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THE
GREAT EPIC OF INDIA

Its Character and Origin

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and we may conclude that the gift-sections of this book were at least as old as the oldest copper-plate grants to priests.¹

The time of the whole Mahābhārata generally speaking may then be from 200–400 A. D. This, however, takes into account neither subsequent additions, such as we know to have been made in later times, nor the various recastings in verbal form, which may safely be assumed to have occurred at the hands of successive copyists.

For the terminus a quo, the external² evidence in regard to the Pandu epic, Mahābhārata, though scanty, is valuable. It shows us first that the Mahābhārata is not recognized in any Sanskrit literary work till after the end of the Brāhmaṇa period, and only in the latest Sūtras, where it is an evident intrusion into the text. For the Gṛhya Sūtras belong to the close of the Sūtra period, and here the words Bhārata and Mahābhārata occur in a list of authors and works as substitutes for the earlier mention of Itihāsa and Purāṇa in the same

¹ The verse xii, 50, 52, which the author of *Das Mahābhārata als Epos und Rechtsbuch*, p. 187, adduces to prove that written deeds were known, is given by him without the context. When this is examined it is found that the verse refers not to land but to a king's realm. Neither does the text nor the commentator necessarily (as asserted, loc. cit.) make it refer to land-grants. The word used is *viṣaya*, a king's realm or country (as in xiv, 32, 8) and the poet says that ministers who are given too much liberty "read the king's realm by counterfeits" (or falsifications). The situation and the analogy of 50, 49, and 69, 22, and 100, 6, where general deceit and dissension are the means employed to destroy a realm, make it most probable that the word *pratirūpaka* is used here to distinguish the forged laws and edicts of the usurping ministers from the true laws which the helpless king would enact. Such suppression of the king and substitution of false edicts are thoroughly Oriental, and may easily be illustrated by the use of this very word, *pratirūpaka*, in the Lotus of True Law, where *pratirūpaka* means just such "false laws" substituted for the real king's true laws (iii, 22; SBE., xxi, p. 68, note, with Iranian parallel). The commentator says "corrupt the country by false edicts-documents," that is, he gives a general application to the words, which may be interpreted as referring to land-grants, but this is not necessary. Possible would be the later law-meaning of frauds of any kind, perhaps counterfeit money. Certain it is that the passage is not "a direct proof for forged documents," still less for "false documents by means of which any one gets land."

² Chinese evidence is negative and without weight. Megasthenes, c. 300 B. C., has left no fragment on Hindu epics, and the source of Dio Chrysostomos (100 A. D.), who mentions a Hindu Homer, is unknown.

place, so recent a substitution in fact that some even of the latest of these Sūtras still retain Itihāsa and Purāṇa. But when the words do actually occur they are plainly additions to the earlier list. Thus in Ṣāṅkhāyana iv, 10, 13, the list is Sumantu, Jāimini, Vāiṣampāyana, Pāila, the Sūtras, the Bhāṣya, Gārgya, etc., with no mention of the epic. But the Āṣvalāyana text, iii, 4, 4, inserts the epic thus: Sumantu, Jāimini, Vāiṣampāyana, Pāila, the Sūtras, the Bhāṣya, *the Bhārata, the Mahābhārata, dharmācāryas, Jānanti, Bāhavi, Gārgya, etc.* The next step is taken by the Ṣambavya text, which does not notice the Bhārata and recognizes only the Mahābhārata (whereas some texts make even the Āṣvalāyana Sūtra omit Mahābhārata altogether, reading Bhārata-dharmācāryāḥ). When it is remembered that these and other lists of literature are not uncommon in the Sūtras, and that nowhere do we find any other reference to the Mahābhārata, it becomes evident that we have important negative testimony for the lateness of the epic in such omission, which is strengthened by the evidently interpolated mention of the poem, withal in one of the latest Sūtras.¹

Patañjali, it may be admitted, recognizes a Pandu epic in the verse, asidvitiyo 'nusasāra Pāṇḍavan, and in his account of the dramatic representation of the sacred legend, indissolubly connected with the tale.² This takes us at farthest back to the second century; but this date (p. 56) is doubtful.

