



HISTORY OF
INDIA.
PART I.

Higher mani-
festations of
fire.

Presence of fire
necessary at the
marriage cere-
mony.

Agni, or Fire, re-
presented in va-
rious forms.

Agni as an im-
mortal being.

Agni as a priest
and divine mes-
senger.

Agni as the de-
vouring ele-
ment.

Character of the
Vedic hymns ad-
dressed to Agni.

charms of female beauty. In its higher manifesta-
tions it becomes identified with the light of the sun
and moon; with the lightning which shoots from the
sky and shatters the loftiest trees and strikes down
the strong man; with the deity who covers the field
with grain and ripens the harvest; with the divine
messenger who licks up the sacrifice and carries it
to the gods. Thus fire was regarded by the Vedic
Aryans as in every way a sacred thing; and, as if
to associate this deity with all that is nearest and
dearest to the human heart, a fire was considered to
be indispensable to the due performance of the mar-
riage ceremony; and the presence of fire as a divine
witness was deemed in some instances sufficient to
sanctify the union of an impatient and impassioned
pair.

Thus Agni, or Fire, is depicted in the Vedas in a
variety of forms: as a priest, a divine messenger, a
devouring element, and a deity who is the source
and diffuser of light throughout the universe. In
some hymns he is personified as an immortal being
enjoying perpetual youth, and travelling in a car
drawn by red horses.¹⁸ He is frequently invoked as
a priest, and like an officiating priest he is said to
have brought prosperity to the worshipper. As a
divine messenger he was implored to bring the gods
to the sacrifice,¹⁹ and the loving wives of the gods to
partake of the soma juice.²⁰ As a devouring element
he is invoked as the bright and purifying deity who
was charged with all the invocations of the gods;
whilst the mere operations of Agni as a consuming

¹⁸ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 36, v. 15; Mand. IV. v. 8.

¹⁹ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 31, v. 17.

²⁰ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 22, v. 9.



fire are frequently described in language eminently poetical. "When generated from the rubbing of sticks, the radiant Agni bursts forth from the wood like a fleet courser."²¹ "When excited by the wind, he rushes amongst the trees like a bull, and consumes the forest as a Raja destroys his enemies." "His path is blackened, and the birds are terrified at his roaring."²² In his more domestic capacity, Agni is described as an ornament in the sacrificial chamber, like a woman in a dwelling.²³ He is young and golden-haired, the domestic guardian, the protector against evil spirits, malevolent men, and noxious animals.²⁴ Like the divine Sun he is the supporter of the universe, but he abides on earth like a prince surrounded by faithful friends, and men sit down in his presence like sons in the dwelling of a father. "Such as thou art, Agni, men preserve thee constantly kindled in their dwellings, and offer upon thee abundant food: Do thou, in whom is all existence, be the bearer of riches."²⁵ But still there are passages referring to Agni, as indeed there are verses referring to almost every other Vedic deity, in which that individual god is represented as supreme and absolute.²⁶ Thus in two particular hymns, Agni is

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Invocations to
Agni as a de-
stroyer.

Invocations to
Agni in his do-
mestic capacity.

Invocations to
Agni as a deity.

Invocations to
Agni as the Su-
preme Being.

²¹ Rig-Veda, Mand. V. Hymn 29, v. 6.

²² Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 58, v. 4; Hymn 65, v. 4; Hymn 94, v. 10 and 11.

²³ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 66, v. 3.

²⁴ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 36, v. 5, 15.

²⁵ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 73. The whole of this hymn is singularly illustrative of the worship of Agni.

²⁶ This coexistence of Monotheism and Polytheism is very clearly explained by Prof. Max Müller in the following very eloquent passage:—"When these individual gods are invoked, they are not conceived as limited by the power of others, as superior or inferior in rank. Each god is to the mind of the supplicant as good as all the gods. He is felt, at the time, as a real divinity—as supreme and absolute, in spite of the necessary limitations which, to our mind, a plurality of gods must entail on every single god. All the rest disappear for a moment from the vision



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Language of
praise to be dis-
tinguished from
the expression
of thought.

Indra and Agni,
the chief gods of
the Rig-Veda.

Characteristics
of Varuna, or
Water.

called the ruler of the universe, the lord of men, the wise king, the father, the brother, the son, the friend of men; whilst the powers and even the names of the other deities are distinctly applied to this god.²⁷ Care must however be taken not to confound the language of praise with the expression of thought. The extravagance of Oriental adulation will permit an Asiatic courtier to address some petty chief or Raja as the king of kings, but this by no means implies an idea of universal empire. At the same time, the language of praise, eager to propitiate and boundless in expression, may have to some extent originated that later conception of the one Supreme Being, the God above all gods, which is undoubtedly to be found in the Vedas.

These two deities—Indra and Agni, Rain and Fire—are the chief gods which were worshipped by the Vedic Aryans. In the hymns they are sometimes identified with each other, and sometimes they are associated in the same hymn; but even as individuals more hymns were apparently addressed to each than to any other divine being in the Vedic pantheon. The remaining gods, however, though less prominent and perhaps less popular, are still well worthy of attention. They comprise the personifications of water, and the sun and moon, air and the winds, all of which were associated with the ideas of deity.

The god of waters was named Varuna.²⁸ Next

of the poet, and he only who is to fulfil their desires stands in full light before the eyes of the worshippers." *Hist. of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 532.

²⁷ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymns 1 and 2. Comp. Max Müller, *Hist. of Sanskrit Lit.* p. 533.

²⁸ Upon this point there is some obscurity. Varuna was undoubtedly regarded as the deity of water, but the name is in some verses applied to the sun and even



to fire, perhaps water has always occupied the most prominent place in the religious worship of nations in general. It purifies, and it is an emblem of purity; and is as necessary in every household as fire. At the same time, the ever-flowing current of a great river awakens ideas of life and infinity; of a past and a future; of going on ever and ever, we know not whence and we know not where, but ever flowing. Springs and rivers, however, are generally separated into individual abstractions, which are personified as divine beings; and the highest conception of one universal god of the waters seems to have been gathered from a familiarity with the sea. Thus amongst a maritime people, the god of the ocean, the lord of tempests, the ruler of the rushing, boiling waves, ever occupies an important place in the sphere of religious thought; and here it should be remarked that the Vedic Aryans were evidently acquainted with the sea, for the hymns contain allusions to merchants, to sea voyages, and to ships with a hundred oars. In a more material or credulous age this deity might be depicted as a mere monster, half fish and half human; but in the higher Aryan conception he is represented as a spiritual existence, powerful to destroy but mighty to save, that could sink the strong man into the depths of the sea, or bear him in safety to the shore. In a later stage the conception rises higher and higher, until a deity is shadowed forth that rewards goodness and punishes sin. The following hymn to Varuna, felicitously translated by Prof. Max Müller, exhibits this deity in the two-fold character of controlling tem-

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Mysterious attributes of water.

Water a purifier and a household necessity.

Ideas awakened by the currents of great rivers.

Springs and rivers generally separated into individual abstractions.

Conception of a god of the ocean.

Distinction between a material conception of a sea monster, and the Aryan conception of a spiritual existence.

Varuna considered as a deity who rewards goodness and punishes sin.

Deep religious feeling in a hymn addressed to Varuna.

to the personification of day. In the Epics he is invariably regarded as water, and is emphatically the god of the ocean.



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pests and punishing sin; and in so doing indicates a tone of religious feeling not so far removed from modern ideas as might have been expected:—

“Let me not yet, O Varuna, enter into the house of clay; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

“If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

“Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone to the wrong shore; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

“Thirst came upon the worshipper, though he stood in the midst of the waters; have mercy, almighty, have mercy!

“Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offence before the heavenly host, whenever we break thy law through thoughtlessness; have mercy, almighty, have mercy.”²⁹

Characteristics
of Śūrya, or the
Sun.

Prominence of
the Sun in all an-
cient religions.

Śūrya, or the Sun, is another important Vedic deity; and indeed seems under different names to have always held a high place amongst the primitive gods of every nation, by virtue of its prominence in the heavens, and the extent to which its influence is felt upon earth. Its daily course and its annual course, its welcome rising in the morning and its glorious setting in the evening, must all have excited the keenest curiosity amongst a child-like and inquisitive people; and, at the same time, the imagination alone was left to account for the existence of phenomena which in a non-scientific age are altogether beyond human ken. Thus it seems extremely probable that one of the earliest efforts of poetical genius was to personify the Sun as the deity of light, travelling through the blue ether in a golden chariot which all men might see, drawn however by steeds which were invisible to the out-

Personification
of the Sun one
of the earliest
efforts of ancient
bards.

The golden cha-
riot and invis-
ible steeds.



ward eye, but which were easily assumed to be white, resplendent, and beautiful beyond expression. In the Vedas the attributes of this deity are frequently the same as those of Agni, especially that of originating and diffusing light; but still the Sun stands forward as a deity altogether distinct from Fire, when described as journeying through the firmament in an upward and downward course, and especially in his character of measuring days and nights. This god is apparently addressed under a variety of names, such as Súrya, Savitri, Mitra, Aryaman, and others; but in the Epics he is chiefly known by the name of Súrya, and was regarded as the great ancestor of the solar race who appear in the Rámáyana. In the higher conceptions the Divine Sun is regarded and invoked as a spirit pervading all things, as the soul of the world and supporter of the universe;³⁰ and this idea is said to be indicated in the celebrated Vedic verse known as the Gayatri, which down to the present day still forms a part of the daily devotions of the Bráhmaṇ.³¹

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Attributes of
Súrya similar to
those of Agni.

Súrya a distinct
personification
from Agni.

Súrya regarded
as the mythical
ancestor of the
Solar race of
Ayodhya.
Súrya regarded
as a divine spirit
pervading all
things.

The Gayatri.

The twelve Ad-
ityas.

In connection with the worship of the Sun, there are some obscure deities, known as the

³⁰ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 73, v. 3.

