

**GRUNDRISS DER INDO-ARISCHEN
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ALTERTUMSKUNDE
(ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDO-ARYAN
RESEARCH). EPIC MYTHOLOGY**

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BEGRÜNDET VON G. BÜHLER, FORTGESETZT VON F. KIELHORN,
HERAUSGEGEBEN VON H. LÜDERS UND J. WACKERNAGEL.

III. BAND, I. HEFT B.

EPIC MYTHOLOGY

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E. WASHBURN HOPKINS

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I. INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. **Date of Epic Poetry.** — The mythology of the two epics of India represents in general the belief of the people of Northern India along the lower Ganges within a few centuries of the Christian era. For the Mahābhārata the time from 300 B. C. to 100 B. C. appears now to be the most probable date, though excellent authorities extend the limits from 400 B. C. to 400 A. D. The Mahābhārata as a whole is later than the Rāmāyaṇa; but R is metrically more advanced, the work of one author, a skilled metrist, who has improved the rougher epic form of the Mahābhārata, as his work represents a life less rude than that depicted in the great popular epic, this being the work of many hands and of different times. Both epics have received long additions. The germ of the Mahābhārata has been referred to the Vedic period and the Rāmāyaṇa has been assigned to pre-Buddhistic times (its germ also recognised as Vedic), but the data, in part negative, oppose the assumption that either epic poem existed before the fourth century B. C. Discussion is futile without a careful definition of the word "germ". That the Rāmāyaṇa was the norm, according to which the Mahābhārata was built, or that the Rāmāyaṇa was completed as it is to-day (barring the first and last books) before the Mahābhārata was begun, are theses impossible to establish. The Rāmāyaṇa has two flagrant additions, books one and seven. The Mahābhārata has been increased by the late addition of the Harivaṃśa (perhaps 200 A. D.), and much of the first book is late. By the fourth century this epic was recognised as a poem of one hundred thousand verses, and it has been argued¹⁾ that this implies the existence of the Harivaṃśa at that time. Such may be the case,

¹⁾ For example, by Professor Macdonell, *Sanskrit Literature*, p. 267. The reasons for assuming an earlier date for both epics than that accepted above are set forth in this chapter of Macdonell's work. In regard to the kernel of the great epic, referred to about 1000 B. C., it may be questioned whether the war between Kurus and Paṇḍās is the historical germ of the epic at all. Professor Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Literatur*, p. 396, arguing from the fact that the Tīpṭaka does not know either epic, though it shows acquaintance with the story of Rāma, assumes the terminus 400 B. C. to 400 A. D. for the present Mahābhārata. The Rāmāyaṇa, he thinks, was "made by Vālmīki probably in the fourth or third century B. C." (p. 439), before the Mahābhārata had its present form. Professor Jacobi in his excellent work, *Das Rāmāyaṇa*, regarding the Mbh, as due to the influence of Vālmīki (p. 78), is inclined to assign a much greater age to the Rāmāyaṇa. The germ of the Mbh, appears, however, to be older than the Rām.; it represents a ruder age as well as a ruder art.

since the (corrected) Northern version contains 84,126 verses, which, with the 16,375 526) verses of the Harivaṃśa, make 100,501(651) verses. But, on the other hand, it might be said, from the off-hand way the Hindus have of assigning a round number of verses to a poem, that they would be quite likely to refer to an epic even approximating one hundred thousand verses as a poem of a lakh of verses. Now the Southern recension, in so far as the recently published text represents it, has twelve thousand more verses than the Northern recension and, without the Harivaṃśa, contains 96,578 verses (or prose equivalents¹⁾), not including the circa two hundred extra verses of single manuscripts. It is therefore doubtful whether the attribution of a lakh of verses necessarily implies the existence, as part of the lakh, of the Harivaṃśa. Yet on the whole this is probable, owing to the fact that the expansion in S appears for the most part to be due rather to the inclusion of new material than to the retention of old passages. Important is the fact for the mythologist that the Harivaṃśa is more closely in touch with Purāṇic than with epic mythology. It is in fact a Purāṇa, and "epic mythology" may properly exclude it, as it may exclude the Uttara in the Rāmāyaṇa, though both are valuable here and there to complement epic material. In no case, however, may passages from either of these additions be assumed to represent epic ideas, although of course epic ideas may be contained in them. It is most probable that Śānti and Anuśāsana were books (XII and XIII) added to the original epic, but equally clear that they were included in the Mahābhārata containing a lakh of verses. They may be looked upon in general as later though not modern additions²⁾, yet as we know that one portion of Śānti has been enlarged in quite modern times³⁾, there should be no hesitation in granting that passages may have been added at any time within the last few centuries. The palpable additions made in the interest of sectarian belief in the Southern recension are merely an indication of what has probably happened in both epics. — Geographically, the Mahābhārata represents the western and the Rāmāyaṇa the eastern districts of Northern India, but only in a limited sense (circa Delhi to Benares). In general it may be said that middle India between the Ganges and Nerbudda was the country most familiar to the poets of both epics. North and South are fabulous but travelled lands. The Punjab is better known but lies remote.

