbolizes the resurrection of the Earth post the pralaya and the establishment of a new Kalpa and new Yuga.

Vamana Purana

The Vamana Purana - yet another Vaishnava Purana - talks about the Vamana Avatara of Vishnu. This Purana has a eulogy praising both Vishnu and Shiva. It has 96 chapters, which deal with the avatara of Vishnu, detailed account of the Tirthas and also the forests of the Kurukshetra region. It also talks about Bhakta Prahlada's story.

The story of Prahlada

Prahlada, son of Hiranyakashipu, was very devout towards Vishnu and prayed to his Lord all day long, in spite of his father being very against it. The egoistical Hiranyakashipu had a boon that no man, animal, demon, demigod or weapon would be able to kill him. He could not be destroyed by day or by night, inside or outside the house, on the ground or in space. This made him vain in the thought that he was indeed all powerful.

He scoffed at Prahlada and asked him to invoke his Lord, while he kicked a pillar. To the demon's horror, a half-man, half-lion form jumped out of the pillar and grappling him, took him to the doorway, placed him on his thigh and tore him apart, drinking his blood.

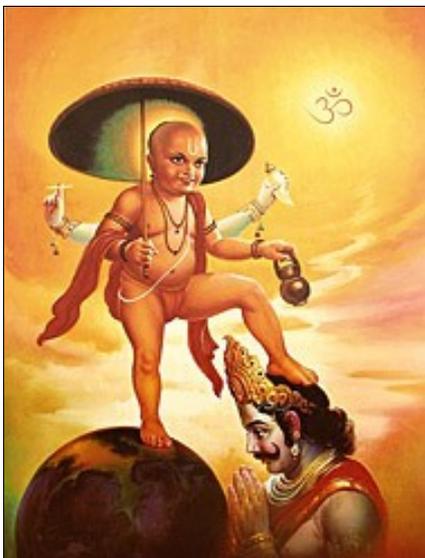
This Narasimha avatara of Vishnu then blessed the fearless child who was in raptures on getting his Lord's darshan and blessings.



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NARASIMHA AVATAR WITH PRAHLAD

The story of Mahabali



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VAMAN AVATAR

King Mahabali, a wise king who ruled Kerala, was also the grandson of Prahlada. He once conducted a grand Yajna, where he gave food, clothing and other gifts to all Brahmins who visited the site of the Yajna. Vishnu took the form of a dwarf, Vamana, and proceeded towards the king. Spying the short Brahmin, Mahabali rushed to him and respectfully, cleaned and wiped his feet. Seating him comfortably, the king requested Vamana to demand his Dakshina (gift). Vamana asked for just a measure of land as covered by three of his tiny steps. Bali, knowing well that this was the Lord Vishnu himself, gladly accepted to fulfil his demand.

Vamana immediately assumed his gigantic Vishwaroopa, his body spanning the entire Universe. His first step covered the entire Earth and his second one engulfed the heavens. Looking down, Vamana asked Bali where he should keep his third foot. Extremely humbled and honoured, Mahabali immediately offered Vamana his own head.

Vamana smiled and blessing him, placed his foot on the king's head, pushing him down to Patala or the Netherworld.

The true reason behind Mahabali's fall

There is an explanation for Mahabali meeting his end in this fashion. Legend has it that

he once questioned his grandfather, Prahlada, about why he was always chanting the name of Hari (another name for Vishnu) and what was so special about him that even demons never dared to fight his power. Enraged by his grandson's apparent lack of devotion towards Vishnu, Prahlada cursed him that he would one day lose all his power and prosperity.

Thereafter, Prahlada relented and consoled Bali that though he would be now forced to endure the curse, he would also go on to be referred to as one of the most important devotees of Vishnu and that the Lord would protect him and grant him Moksha or liberation.

Markandeya Purana

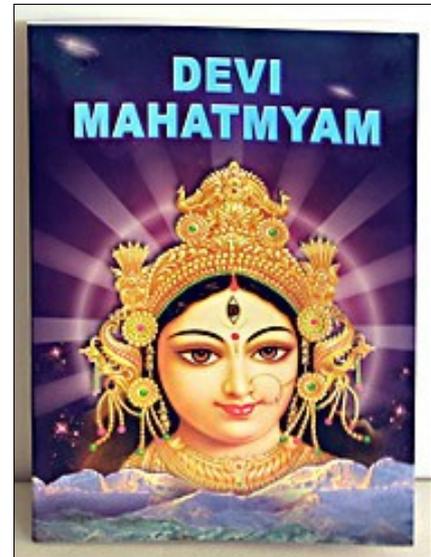
The Markandeya Purana is essentially written in the form of a dialogue between sage Markandeya and Jaimini, one of the disciples of Veda Vyasa.