³¹ Rig-Veda, Mand. III. Hymn 62, v. 10. The original Sanskrit of this verse appears to be simple enough. Wilson's translation is as follows:—"We meditate on that desirable light of the divine Savitri, who influences our pious rites." Sir William Jones's paraphrastic translation was as follows:—"Let us adore the supremacy of that divine sun, the godhead, who illuminates all, who recreates all, from whom all proceed, to whom all must return, whom we invoke to direct our understandings aright in our progress towards his holy seat." Colebrooke proposes the following version:—"Earth! Sky! Heaven! Let us meditate on (these and on) the most excellent light and power of that generous, sportive, and resplendent Sun, (praying that) it may guide our intellects." From information gathered personally from educated Bráhmaṇs, the writer has been led to infer that Colebrooke's translation exhibits the nearest approximation to the religious ideas involved in the words. The verse is apparently an invocation to the several deities who are implored by the worshipper to aid his intellect in the apprehension and adoration of God.



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Adityas.³² These are said to be the sons of Aditi, who is apparently identified with the universe.³³

It is not sufficiently clear how these Adityas were regarded by the Vedic worshippers, but at a later period they were represented as being twelve in number, and were apparently identified with the twelve signs of the zodiac, or rather with the sun in twelve different characters, each character corresponding to the sign through which it passed in succession. The most important fact connected with this circle of divinities is that the god Vishnu, so prominent in the later mythology, appears in the Rig-Veda merely as one of the Adityas. Also Aryaman, Mitra, Varuna, and Savitri, are identified both with the Sun and with certain of the Adityas.

The god Vishnu originally an Aditya.

Characteristics of the minor Vedic deities.

Of the remaining Vedic deities but little remains to be said. Their individual character may be easily inferred from their names, whilst their form of worship appears to differ in no way from that of the deities already described. Soma, or the Moon, which appears in some Pantheons as a female divinity corresponding to the male personification of the Sun, is chiefly celebrated in the Vedas in connection with the soma plant; but it appears in the Mahá Bhárata, indifferently under the names of Chandra and Soma, as the mythical progenitor of the great Lunar race of Bhárata. Two obscure deities, known as the Aswins, are apparently a personifica-

Soma, or Chandra, or the Moon.

Connected in the Vedas with the soma plant.

Regarded as the mythical progenitor of the Lunar race of Bhárata.

The two Aswins.

³² Comp. Wilson, Rig-Veda, Vol. I. Introd. p. xxxiii. Also Muir's Sanskrit Texts, Part IV. p. 101.

³³ The Vedic verse is as follows :—"Aditi is heaven; Aditi is the firmament; Aditi is mother, father, and son; Aditi is all the gods; Aditi is the five classes of men; Aditi is generation and birth." Upon this verse Sáyana remarks :—"Aditi is hymned as the same with the universe." Wilson, Rig-Veda, Vol. I. p. 230, and note.



tion of light and moisture, and as sons of the Sun seem sometimes to be identified and multiplied as the sun's rays.³⁴ They are invoked in several hymns, but do not appear to have been invested with any peculiar attributes, beyond that of being young and handsome, and riding on horses. The deifications of Vāyu, or the air, and of the Maruts, Vāyu, or the winds, are frequently invoked, in many instances, in conjunction with Indra and Agni. The Maruts especially, whose power was manifest, are described in such figurative language as is usually applied to the strong and impetuous winds by poets of all nations and ages. In this way they are depicted as roaring amongst the forest trees, and blowing up the clouds for rain; but they are also personified in the imaginations of the Vedic psalmists as youthful warriors bearing lances on their shoulders, delighting in the soma juice like Indra, and, like him, the bestowers of benefits upon their worshippers. The Maruts.

The next Vedic deity who may be taken into consideration is Ushas, or the personification of the dawn. This divinity scarcely appears in the Epics, and can hardly have been extensively worshipped, but yet is especially deserving of notice from the remarkable contrast which the conception presents to those of other gods, and especially to the idea of Indra. In the place of the impetuous warrior, strong and drunk with wine, and cleaving the clouds with his thunderbolt, we have the vision of early morning, of the first pale flush of light, imaged as a pure and lovely maiden awakening a sleeping Characteristics of Ushas, or the dawn.

Contrast between the conception of Ushas and that of Indra.

³⁴ In the Epics they are said to have been the physicians of the gods, and are constantly represented as twins.



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Poetry of the
conception of
Ushas.

Associations
connected with
the dawn in
India.

Vedic hymns ad-
dressed to Ushas
as a maiden.

Vedic ideas of
Ushas as a deity.

world as a young wife awakens her children. This poetical conception seems to have had peculiar charms for the old Vedic bards; and, in truth, the dawn of early morning in India is singularly grateful to the feelings, and in the mind of the Vedic worshipper was associated with early prayer as well as with early duties. In addition to the refreshing coolness and delightful stillness of the hour, there is a peculiar whiteness in the atmosphere, not so expressive as moonlight, but infinitely more delicate and more suggestive of innocence and purity. Thus the night with all the horrors of darkness—the fear of ghosts, demons, snakes, tigers, and midnight robbers—is supposed to have passed away before the rising of this white-robed maiden, the first in all the world who is awake, and the first to appear at the invocation of the gods. But notwithstanding the unsubstantial character of the original personification, it nevertheless became in many hymns a vivid conception of a deity. As a mere female, Ushas is likened to a young bride, with perhaps more warmth of painting than would suit modern taste:—

“Goddess, manifest in person like a maiden, thou goest to the resplendent and beautiful sun; and, like a youthful bride before her husband, thou uncoverest thy bosom with a smile.”³⁵

But as a divinity, the language respecting Ushas is much more elevated:—

“Ushas, daughter of heaven, dawn upon us with riches; diffuser of light, dawn upon us with abundant food; beautiful goddess, dawn upon us with wealth of cattle.”³⁶

³⁵ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 123, v. 1.

³⁶ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 48, v. 1.



"This auspicious Ushas has harnessed her vehicles from afar, above the rising of the sun, and she comes gloriously upon man with a hundred chariots."³⁷

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"First of all the world is she awake, triumphing over transitory darkness; the mighty, the giver of light, from on high she beholds all things; ever youthful, ever reviving, she comes first to the invocation."³⁸

Such were the chief gods of the Aryans, and to them may be added some others less prominent, such as the personifications of Food, of Day and Night, and of the Seasons. These require no special description, inasmuch as they are little more than poetical personifications; and probably at the period of their composition they were as little connected with religious worship as the songs of Hafiz were connected with the sentiments of Mahomedan devotion. These creations of the fancy have ever been the favourite product of the Aryan mind, and thus the Vedic "Hymn to Pitri, the Divinity of Food,"³⁹ is even surpassed in intensity of personification by Burns's ballad of "John Barleycorn," and Tennyson's exquisite poem on the "Death of the Old Year."⁴⁰

Minor Vedic deities the mere personifications of poetry.

Comparison of ancient and modern personifications.

Having thus sketched generally the individual character of the leading deities of the Aryans as they appear in the Rig-Veda, it may be advisable to glance at that conception of One Supreme Being, as in all and above all, which finds full expression

Vedic conception of one Supreme Being.

³⁷ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 48, v. 7.

³⁸ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 123, v. 2.

³⁹ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 187.

⁴⁰ The great master in the power of personifying abstractions, until they become objects of actual interest, is John Bunyan; an interest however which is derived more from the religious experiences of the author than from a large knowledge of human nature.



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Monotheistic
VERSOS.

in the Vedic hymns. Upon this point the following passages will be found very significant:—

“Who has seen the primeval being at the time of his being born; what is that endowed with substance which the unsubstantial sustains; from earth are the breath and blood, but where is the soul; who may repair to the sage to ask this?”⁴¹

“What is that One alone, who has upheld these six spheres in the form of an unborn?”⁴²

The following hymn, translated by Professor Max Müller, still further expresses the conception of monotheism, and indeed seems to indicate that the idea itself is a necessary idea forced upon the mind by a thoughtful consideration of the phenomena of the universe.⁴³

Grand monotheistic hymn translated by Professor Max Müller.

“In the beginning there arose the Source of golden light: He was the only born lord of all that is. He established the earth, and this sky:—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He who gives life, He who gives strength; whose blessing all the bright gods desire; whose shadow is immortality; whose shadow is death:—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He who through His power is the only King of the breathing and awakening world: He who governs all, man and beast:—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?

“He whose power these snowy mountains, whose power

⁴¹ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 144, v. 4.

⁴² Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 144, v. 6.

⁴³ The translation which follows has been borrowed from Mr Max Müller's History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 569. That eloquent scholar is perhaps mistaken in alluding to the idea as “an instinctive monotheism.” The theory that the Aryan nations may possess an instinct which is denied to the Turanian peoples seems untenable. An instinct is an element of human nature, and not a mere characteristic of a race; and it appears more probable that what are called characteristics of a race, arise from peculiarities of development and history rather than from any original diversity in human nature.



the sea proclaims, with the distant river : He whom these regions are as it were His two arms :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

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“He through whom the sky is bright and the earth firm : He through whom the heaven was established, nay, the highest heaven : He who measured out the light in the air :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

“He to whom heaven and earth, standing firm by his will, look up, trembling inwardly : He over whom the rising sun shines forth :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

“Wherever the mighty water-clouds went, where they placed the seed and lit the fire, thence arose He who is the only life of the bright gods :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

“He who by his might looked even over the water-clouds, the clouds which gave strength and lit the sacrifice, *He who is God above all gods* :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?

“May He not destroy us, He, the creator of the earth ; or He, the righteous, who created the heaven ; He who also created the bright and mighty waters :—Who is the God to whom we shall offer our sacrifice ?”

The true conception of marriage, involving the idea of the union of one woman to one man, also finds expression in the Vedas. Husbands and wives in twos and twos are described as presenting their oblations together,⁴⁴ and in one hymn which dwells upon the duality of the two Aswins, the pair of deities are compared with pairs of almost everything that runs in couples, including a husband and a wife, and two lips uttering sweet sounds.⁴⁵

Vedic conception of marriage.