§ 2. **The Concept Deva.** — Epic mythology, however, is fairly consistent. There is no great discrepancy between the character of any one god in Mbh. and that of the same god in R. Nor is the character of gods very different in different parts of Mbh., save for the sectarian tendency to invert the positions of the three highest gods in favor of the sect. There are of course differences, but not such as to imply that we are dealing with totally diverse conceptions or traditions. In both epics the older gods

¹⁾ In reckoning the verses of the Northern recension, account must be taken of the egregious typographical errors in the Calcutta edition, which in Vana make eleven thousand odd into seventeen thousand odd verses, in Udyoga convert six thousand one hundred into seven thousand, etc. The Bombay Vana has 11,712 verses as contrasted with 12,082 in the Southern (S) recension. The total sum 84,126 is the number for C as corrected by B. As an indication of the difference between S and B-C, Ādi has 11,080 verses in S, 8479 in C.

²⁾ Śānti in S has 15,050 and Anuśāsana 11,184 verses, as contrasted with 13,943 and 7,796 in the Northern recension. Holtzmann, *Das Mahābhārata*, I, 194, argued for a modern epic throughout, but this view has not been substantiated.

³⁾ In Śānti, Parv. 342 to 353, S has many more sectarian additions in honor of the Nārāyaṇa lauded in these interpolated chapters.

are reduced in estate, in so far as they represent personifications of nature; in both, new gods are throned above the old. The conception Deva, god, embraces all spiritual characters, as it is said, "the gods beginning with Brahman and ending with Piśācas" (Brahmādayaḥ Piśācāntā yaṃ hi devā upāsate)¹), but loosely, so that in the very clause thus specifying the host of gods, Śiva, as the greatest god, is set in antithesis to them all as the one being through devotion to whom even Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu pervades the universe. Nor is the world of men without close kinship with the gods, who descend to earth and are reborn as mortals. Not Viṣṇu alone but those who worship him become earthly Avatars. Kuśika is permeated with Indra, and Gādhi, son of Kuśika, is in reality son of Indra; in other words, for the purpose of having a son Gādhi, Indra becomes incorporate; Gādhi is Indra on earth (putratvam agamad rājams tasya lokesvareśvaraḥ, Gādhir nāmā 'bhavat putraḥ Kauśikaḥ Pākaśāsanaḥ, 12, 49, 6).

II. THE LOWER MYTHOLOGY.

§ 3. **Definition.** — It is obvious that a mythology which on the one hand touches upon that of the Purāṇas and on the other reaches back to the Vedic age may best be presented chronologically, and this would be the case were it not that there is an aspect of mythology which does not fit into this scheme. This will be referred to again under the head of General Characteristics. At present it will suffice to say that at all times in India there has been under the higher mythology of gods and great demons a lower mythology of spiritualised matter less remote than the gods of sun, storm, etc., and less remote even than the recognised spirits inhabiting yet not confined to such matter, spirits that receive their proper recognition in the pantheon. Though this lower mythology has various aspects which blend it with the higher, as in the case of the Corn-mother already absorbed into a title of a high goddess, yet in part it stands aloof and may be treated separately, at least in its broad divisions of river- and mountain-mythology, the lesser traits of divine trees and pools being more conveniently discussed under the head of the divinities into whose province the lower spirits have been drawn.