Pāṇini knows the names of the epic heroes, and recognizes the Arjuna-Krishna cult in giving a derivative meaning "worshipper of Arjuna" (Krishna). He also, which is more important, recognizes the name Mahābhārata. It cannot reasonably be claimed, I think, that this name does not refer to the epic. It stands, indeed, beside mahā-Jābāla, and might (as masculine) be supposed from this circumstance to mean "the

¹ That these lists, anyway, are not of cogent historical value, has lately been emphasized by Dr. Winternitz in his last review of Dahlmann. They certainly cannot help in dating the epic before the fourth century. The intrusion of the genus itihāsa-purāṇa into such lists is illustrated even in the Upanishads. Compare Muṇḍ. Up. i, 5, with the note at SBE., xv, p. 27.

² Compare Weber, IS., i, pp. 147-149; xiii, pp. 350-357.

great descendant of Bharata," yet not only do other words in the list show that this is not necessary, but further, there is no instance, either in the epic itself or in outside literature, where Mahābhārata means a man, or where it does not mean the epic. In this particular, therefore, as it gives me pleasure to state, I believe that the Rev. Mr. Dahlmann is right, and that Pāṇini knew an epic called the Mahābhārata. That he knew it as a Pandu epic may reasonably be inferred from his mentioning, e. g., Yudhiṣṭhira, the chief hero of the epic.¹

But no evidence has yet been brought forward to show conclusively that Pāṇini lived before the third century B. C.

Again, it is one thing to say that Pāṇini knew a Pandu Mahābhārata, but quite another to say that his epic was our present epic. [The Pandu epic as we have it represents a period subsequent not only to Buddhism 500 B. C., but to the Greek invasion 300 B. C.] Buddhistic supremacy already decadent is implied by the passages (no synthesist may logically disregard them) which allude contemptuously to the eḍūkas or Buddhistic monuments as having ousted the temples of the gods. Thus in iii, 190, 65, "They will revere eḍūkas, they will neglect the gods;" ib. 67, "the earth shall be piled with eḍūkas,² not adorned with god-houses." With such expressions may be compared the thoroughly Buddhistic epithet, cāturmahārājika, in xii, 339, 40, and Buddhistic philosophy as expounded in the same book. More important than this evidence, however, which from the places where it is found may all belong to the recasting of the epic, is the architecture,³ which is of stone and metal and

¹ He mentions him not as a Pandu but only as a name, like Gaviṣṭhira; to distinguish the name from the expression (e. g. R. vi, 41, 66) yudhi sthiraḥ, I presume.

² Lassen, loc. cit., p. 400. So, iii, 188, 66, vihāra; 40, pāṇḍya; 67, seven suns; all found in one place (p. 388). See final notes.

³ Buddhistic buildings with wooden fences and walls of brick and stone are alluded to in Cull. vi, 3, 8. In connection with this subject it must be remembered that even the late Gṛhya Sūtras in giving directions for house-building know only wooden thatched houses. The Greek account states that the Hindus used only mud, wood, and brick. This makes it improbable that wood architecture had almost disappeared in the third century.

is attributed in all the more important building operations to the demon Asura or Dānava Maya, who, by his magic power,¹ builds such huge buildings as are described, immense moated palaces with arches and a roof supported by a thousand pillars. [There is in India no real architecture that goes back of the Buddhistic period, and of both Buddhistic and Jain architecture the remains are distinctly influenced by Greek models.²]

The Greeks are described as a western people (northwestern, with Kāmbojas), famous as fighters, wearing especially fine metal armor, and their overthrow is alluded to. The allies engaged in the epic battles are not only native princes but also Greek kings and Persians, who come out of the West to the war. In one passage the Greeks are described as "all-knowing," though I think this to be a late interpolated chapter.³ But rāçi, iii, 190, 90, surely implies the zodiac.