⁴⁴ Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 131, v. 3. Also Mand. Hymn 43.

⁴⁵ Rig-Veda, Mand. II. Hymn 39. There is however an exceptional passage in which a young Rishi named Kakshivat celebrates the generosity of a Raja who had given him his ten daughters in marriage. (Rig-Veda, Mand. I. Hymn 126.) This reference to polygamy as well as two hymns relating to a horse sacrifice, will be considered hereafter.



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Subsequent decay of the Vedic religion in the Brahmanic age.

Changes in circumstances and geographical position.

Existence of a military class and institution of caste.

Origin of the caste system in the period between the Vedic and Brahmanic ages.

Such, then, were the leading characteristics of the principal deities of the Aryans in the old Vedic age, when the new colonists were still dwelling in the neighbourhood of the five rivers. During the subsequent age of Brahmanism, the spiritual conceptions and aspirations passed in a great measure away; a new dynasty of deities arose; and the gods of the Vedas lost their hold upon the national sympathies, and shrivelled more and more into human heroes with human instincts and passions. Meantime the circumstances of the people, and their geographical position, had undergone a great and significant change. In the Vedic age the Aryan people were a band of agriculturists and herdsmen, and were still dwelling in the neighbourhood of the Punjab; but in the Brahmanic age they had become a conquering power, and had made their way down the fertile valleys of the Ganges and Jumná, and established kingdoms which are still famous in ancient story. This period of conquest implies the existence of a large military class; and in connection with this subject it may be remarked that the most significant change which appears to have taken place about this time was the institution of caste. In the Vedic age there appears to have been no direct traces of a caste system; but in the Brahmanic age the distribution of the people into castes is one of the most prominent features, and this caste system has prevailed more or less down to the present day. Thus the caste system seems to have arisen in the period which intervened between the Vedic and Brahmanic age; in other words, between the time when the Aryans appeared as simple colonists in the land of the five rivers, and the time



when they had become a conquering power, and established Aryan empires at Delhi, Oude, Tírhút, and Bahar, under the ancient names of Bhárata, Kosala, Mithila, and Magadhá. The question accordingly remains for consideration of how far the circumstances which attend the invasion of a well-populated country by a band of foreign emigrants, and the subsequent establishment of the settlers as a dominant and imperial power, are calculated to lead to the introduction of caste, and the perpetuation of a caste system for ages afterwards. This question is of more general importance than is generally supposed. The tendency of all foreign conquests is to create a caste feeling between the conquerors and the conquered; and this feeling becomes intensified when the difference is one not merely of political relations, but of colour, language, and religion. In the progress of another century, for instance, from the present date, the old caste antagonism amongst the Hindús may in some measure have passed away; but in its place there will be a caste feeling between Europeans, East Indians, and Natives, altogether different from that exclusiveness in different ranks of society which prevails amongst European nations.

Many of the difficulties connected with this interesting subject of inquiry will be cleared up, as far as the Hindús are concerned, by means of the evidence furnished by the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana. But still it appears necessary for the continuous identification of the Aryan people, and their separation from the Turanian populations by whom they were apparently surrounded, and with whom they must to some extent have intermingled, to

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Question of how far the establishment of the Aryans, as a conquering power, was calculated to lead to the introduction of caste.

Importance of the question from the general tendency of foreign conquest to create a caste feeling.

Question of how far the elements of an opposition of classes are to be found in the Rig-Veda.



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Four castes existing in the Brahmanic age.

Bráhmans.

Kshatriyas, or Rajas.

Vaisyas.

Súdras.

Outcastes and slaves.

Bráhmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas distinguished from the Súdras by the thread, and the designation of "twice born."

Hypothesis that the three twice-born castes are descendants of the Aryans of the Rig-Veda, and that the Súdras are a pre-Aryan people.

Antiquity of the Pariahs, or outcastes.

ascertain which of the castes had an Aryan origin, and how far the elements of an opposition of classes is to be found in the Rig-Veda.

In the Brahmanic age the great body of the people were divided into four castes, as follows:—

1st, Bráhmans, or priests; sometimes called preceptors.

2nd, Kshatriyas, or soldiers; also called Rajas, or sovereigns.

3rd, Vaisyas, or merchants and farmers.

4th, Súdras, a servile class who tilled the soil.

Below these was a nondescript population who were treated as outcastes, and who appear as the slaves of the Súdras. Of the four castes, the three first mentioned are distinguished from the fourth caste in a very particular manner. The Bráhmans, Kshatriyas, and Vaisyas, are each invested at a certain age with the sacred thread, from which circumstance they are entitled the "twice born," to distinguish them from the Súdras, who are not permitted to wear the thread. This line of demarcation between the three twice-born castes and the Súdras is far broader according to caste ideas than that between the Bráhman and the Kshatriya, or the Kshatriya and the Vaisya. Accordingly the most plausible conjecture appears to be that the three twice-born castes may be identified with the descendants of the Aryans of the Rig-Veda; whilst the Súdras, who form the mass of the population, may be regarded as the descendants of a Turanian people, who settled in India ages before the Aryans, and at some remote period contemporary perhaps with the earliest Egyptian dynasties. As to the outcastes, known in the south of India by the general name of Pariahs, they



probably were the descendants of an aboriginal people possessing a still more remote antiquity, who were originally conquered by the Súdras, and of whom some may have escaped to the hills and become the ancestors of the existing hill tribes.

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Now although no caste system appears in the Rig-Veda, the hymns certainly present glimpses of three distinct classes of worshippers. One class, the most prominent of all, comprised a people who evidently possessed strong religious instincts. They prayed in earnest language to primitive deities for such simple benefits as colonists in a new country might be expected to crave; namely, seasonable rains, abundant harvests, prolific cattle, and plenty of children. They were certainly a peaceful community, and appear to have been altogether indisposed for war, for they prayed not for victory but for protection. They do not even seem to have sacrificed to any god of war, unless Indra may be regarded as such; but their offerings were exclusively made to what might be termed family or domestic deities, who were supposed to supply the daily wants of a simple but contemplative people. Moreover, with the exception of the soma wine, which was especially quaffed by Indra, there was nothing of an orgiastic character in their worship. They invoked the gods, and propitiated them with such bloodless offerings as butter, curds, and milk. Again, whilst they implored the gods for protection, and lauded their exploits against robbers, cattle-lifters, and other enemies, they manifested no warlike spirit, no direct aspiration for revenge, such as would find expression in the prayers or hymns of a people devoted to deeds of arms. Indeed, it might almost be said that the flow of religious feeling which

Three distinct classes of worshippers indicated in the Rig-Veda.
1st. A peaceful and religious class, the ancestors of the Brāhmanis.



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runs through the greater number of the Vedic hymns, is altogether at variance with that exultant delight in blood and slaughter which is generally manifested in the ballads of a warlike people. Altogether the hymns of the Rig-Veda, as far as peaceful pursuits are concerned, are of such a character that it is not difficult to identify the people who gave them utterance with the ancestors of the later Bráhmans.

2nd. A military class, the ancestors of the Kshatriyas.

Marks of difference between the peaceful and the military class.

Increased prevalence of animal sacrifices when the Aryans became a conquering power.

A second class of Vedic worshippers adopted a different order of religious rites, namely, the sacrifice of animals; thus they immolated horses to Indra and the Sun, and Indra is also said to have delighted in roasted buffalo. This difference in sacrifice involved a difference of food, and in all probability a difference of avocation. A peace-loving community might be contented with a milk and vegetable diet; but a military community, to whom physical strength was of the highest importance, would delight in flesh meat, and such they would offer to the gods. It is a significant fact that the allusions to animal sacrifice are by no means frequent in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, whilst they find full expression in the ritualistic works of a later age, in which the Bráhmans are represented as the sacrificers.⁴⁶ From this it may be inferred that so long as the Vedic Aryans were dwelling in the Punjab, the priestly orders still retained their bloodless sacrifices; but as they advanced further and further into the interior, and depended more and more upon their military protectors, so they found it more and more necessary to propitiate the warriors by the worship of their gods and the performance of animal sacrifices. The

⁴⁶ See especially the Brahmanam Aitareya. Haug's translation.



military community thus referred to may therefore be identified with the ancestors of the Kshatriyas.

The third class of worshippers cannot be traced quite so easily, but still glimpses are to be obtained of a mercantile and maritime community, who especially worshipped Varuna, the god of the ocean, and who may be identified with the Vaisyas. Here it may be remarked that no opposition seems ever to have arisen between the Vaisyas and the other two castes, like that which broke out between the Bráhmans and the Kshatriyas. Indeed the wealth of the Vaisyas rendered them at a later period of considerable influence, inasmuch as they employed Bráhmans to perform sacrifices, and took Kshatriyas into their pay as soldiers and guards.

The early separation of the Bráhmans from the Kshatriyas, the priest from the soldier, is a question of much historical importance, and will be further discussed hereafter. For the present it may be sufficient to remark that the separation does not appear to have originated so much in those superstitious caste ideas which prevailed at a subsequent period, as in the difference of vocations, sentiments, and aspirations. What the priest was to the feudal Chieftain of the Dark Ages, such was the Bráhman to the Kshatriya. The Bráhman subsisted upon a diet of milk and vegetables, and spent his time in tending his flocks and herds, in composing hymns to the different deities, and in speculative inquiries as to the origin of man and the universe, and their relationship to the Supreme Being. As to the history of the past, apart from religion, he cared nothing, excepting so far as he might succeed in converting ancient traditions into a vehicle for religious teaching. Ac-

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3rd. A mercantile class, the ancestors of the Vaisyas.

Origin of the difference between the Bráhmans and the Kshatriyas.

Characteristics of the Bráhmans.



