

which would give them mental peace. So the Itihāsa-Purāṇa literature became popular with the masses. As they contained many interesting and valuable information, arrangements were made to expound them for the benefit of the public in the common hall of the village or town. It formed a useful course of general and adult education for which we are crying to-day.

It would appear that even men of letters went to hear the expositions of these Purāṇas. An instance in point is as furnished by the *Harshacharita*, that Bāṇa himself went to hear the Vāyu Purāṇa in his village. In general the Purāṇas contain many forms of worship and prayer, superstitions, a crude knowledge of geography and history, legendary descriptions of places of pilgrimage and rituals, some knowledge of astronomy and astrology, different schools of philosophy, easy methods of attaining salvation and others. These and other topics of a common place interest would cater largely to the taste of the common person. In this way the Purāṇic literature contributed largely to general culture.

Tradition has unanimously accepted the existence of eighteen Mahāpurāṇas and eighteen Upapurāṇas. The Upapurāṇas are very late productions and are much more of a sectarian character while they are of purely local interest. Their value to the student of history and even religion, is very little and therefore we may dismiss them for the time being. Confining them to the Mahāpurāṇas, one classification is according to the preferential worship of deities like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī. From the nature of the subjects dealt with, it is wrong to assume that the ancient Purāṇa literature was divided into few water-tight compartments like the Śaiva and Vaishṇava. On this unfounded assumption, these works of value are looked upon as sectarian in character and extent. Whatever classification any Purāṇa may come under, the fact is that every Purāṇa