

Historicity of Sri Krishna.

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Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Christ of India, is regarded as a Saviour of mankind and His teachings are known as the *Bhagavad-gītā* or the "Song Celestial". Those who have studied the Divine Ode have often wondered at the vast wisdom of its Teacher, and have asked: "Who was Śrī Kṛṣṇa? When did he live, and what were his works?" Oriental scholars and Christian missionaries have often compared His life and teachings with those of Jesus Christ. Some of them have denied the historical personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa; while others have tried to prove that He was a mythical god of ancient India, and that He did not exist at all. Again, after noticing the wonderful similiarity that exists between the lives of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Christ, many have come to the conclusion that the whole story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life and teachings is based upon the life and sayings of Jesus the Christ, and that the Kṛṣṇa-cult of the Hindus did not exist before the first invasion of this country by the early Christian missionaries. Furthermore, some of the followers of the Christ were so astonished at finding in India a religion so near like their own that they could only account for it by supposing that the devil, foreseeing the advent of their Saviour, originated a system of religion in advance of His, and just like it.

All these ingenious explanations of the Christian scholars and missionaries have not succeeded in quenching the fire of reverence, devotion and love, which was kindled upon the altar of the Hindu heart by the unparalleled character and divine powers of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the God Incarnate, Saviour of mankind.

Waves of conquest and religious fanaticism have come to India from

the West, one after another, and have swept away by their tremendous onrush millions and millions of lives and the most glorious spiritual monuments which this country had produced; but still the marvellous ideal and the spiritual kingdom of the sin-atonning Śrī Kṛṣṇa have remained for ages firm as the unshakable Himalayas, defying their strength and destructive powers. The fanatical Mahometans invaded India, holding their Scripture, the Koran, in one hand, and a sword in the other, and brought terror and havoc in the heart of Hindu communities, ruined the temples of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, looted the country, massacred the innocent priests and priestesses, sages and saints, and converted many to their faith of Islam by mere brute force; notwithstanding all this, the illimitable powers of the Divine Śrī Kṛṣṇa have survived the ravages of time. He still reigns over the hearts of the Hindu people, and will continue to do so in time to come.

In the present age, the Christian missionaries, supported by the enormous resources of the English-speaking nations, are trying with head and heart to place their ideal Jesus upon the altar of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and to convert His followers to their religion; but the undying divine powers which Śrī Kṛṣṇa has manifested will surely be able to withstand the futile efforts of ordinary mortals.

The name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is heard in almost every corner of the Hindu community throughout the length and breadth of the vast Indian continent. His sweet and holy name is uttered and reverentially repeated at all hours of the day—in sleeping, in walking, in working, in prosperity, in adversity, in times of

woe and suffering, as well as during festivities and national rejoicings. The popular songs which are sung in India by the illiterate masses describe the superhuman deeds and boyish sports of the Divine Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Shepherd of mankind. In victory and in defeat, in nuptial ceremony or crematory rite, at the time of birth as well as death, the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is uttered by millions of worshippers with deepest feelings of devotion, love and reverence. In short, they have coupled the name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with everything that takes place upon the earth, whether good, bad or indifferent. For the last three thousand years He has ruled over the heart of the Hindu nation as the most beloved Lord and Saviour of all.

The life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, to the Hindu mind, is as historical as the life of Jesus the Christ is to the Christian. It is, of course, a well-known fact that no one has yet succeeded in giving authentic evidences to establish the truth of all the stories that we read in the synoptic Gospels regarding the life of the Christ. On the contrary, the historic personality of Jesus has been denied over and over again by the most able scholars and higher critics of Europe and America. Still the majority of Christians, disregarding their opinions, believe in the Lord Christ as a historic personage, worship Him, revere Him, and expect to obtain salvation through Him after death. Similar is the case with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Hindu Christ. There have been scholars in India who have denied His historic personality; some have regarded Him as a mythical deity, while others have given authentic proofs of His earthly career. The masses of people, however, do not recognize such criticism, but consider Śrī Kṛṣṇa as a veritable personage who lived among the Hindu people as a great Hero, and showed His divine powers in order to establish His spiritual kingdom on earth.

Whether or not we can give the exact time, date and year of the advent

of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, so much is certain that His name was known in India hundreds of years before the Christian era. Centuries before Jesus the Christ, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not only loved, honoured and worshipped, but was recognized by the vast majority of Hindus as God Incarnate and Saviour of mankind. The most authentic evidence in favour of this point can be gathered from the accounts of Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador of Seleucus, who lived in India in the court of the Emperor Chandragupta in the fourth century B. C.