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Characteristics
of the Kshatri-
yas.

cordingly, in a later age he readily falsified those traditions for the purpose of promulgating Brahmanical ideas and exalting the pretensions of his own caste; and it was doubtless by this process that the Bráhmans ultimately succeeded in forming themselves into a sacerdotal community, who sought to bring all classes and ranks, Turanians as well as Aryans, under the yoke of ecclesiastical or caste supremacy. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, were eaters of flesh meat, and delighted in war and the chase, and especially gloried in the exploits of their forefathers. The consequence was that they possessed a rich stock of traditions which appear to have been handed down from generation to generation in the form of ballads. Thus the Kshatriyas appear as a fighting and conquering class, and originally exercised such influence over the masses as to be known as Kings or Rajas, whilst their god Indra was worshipped as the emblem of sovereignty. Ultimately, however, they appear to have degenerated into effeminate priest-ridden sovereigns and mercenary soldiers; and whilst such sovereigns served the Bráhmans out of superstitious fear, the soldiers entered the service of the Vaisyas for the sake of pay.

Extent of the
separation be-
tween the Bráh-
mans and the
Kshatriyas in
the Vedic age.

The question of how far the two classes of Bráhmans and Kshatriyas were really separated from each other in Vedic times does not appear to be indicated in the Rig-Veda; but it may be inferred from the data which will appear hereafter. Originally they probably grew up side by side, and their cause was identical, namely, the subjugation of the country. Indeed it is by no means improbable that the duties of priest and warrior were originally fulfilled by one and the same individual, the father,



the Chieftain, or the Raja. Gradually, however, the Chieftains or Rajas may have found it convenient to engage priests specially for the performance of sacrifices and other rites and ceremonies; and at such a stage, a stage to which the original story of the Mahá Bhárata appears to belong, the haughty Kshatriyas would look down with some disdain upon the mercenary or mendicant priest. But in due course the priests, as already indicated, formed themselves into a class, and exercised a vast and mysterious influence upon the masses; and in later times of peace and luxury, they established a spiritual and caste ascendancy, which overshadowed and overawed the mightiest Raja of the Kshatriyas. Indeed whilst the more ancient Kshatriyas seem to have regarded the Bráhmans with much the same disdain as might have been exhibited by the half-converted warriors of the Dark Ages towards the wandering Friars, no priest or confessor ever possessed a more powerful sway over King or Baron, than was exercised by the later Bráhmans over the Hindú Rajas.

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Rise of Brah-
manical ascend-
ancy.

The original traditions and institutions which appear in the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana are undoubtedly of Kshatriya origin, and in their earliest form were probably little more than ballads, which were sung or chaunted by bards and eulogists at the feasts and festivals of the Kshatriyas. Under such circumstances the details may have been exaggerated by the old Kshatriya bards in order to glorify the ancient Rajas, and gratify the Chieftains present by extravagant praises of their ancestors. Occasionally too the bards seem to have introduced poetical embellishments, and artificial turns of a

Traditions and
institutions in
the Mahá Bhá-
rata and Rámá-
yana, chiefly of
Kshatriya ori-
gin.

Exaggerations
and embellish-
ments of the
Kshatriya
bards.



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Later Brahmanical compilers of the Mahá Bhá-rata. Their falsifications and interpolations.

Data by which the fact of an interpolation can be established.

plot, which were more in accordance with a later and luxurious stage of civilization, and also better calculated to awaken and keep alive the interest of large and mixed audiences. But the latest compilers of the Mahá Bhá-rata were unquestionably Bráhmans; and they appear to have resolutely and consistently falsified the Kshatriya traditions, for the purpose of promulgating their own tenets of religion and morality; and especially for asserting their own supremacy as an hereditary sacerdotal caste, invested with supernatural powers, and superior not only to the Rajas but to the very gods of the Kshatriyas. Ancient Bráhman sages, under the name of Rishis, are abruptly and absurdly introduced in order to work miracles of the wildest and most senseless character, and to compel the reverence and obedience of such deities as Indra to Brahmanical authority. Moreover acts which are contrary to morality and common decency, are occasionally introduced for the depraved purpose of representing the more famous Bráhmans as the direct progenitors of the more famous Rajas. Again, Rajas are described as paying a reverence to Bráhmans amounting to worship, and as rewarding them with extravagant profusion, probably as examples for later Rajas to follow. Fortunately however for the purposes of history, these interpolations can generally be detected by the supernatural character of the details, and may therefore be largely eliminated; excepting in those cases where the later fable has been so intertwined with the more authentic narrative, that it is impossible to separate the one from the other without danger of mutilating the original Kshatriya tradition.



Besides these exaggerations of Kshatriya bards and Brahmanical compilers, an element of Buddhism is frequently perceptible in these ancient legends. But inasmuch as it is often difficult to decide upon the exact line of separation between Brahmanism and Buddhism, much in the same way as it is often difficult to draw the precise line between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, it will be sufficient for the present to indicate very briefly such traces of Buddhism as they arise, and reserve the general question for separate discussion hereafter.

The form in which the contents of these poems will be hereafter exhibited in the present volumes requires perhaps some explanation. A mere translation would be unreadable to any but the practised critic; a bare analysis without sufficient detail, would be a skeleton without life and blood, and consequently would be comparatively useless for the purposes of history. Accordingly a middle course has been adopted. Large masses of supernatural matter have been either briefly indicated, or cut away altogether. Brahmanical discourses and religious myths have been generally eliminated, to be reconsidered subsequently in connection with the religious ideas and belief of the people. Many episodes have been excluded, especially from the Mahá Bhárata where they mostly abound, but a sufficient number have been exhibited in outline; whilst three favourite stories, which are apparently types of three different epochs of Hindú history, have been preserved by themselves under a separate head. Finally, the residue has been recast in English prose in such a condensed form as would preserve the life and spirit of the ancient traditions

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Buddhist element in the
Mahá Bhárata.

Form in which
the two Epics
are exhibited in
the present history.

Neither a translation nor an analysis, but a condensed paraphrase interspersed with explanation, commentary, and historical inferences.



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without oppressing the reader with needless repetition and unmeaning dialogue ; and has been interspersed with such explanations and commentary, and such indications of the inferences to be derived from different phases in the traditions, as might serve to render the whole acceptable to the general reader.⁴⁷

Degree of credibility to be attached to the subject matter thus exhibited.

But when the main stories of the "Great War of Bhārata," and the "Adventures of Rāma" have been reproduced from the ancient poems, and cleared of most of the non-essential and non-historical matter, a question arises as to the degree of credibility to be given to the residue. Upon this point it may be remarked that where there is no motive for deception, and no departure from nature, a general belief may be accorded to the incidents ; and even when the incidents themselves are doubtful, there is no occasion for withholding a general belief in the pictures of life and manners which the descriptions convey. It has already been admitted that the ancient bards did occasionally indulge in Oriental exaggeration and embellishment, which a critical age refuses to accept as abstract truth. Deeds of heroism and feats of skill or strength are frequently described in the language of hyperbole ; and so too are the goodness of men and the beauty of women, or the wickedness and deformity of those aboriginal tribes with whom the ancient Hindús were occasionally at war. Garlands of jewels are substituted for garlands of flowers ; thrones of gold and silver for

Exaggerations and embellishments to be treated with leniency.

⁴⁷ Some idea of the enormous bulk of the Mahā Bhārata and Rāmāyana may be formed from the estimate that a literal translation of the former would occupy about fifteen volumes octavo, whilst a similar version of the latter poem would fill about six volumes octavo.



seats of a less rare and costly material; gorgeous palaces for rude forts of mud or stone. Again, the humour of incidents is often heightened by the interpolation of telling words in the dialogue; or the interest of the plot is increased by the introduction of new but trivial details. Such additions, however, are both allowable and natural in a primitive age, when the historian is little more than a narrator of stories, and is appreciated, not for his critical powers, or his impartiality, or his rigid adherence to abstract truth, but for the interest he excites and the amusement he conveys. Such history should of course be accepted, not as a sober narrative or unimpassioned disquisition, to be perused in silence and calmness in the study, but rather as a romantic ballad to be chaunted with modulated voice before a large and mixed audience of men and women of all ages, with uncultured minds probably, but with every passion of the human heart in full and healthy play. Under such circumstances the reader or chaunter is rewarded, not by calm approval, but by tears and laughter, and by the excitement which is perceptible in lips and eyes. These conditions of Hindú historical literature will be fully indicated in the progress of the narrative; but if the European reader would really identify himself with a Hindú audience, he must enter the covered court-yard of a wealthy zemindar during a marriage-feast, or approach a shady tree on the evening of some village festival. Then when the gods have been worshipped, and the dancing-girls are weary, he may watch the appearance of a Bráhmaṇ with his sacred palm-leaves, and soon perceive that the ears of young and old are all open to the ancient song.

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Simple character
of ancient
Hindú historians.

Ballad histories.

Excitement of
the audience.

Circumstances
under which
portions of the
Epics are
chaunted or
read.



PART II.

THE MAHÁ BHÁRATA.

CHAPTER I.

FAMILY TRADITIONS OF THE HOUSE OF BHÁRATA.

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Opening scene of
the Mahá Bhá-
rata at Hastiná-
pur, near the
modern Delhi.

Significance of
the site as an
outpost of the
Aryans.

THE opening scene of the Mahá Bhárata is laid at the city of Hastinápur, on the banks of the upper course of the river Ganges, and about sixty miles to the north-east of the modern city of Delhi. At the present day scarcely a vestige remains, for in the progress of ages the river has changed its course, and carried away nearly every trace of the ancient site ; but local tradition has preserved the name, and still points to the spot which has been immortalized in the national Epic. This geographical position is one which well deserves attention. Hastinápur was situated in the northern part of India, at a distance of more than a thousand miles from the eastern frontier on the Bengal side, but scarcely more than three hundred miles from the western frontier on the side of the Indus. Accordingly it may be regarded as an outpost of that great Aryan race, who are generally supposed to have made their appearance in the Punjab, or land of the five rivers,



at some period of remote antiquity, and to have gradually pushed their way towards the east along the fertile valleys of the Jumná and Ganges.