But even if the passage mentioning all-knowing Greeks be an interpolation, the fact that the "Greeks," who must here be the real Greeks, bear the name Yavanas, shows that the

¹ So the great walls and palaces of Patna, which are especially mentioned in the Mahābhāṣya, are attributed by tradition to demoniac power (Fa-Hien), and the great architecture of Mathurā is also ascribed to superhuman power. On Maya's māyā, to which is attributed the most extensive building, compare ii, 1; v, 100, 1-2; viii, 33, 17 (Asura cities); R. iv, 51, 10. It is possible that the Benares ghāts are referred to in vii, 60, 1 (Gaṅgā) cayanāḥ kāñcanāḥ citā. "Golden" buildings may be only gilded wood (as they are to-day). Plated stone is mentioned in ii, 3, 32. Old Patna's noble "walls and palaces" are now unfortunately under the Ganges, in all probability.

² The cāitya and stūpa mounds (only R. has a cāityaprāsāda, v, 43, 3), like the caves, are not to be compared with roofed palaces of stone and marble. A statue of iron is mentioned, āyaso Bhīmaḥ, xi, 12, 15; iron bells in temples, xii, 141, 32. In ii, 4, 21-22, the Greeks are compared to Kālakeya Asuras. Here, along with the king of Kāmboja, is mentioned one king, (the) Kampana, "who was the only man that ever frightened, kamp, the Yavanas, (men) strong, heroic, and skilled in weapons. Like as Indra frightened the Kālakeya Asuras, so" (K. frightened the Greeks). Compare also Kālayavana who had the Garga-glory (p. 15) in xii, 340, 95, Weber, loc. cit.

³ Compare ii, 14, 14; iii, 254, 18; xii, 101, 1 ff.; Ruling Caste, p. 305; viii, 45, 36, sarvajñā Yavanāḥ, in the expansion of the preceding vituperative section, where from hanta bhūyo bravīmi te, in 45, 1, Karṇa bursts out again in new virulence, which looks almost too much like a later adornment.

Yavanas elsewhere mentioned¹ are also Greeks and not some other people exclusively. It is a desperate resort to imagine that, in all these cases, well-known names refer to other peoples, as the synthesist must assume in the case of the Greeks, Bactrians, Persians, Huns, and other foreigners mentioned frequently throughout the poem. A further well-known indication of Greek influence is given by the fact that the Kṣudrakas and Mūlavas were united into one nation for the first time by the invasion of Alexander,² and that they appear thus united under the combined name kṣudrakamālavās in the epic, ii, 52, 15. The Romans, Romakas, are mentioned but once, in a formal list of all possible peoples, ii, 51, 17 (cannibals, Chinese, Greeks, Persians, Scythians, and other barbarians), and stand thus in marked contrast to the Greeks and [Persians, Pahlavas,] who are mentioned very often; though in the account of Krishna killing the Yavana whose name was Kaserumat, iii, 12, 32, it has been suggested by Weber that the name was really of Latin origin. It is clear from this that, while the Greeks were familiar, the Romans were as yet but a name. Further, the distinct prophecy that "Scythians, Greeks, and Bactrians will rule unrighteously in the evil age to come" (kali-age), which occurs in iii, 188, 35, is too clear a statement to be ignored or explained away. When this was written the peoples mentioned had already ruled Hindustan. If this were the only place where the names occurred, the Mārkaṇḍeya episode, it might be regarded as part of an interpolation in mass. But the people here described as foreign oppressors are all mentioned repeatedly as barbarians and warriors, associated generally, as in the passage just mentioned, with other peoples of the West, such as Abhīras and Kāmbojās. Thus in iii, 51, 23, "Singhalese, Barbaras and barbarians,"

¹ Yavanas or Yāunas (xii, 207, 42-3), i. e., Ionians. So Jacobi, loc. cit.

² Lassen, Ind. Alt. ii, pp. 160-171; Weber, Ind. Stud. xiii, p. 375.

³ That is both the Hindu and native name for Ceylon, and the Greek and Herodotus name for barbarian. Siṅhalān Barbarān Mlecchān ye ca Laṅkānivāsaḥ. The word barbarās (= of Βάρβαροι) occurs in both epics but not in literature of an earlier date. Weber, Ind. Lit., p. 237, note, calls attention

and the inhabitants of Laṅkā” are grouped together, in contrast to the “Western realms, those of the Persians, Greeks, and Scythians” (with the folk of Kashmeer, Daradas, Kirātas, Huns, Chinese, Tuṣāras, Indus-dwellers, etc.). So in xii, 207, 43, opposed to sinners of the South, are the Northern sinners, Greeks (Yāunas), Kāmbojans, Kandahar-people (Gāndhāras), Kirūtas and Barbaras, who are here said to be wandering over this earth from the time of the Tretā age, having customs like those of wild animals or of the lowest castes.