§ 4. **Divine Rivers.** — Water has always had a healing (hence supernatural or divine) power. The epic recognises this, but in conjunction with the act of a god. Thus a god revives the dead with a handful of water, though a divine fiat is sufficient for this purpose, or the use of a magical plant²). But as a self-conscious power, aiding the right, water also dries up before a sinful priest, who tries to escape by way of water (as a guard against evil influence; compare the popular notion that evil spirits cannot pass running water). Water is also a divine witness against wrong, for which reason one who curses or takes any oath touches water, as one does in accepting a gift. In fact in any solemn event a sort of bap-

¹) This inclusion of Piśācas under Devas occurs in the exaltation of Śiva in 13, 14, 4 and verses added in S to 13, 45. Ordinarily the Devas exclude the demons; they are as light to darkness, but (as shown below) all spiritual beings are sons of the Father-god and so all are divine. It is rather the nature of the individual which determines whether he is "god" or "demon", than the class to which he is assigned.

²) See the writer's paper on Magic Observances in the Hindu Epic (Am. Philosophical Society, vol. XLIX). In 12, 153, 113, S has pājinā for cakṣuṣā. For the other examples, see 3, 136, 9f.; 1, 74, 30; 3, 110, 32; and the cases cited, loc. cit.

tism of water takes place, for water is one of the "three purities". As truth is another "purity", a speaker of the truth can walk over water without sinking¹). The priestly influence predominant in the epics proclaims (3, 193, 36) the sin-expelling quality of water sprinkled by the hand of a priest, and this is the idea of the Tirtha, that it has been made effective through an outer influence, priestly or divine, which imparts power to wash away ill-luck and sin or to bestow upon the bather "beauty and fortune" (5, 47, 29; 82, 43 f.). But the cult of such powers, though constantly recommended by the less orthodox writers of the epic, is not in conformity with the sacred writings and is not infrequently depreciated, as a *deśātīthi* or "cultivator of places" stands opposed to the view that "all rivers are Sarasvatis" (12, 264, 40), that is, all rivers are holy in themselves; though certainly the modified view, for example that "rivers are hallowed if Rāma bathes in them" (R 2, 48, 9), is normal. This example also shows that rivers and ponds are regarded as living persons, to whom the predicate *ketapūṇyāḥ* (blessed or hallowed) can properly apply. Especially holiness attaches to the Payoṣṇi, because of its relics; to the Cauvery, because of its nymphs; to the Godāvāri, because of its saints and contact with Rāma; to the Ganges, because of Rāma's passage over it; and to any union of river with river or with ocean, because the sacred nature of each is doubled by contact with the other (3, 85, 22 f. and R 4, 41, 15). The Cauvery is "half the Ganges" but at the same time is wife of Jahnu and daughter of Yuvanāśva (H 1421 f.), as all rivers are wives of ocean, though not always so completely anthropomorphised²). Offerings are made to rivers and they are invoked for aid as divine beings (R 2, 55, 4 f.; *ibid.* 4, 40, 9), the offerings when made by Sītā being a thousand cows and a hundred jars of brandy, perhaps intended eventually for the priests. Although over a hundred and sixty divine rivers are mentioned by name (6, 9, 14 f.; *ibid.* 11, 31 f.; 3, 188, 102 f.; *ibid.* 222, 22 f.; 13, 166, 19 f.) and the Rāmāyaṇa says that five hundred rivers furnished water for Rāma's consecration (R 6, 131, 53), yet the time-honored designation Five Rivers is still used (Indus being the sixth) to designate a group sometimes also vaguely called the Seven Rivers, this latter group including the Ganges (see below). The Five are named as the (modern) Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chinab, and Jhelum (8, 44, 31 f.). As the rivers are recipients of offerings, so in turn they make to Indra an offering of praise but are overawed by the presence of Śiva and, like the birds, when he appears, cease to make a sound (3, 96, 6; 5, 17, 22). Their bestowal of purification may be unconscious, owing to their divine purity, but they consciously save as well. Thus the Beas and Samaṅgā (3, 139, 9 f.; 13, 3, 13) act consciously in saving a man from drowning. All these rivers used to bear gold, but now only Ganges has that bye-product of Śiva's seed (7, 56, 6, etc.). The mental state of rivers is often alluded to as a matter of course. They are troubled in mind, run backward in fear, or cease to flow in mental distress (8, 94, 49; R 5, 16, 4, etc.). Ganges converses with Ocean and explains why huge trees but not slender reeds are carried on her waves (the trees resisting are overwhelmed, the reeds by bending

¹) Both *Prthu Vainya* and *Dīṭpa*, as "speakers of truth" pass over water without sinking, even in a battle-car (7, 61, 9 f.; 69, 9).