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The city and palace at Hastinápur are not described with any exactitude of detail; and yet so many ancient remains still exist in India, bearing a general resemblance to each other, that it would be by no means difficult to depict Hastinápur as it probably appeared at the date when the events recorded in the Mahá Bhárata actually occurred. A nondescript population, which may have comprised cultivators, herdsmen, mechanics, retainers, and petty shopkeepers, seem to have dwelt in an assemblage of huts, or houses, constructed of mats, bamboos, mud, or bricks, which was dignified by the name of the city. The palace was very likely built after a similar fashion, though on a larger scale, and with some pretensions to strength. Probably it was a rude quadrangular building, having men's apartments on one side, and women's apartments on the other; whilst the third side was devoted to the kitchens and household servants. The fourth side, the most important of all, formed the gateway or entrance Hall, so common in Hindú palaces; and in this Hall, which was open to all comers, the Raja sat in Council with his kinsmen and subordinate Chieftains, and administered rude patriarchal justice, or discussed affairs of State, such as wars, marriages, alliances, or other business connected with the Raj. In the neighbourhood of the city, lands were probably cleared and cultivated, and herds of cattle were pastured; all of which either belonged to the Rája, or to Chieftains subordinate to the Rája.

Approximate description of Hastinápur.

The City.

The Palace.

The Council Hall.

The Raj.

The Raj of Bhárata, an Aryan empire, established by the hero Bhárata, amidst an aboriginal population.

This simple community was known as the Raj

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of the Raj.

of Bhárata, after the name of the great hero Bhárata, who is said to have first established an empire in India. It may be called Aryan, because its traditions have been preserved in the Sanskrit language; and because, as will be perceived hereafter, its institutions resembled those of other branches of the Aryan race; and the Raj itself had probably been wrested from an aboriginal population by the Aryan invaders. The extent of the Raj is doubtful, and the frontiers probably advanced or receded according to the prowess or otherwise of the reigning Raja, either against the aboriginal tribes in the neighbourhood, or against an enemy or rival of the same race. Judging from the homely character of some of the details, the rule of the Raja could scarcely have extended many miles from the city of Hastinápura; but these details are mingled with references to far distant localities, and general allusions to conquest and empire. Such references, however, are probably only the exaggerations of bards and eulogists, intended to gratify the later Rajas; but, if true, they would carry the frontiers of the Raj of Bhárata over all or the greater portion of the Doab, or that fertile territory which lies between the Ganges and the Jumná, and extends from the foot of the Himálayas to the junction of the two rivers. At a later period the exploits of Bhárata and the greatness of his empire were celebrated with even a larger amount of laudation and extravagance. He was a Mahá Raja, or great Raja, or Raja of Rajas; and his Raj included all the kingdoms of the earth. Indeed, so famous became the name of Bhárata, that to this day the whole continent of

Name of Bhá-
rata applied in
modern times to
all India.



India is known to the Hindús by the name of Bhá-rata-varsha, or the country of Bhárata. How far these assertions are to be believed will be best gathered from the following history.

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The ancient traditions of the royal house of Bhárata might have been expected to throw some light upon the early history of the Aryan conquest of India. Unfortunately, however, the attention of the Kshatriya bards was directed not so much to the Aryan conquest of the aborigines of the country, as to a desperate fratricidal struggle which took place between two rival branches of the family. Early legends have been preserved of the Rajas who reigned before the breaking out of this great war, but they have been reduced to such a mythical condition by Kshatriya bards and Brahmanical compilers as to be generally worthless for the purposes of history. Thus the Kshatriya bards declared that the Rajas of Bhárata were descended from the Moon, and that one of their number conquered Indra, the ruler of the gods; whilst the Brahmanical compilers, not to be behindhand in the work of supernatural laudation, admit both statements, but add that the Moon itself was begotten by one of their own Rishis or saints, and that the Raja only conquered Indra by the aid of the Bráhmans. The authentic tradition which forms the groundwork of the Mahá Bhárata really commences with Raja Dhritaráshtira, whose sons, known as the Kauravas, engaged in a long and bitter rivalry with their cousins the Pándavas, who were the sons of Raja Pándu; and it was this rivalry between the Kauravas and Pándavas that ultimately

Mythical character of the more ancient traditions of the royal house of Bhárata, which precede the main story of the great war.

Kshatriya myth that the Rajas of Bhárata were descended from the Moon.

Brahmanical myth that the Moon itself was begotten by an ancient Rishi.

Commencement of the main story of the Mahá Bhárata with Raja Dhritaráshtira.

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PART II.Legends of the
Rajas of Bhárata
from Bhárata to
Dhritaráshtra.

Four legends.

led to the great war from which the Mahá Bhárata derives its name.¹

The traditionary history of the royal house of Bhárata, from the great Rája Bhárata himself down to the commencement of the reign of Dhritaráshtra, when this rivalry first began, comprises a few legends which are worthy of notice ; inasmuch as by removing the supernatural matter, which may be regarded as a mythical husk added by the later bards, it is possible to arrive at the authentic tradition which forms the kernel of the legend. The narratives in question are four in number, and may be thus indicated :—

1st, Legend of Raja Bhárata, who played with lions in his childhood, and afterwards founded the great Raj of Bhárata.

2nd, Legend of Raja Sántanu, who married a young wife in his old age.

3rd, Legend of Raja Vichitra-vírya, who died childless, and had sons begotten to him by Vyása, the sage.

4th, Legend of Rajas Pándu and Dhritaráshtra, and their sons the Pándavas and Kauravas.

The legend of Raja Bhárata may now be related, as follows :—

¹ The Mahá Bhárata really opens with a so-called sacrifice of snakes, in which vast numbers of snakes, who are confounded with an ancient race of serpent worshippers known as Nágas, are said to have been forced by certain Brahmanical incantations to enter the fire of a great sacrifice which was being performed by a Raja named Janamejaya, in revenge for the death of his father, who had been bitten by a snake. The origin of this confusion of snakes and Nágas will be explained hereafter. It will be sufficient to say that according to the myth Janamejaya subsequently killed a Bráhmaṇ, and that in order to expiate this dreadful crime, he listened to a recitation of the whole of the Mahá Bhárata, which was performed by Vaisampáyana, the pupil of Vyása, the sage. Accordingly the Mahá Bhárata, which is said to have been originally composed by Vyása, is supposed to be written exactly as it was recited by Vaisampáyana.

1st, Legend of
Raja Bhárata.



Once upon a time the valiant Raja Dushyanta was hunting in the forest, when he beheld the beautiful Sakuntalá, the daughter of Kanwa the sage; and he prevailed on the damsel to become his wife by a Gandharva marriage, and gave her his ring as the pledge of his troth. Then Dushyanta returned to his own city, whilst Sakuntalá remained in the hermitage of her father. After this Durvásas the sage visited the hermitage of Kanwa, but the thoughts of Sakuntalá were fixed upon her husband, and she heard not the approach of the sage. And Durvásas cursed the damsel, that she should be forgotten by the man she loved; but after a while he relented, and promised that the curse should be removed as soon as Dushyanta saw the ring. And Sakuntalá found that she was with child, and she set off for the palace of her husband; but on her way she bathed in a sacred pool, and the ring dropped from her finger and was lost beneath the waters. When she reached the palace of the Raja, his memory had departed from him, and he would not own her to be his wife; and her mother came and carried her away to the jungle, and there she gave birth to a son, who was named Bhárata. And it so happened that a large fish was caught by a fisherman, and the ring of Dushyanta was found in the belly of the fish, and carried to the Raja; and Dushyanta saw the ring, and he remembered the beautiful Sakuntalá, who had become his wife by a Gandharva marriage. And the Raja went into the jungle and saw the boy Bhárata sporting with young lions, and setting at nought the lioness that gave them suck; and his heart burned towards the lad; and presently he beheld the sorrowing Sakuntalá, and he knew that Sakuntalá was his wife, and that Bhárata was his son. So Raja Dushyanta took Sakuntalá and Bhárata to his own city; and he made Sakuntalá his chief Rání, and appointed Bhárata to succeed him in the Raj.

Now when Bhárata was grown, he became a mighty warrior, and conquered all the regions of Hindustan and called them by his own name; and he was the most renowned of all the Lunar race, who boasted that they were the children of the Moon. And Bhárata begot Hastin, who built the city

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Amour of Dushyanta and Sakuntalá in the jungle.

Bhárata, the son of a Raja by the daughter of a Bráhman.

Curse of Durvásas the sage.

The lost ring.

The ring found.

Raja Dushyanta sees his son Bhárata playing with lions.

Dushyanta takes Sakuntalá to wife, and acknowledges Bhárata to be his son.

Foundation of the great Raj of Bhárata by Raja Bhárata.



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of Hastinápura;² and Hastin begot Kuru, and Kuru begot Sántanu; and Sántanu was the great-grandfather of the men who fought in the war of Bhárata.

Review of the foregoing story of the birth of Bhárata.

Significance of the tradition rendered perceptible by eliminating the supernatural incident of the curse of Durvāsas.

Historical form of the tradition.

Gandharva marriage, a union without marriage ceremonies.