Such allusions as these can mean only this: the Pandu-Epic, in its present form, was composed after the Greek invasion.¹ I have suggested above that the form of the name Bactrian does not compel us to accept Professor Weber's conclusions in regard to the date of passages now containing this form. If this seems inconclusive, there is nothing for it but to refer the epic in its present form to a post-Christian era. But even otherwise, the presence of the Greeks and Bactrians as warriors and rulers in India cannot be explained out of the poem by a loose reference to the fact that India had heard of Yavanas before Alexander.

This brings us to another point of view. A stanza following the one last cited proclaims that “even Nārada recognizes Krishna's supremacy,” an utterance² which points clearly to a comparatively recent belief in Krishna as All-god, a point long recognized. On the basis of the Arjuna cult implied by Pāṇini, the synthesist urges that the whole epic, in its present Smṛti form and with its belief in the all-godhead of the Krishna-Arjuna pair, is as old as the fifth century B. C. But even if an Arjuna cult were traced back to this date, to this constant union of Greek with other Western peoples in other literature as well. The name was extended to Indo-Scythians and later even to Persians and Arabians. Weber, loc. cit.

¹ As has long ago been suggested, of the Greeks mentioned in the epic among the allied forces, Bhagadatta may be Apollodotus the founder of the Græco-Indian kingdom (160 n. c.). Weber, *Ind. Lit.*, p. 204 ff. This Greek is especially mentioned not only as “ruler of the Yavanas,” but as the friend of the epic hero's father, that is, as known to an older generation, ii, 14, 15; von Schroeder, *Lit. und Cultur*, p. 463 (with other references).

² Narado 'py atha Kṛṣṇasya param mene . . . çāçvatattvam, xii, 207, 43.

there would still be no evidence in regard to the cult of the twain as All-god. And this is the claim of the present epic, except where, as in the case just cited, incredulity is involuntarily manifested or plainly stated (as in the reviling scene in Sabhā). The Gītā itself admits that those who worship Krishna as the All-god, or recognize him, are few in number: *vāsudevaḥ*¹ sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ, 7, 19; "Me (as All-god) in human form, not recognizing my godhead, fools despise," 9, 11. The Mahābhāṣya does not recognize Krishna as All-god, but as hero and demigod. The cult is growing even in the epic itself. So, too, no Smṛti² can be implied by Pāṇini's words.³

I come now to the testimony of Buddhistic literature. As said above, the oldest literature knows only ballad tales. It may be assumed that the Jātakas are older than Aṅgavahosa, who knows epic tales, but not always in epic form, and does not refer to the epic either by name or by implication, his general āgama being, as I have shown, a term used of any traditional literature, sacred or profane.⁴ The Jātakas may

¹ Mathurā in the whole epic is the birthplace of Vāsudeva, who seems to herd his cattle there; while in the Mahābhāṣya it is bahu-Kurucarā Mathurā and the chief city of the Pañcālas, clearly the older view. See ii, 14, 34, 45 ff.; xii, 340, 90; i, 221, 46 (cows, māthura-decyāḥ); IS. xiii, p. 379 ff.; on Krishna as not Vishnu in the Bhāṣya, ib., pp. 349, 353. In ii, 14, Krishna (as All-god) "could not injure his foe even in three hundred years," 36 and 67.

² The state of mind that in the face of the "evidence" of Pāṇini can lead one to say Pāṇini was acquainted with a *Pandu-Mahābhārata* peculiarly didactic (Das Mh. als Rechtsbuch, p. 155) is inconceivable. The whole "evidence" at its most evincing is that Pāṇini knew a Mahābhārata in which the heroes were objects of such worship as is accorded to most Hindu heroes after death.

