

India in Lord Sri Krishna's Time.

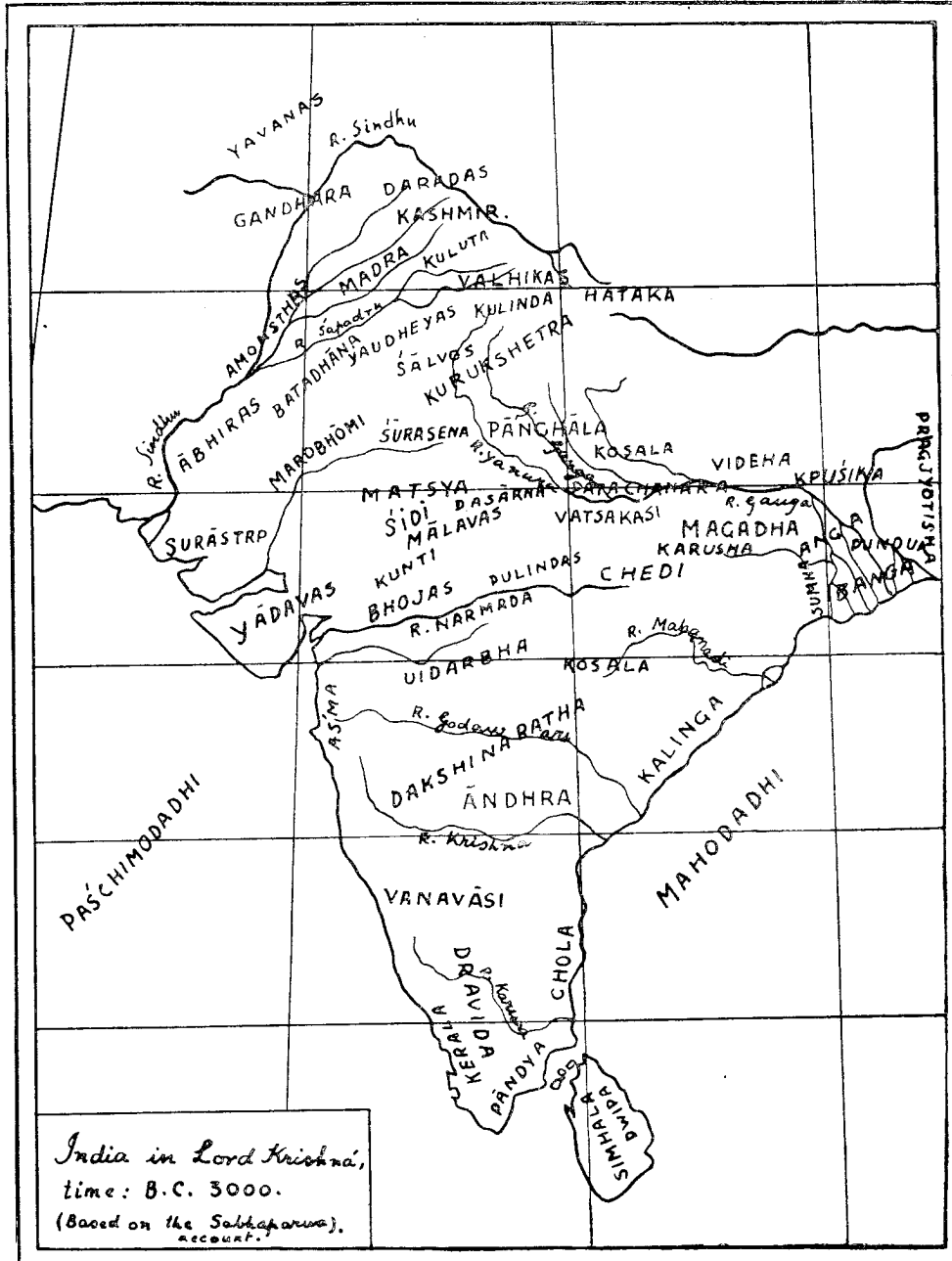
BY DASHARATHA SHARMA, M. A.

The terminating years of Dwāpara were a period of intense conflict in spheres temporal as well as spiritual. Vast forces stood arrayed against each other, ready to fight out thoroughly the questions at issue. On one side were justice, duty and religion; on the other, passion, blind attachment and superstition. On one side were the peace-loving Pāṇḍavas, and the Yādavas; on the other, the mighty Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla, Dantavakra, Kaṁsa, and the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. It was a fight between unequal forces, the side espoused by Śrī Kṛṣṇa being throughout the weaker of the two. That it did not in the end prove the loser was due to the superhuman exploits and unique personality of the Lord who in this *Avatāra* combined in Himself the roles of a philosopher, religious teacher, lover, friend, warrior, and man of affairs.