There are different printed editions of this text, giving different details. But generally, this text begins with four questions being asked by Jaimini to Markandeya, which had arisen in his mind after having studied the Mahabharata. His doubt was about the four aspects of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha, which sometimes seemed inseparable from each other, yet at other times, seemed to be very removed from each other as well. Jaimini told Markandeya that since the entire essence of the four Vedas was contained in the Mahabharata, he was desirous of learning and understanding the epic in all its glory.

Markandeya, however, was engaged in evening worship at the time and could not oblige Jaimini. He directed him to visit four particular enlightened birds - Pingaksha, Vibodha, Suputra and Sumukha - in the hills of Vindhyachal, and they would clarify all his doubts.

The Markandeya Purana, which is divided into five sections, is quite different from the other texts. The first part relates how Jaimini approached the great, wise birds and they proceeded to enlighten him. The second section shows that though the birds seem to expound concepts to Jaimini, the real speakers are Sumati and his father.

The scenario changes yet again and the third section shows that the real speakers are Markandeya and his disciple Kraustuki. The fourth section that deals with Devi Mahatmyam reveals that the true speaker is Rishi Medhas and that Markandeya is only repeating what he said. In the fifth section, one understands that the birds end their long discourse, which was delivered as a dialogue between Markandeya and Kraustuki. In the end, Jaimini thanks each one of them and leaves from there.



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DEVI MAHATMYAM IN SANSKRIT AND ENGLISH

Brahma Vaivarta Purana

The Brahma Vaivarta Purana is divided into four parts. The first section, called the Brahma Khanda, deals with the Universe and all living beings and also talks about

Brahma and his son, Narada. The second part, called the Prakriti Khanda, describes the history of the various Shaktis or Goddesses of Hinduism. The third part, the Ganesha Khanda, talks about Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Shiva and Parvati. The last part, Krishna Janma Khanda, focuses on the deeds of Krishna.

This Purana is believed to have been originally written in Banga, or the ancient Bengal, as recited by Suta to the sages in the forest of Naimisharanya.



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RADHA KRISHNA

This Purana considered Krishna to be the supreme Godhead or the Para-Brahman, who along with Raseshwari or Radha by his side, creates the entire universe. According to this Purana, Krishna and Radha are married by Brahma himself. Interestingly, the viewpoint that Radha and Krishna are a married couple, is also accepted by the Narada Pancharatra.

Krishna, as per the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, is believed to have created the Divine Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, for the triple purpose of creation, maintenance and destruction of the Universe respectively.

Brahmanda Purana

Brahmanda literally, "Brahma's Cosmic Egg", is another term for the Universe, that was all created by Brahma, according to Hindu mythology. As the name suggests, this Purana deals with the origin of the Universe as related by Brahma, from the time it was created to the various Yugas it went through, to the present day Universe as we know it. This Purana relates that there was this Anda or egg at the very beginning. The Prapancha or Universe slowly evolved from this.

The Brahmanda Purana also includes small portions of the Adhyatma Ramayana and the story of Radha and Krishna and Parashurama, one of Vishnu's avatars. This Purana, containing 12,000 verses and divided into two parts, is believed to be the Uttama (best) one to give in Dana (as a gift) to a Brahmin.

The first section comprises two parts, the Poorvabhaga and the Madhyabhaga, whereas, the second section actually contains the third part, the Uttarabhaga. The Poorvabhaga contains the Prakriya and Anusanga Padas, while the Madhyabhaga and Uttarabhaga have one Pada each, namely, Upodghata and Upasamhara respectively.

In this Purana, the Uttarabhaga, referred to as Lalitopakhyana, contains details about the Tantric worship rites of Devi Lalita, one of the Dasa Maha Vidyas. This part appears as a dialogue between Hayagriva and Rishi Agastya.

Kurma Purana

The Kurma Purana is believed to have been narrated by Vishnu to Narada and contains details about the Kurma Avatara of the Lord. Narada in turn gave these details to Suta, who related these stories to an assembly of great sages.

This Purana is again divided into two parts, the Poorvabhaga and the Uttarabhaga. Originally, this work contained four main samhitas, namely, Brahmi samhita, Bhagawati samhita, Sauri samhita and Vaishnavi samhita.

The first part, comprising 6,000 slokas, relates details about the Kurma avatara and the second, comprising 4,000 slokas, deals with the duties of people of all four classes of the society, namely, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The third part, containing 2,000 slokas, deals with the six magic arts of Shanti, Vasheekarana, Stambhana, Vidveshana, Ucchatana and Maarana. The final part, containing 5,000 slokas, deals with Moksha Dharma.



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**KURMA PURANA
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Bhavishya Purana

Bhavishya Purana, as the name suggests, contains prophecies regarding the future. It is attributed to Rishi Vyasa. Though the "purana" actually implies "stories of ancient times", this is the only Purana which lists out a few of the "past" rulers and talks more about kings who would rule in the future.