³ So the later Rāmāyaṇa is turning into just such a moral and didactic work as the other epic. I have already instanced the intrusion of the Kaccit section. So Rāma, in vii, 55, 3, sets himself to telling homilies, with a familiar sound, *katvā paramadharmaikāṃ vyāhartum upacakrame* (just as in xv, 29, 14, *kathā divyā dharmiṣṭhāḥ cā 'bhavan, nṛpa*); and R. ib. 37, 24, *kathāḥ kathante dharmasanyuktāḥ purāṇajñāir mahātmabhiḥ*. In the same way, the late (gradual) identification of Rāma with Vishnu stands parallel to the change of the demigod Krishna to the All-god Vishnu, for Krishna is never mortal — there is no such antithesis — but he nevertheless is often not supreme god but only demigod in the epic.

⁴ So of law-rules in epic language, e. g., *śiṣṭīḥ śiṣṭeṣv anāgatam vyavasyanti anu rājānaḥ dharmam*, R. iii, 50, 9 (G. has *nayaḥśiṣṭeṣu*).

go back to the third or fourth century, or they may not, so far as their present form is concerned. At any rate, they show no knowledge of the epic as such. What they show (the material has been sufficiently collected by the Rev. Mr. Dahmann) is that the epic characters were familiar and the story of the Pandus was known, although the characters do not occupy the position they do in the epic.¹ But no date of an epic, still less of our epic, can be established on casual references to the heroes of the epic found in literature the date of which is entirely uncertain. Perhaps it is negatively quite as significant that the Jātakas do not refer to the epic at all, but only to people mentioned in it.

The present epic, if it records anything historical, records the growth of a great power in Hindustan, a power that could not have arisen before Buddhistic supremacy without leaving a trace of the mighty name of Pandu in the early literature. There is no such trace. Moreover, even the idea of such a power as our epic depicts was unknown before the great empire that arose under Buddhism. For this reason it is impossible to explain the Pandu realm described in the epic as an allegory of the fifth century, for we cannot have an allegory in unknown terms. The Pandus, be it remembered, rule all India, and the limits of their empire, as geographically defined in the epic, far surpass the pre-Açoka imagination, as it is reflected in the literature. Even Manu has no idea of an empire. His king is a petty rāj.²

Before the Mahābhārata there were tales of Kurus and Bharats known to antiquity. Incongruous as the name appears to be, Bhārata yet designates the Pandu epic. How

¹ The latter point proves nothing, for even in Sanskrit literature, as I pointed out long ago, the heroes of the two epics are mixed up confusedly, and we cannot suppose a Buddhist would be more careful than a Brahman in verifying references to Brahmanic literature.

² "Great kings" and "emperors" are indeed known even in pre-Buddhistic times, but what was the "empire" of any king before Açoka? Certainly not that of the Pandus. It is significant, in view of the great importance laid by some scholars on the cakravartin idea, that this word does not occur before the later Upanishads, although "great kings" are mentioned; nor is it an early epic phrase.

the Pandus succeeded in attaching themselves to the tales which told of the old national heroes is unknown. All theories and hypotheses of development are pure guesswork. What we know is that the tales which told of Kurus and Bhāratas became the depository of the Pandus, who appear to have substituted themselves for Bhāratas¹ and may in fact have been a branch of the tribe, which from a second-rate position raised itself to leadership. There is a theory that the epic story has been inverted, in favor of the Pandus; there is another that it is what it pretends to be, the strife of Pandus, calling themselves Bhāratas, with the scions of the old Kurus. With the former, that so persuasively advanced by Professor Holtzmann, I have never been able to agree; but my own theory I have from the beginning put forward merely as one of probable epic growth.²

While, however, it is necessary to recognize the doubtful character of speculation in regard to the exact course of epic development, it is not desirable to blink the truths that are made clear in view of the facts we actually possess, the evidence of remaking, the base of the poem resting on old Kurus and Bhāratas, the present structure of Pandu material; the age of the Pandu poem as a whole (synthetically considered), evinced *inter alia* by its recognition of late philosophical writers such as Pañcaçikha (c. 100 A. D.), by a growing modernness of metre, by acquaintance with Greeks and Greek art, etc.

Putting these facts together with those gleaned from other works than the epic itself, we may tentatively assume as approximate dates of the whole work in its different stages: Bhārata (Kuru) lays, perhaps combined into one, but with no evidence of an epic before 400 B. C. A Mahābhārata tale

¹ The Bhārati Kathā (never "Pandus-tale"), as the received name of the epic, certainly favors this view.