The conflict on the spiritual side can be seen best in the pages of the

Bhagavadgītā, the 'Song Celestial', wherein Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa delivers His eternal message to Arjuna, the representative man, calling upon him to do his duty, regardless of its worldly consequences. A few words about it may not be out of place here. But, as its teaching, and the occasion that necessitated it form the subjects of some other papers in this number, we confine ourselves to the political side of the great conflict, of which, too, the hero was none other than our Lord. The *Draupadī-Swayamvara-Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* supplies some details regarding the rulers of the period. But these are rather vague and have to be used with some caution. In the *Mantra* and *Digvijaya* Parvas, however, we get a detailed account not merely of the chief principalities of the time but also of their alliances and counter-alliances, and the territories over which they held sway. This account, supplemented by that contained in the

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India in Lord Krishna,
 time: B.C. 3000.
 (Based on the Saptaparva
 account.)

Bhāgavata-Purāna, is the best that can be had for a good study of the political situation of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa's time.

The *Digvijaya-Parva* supplies the following list of kingdoms and republics:—

(a) The northern kingdoms and republics conquered by Arjuna:—

1. Kuṇḍinas
2. Śālvapura
3. Kaṭa ruled by Sunābha.
4. Śakaladwīpa
5. Prāgjyotiṣa ruled by Bhagadatta.
6. Rāmāgiri
7. Kulūta ruled by Bṛhanta.
8. Modāpura ruled by Vāmadeva.
9. Kāśmīra
10. Siṃhapura.
11. Daradas.
12. Yavanas, Kirātas, Śakas, Kharas, Kāchas, Vibhrakas, etc.
13. The kingdoms of Yakṣas, Kinnaras and Gandharvas.

(b) The eastern kingdoms and republics conquered by Bhīma:—

1. The Pāñchālas.
2. Videha.
3. Daśārṇa ruled by Suvarmā.
4. Pulindanagara ruled by Sumitra.
5. Chedi ruled by Śiśupāla.
6. Kumāra ruled by Śreṇimanta.
7. Kosala.
8. Malla.
9. Kāśī ruled by Subandhu.
10. Matsya.
11. Mālavas.
12. Vatsa.
13. Gargas, Niṣadhas, Southern Madras, etc.
14. Sumbha, Prasumbha, and Samakṣa.
15. Magadha ruled by Jarāsandha's son.

16. Anga ruled by Karṇa.

17. Puṇḍra ruled by Vāsudeva.

18. Vānga.

19. Tāmralipta, Kauśika, etc.

(c) Southern kingdoms conquered by Sahadeva:—

1. Sūrasenas.
2. Adhirāja ruled by Dantavakra.
3. Kuntibhoja's kingdom.
4. Mokas, Paramamokas.
5. Bhojakaṭa ruled by Bhīṣmaka.
6. Southern Kosala.
7. Bennākāṭa.
8. Krāntakas, Bālakeyas, Hairambakas, etc.
9. Kiṣkindhā ruled by Sugrīva.
10. Māhiṣmatī ruled by Nīla.
11. Tripura.
12. Surāṣṭra.
13. Gollagira, Murachipattana, Timilingila, etc.
14. Bhṛgukachchha ruled by Barbaras.
15. Vanavasis, Aśmakas, Mūlakas, etc.
16. Pāṇḍyas, Keralas, and Cholas.
17. Siṃhaladwīpa.
18. Lankā ruled by Bibhiṣeṇa.

(d) Western kingdoms conquered by Nakula:—

1. Mattamayūrakas.
2. Marubhūmi, Bahudhānyaka, Śairiṣaka.
3. Lilindhas, and Vaṭadhānas.
4. Śibis, Trigartas, Āmbaṣṭhas, Mālavas, Karpaṭas, and Mādhyamikas.
5. Ābhīras, Rāmaṭhas, Huṇas, etc.
6. Madras ruled by Śalya.

The *Mantra-Parva* describes the subdivisions in which these groups were further divided. Here the describer of

the political situation is Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself, and the description given is really vivid and masterly. When consulted regarding the Rājasūya sacrifice, He tells Yudhiṣṭhira about the existence of two great confederacies. One of these was headed by Jarāsandha, the powerful ruler of Magadha, who had conquered ninety-nine kings, and confined them in a cell with a view to sacrificing them to Rudra when their number reached one hundred. He was the father-in-law of Kāṁsa and the most determined enemy of the Yādavas. Śiśupāla, the redoubtable ruler of Chedi, acted as his general. That wonderful fighter Vakra, the ruler of Karūṣa, regarded him as his *Achārya*. Haṁsa and Sibhika were his renowned commanders. Even rulers like Bhagadatta, the ruler of Prāgjyotiṣa and an old friend of Pāṇḍu, who sympathized secretly with the Pāṇḍavas, had perforce to recognize the authority of the Magadha ruler. Pauṇḍra Vāsudeva, the ruler of a part of Bengal, and a great rival of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, had been safe in spite of Yādava hostility on account of the alliance he had entered into with their arch-enemy. Bhīṣmaka, the ruler of Vidarbha and father of Śrī Rukmiṇī, recognized the supremacy of Jarāsandha and acted against the Yādavas, even though he happened to be so near a relative of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Bhīṣmaka's son, Rukmī, was a close friend of Śiśupāla, to whom his sister, Rukmiṇī, would have been given in marriage, had she not been carried away by Śrī Kṛṣṇa when she was going to worship the goddess Kātyāyanī. Other kings, too, ruling in the south and the east, recognized the authority of Magadha, and Jarāsandha was thus practically the undisputed *Samrāj* of the eastern half of India. He was now advancing towards the west, and, coming into conflict with the western confederacy, the chief members of which, viz. the northern Bhojas, the 18 Yādava clans, the Sūrasenas, the Bhadrakas, the Yaudheyas, the Pāṭacharas, the Aśmakas, the Kuṇindas, the