The text in existence today gives some details of the law book of Manu and also an account of the creation of the Universe. This Purana is one of the ten Shaiva Puranas and is classified as being in the Rajas category, which has Brahma as its central character.

There is no clear dating for this particular Purana. Though some experts believe that it dates back to the 5th Century BCE, many others do not agree with this viewpoint.

This Purana consists of four main parts, which are as follows:

The Brahmeparvan largely deals with Brahminical ceremonies, rituals, feasts and duties of all the castes of society. It also covers the duties of women, some snake myths, snake worship and some signs of good and bad people. A lot of this section also deals with Sun worship and the methods of worshipping Ganesha, Brahma and Skanda.

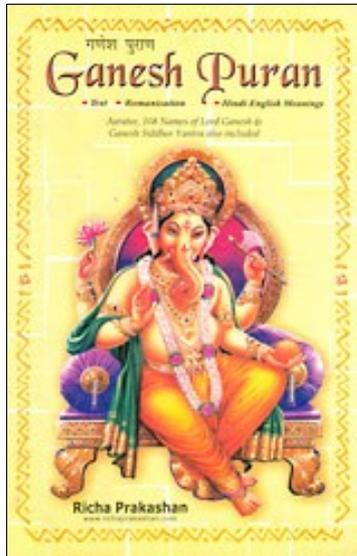
The Madhyamaparvan talks about Tantric elements and worship of Tantric deities.

The Pratisargaparvan, interestingly enough, relates stories about Adam, Noah, Taimurlong, Takuta, Nadir Shah, Emperor Akbar and many others. It even talks about the British Raj in India and the Indian Parliament. Not only that, this Purana also mentions Zarathustra, Nishkubha and Mihira, popular characters from Iranian mythology, as also prophet Muhammad as originating from Arabia.

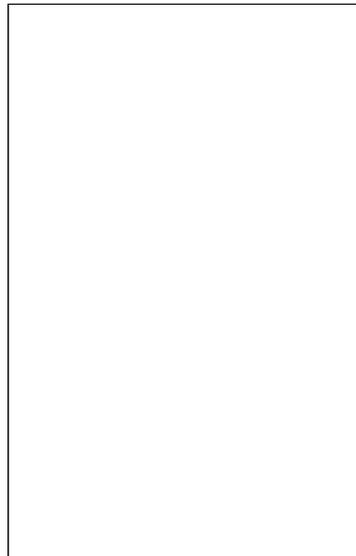
The Uttaraparvan, generally considered an independent work by some scholars, is also referred to as the Bhavishyottara Purana. It is also sometimes included among the Upapuranas or the lesser Puranas. This does not contain sections as Puranas usually do, but it does collect materials from the many external sources to give an interesting account of festivals, vratas, vows and Danas from the socio-religious angle of Indian society and culture.

The Upapuranas

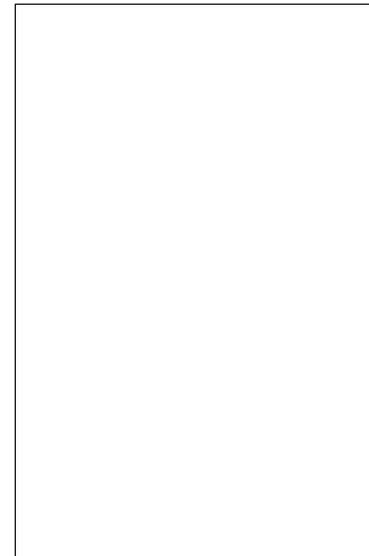
Apart from the 18 Mahapuranas, there are also 18 Upapuranas, which are broadly classified under Devi Purana (also Devi Bhagavatam) and Ganesha Purana. These Puranas include the Kalki, Santhkumara, Narasimha, Brihannaradiya, Shivarahasya, Durvasa, Kapila, Vamana, Bhargava, Varuna, Kalika, Samba, Nandi, Surya, Parashara, Vasishtha, Devi Bhagavatam, Ganesha and Hamsa Puranas. There are also some other Puranas such as the Vayu Purana, which did not find any place among the Mahapuranas.



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The Puranas have, over the ages, influenced and shaped the outlook of Hindu society - often being the basis of most Hindu social rules. Through tales of Gods and demons, they have been greatly instrumental in ritualizing Hinduism, and possibly also in catalyzing sectarian tendencies in Hinduism. However, they remain a valuable repertoire of Hindu mythology and reflect the growth and shaping of the Hindu society.

This article was written by **Priya Viswanathan**, a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Classical Music and Classical Instrumental Veena. A recipient of several awards for both music and dance, Priya is also a freelance writer online. She currently writes for About.com, a subsidiary of the New York Times Company (<http://mobiledevices.about.com>)

Our efforts have been directed at making this article informative and refreshing for you. We will truly appreciate all forms of feedback. Please send your feedback to info@dollsofindia.com.

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