² This I was careful to point out at its first presentation in my *Ruling Caste* (now nearly fifteen years ago) with *mays* and *mights* and *seems*, and other useful words. As a theory I still consider this the best yet offered, but I have never held it to be demonstrable, only more or less probable, in outline and detail respectively.

with Pandu heroes, lays and legends combined by the Puranic diaskeuasts, Krishna as a demigod (no evidence of didactic form or of Krishna's divine supremacy), 400-200 B. C. Re-making of the epic with Krishna as all-god, intrusion of masses of didactic matter, addition of Puranic material old and new; multiplication of exploits, 200 B. C. to 100-200 A. D. The last books added with the introduction to the first book, the swollen Anuṣāsana separated from Čānti and recognized as a separate book, 200 to 400 A. D.; and finally 400 A. D. + : occasional amplifications, the existence of which no one acquainted with Hindu literature would be disposed antecedently to doubt, such as the well known addition mentioned by Professor Weber, *Lectures on Literature*, p. 205; and perhaps the episode omitted by Kṣemendra,¹ *Indian Studies*, No. ii, p. 52.

In the case of these more precise dates there is only reasonable probability. They are and must be provisional till we know more than we know now. But certain are these four facts:

1, That the Pandu epic as we have it, or even without the masses of didactic material, was composed or compiled after the Greek invasion; 2, That this epic only secondarily developed its present masses of didactic material; 3, That it did not become a specially religious propaganda of Krishnaism (in the accepted sense of that sect of Vaiṣṇavas) till the first century B. C.; 4, That the epic was practically completed by 200 A. D.; 5, That there is no "date of the epic" which will cover all its parts (though handbook makers may safely assign it in general to the second century B. C.).

The question whether the epic is in any degree historical

¹ We cannot, however, be too cautious in accepting the negative evidence of one mañjari, or précis, as proof that the original work lacked a certain passage. I dissent altogether from the sweeping statement, made *loc. cit.*, p. 27: "The importance of the condensations lies in the fact that by means of them we are enabled to determine the state of these works (epics, etc.) in his (Kṣemendra's) time." Two or three compendia agreeing on one point of omission might "determine," but one résumé alone can only create a possibility, as in this case (p. 53 note).

seems to me answerable, though not without doubt, and I cannot refrain from expressing an opinion on a point so important. As I have remarked above, there is no reflex of Pandu glory in Brahmanic literature before the third or fourth century. It is, further, impossible to suppose that during the triumph of Buddhism such a poem could have been composed for the general public for which it was intended. The metre of the poem shows that its present form is later than the epic form of Patañjali's epic verses, but this indicates simply recasting; so that a Pandu Mahābhārata may have existed previously, as implied by Pāṇini. But while a Buddhist emperor was alive no such Brahmanic emperor as that of the epic could have existed, no such attacks on Buddhism as are in the epic could have been made, and the epic of to-day could not have existed before the Greeks were personally familiar. In other words, granted a history, that history must have been composed at least as late as the history was possible. Pāṇini's allusions and those of Buddhist writers show that the Pandus were known as heroes. It is, further, most improbable that the compilers, who made the poem represent Pandu virtues and victories, would have chosen them for this position had they been mythical. In their reassertion of Brahmanism they would have chosen rather the well-known ancient Brahmanic legends of the old Itihāsa, Bhāratī Kathā; yet to appeal to the people's nothing real and near was necessary. But while before the second century the conditions were lacking which could have produced the poem, with the second century they were supplied, and there was already the Pandu tribe of the Mahābhārata. I have to press I have Keene's essay Zur Mahābhārata-Entstehung, and I believe that the work could have been written at any time as a result of a study of Buddhist records, and as a result of a study of the history of the Maurya dynasty. The work was written, I believe, by Pāṇini, in 175 B.C., for the new emperor, Ashoka, had died. Professor Keene thinks, indeed, that the poem is of a later date, and a historical tract, and gives a very ingenious account of the origin of the Mahābhārata, which, however, scarcely convinces me. But I am glad to find my own suggestion of the independence of the Mahābhārata being cast in its present shape before the second century is supported by this independent reference to actual history.

with its perhaps justified claim to be considered a branch of the Bhāratas, its own later heroes, its cult of anti-Buddhistic type. In so far, then, as we may discern a historical germ in the midst of poetic extravagance, it would seem that the poem represents an actual legend of a real tribe, and in so far as that legend persists in its adherence to polyandry as an essential part of the legend, a tribe which, like so many others in India, had been brahmanized and perhaps become allied by marriage to the old Bhārata tribe, whose legends were thus united with its own.

