

## The Date of Lord Krishna's Birth

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It is an admitted fact that Lord Kṛṣṇa was born at Mathura on the midnight of Śrāwanawadi 8 (Bhādrapadawadi 8 according to northern calculation). The day of the week was a Wednesday and the moon was near the Asterism (Rohiṇī).

From the traditional horoscope of Śrī Kṛṣṇa we can say that He was born when the moon was on the eastern horizon, occupying a high (उच्च) station. *Guru* (Jupiter) too was उच्च, and so also were *Śani* (Saturn) *Mangala* (Mars) and *Budha* (Mercury). The sun was in स्वगृह (in its own position).

I cannot say whether this horoscope may help us in determining the date of birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But it has its own traditional value. From several recorded traditions in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃsa*, and the *Purānas* we can say without hesitation that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was 83 years of age when the memorable *Mahābhārata* war was fought.

Now all astronomers of ancient India except *Varāhamihira* have

unanimously accepted 3101 years *before Christ* as the date of the *Mahābhārata* war. *Varāhamihira* misunderstood the word राजा in *Garga's* statement, viz.—

षड्विकपञ्चदशसुतः शककालस्तस्य राजश्च ।

—and computed 2526 before Śaka or 2449-8 B. C. as the date of the war. Astronomer *Garga*, however, must have arrived at the above figure 2526 before Śaka on the basis of calculations made from genealogical tables.

The date 3101 B. C. is strikingly supported by the genealogical tables of the rulers of *Magadha* (from *Jarasandha* down to *Chandragupta Maurya*) as noted down by the Greek ambassador *Megasthenes*.

However, some antiquarians, being jealous of giving such great antiquity to the *Mahābhārata* war, have propounded a third date for this great war. They say that the war was fought at about 1400 B. C. Nay, some western scholars drag this date two centuries towards our times, *i. e.*, to the 13th century B. C. This view is mostly

supported by some statements of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. We are, however, not justified in accepting only a few statements of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and disregarding other statements which directly contradict the former. It will be out of proportion here to discuss how the statements of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are quite unworthy of reliance.

The testimony of the *Purāṇas* is certainly less reliable than that of Megasthenes. The work of Megasthenes has unfortunately been lost and we possess only a few mutilated fragments thereof. Had the whole work been in our hands, all our doubts would have completely vanished.

Let us first take for consideration an extract from his ( Megasthenes's ) work, taken by the renowned historian Pliny. The substance of this extract is:—

“154 kings are mentioned from the time of Bachus to the times of Alexander the Great, and the total duration of their reigns is said to be 6451 years and 3 months.”

Let us compare with this an extract from the historical works of the Greek historian Arrian:—

“From the times of Dionysos to Sandrokottas, the Indians counted 153 Kings and a period of 6042 years. But among these a republic was thrice established. The Indians also tell us that Dionysos was earlier than Heraclese by 15 generations.”

“This Heraclese was held in special honour by the Śauraseni Indian tribe who possessed two large cities, Mathura and Cleisobora.”

(McCrindle's *Ancient India*, pp. 204, 201)

From the evidence of the Vedic Literature we can affirm that the Mahābhārata War was fought within 150 years or four or five generations after the last hymn of *Ṛgveda*, viz.,

that composed by Arṣṭiṣeṇa Dewāpi, brother of Śāntanu, and uncle of the great Bhīṣma. Bhīṣma was above 160 years of age when he took part in the great war as the Generalissimo of the Kaurava armies.

Similarly, because the *Yajurveda* mentions the Kurus and the Pāñchālas as united, and the Kāṭhaka Brāhmaṇa mentions king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, son of Vichitravīrya, it may be definitely said that the Mahābhārata War was fought before the compilation of the *Yajurveda* and the Kāṭhaka Brāhmaṇa. Another support to this conclusion is derived from the mention of Janamejaya, son of Parīkṣit, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* of the *White Yajurveda*. Thus the Mahābhārata War was fought before the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* came into existence; but how many years prior to it we cannot determine from that statement. The seer Yājñavalkya has definitely stated in chapter 317 of *Śānti-Parva* of the Mahābhārata that the *White Yajurveda* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* were compiled after the Mahābhārata War. The date of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is timidly given as 800 B. C. to 500 B. C. by Dr. Mc Donnell; but the late Indian astronomer Prof. S. B. Dikshit of Poona has now proved beyond doubt “that from the positions of the *Kṛttikā Nakṣatra* as mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the date of the Brāhmaṇa or at the least that portion which contains those statements are at least as old as 3000 B. C.” (*Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 24, pp. 245). This proposition of Prof. Dikshit is as yet unopposed and holds its ground. A hundred years before the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, i. e., about 3100 B. C. the Mahābhārata War was fought.

Western scholars unanimously hold that the Mahābhārata War was fought after the compilation of the *Ṛgveda* and before the advent of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. They disagree only on the point of the dates of the three events. It has already been stated that the date

of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, as given by Western scholars is 800 B. C.; but this is quite wrong as can be easily proved from certain statements made in the *Vedānga Jyotiṣa* regarding the position of the solstices and equinoxes. Nobody is in doubt as to the priority of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* to the latter work.