The foregoing legend of the birth of Raja Bhárata is very prominent in Hindú story, and forms the groundwork of Kálidása's charming drama of "Sakuntalá, or the Lost Ring." Its historical significance, however, can only be apprehended by a consideration of the suspicious incident in the legend, namely, the curse of Durvāsas. This incident is supernatural, and may be eliminated from the legend on two grounds; first, it is incredible that the curse of a Bráhmaṇ should possess the efficacy ascribed to it in the story; and, secondly, if the efficacy of the Bráhmaṇ's curse could be admitted, it is incredible that a holy sage should have inflicted such a curse upon a maiden for so trifling a provocation.³ By excluding the curse, the legend assumes a natural and historical form. A Kshatriya, whilst hunting in the forest, falls in love with the daughter of a Bráhmaṇ, and prevails upon her to accept him as her husband by what is called a Gandharva marriage. This Gandharva marriage is an anomaly. It is simply a union prompted by mutual desire, and

² The bare statement that the city of Hastinápura was founded by Hastin, the son of Bhárata, is not without value. According to local tradition the original seat of the empire of Bhárata was much further to the north-west, namely, at the site now occupied by the ruins of Takh-i-Bahi, in the country of the Yusufzais to the northward of Peshawur. (See Bellew's *Report on the Yusufzais*, p. 136.) It is therefore easy to infer that the Aryans pushed on from the neighbourhood of Peshawur in a south-easterly direction through the Punjab until they reached the banks of the Ganges, where they erected an outpost at Hastinápura.

³ It may be remarked that Durvāsas appears as the most irascible sage in the whole range of Brahmanical tradition. He cursed Indra so that he lost his strength and sovereignty merely because he dropped a flower which had been given him by the sages. The mythical character of Durvāsas is well displayed in the fable of the birth of Karna, which will be related further on.



consummated without any preliminary ceremonies whatever. It was legalized by the Brahmanical legislator, Manu, probably to cover the scandal of the lawless amours in which the Kshatriyas indulged; and is entitled Gandharva, because such unions prevailed largely amongst the Gandharvas, or mountain tribes on the western Himálayas. Manu however declares that none but Kshatriyas may contract such marriages; and he denounces them as base marriages, the offspring of which will act cruelly, speak untruthfully, and abhor the Vedas.⁴

But to return to the story. The Kshatriya in question prevailed upon the Bráhmaṇ's daughter to yield to his desires by engaging to marry her, and giving her his ring as a pledge of his troth. He then abandoned the damsel, and returned to his own city. Subsequently the damsel found that she was about to become a mother, and accordingly proceeded to the house of the Kshatriya to demand the fulfilment of his promise. Unfortunately, she had lost the ring, and in the absence of such evidence the Kshatriya conveniently forgot his engagement to marry the daughter of a priest. Ultimately when the ring was found, and he either saw or heard of the exploits of Bhárata in taming lions, he acknowledged the young hero to be his son, and made the mother his chief Rání. The question of why the Kshatriya was reluctant to acknowledge the daughter of a Bráhmaṇ to be his wife, will be solved hereafter, when it will be seen that in the Vedic period the Bráhmaṇ held an inferior rank to the Kshatriya. The reason for the interpolation of the

Reluctance of the Kshatriya to acknowledge the daughter of a Bráhmaṇ to be his wife.

Inferiority of the Bráhmaṇ to the Kshatriya in the Vedic age.

⁴ Manu, c. III. v. 26, 32, 41.



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myth respecting the curse of Durvása will then, in like manner, become apparent; it was intended to explain the reluctance of the Kshatriya, without wounding the pride or lowering the assumption of the later Bráhmans.⁵

2nd, Legend of
Raja Sántanu.

The second legend, namely, that of Raja Sántanu, turns upon a more natural event. Sántanu was third in descent from Bhárata. The legend is as follows:—

Desire of old
Raja Sántanu
for a young wife.

Now Raja Sántanu, the great-grandson of Bhárata, reigned in much glory in the city of Hastinápura, and he had many sons by the goddess Gangá,⁶ but only one lived to be a man, and his name was Sántanava. And it came to pass that when Raja Sántanu was very old, he desired to marry a damsel who should be young and beautiful; and Sántanava found such a damsel as his father desired. But the parents of the girl would not give her to the Raja, saying:—“If our daughter bear sons to the Raja, they will neither of them succeed to the Raj; for when Sántanu dies his son Sántanava will become Raja.” Then Sántanava determined to sacrifice himself in order to gratify his father; and he made a vow to the parents of the damsel, saying:—“If you will give your daughter in marriage to my father, I will never accept the Raj, or marry a wife, or become the father of children by any woman; so that, if your daughter

Vow of his son
Sántanava, who
was henceforth
known as Bhish-
ma, or “the
dreadful.”

⁵ Sakuntalá's own birth is lost in a myth, which was probably intended to exalt her origin. She is represented as being not the real but the adopted daughter of Kanva the sage. Her real father is said to have been Viswámitra, a sage who is celebrated in Brahmanical legend on account of his having been originally a Kshatriya, who subsequently became a Bráhmaṇ as the reward (?) of his austerities. Her mother was a celestial nymph named Menaka. The myth is of no value, and may be dismissed as a pure fabrication.

A tradition has been preserved in Hebrew history which bears a curious resemblance in some points to that of Sakuntalá and the ring, excepting that it is free from mythical matter. See the story of Judah and Tamar, Gen. xxxviii. 12—26.

⁶ The idea that Sántanu had children by the goddess Gangá, who is sometimes regarded as the genius or spirit of the river Ganges, and sometimes as the river itself, is one of those senseless myths by which the Bráhmans sought to glorify the ancestry of the later Rajas.



bear a son to the Raja, that son shall succeed him in the Raj." And the vow of Sántanava became noised abroad, and ever from that day he went by the name of Bhíshma, or "the dreadful," because of his dreadful vow.⁷ And the parents of the damsel gave her in marriage to Raja Sántanu, and her name was Satyavatí; and she bore two sons to the Raja. After this, Raja Sántanu was bowed down with age, and his soul departed from his body; and he left his two younger sons, and their mother, Satyavatí, under the care of his eldest son, Bhíshma.

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Death of Rajah
Sántanu.

The foregoing legend of Raja Sántanu calls for but little remark. That an aged Raja should sigh after the pleasures of matrimony, and desire to marry a young and blooming damsel, is an incident by no means unfrequent; but the idea that a son should sacrifice his right to the succession, and devote himself to a life of celibacy, for the sake of gratifying a doting father, can only be ascribed to that exaggerated idea of filial obedience which appears to be peculiar to the Hindús. Henceforth Bhíshma becomes the patriarch of the family, and is represented as a model of faithfulness and loyalty; and indeed stands forth as one of the leading characters in the Mahá Bhárata.

Review of the
foregoing legend
of Raja Sántanu.

Bhíshma, a lead-
ing character in
the Mahá Bhá-
rata.

The third legend, namely, that of Raja Vichitra-vírya, involves two questions of considerable importance, namely, the real extent of the Raj of Bhárata, and the connection of the sage Vyása with the royal

3rd. Legend of
Raja Vichitra-
vírya.

⁷ An instance of the injury to which a son is exposed in the effort to gratify an aged father, is to be found in the family history of the late Ameers of Scinde. Meer Roostum was the eldest son of Meer Sohrab, who was the founder of the Talpoora dynasty in Upper Scinde, and died in his eighty-sixth year in 1830. Poor Meer Roostum procured a young wife for his aged father, and the young wife gave birth to the present Ali Moorad, who subsequently deprived Meer Roostum of his Raj, and effected his utter ruin. It was a curious question at the time whether Ali Moorad did not owe a debt of gratitude to Meer Roostum for that intervention without which he could scarcely have been born.



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house at Hastinápura. Before, however, opening up these discussions, the legend may be related as follows:—

Loyalty of
Bhishma to-
wards his two
half-brothers.

When the days of mourning for Raja Sántanu were fully over, the faithful Bhíshma refused to become Raja, and placed the elder of his two half-brothers upon the throne; but the young Raja was haughty and arrogant, and he went to war against the Gandharvas, who dwelt upon the hills, and he was slain by the Raja of the Gandharvas. Then Bhíshma placed the younger brother upon the throne, and ruled the Raj until he should be grown; and the name of the young Rája was Vichitra-vírya.

Accession of
Vichitra-vírya.

Legend of Bhish-
ma carrying
away the three
daughters of the
Raja of Benares
to be wives to
Vichitra-vírya.

In process of time Bhíshma and the Rání Satyavati began to think of procuring wives for Raja Vichitra-vírya, that he might perpetuate the race of the great Bhárata. And it was told to Bhíshma that the Raja of Kási* had three daughters, and that the Raja was celebrating a Swayamvara in order that they might choose their own husbands. So Bhíshma thought in his heart that the three damsels might become wives to Vichitra-vírya; and he ordered his chariot, and drove to the city of Kási, that he might see them with his own eyes. And Bhíshma beheld the damsels, and saw that they were very beautiful; but the city was filled with Rajas from all quarters of the world, who desired to wed them. And Bhíshma did not wait for the day of the Swayamvara, nor did he ask the Raja to give his daughters in marriage to Raja Vichitra-vírya; but he seized the three damsels, and placed them in his own chariot, and challenged every Raja present to do him battle. Then the Rajas attacked Bhíshma in great wrath; but he was strong in arm, and skilful in the use of weapons; and he fought and conquered them every one, so that there was not another Raja left to come out against him. Thus did Bhíshma win the daughters of the Raja of Kási, and carry them away in triumph to the city of Hastinápura.

Bhishma defeats
all the Rajas at
Benares.

The Rání Satya-
vati resolves to
marry the three
damsels to her
son Vichitra-
vírya.

Now when Bhíshma had brought the three damsels into

* Kási was the ancient name of the city of Benares.



the city, he took them to the palace, and led them into the presence of the Rání, and told her how he had carried them away to be wives to Vichitra-vírya. And Satyavatí was much pleased with the beauty of the damsels, and she bestowed great praises upon Bhíshma, and resolved on marrying them to her son, the Raja. But when the day had come on which the marriage was to be performed, the eldest of the three, whose name was Ambá, prayed the Rání not to marry her to the Raja, saying:—"My father has already betrothed me to the Raja of Salwa, and I entreat you to send me to Salwa, for I cannot marry a second husband." And the Rání replied:—"Two wives will suffice for my son; therefore let Ambá go to the house of her husband." So Bhíshma sent Ambá under a safe-conduct to the Raja of Salwa; and Ambá told the Raja how she had been carried away by Bhíshma, and had come to fulfil her betrothal. But the Raja of Salwa replied:—"You have entered the dwelling of a strange man, and I will not take a woman to be my wife who has seen the face of a strange man." Then Ambá wept very bitterly and said:—"O Raja, no man has wronged me, and Bhíshma is the last man who would lay his hand upon a woman, because of his dreadful vow: If, however, you cannot take me to be your wife, I pray you to receive me as your concubine, and suffer me to dwell here under your protection." But the Raja would not listen to her words, but ordered his servants to thrust her out of his city; and she went into the jungle and perished very miserably.⁹

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Ambá, the eldest, declines to be married, as she is already betrothed.