After the invasion of India by Alexander the Great, between 333 and 327 B. C., Seleucus Nikator became his successor and ruled over the entire region between the Euphrates and the Indus, and sent his ambassador to the court of Chandragupta, the reigning emperor of India. These are all historical facts. Megasthenes lived in India for several years and left some records describing his experiences there, which have been preserved and handed down by Arrian, the Greek historian. Among other things, Megasthenes says: "He, the Indian Heracles, excelled all men in strength of body and spirit, he had purged the whole earth and sea of evil and founded many cities; and after his death, divine honours were paid him." "This Heracles is especially worshipped by the Sourasenians, an Indian nation, in whose land are two great cities, Mathura and Cleisobara, and through it flows the navigable river Johares (Jamuna)."* This Cleisobara or Chrysobara is identified by some with Calisapura;† but it was supposed by Pliny, the historian, to be the same as Kṛṣṇapura, the city of Kṛṣṇa—probably modern Dwaraka—which was founded by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Ptolemis mentions Mathura as the city of the gods. Prof. Lassen

* Translation of Arrian's "Anabasis of Alexander and Indica" by E. J. Chinnock, p. 468.

† See Higgins' Anacalypsis, Vol. I, p. 329.

identifies this Indian Heracles with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, while Prof. Wilson and other Orientalists think that the Heracles of the Greek writers was indubitably Balarāma, the brother of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Respecting the Hercules of India, Captain Wilford says: "The Indian Hercules, according to Cicero, was called Belus. He is the same as Bala, the brother of Kṛṣṇa, and both are conjointly worshipped at Muttra; indeed, they are considered as one Avatar or Incarnation of Viṣṇu. Bala is represented as a stout man with a club in his hand. He is called also Balarāma. As Bala springing from Viṣṇu or Heri¹ he is certainly Hericula, Hericulas, Hercules."²

Arrian says that Alexander the Great saw those cities and other kingdoms governed by Śurasenas, or the descendants of the royal family of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. "Both Arrian and Strabo assert that the God Kṛṣṇa was anciently worshipped in Mathura on the river Jamuna, where he is worshipped at this day, but the emblems and attributes essential to this deity are also transplanted into the mythologies of the west."³

These historical accounts show how unfounded are the remarks of the Christian missionaries who believe that the whole story of the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His teachings was based upon those of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it is proven that Śrī Kṛṣṇa existed centuries before Christ, and His teachings were already in writing at the time of the invasion of

Alexander the Great. Sir William Jones, the father of Oriental scholars in Sanskrit, after residing in India for several years said: "That the name of Chrishna⁴ and the general outline of his history were known in India long anterior to the birth of our Saviour and probably to the time of Homer (900 B. C.) we know very certainly,"⁵

Sir Godfrey Higgins, one of the best English scholars and antiquarians of the last century, after making proper investigations and researches as far as he could, came to the conclusion that Śrī Kṛṣṇa lived at the end of the Brazen Age. "He passed a life of the most extraordinary and incomprehensible devotion. His birth was concealed from the tyrant Kansa, to whom it had been predicted that one born at that time and in that family would destroy him, *i. e.*, his power."⁶ Mr. Higgins says: "In fact, the sculptures on the walls of the most ancient temples—temples by no one ever doubted to be long anterior to the Christian era, as well as written works equally old, prove beyond the possibility of doubt the superior antiquity of the history of Cristna to that of Jesus."⁷ Again, he refutes the arguments of his opponents against the antiquity of Cristna by saying: "Cristna, his statues, temples and books, etc. respecting him are to be found where a Christian never came. Is it not absurd to suppose that the Brahmans could invent the story of Cristna and make it dovetail into all their other superstitions (P)—make him form an integral part of their curious Trinity, the actual Trinity of ancient Persia and of Plato—make him also fit into the theological inferences of the

1. In Sanskrit, "Hari" means a Saviour; and "Cula," the direct descent from a family. Therefore, Hercules means a direct descendant of Hari, the Saviour. This word, according to Higgins, is admitted to be neither Greek nor Latin, but of barbarian origin. See *Anacalypsis* Vol. I, P. 329.

2. *Asiatic Res.*, Vol. V. P. 270.

3. Quoted in "Monumental Christianity", pp. 141, 152.

4. Sir William Jones always spells the name of this personage as "Chrishna."

5. *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. I, p. 273.

6. *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. I, p. 273.

7. *Anacalypsis*, Vol. I, p. 160.

modern Christians respecting the meaning of the first chapter of Genesis—make his story exactly agree with the orthodox massacre of the innocents, and finally make all this be received as an ancient doctrine and article of faith by millions of people who must have known very well that it was all perfectly new to them and that they had never heard of it before.”*

Captain Wilford, in his “Chronology of the Hindus” fixed the date of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Parāśara, who were contemporaneous with the Emperor Yudhiṣṭhira, as about 1180 B. C.; while the astronomer Davis, as well as Colebrooke, believed that they lived as early as 1391 B. C. Mr. W. Brennard, the author of “Hindu Astronomy”, says: “The received opinion, however, as before stated, is that Yudhiṣṭhira (with Garga and Parāśara) lived some time about the 12th or 13th centuries before the Christian era.”†

Furthermore, the most ancient sculpture of India in the Cave of Elephanta, near Bombay, representing the ferocious figure of King Kaṁsa (like the Herod of the Christian Bible), surrounded by slaughtered infant boys and holding a drawn sword, cannot be accounted for even by the ingenious theory of the Christian missionaries. This fact not only proves that Śrī Kṛṣṇa lived centuries before Christ, but also establishes the antiquity of the whole story of His miraculous birth, His escape from the tyrant Kaṁsa, the infanticide by this wicked king and the other principal events of the divine life of this Saviour.