Finally, I would speak shortly of the poem as a literary product of India. In what shape has epic poetry come down to us? A text that is no text, enlarged and altered in every recension, chapter after chapter recognized even by native commentaries as *prakṣipta*, in a land without historical sense or care for the preservation of popular monuments, where no check was put on any reciter or copyist who might add what beauties or polish what parts he would, where it was a merit to add a glory to the pet god, where every popular poem was handled freely and is so to this day. Let us think ourselves back into the time when the reciter recited publicly and dramatically; let us look at the battle scenes, where the same thing is repeated over and over, the same event recorded in different parts of the poem in slightly varying language. The Oriental, in his half-contemptuous admission of epic poetry into the realm of literature, knows no such thing as a definitive epic text. The Vedas and the classics are his only real care. A Bhāratavid in India is even now more scorned than honored.

If the epic as a whole belongs to no one era, and this remains an incontrovertible fact, it is then in the highest degree probable also that no one part of the whole can be assigned to a certain period. I mean, not only must we admit that old books contain more recent insets, as for example chapters five and eleven of book ii, and that late books contain old passages, as for example the rape of Subhadrā and the burning of Khāṇḍava in book i, or the lotus-theft in book

xiii, but we must admit further that the smaller divisions, these special scenes themselves, have in all probability not remained untouched, but that the tale, the language, and the verse of the epic have been subjected to an evening process irregularly applied since first the poem was put together as a *Mahābhārata*; great liberty being taken with the poem both by reciters and copyists, the establishment of the text by commentaries (noticed as early as the introductory chapter of the poem itself) proving no bar to occasional alterations and additions. (Such changes were not introduced of set purpose (or the metre would have been made more uniform), but incidentally and illogically.) The same tale was told not in identical language but with slight variations; intrusions were not shunned; grammatical and metrical forms were handled freely, but with no thorough revision of form or sustained attempt at harmonizing incongruities of statement. It is for this reason that there is not a still sharper metrical line between old and new in the epic itself, and it is for this reason that the epic verses of the *Mahābhāṣya* are freer than those of the *Mahābhārata*. The former were fixed by their function as examples in a grammar; the latter were exposed to constant though sporadic modification, and appear to-day as they survive after having endured the fret and friction of innumerable reciters and pedantic purists. One by one, and here and there, the transmitters, working neither in concert nor continuously, but at haphazard and at pleasure, have trimmed this mighty pile into a shape more uniform, though they have not altogether hid its growth, except from eyes that, seeing the whole as a thing of power and beauty, are perhaps less apt to mark the signs of varying age.

But if this be so, it may be asked, and I think it will be asked, perhaps triumphantly, by those lacking in sobriety of judgment, what becomes of the results of the analysis of metres, of the discovery of late elements in this or that section? What do they signify?

They signify and proclaim that the Great Epic was completed in just the way the synthesist proclaims it was not

completed. Pitched together and patched together, by the diaskeuasts and priests respectively, the older parts, though not free from rehandling, bear a general stamp of antiquity lacking in later parts. For this reason, the *Gītā* and *Gambling scene* are, as wholes, metrically and stylistically more antique than are the *Anugītā* and the *extravaganzas* in the battle-books; and for this reason, the pseudo-epic comes nearest in syntax and forms to the hybrid language that is preserved in literary monuments immediately preceding and following the Christian era. But it is true that no one can prove the relative antiquity of the *Gītā* and *Gambling scene* so absolutely as to prevent one devoid of historical sense from clinging to the notion that these parts of the epic are in origin synchronous with the pseudo-epic. Fortunately, however, the judgment of scholars is in general sane, and the determination of values may safely be left in their care.