

pilgrimage dedicated to Vishṇu, and his worship are not mentioned. From this we have to conclude that these special rituals had not yet come into existence at the time when the Purāṇa was reduced to writing. This fact compels us to rank it among ancient Purāṇas, perhaps as the oldest among them.

In this connection we can once again point out that a sort of homogeneity pervades the whole of this Purāṇa and it hardly indulges in Māhatmyas and the like which are found in the other literature of this class. These facts force us to conclude that this Purāṇa perhaps belonged to the age of the Upanishads when there was wide speculation about the philosophy of religion, and when there was no glorification of this god or that, and when there was faith only in one God who pervaded the whole universe and manifested himself in different ways for specific purposes. If we take these things into consideration, the Vishṇu Purāṇa must be contemporaneous with the Atharva Veda Samhitā but it can be safely placed in the 6th or 5th century B.C. Though orthodox tradition would assign a much higher antiquity to this Purāṇa, a critical student of history would place its composition in the epoch of the Upanishads which may be roughly said to extend from the seventh to the fourth century B.C.

A word might be said about reference to it in ancient Tamil literature. In the Tamil epic Maṇimekhalai, roughly of the second century after Christ, in the course of a discussion of the various religious activities in the Tamil land at a gathering at Vañji, the renowned capital of ancient Cheras, there is a significant phrase *Kaḍal Vaṇan Purāṇam ōḍinan* (Canto 27. 11·98-99). This means that the Purāṇa dedicated to *Kaḍal Vaṇan* which is simply an epithet of Vishṇu, (the God who had the colour of the sea) is mentioned. Then it is reasonable to take the view that this reference in the Maṇimekhalai is distinctly to the Vishṇu Purāṇa, and that the Vishṇu Purāṇa was known to the author of the Maṇi-