²) For further references, see *The Sacred Rivers of India in (the Toy volume) Studies in the History of Religions*, p. 215. Few rivers are masculine, though male rivers, Indus, Oxus, Lohita, Śopa, etc., are representatives of the masculine form (but also Śopā, fem.) and Ocean is "lord of rivers male and rivers female" (R 3, 35, 7, etc.).

escape destruction, 12, 113, 2 f.); she also explains to Umā the habits of good women (13, 146, 17 f.). The river is sometimes a reborn saint, as the Cosy (Kauṣikī) is an Avatar of Satyavati, wife of Viśvāmītra (R 1, 34, 8), as in the Purānas Gaurī, wife of Prasenajit, became the river Bāhudā. On the other hand, the Nerbudda (Narmadā) became the wife of the king Purukutsa (15, 20, 13). This river fell in love with a Duryodhana, by whom she had a fair daughter, Sudarśanā, whose son in turn married Oghavati and "half of her became a river" (13, 2, 18 f.). A crooked river, hence evil, may be in effect an evil woman reborn. Thus Ambā remained in life half as a human being and half as a crooked river (5, 186, 41). Sons of rivers are human heroes. Bhiṣma is son of Ganges; Śrutāyudha is son of the river Parṣā, by Varuṇa (cf. § 63; 7, 92, 44 f.); Duṣyanta is great-great-grandson of the Sarasvatī, whose son was Sārasvata. Śukti-matī was a river who became the mother of a son by a mountain (1, 63, 35 f.; *ibid.* 95, 27; 9, 51, 17 f.). As intimated apropos of Ambā, a river may represent sinful power, but the Vaitaraṇī is the only river leading to hell, under the name Puṣpodakā (Vaitaraṇī being a sacred stream of Kalinga as well as the river of hell, 3, 200, 58; 8, 77, 44). The Yamunā (Jumna) is called Kālindī from the mountain Kalinda, and its place of union with the Ganges is celebrated as holy (Bharadvāja's hermitage is there); but it is often omitted from lists where it might be expected to appear, as in 13, 146, 18 f., where Ganges is the glorious last of a list of sacred rivers: Vipāśā ca Vitastā ca Candrabhāgā Irāvati, Śatadrū Devikā Sindhuḥ Kauṣikī Gautamī tathā, tathā devanadī ce 'yaṃ sarvatīrthā-bhisambhṛtā, gaganād gāṃ gatā devī Gaṅgā sarvasaridvarā. Ganges is here apparently derived from her "going" (cf. Sarasvatī and European parallels from roots meaning go or run). She is the most completely personified of all the holy rivers, not only as mother of Bhiṣma, Gaṅgeya, āpagāsuta, āpageya, nadija, and of Kumāra (Kumārasū, H 1081) but as co-wife with Umā of Śiva, and as assuming human form, to become wife of Śāntanu (1, 98, 5). She is called "daughter of Jānu" (*ibid.* 18), Jānusutā and Jānavī, and "daughter of Bhāgīratha", by adoption, though her true patronymic is not Bhāgīrathī but Haimavati (6, 119, 97), as she is the daughter of the Himālaya mountain. Her title among the gods is Alakanandā, and as she is regarded as identified with other streams so she is identified with Puṣpodakā Vaitaraṇī (1, 170, 22). Usually she is spoken of as threefold, three-pathed, as in 6, 6, 28 f., where Sarasvatī, Ganges, is said to issue from the world of Brahman and to fall like milk from Mount Meru into the lake of the moon, which her own fall has created, after being upheld for one hundred thousand years on Śiva's head. She is said to be both visible and invisible and is represented as divided into seven streams, the names of which vary but appear in the Mahābhārata as (6, 6, 50) Vasvaukasārā, Nalinī, Pāvani, Jambūnadī, Sitā, Gaṅgā, and Sindhu. In the Rāmāyaṇa (1, 43, 12) the Hlādīni and Sucakṣu take the place of the first and fourth. She appeared first at Bindusaras (6, 6, 44 f.; R 1, 43, 10), when Bhāgīratha induced her to come to earth to baptise the bones of Sagara's sons, since till that was done these sons could not attain to heaven (3, 108, 18). The famous story of her descent is told in R 1, 43. As she sank when weary upon the lap of Bhāgīratha, she is said to have chosen him for her father (cf. 3, 109, 18 f.; and 7, 60, 6 f.). The Southern recension says that she was angry at being forced to go to hell and got caught in Śiva's hair (cf. R 1, 43, 5). She is three-fold as the river of