

## INTRODUCTION

Some years back I delivered a lecture under the auspices of the University of Madras on the Purāṇas and it has been published in the *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. VIII, No. 4. Ever since I have been pursuing the study of the subject and the result has been a feeling that a comprehensive index of the Purāṇas is a desideratum. We have an index of Vedic literature by Prof. Macdonell and A. B. Keith; we have also the index to the Mahābhārata by Dr. Sorenson. I felt that the most important branch of Indian literature, viz., the Purāṇas should similarly have an index for all the eighteen major Mahāpurāṇas. But due to want of time I have confined myself to five of them, viz., the Vāyu, the Brahmāṇḍa, the Viṣṇu, the Matsya and the Bhāgavata. Though the other Purāṇas are of equal historical importance and cultural value, I have selected these five because they are in my opinion the most ancient compositions among the eighteen Purāṇas. Their antiquity will be examined in the following pages in the section on the date of the Purāṇas.

As early as the thirties of the last century Mr. H. H. Wilson did some pioneer work in Purāṇa literature. From the Purāṇas available to him in print and manuscript he came to the hasty conclusion that they are a special kind of literature 'compiled for the evident purpose of promoting the preferential or in some cases the sole worship of Viṣṇu or Śiva'. He was also of the view that Purāṇas as a class of literature must have come into existence not later than the 10th century A.D. and not earlier than the 7th and 8th centuries of the Christian era, when Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism had become firmly established in the land. In other words, Wilson took the view that the Purāṇas were sectarian in character. The erroneous position which Wilson took in