Miserable fate of Ambá.

Meantime the marriage ceremonies of Raja Vichitra-vírya were performed in the palace at Hastinápura, and the two younger daughters of the Raja of Kási became his wives. And Vichitra-vírya took great delight in his wives, and his days passed away in much joy; but after a while he sickened and withered away until he died; and he left no child behind him, nor had either of his two wives any hope of becoming

Marriage of Vichitra-vírya.

Death of Vichitra-vírya without issue.

⁹ The story of Ambá is overlaid with a mass of mythical matter, which has been eliminated from the above text as mere unmeaning fabrication. Thus she is said to have met with the mythical hero Parasu Ráma, who vainly tried to avenge her cause, but whose real home was more than a thousand miles from Hastinápura, on the Mahendra mountain near the coast of Coromandel.



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Ancient custom
of raising up
seed to a de-
ceased kinsman.

Bhishma's re-
fusal.

Vyása, the sage,
requested to in-
terfere.

Vyása becomes
the father of
Dhritarashtra,
the blind; Pán-
du, the pale;
and Vidura, the
slave-born.

a mother. And the two widows were filled with sorrow, and the Rání Satyavatí wept very bitterly, for her two sons were dead, and neither of them had left a son to perpetuate the race of Bhárata.

Now the custom was that when a man died and left no son, his brother or near kinsman took his widows, and raised up seed to the dead man. So after some days the Rání Satyavatí said to Bhishma :—" Take the Raja's widows, I pray you, and raise up sons that shall be to him as his own sons." But Bhishma replied :—" How can I do this thing? Have I not vowed a vow that I would never become the father of children by any woman?" So Satyavatí called upon a kinsman of her own to do her bidding; and his name was Vyása. Now this Vyása was a great Bráhmaṇ sage who dwelt in the jungle; and his form was terrible to behold on account of his many austerities. And Vyása proceeded to the palace at Hastinápura, and fulfilled the wishes of the Rání; but his presence filled the widows with terror. The first widow shut her eyes when she beheld him, and she gave birth to a son who was blind, and who was named Dhritarashtra; and the second widow was so white with fear that she gave birth to a son who was pale, and who was named Pándu. Then Satyavatí requested Vyása to become the father of a third son, who should be without blemish; and the first widow would not go to him, but arrayed her maid-servant in garments of her own, and sent her to the sage in her stead; and the servant gave birth to a third son who was named Vidura. Thus were born three sons to the royal house at Hastinápura; namely, Dhritarashtra, the blind; Pándu, the pale; and Vidura, the slave-born.

Review of the
foregoing legend
of Raja Vichitra-
vīrya.

The foregoing legend of Raja Vichitra-vīrya is one which demands a careful consideration. The opening portion of the story is simple and natural. The old Raja Sántanu was dead, and his youthful Rání appears to have lived many years after him as a matron and Queen mother; and it may be remarked that neither in her case, nor in that of her

No allusion to
Sati in connec-
tion with his
mother or wives.



daughters-in-law, is there any reference to the rite of Satí, or that of the widow burning herself alive with the body of her deceased husband. Meantime Bhíshma, in faithful adherence to his vow, had placed the sons of Satyavatí in succession upon the throne of Hastinápura. The first was slain in a war with a neighbouring tribe of Hill men; and the survivor, although only a boy, was acknowledged to be Raja, whilst Bhíshma as guardian managed the affairs of the Raj. At length the young Raja approached the age of manhood, and it became necessary to provide him with a wife or wives; a question which is always considered of the highest importance in Hindú households, where the marriages of sons or daughters are arranged by parents or guardians, without any reference to the inclinations of the parties concerned, who indeed are generally so young as to have no inclinations at all.

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Importance of
marriage in Hin-
dú households.

The tradition of the marriage of Vichitra-vírya to the daughters of the Raja of Kási is, however, very obscure. It would seem from the story that Kási could have been at no great distance from Hastinápura; for Bhíshma drove there in his chariot, and drove back again in the same chariot with three young damsels. But Kási is the ancient name of Benares, and Benares is five hundred miles from Hastinápura as the crow flies. Moreover, in the Vedic age the Aryans could have advanced but a comparatively small way into the north-west quarter of India; and there is reason to believe that Hastinápura was an Aryan outpost in that direction; for it will be seen hereafter that when a branch of the family migrated southward from Hastinápura to the neighbourhood of Delhi, they

Suspicious character of the legend, that the wives of Vichitra-vírya were the daughters of the Raja of Benares.

Distance of Benares from Hastinápura.



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Region south
and west of Has-
tinápur, a land
of fable in the
Vedic period.

Probability that
either the Budd-
hists or the
Bráhmans inter-
polated the
name.

General credibil-
ity of the tradi-
tion.

Abduction of
women by the
Kshatriyas,
sanctioned by
Brahmanical
law, as Rákshasa
marriages.

found an uncleared jungle. Indeed, the whole region south and west of Hastinápur appears, as far as the descendants of Bhárata are concerned, to be a land of fable, which was peopled by a wild and cannibal race known as Asuras and Rákshasas, who were a pre-Aryan race, and the natural enemies of the Aryans. Accordingly, the legend may be regarded as an instance, of which there are many in the Mahá Bhárata, of the extent to which the later manipulators of the traditions set geography at defiance for the sake of associating later Hindú dynasties with the famous heroes of the house of Bhárata. It is, however, difficult to say whether the Brahmanical compilers invented the story or merely borrowed it from the Buddhists; for though Benares is regarded by the Bráhmans as a holy city, it is still more famous in Buddhist tradition. Either way it is easy to conceive that the name of Kási has been substituted for that of a city very much nearer to Hastinápur; and by adopting this simple hypothesis, not only does the whole story become credible, but actually throws further light upon the condition of the ancient Kshatriyas in India.

The story that Bhíshma carried away the three daughters of a neighbouring Raja to become wives to his young half-brother is, however, in accordance with the rude manners of the Kshatriyas, although the statement that he conquered every Raja in the city borders on the miraculous, and is indeed an interpolation for which it is not difficult to assign a reason. The Kshatriyas were foreign settlers, surrounded on all sides by an aboriginal population; and they had probably brought with them but few women from their native homes beyond the Indus.



Under such circumstances the abduction of women was to be expected, and indeed appears to have been very common. Even the Brahmanical law-makers were compelled to recognize such irregular proceedings, inserting, however, a clause that no one but a Kshatriya should be permitted to commit such an act, and that even a Kshatriya would not be justified unless he had first overcome all the friends and kinsmen of the damsel.¹⁰ Accordingly, such being the law, the Brahmanical compilers were naturally anxious that Bhíshma should appear to comply with it, even at the expense of a miracle.

The next point worthy of attention is the story of Ambá, who pleaded that she could not marry Raja Vichitra-vírya because she had already been betrothed to the Raja of Salwa. In all probability this incident is a later myth, and may have been inserted at the same time that the name of Kási was apparently substituted for that of some city less distant from Hastinápur. It is scarcely compatible with the primitive manners of the patriarchal age, to which the story of the great war evidently belongs; and it is altogether foreign to the idea of a

Mythical character of the legend respecting Ambá.

¹⁰ The Brahmanical law is thus stated by Manu :—"The seizure of a maiden by force from her house, while she weeps and calls for assistance, after her kinsmen and friends have been slain in battle, or wounded, and their houses broken open, is the marriage styled Rákshasa." Manu, III. 33. The name Rákshasa was indiscriminately applied to the aboriginal races, and consequently the origin of the custom thus sanctioned by Manu is to be found in the wars between the Aryans and aborigines. In another place it is said to be allowable only to the Kshaatriyas. Comp. Manu, III. 24, 41. The distinction between a Rákshasa and a Gandharva marriage will be readily perceived. In the former the woman was carried away by force; in the latter the connection was the result of mutual inclination.

The scarcity of women at Hastinápur, and the difficulty of forming suitable alliances, will be noticed hereafter, as this condition of society may have led to the institution of polyandry, and judging from one half-mythical legend seems to have led indirectly to the migration of a colony of Amazons to the Raj of Hastinápur.



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Swayamvara, or privilege of free choice on the part of a daughter of a Raja. Indeed, the father of Ambá could scarcely have undertaken to celebrate her Swayamvara after he had betrothed her to another Raja. The legend, however, is worth preserving, as illustrating those later ideas of chastity and purity which still prevail amongst the Hindús.¹¹

Ancient custom of begetting sons on the widow of a deceased kinsman.

But the most remarkable incident in connection with Raja Vichitra-vírya is the alleged intercourse between Vyása, the Bráhmaṇ sage, and the Raja's widows. The barbarous custom of raising up sons to a deceased kinsman certainly prevailed amongst the ancient Aryans. It is frequently enjoined in Brahmanical law, but is prohibited in the present age, and is especially prohibited to the three twice-born castes of Bráhmaṇs, Kshatriyas, and Súdhas.¹² A similar custom was also recognized by the Mosaic law, and indeed is common to many nations in which an undue stress has been laid upon the necessity for the birth of progeny who should perpetuate the family name. But the story that Vyása was the kinsman selected on the present occasion, and that he thus became the direct ancestor of the Kauravas and Pándavas who fought in the great war, is open to the gravest suspicion; and a brief consideration of the traditionary life of the sage, and the quarter of India in which he flourished, will suffice to prove that the story is a mythical interpolation of a later age.