Kuntis, the Pāñchālas, the Mālavas and the Matsyas were one and all being forced westwards on account of the pressure exerted by Jarāsandha's powerful confederacy. The western confederacy was rather loosely organized, or it might even be said that it was not much of a confederacy before the Pāṇḍavas took the lead under the advice of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Hitherto each one of its members had been fighting for its own ends and this had largely accounted for their failure. It was the Rājasūya sacrifice which brought these fully under the Pāṇḍavas, and safeguarded their interests by breaking once for all the power of the eastern confederacy.

As to how this great task was accomplished, we should consult the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*. It tells us that the anti-Yādava confederacy was the master of the field when Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born. Kāṁsa was ruling at Mathurā, Jarāsandha in Magadha. The Yādavas were immersed in a slough of despondency from which there appeared no way of extrication, and Pāṇḍu was perhaps wandering somewhere in the jungles. It was a terrible situation which only a divine figure like Śrī Kṛṣṇa could retrieve. Even before reaching majority He slew Śakāṭa, Baka, Dhenuka and Ariṣṭa, and then, allying Himself with Akrūra, to whom He gave the daughter of Āhuka in marriage, he slew Kāṁsa, the persecutor of the Yādavas, and put Ugrasena on the throne of Mathurā. This brought on Him the enmity of Jarāsandha, who, though defeated seventeen times, succeeded ultimately in driving the Yādavas to Dwārakā. His brave commanders Haṁsa and Sibhika, mentioned above, fell at the hands of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma in his seventeenth raid. Naraka, another ally of Jarāsandha, also met his end in the battle. Rukmī, the son of Bhīṣmaka, was killed by Balarāma, and Pauṇḍra Vāsudeva fell at the hands of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself. But,

in spite of these set-backs, the eastern confederation retained its strength for some time more. The death of Jarāsandha at the hands of Bhīma, however, broke its backbone, and thereafter its dissolution did not take much time. The Rājasūya sacrifice which the Pāṇḍavas were performing under the superintendence and direction of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, did not merely put them at the head of an empire; it also proved the immediate cause of the death of many of the remaining members of the Jarāsandha confederation. Angered by the signal honour paid to Śrī Kṛṣṇa during that sacrifice, Śiśupāla abused Him, and was killed in the combat that followed. Śālva, the friend of the slain monarch, tried to avenge his death by besieging the Yādava capital, Dwārakā. Returning from the Rājasūya, Śrī Kṛṣṇa let him join his friend in the next world. Dantavakra and Vidūratha were killed soon after. The eastern confederacy was thus ended. But the Lord had still much left to do. Safeguarding the Yādavas and other rulers was surely a great achievement. But a task equally great yet awaited Him; for He had now to protect His friends, pupils, cousins, and allies, the Pāṇḍavas, against the machinations of the Kauravas, and to rid the world of much that He regarded as undesirable.

Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, especially the former, relate how He did this during the next thirteen or fourteen years. He saved Draupadi's honour, protected the Pāṇḍavas from the possible ire of Durvāsā, and after they had completed their period of exile, it was Śrī Kṛṣṇa who, after trying to bring about an honourable peace between the two factions, advised Arjuna to fight like a true Kṣatriya and thus wrought the end of the

Kauravas and their friends. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa had once changed the political map of India by destroying the eastern confederacy. He now changed it a second time by standing against the overweening pride of the Kauravas, and destroying them in the terrible eighteen days' battle of the *Mahābhārata*. Thereafter, following the principle that tyrants must go, He changed the political situation once more when He let His own brethren, the Yādavas, die in an internecine quarrel, because, forgetting their old days, they had towards the end become extremely proud, factious and tyrannical. Where questions of principle were involved Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa was ever for following the clear-cut line of duty, caring little even when the persons He had to fight against were His near relations or friends.

In conclusion, it may be pointed out once again that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa's time was one of intense and all-pervasive conflict. Everything was, as it were, in the melting-pot. That out of it came finally the strong rule of Parikṣita, and not anarchy and religious bigotry represented by the fanatical Śaivism of Jarāsandha and Sudakṣiṇa, is almost fully due to the achievements of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He was the refuge of the weak, the guide of the benighted, the helper of the lowly, and the enemy of the proud and unprincipled. He was surely great as a religious teacher, but He was as great a warrior and man of affairs. He was the true Avatara in the sense defined by Himself in the *Bhagavadgītā*, inasmuch as He destroyed evil-doers, protected good people and established once more the reign of religion, piety, and morality. May He once more grace India with His presence, for sore is the need of India at this juncture.