The popular belief among the orthodox Hindus is that He lived toward the end of Dwapara Yuga or the Brazen Age; and the present Iron Age, or Kali Yuga, began on the very day Śrī Kṛṣṇa ascended to heaven. According to this belief or tradition, He must have lived about 3091 B. C.

* *Ibid.* p. 337.

† “Hindu Astronomy”, p. 119.

But modern Hindu scholars like Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and others have fixed the historical date of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and of the battle of Kurukṣetra as 1430 B. C.*

Although the name ‘Kṛṣṇa’ occurs in many places in the Hymns of the *Rgveda*, e. g., in verse 23, Hymn 116, Book or *Maṇḍala* i, and also in verse 7, Hymn 117, *Maṇḍala* i, Oriental scholars cannot trace the identity of this Kṛṣṇa, and are not sure whether he was the son of Devaki and Vasudeva. In one passage of the *Chhândogya Upaniṣad*, we find the name of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devaki. Again Kṛṣṇa was also the inspired Ṛṣi (Seer) of many Hymns (85—87 of *Maṇḍala* viii; and 42—44 of *Maṇḍala* x) of *Rgveda*. From this we learn that He was contemporaneous with Vyāsa, who divided the Vedas into four parts.

The Sanskrit Grammar of Pāṇini, who lived in the eleventh century B. C., mentions the name of Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Vāsudeva (the son of Vasudeva), another name of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Furthermore, in the *Mahābhāṣya*, or the Great Commentary by Patañjali, on Pāṇini’s Sanskrit Grammar, which dates at least the second century B. C., we find convincing proof that the story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kaṁsa was current and popular during his lifetime and that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was worshipped as a God in those days.

Prof. Bhandarkar of Bombay mentions the following allusions to Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhāṣya*:

(1) That the stories of the death of Kaṁsa and subjugation of Bali were popular and current in Patañjali’s time.

* See “Krishna-Charitra” by B. C. Chatterjee, p. 22, and pp. 43—48. According to this author, the Emperor Yudhisthira, a contemporary of Sri Krishna, lived 1115 years before Chandragupta, who defeated Seleucus Nikator, the successor of Alexander the Great, in a battle, and drove the Greeks out of India, becoming the Emperor of India in 315 B. C. He married the daughter of Seleucus. Therefore the date of Yudhisthira was 315 plus 1115, i. e., 1430 B. C.

(2) That Kṛṣṇa or Vāsudeva was mentioned in the story as having killed Kāṁsa.

(3) That such stories formed the subjects of dramatic representations, as Puranic stories are still popularly represented on the Hindu stage.

(4) That the event of Kāṁsa's death at the hands of Kṛṣṇa was in Patañjali's time believed to have occurred at a very remote time.*

Another convincing proof that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was an important Deity in India, long before any Christians visited the country, we gather from the Bhitari pillar inscription, dating probably the second century A. D., which was transcribed and translated by Dr. W. H. Mill. The passage in Dr. Mill's translation reads thus: "May he who is, like Kṛṣṇa, still obeying his mother Devakī, after his foes are vanquished, he of golden rays with mercy protect this my design."† The German Antiquarian Lassen corrects it thus: "Like the conqueror of his enemies, Kṛṣṇa, encircled with golden rays, who honours Devakī, may he maintain his purpose."‡

In the "Chronology of Ancient India" published by the University of Calcutta,

* Indian Antiquary, Bombay, Vol. III (1874), p. 16.

† Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, January, 1837, pp. 1-17.

‡ Indische Alterthumskunde, ii (1849), p. 1108 note.

however, Sita Nath Pradhan, M. Sc., Ph. D. places the date of the great war of Kurukṣetra, in which Śrī Kṛṣṇa was the charioteer of Arjuna, between 1150 B. C. and 1152 B. C.

These evidences will be enough to convince the reader that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was a historic personage and that He lived in India centuries before Jesus the Christ.

In His early life, Śrī Kṛṣṇa showed to His playmates that He was the embodiment of Divine Love; in His youth, that He was the personification of heroism, patriotism, justice and righteousness; in His maturity He married a beautiful girl to set before the world's eye the ideal of a perfect householder; yet His non-attachment to earthly relations was so great that He witnessed the destruction of His own royal race before He passed away, because His relatives and kinsmen deviated from the path of virtue. Through all the acts of His life, whether in politics, war, or in the duties of a householder, He emphasized and proved the truth of the grand ethical law—"Wherever there is virtue, there is victory and glorious life both in this world and hereafter; and wherever there is vice, unrighteousness, injustice and immorality, there is destruction physically, morally and spiritually."*

* Adapted from the Author's 'Great Saviours of the World', Vol. I, published by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, 19 B, Raja Raj Kissen Street, Calcutta.