Vaidyas

Story that Vyása, the sage, became the progenitor of the Kauravas and Pándavas, proved to be a later myth.

¹¹ The country of Salwa has been identified with a part of Rajasthan, or Rajputana, at a considerable distance to the south-west of Hastinápura. (See Wilson's *note*, Vishnu Purana, p. 177.) The identification of the locality of the present myth can however be of little value.

¹² See Colebrooke's *Hindú law*, Vol. II. p. 466, *et seq.* Traces of the ancient custom may still be found amongst the lower orders of Hindús.



In the first place, it may be remarked that amongst all the Bráhmaṇ sages of antiquity who are famous for their learning, their austerities, and their miracles, few can be compared with the Rishi Vyása. The real history of this Rishi is, however, lost in a jungle of legend. He is said to have been the illegitimate son of a fish-girl, named Matsya, who was employed as a ferry-woman on one of the many small rivers which intersect eastern Bengal, and flow into the Brahmaputra. The native country of Vyása would thus correspond to the modern districts of Dinajpur and Rangpur, on the western bank of the Brahmaputra, and situated about a thousand miles from Hastinápura. His original name was Krishna-Dwaipáyana, but having become famous as the compiler of the Mahá Bhárata and the Vedas, he is widely known by the name of Vyása, or "the arranger." Other Bráhmaṇs probably assisted in this gigantic undertaking, and went by the name of Vyása, and these Vyásas are the men who have falsified the Kshatriya traditions for the purpose of promulgating the tenets and exalting the pretensions of their tribe.¹³

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Traditionary
history of Vyása,
the "arranger."

Born of a fish-
girl, named Mat-
sya, in Eastern
Bengal.

Identified with
the Vyása, who
compiled the
Mahá Bhárata.

One of the principal objects of these Brahmanical compilers has been to persuade the Hindús that the famous heroes of the Mahá Bhárata were descended from the Bráhmaṇs. It has already been seen that

Efforts of the
Brahmanical
compilers to re-
present the he-
roes of the Mahá
Bhárata as de-
scendants of
Bráhmaṇs.

¹³ In the Vishnu Purána there is a list of twenty-eight Vyásas, ending with the great Muni Krishna-Dwaipáyana, who is popularly regarded as the author of the Mahá Bhárata, although, in fact, he is only the compiler or editor. The list, however, like all lists of names, genealogical or otherwise, which have been preserved in the sacred books of the Hindús, has been so garbled by the Bráhmaṇs as to be useless for the purposes of history. The mythical character of the Puranic list of Vyásas is abundantly proved by the insertion of such names as Bráhma, Manu, Yama, and Indra! It should be added that these names are not merely patronymics which might possibly have been applied to different sages, but evidently refer to the gods themselves.

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Brahmanical
myth that Vyása
was the father of
Dhritaráshttra,
Pándu, and Vi-
dura.

The myth
proved to be an
interpolation by
the super-
natural charac-
ter of its details.

as the Kshatriyas boasted that they had descended from the Moon, the Bráhmans added to the myth by declaring that the Moon itself was begotten by a Bráhman Rishi. In the present instance they state that Matsya, the fish-girl of eastern Bengal, was identical with Satyavatí, the damsel who married Raja Sántanu at Hastinápura; that Satyavatí was the mother of Vyása by an illicit amour prior to her marriage; and that Vyása was the kinsman who was invited to raise up sons to the deceased Raja. The reason for this myth is obvious. Two of the sons who were subsequently born, namely, Dhritaráshttra and Pándu, ultimately became great Rajas, and the fathers of the men who fought in the great war. The supernatural details which the compilers have introduced for the purpose of rendering this myth acceptable to the Hindús, sufficiently betray the whole design. A fish is said to have carried away in its stomach the germ of a boy and girl, of whom a Raja was the father. Subsequently, the fish was caught by a fisherman, who found the boy and girl alive in its stomach, and sent the boy to the Raja, and brought up the girl as his own daughter. The girl grew up and was employed to ferry passengers across a river. She was very handsome, but had a very fishy smell; and a famous Rishi, named Parásara, fell in love with her, and induced her to yield to his desires by promising to remove the fishy smell, and to restore her virginity. The intercourse took place beneath a cloud of thick darkness, which the pious Rishi produced by a miracle in order to escape observation, and immediately afterwards the ferry-girl gave birth to a son, who, in a few moments, became a



full-grown man. This son was Vyása, and he told his mother that he was going off to the jungle to spend his whole life in devotion; but that if ever she required his services, she had only to wish for his presence, upon which he would instantly appear before her. Accordingly, he went away, whilst his mother found that her fishy smell was changed to a delicious perfume, and that she was a virgin as before. Subsequently, she became the wife of Raja Sántanu under the circumstances described; and when Raja Vichitra-vírya died childless, she thought of Vyása, who immediately appeared and did her bidding.

This preposterous myth is not only a manifest falsehood, but its whole tone is so widely different from that of the Kshatriya tradition, that it is difficult to understand how the two could have been possibly amalgamated. In the present place it has been shorn of many details still more extravagant and repulsive, but it may yet serve as a fair specimen of the Brahmanical fables which abound in the Mahá Bhárata. At the same time this fable, like every other which has found its way into the sacred books, is implicitly believed by the Hindús. The ignorance of the masses as regards the actual geography of India has enabled the Brahmanical compilers to ignore the vast tract of land, at least a thousand miles, which intervenes between the native country of Vyása and the city of Hastinápur; whilst the gross superstition of the people has induced them to give the most entire and unquestioning credence to any fable or miracle however monstrous, provided only that it be represented as a religious mystery, or as an article of faith which cannot be doubted without heinous sin. It must, however, be remarked

Tenacity of Hindu belief in Brahmanical fables, when represented as religious mysteries, which cannot be doubted without impiety.

Frequent appearances of the mythical Vyása, in an abrupt or supernatural manner, throughout the Mahá Bhárata.



that having once foisted Vyása upon the royal house of Bhárata, the sage becomes ever afterwards an important personage in the Epic. He is introduced upon all occasions, and generally in a supernatural manner, for the purpose of giving wearisome advice of a Brahmanical character, or relating some tedious and unmeaning legend. Practically, however, his presence is never necessary to the story, and the Brahmanical interpolations respecting this sage can be generally eliminated from the Kshatriya tradition without any mutilation of the more authentic legend.¹⁴

Kshatriya tradition of the custom of raising up heirs to a deceased Raja, compared with the story of Ruth.

By rejecting the myth that Vyása was the son of the dowager Rání, and accepting the hypothesis that some other kinsman performed the duty of raising up sons to the deceased Raja, the original Kshatriya tradition is at once perceptible, and moreover displays a truthfulness to human nature which throws a new light upon the barbarous custom with which it is connected. In the beautiful story of Ruth this barbarity does not appear, for her husband had been

¹⁴ One circumstance may seem to militate against the hypothesis which refers Vyása to eastern Bengal, namely, that there are apparently two countries entitled Matsya, one being in the neighbourhood of Jeypur in Rajputana. The word Matsya, however, signifies "fish," and not only is eastern Bengal eminently a fish country, but local tradition is very strong in favour of its being the birth-place of Vyása. These conditions are not to be found in the neighbourhood of Jeypur.

It may, however, be remarked that the difficulty of approximating to truth in geographical identification is somewhat appalling. Local tradition will sometimes settle the question, but even that is frequently untrustworthy, for the local traditions of widely distant countries will often refer to one and the same event. Thus it will appear hereafter that in the case of a country named Viráta, local tradition is equally strong in Guzerat and Bengal; and the capital of this perplexing country is still called Matsya. As for the Pundits, I have found men who may be almost said to have the whole of the Mahá Bhárata and Rámáyana by heart, and yet with the exception of a few prominent places they are utterly ignorant of the geography. I once put a few questions of the kind to a very learned Pundit through a third party, and his reply was most significant. "I am sixty-five years of age," he said, "and I was never asked for such information before."



dead a long time, and the poor widow was anxious to find favour in the eyes of Boaz. But for a widow to be compelled to receive a strange man whilst her grief is still fresh, is foreign to the womanly instinct; and this disinclination is exquisitely illustrated in the case of the two widows of the deceased Raja. The aspect of the kinsman is said to have excited their alarm,¹⁵ and thus has given rise to the curious tradition of the birth of the blind Dhritarāshtra, the pale Pāndu, and the slave-born Vidura.

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Significant terror of the widows.

The fourth legend, which refers to Pāndu and Dhritarāshtra, is chiefly of importance as bringing their respective sons upon the stage, who were known as the Pāndavas and Kauravas, and who ultimately engaged in the famous war which forms the leading subject in the Mahā Bhārata. The narrative is as follows :—

4th, Legend of Pāndu, and Dhritarāshtra.

When Dhritarāshtra, the blind, and Pāndu, the pale, and Vidura, the slave-born, were yet boys, they were carefully educated by their uncle Bhīshma; and they were taught the rules of good conduct and polite manners, and practised in the use of arms. And Bhīshma ruled the Raj until they should be grown; but when they were of sufficient age, Dhritarāshtra was set aside because of his blindness, and Vidura because his mother was a slave. So the Raj fell to Pāndu, and he was installed by Bhīshma as Raja of Bhārata.

Education of the three sons raised up to Vichitra-virya.

Pāndu installed Raja of Bhārata.

After this Raja Pāndu married two wives, and their names were Kuntī and Mādri. Now Kuntī was the adopted daughter of Kuntī-bhoja, a Raja who dwelt in the Vindhya mountains, but her real father was Sura, the grandfather of Krishna, and she became the wife of Pāndu

Pāndu marries two wives, Kuntī and Madri.

¹⁵ In the Mahā Bhārata the terror of the women is said to have been excited at the gaunt aspect of the sage, who was wasted away with religious austerities. The details are related at great length and with much simplicity in the poem, but are not suited to the tastes of European readers.