Even the most modest calculations made by Archdeacon Pratt from these positions have given a date between 1269 B. C. to 1181 B. C. to the *Vedānga Jyotiṣa*. Of course the date of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is much anterior to this. The *Ṛgveda* is undoubtedly much older than the whole of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. In short, the date of the Mahābhārata War is half-way between the close of the *Ṛgveda* and the beginning of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.

Another very important piece of internal evidence is the resolve of king Jarāsandha of Magadha regarding the performance of a *Puruṣamedha* (human sacrifice)—wherein he desired to offer some Kṣatriya princes as victims—before the Mahābhārata War. For this purpose Jarāsandha had imprisoned some Kṣatriyas in his capital. This story of the Mahābhārata is not at all a fiction; it is a very reliable historical nucleus of truth. The *Puruṣamedha* is not a myth but it was in vogue in ancient times. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* has given a detailed description of it and stated its superior efficacy in giving the performer unlimited political power (अमर्याद राजसत्ता) even more than can be obtained by *Aśwamedha* (horse sacrifice). It seems that it ceased to be performed soon after the times of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. It was on account of his liberal views that Śrī Kṛṣṇa desired to get rid of a monster like Jarāsandha. From this information about Jarāsandha's intention to perform a *Puruṣamedha* sacrifice, it is clear that the Mahābhārata War is an event of great antiquity and must have taken place before the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. We

do not find a direct description or mention of this sacrifice in any modern work or myth.

Another very important point which proves the great antiquity of the Mahābhārata War is the fact that there were in vogue in times of the Mahābhārata War two kinds of वर्षगणना (calculation of a calendar year). At the time of the Gambling (अतूम्) between Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira both the solar (सौर) and lunar (चान्द्र) methods of calculation were in vogue. Both the parties forgot at the time of the second game (अनुवृत्त) to arrive at a definite understanding as to how time should be computed while calculating the period of 12 years' exile and one year's अज्ञातवास (remaining incognito). Bhīṣma gave his decision that the Pāṇḍavas were the followers of the lunar method of calculation and that they had completely served the 13 years' period of exile. The lunar year which the Pāṇḍavas followed in their worldly transactions was just like the lunar year now followed by the Mohammedans.

At present our British Government observe the Roman Civil year, the Hindus observe the Luni-Solar year, and the Mohammedans the Lunar year.

Prof. Dikshit (author of the "History of Indian Astrology") has proved without a shadow of doubt that after 2000 B. C. the lunar year (चान्द्रवर्ष) was given up in India. It was of course in vogue at the time of the Mahābhārata War. Hence there can be no objection in holding that the Mahābhārata War was fought before 2000 B. C. (Dikshit: "History of Indian Astrology", P. 102)

Lastly, let us consider how far the several astronomical statements made here and there in the Mahābhārata help us in arriving at an approximate

date of the Great War. The position of the planets (ग्रहस्थिति) at the time of the war is especially mentioned at the end of *Udyoga-Parva* and the beginning of *Bhishma-Parva*. At various other places in the *Mahābhārata* also there are statements regarding the date of the war.

It will be inopportune to note down here all such statements as they are so many. We can, however, hold it as an *undoubted fact* that:—

On Kārtika Vadi 30, just previous to the war, a total solar eclipse occurred; the other event of a total lunar eclipse on Kārtika Śukla 15 cannot be held to be a fact beyond doubt.

The solar eclipse of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (on the day of the death of Jayadratha) cannot be but a mere poetical fancy, because its description is more imaginary than real.

We have three chief dates of the war:—

(i) That accepted unanimously by astronomers, 3101 B. C.

(ii) That accepted by Garga, Varāhamihira and the author of the *Rājatarangini*, 2449 B. C.

(iii) That taken by Ayyar, 31st October, 1194 B. C.

By making calculations we can say without the least hesitation that there was a solar eclipse on Kārtika Vadi 30, but *not* a lunar one on the full-moon day just previous to it. With reference to the dates in (ii) and (iii) it was quite impossible to have either a solar or a lunar eclipse in those two years.

We think this evidence derived from the solar eclipse is very well-founded and highly reliable. This evidence belongs to the original *Bhārata* and was not inserted in the *Mahābhārata* during the time of Sauti. Besides, it is handed down from ages past by tradition. In short, we can say that the date given in (i) is mathematically correct, and not those in (ii) and (iii).

The fourth date, viz., 1425 B. C. which is inferred from statements in the Purāṇas has been arrived at roughly, and we cannot give it any value. For instance, in one place it is stated that 1015 years elapsed between Parikṣit and the time of the Nandas, while at another place it is stated as 1115 years.

Again, 100 years as the period of the nine Nandas is undoubtedly a rough calculation; besides 312 B. C. as the date of Chandragupta Maurya cannot be said to possess any mathematical accuracy.

Many statements in the *Mahābhārata* which foretell future impending calamities, though in the garb of astronomical facts, are in our opinion imaginary and not real. The ग्रहस्थिति mentioned in such statements is not found to be at all probable in 3101 B. C. or in any other years.

In short, it must be admitted from the above discussion that 3101 B. C. is the most probable date of the great Bhārata War. Similarly, as it is certain that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was 83 years of age at the time of the war, the date of his birth is 3184 or 3185 years before Christ.

