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# THE MONIST

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## CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN THE MAHABHARATA, EXCEPTING THE BHAGAVADGITA.<sup>1</sup>

IN the question with regard to the influence Christianity has exerted upon Brahmanism, one of the two great epics, the Râmâyana, is not to be taken into consideration, for it was certainly composed before the Christian era and even its later insertions are not later than the second century after Christ;<sup>2</sup> then too the home of the Râmâyana is in the eastern part of India. The case is different with the Mahâbhârata whose composition extended over at least a millennium. We now know, to be sure, that the Mahâbhârata gradually attained its enormous size for the most part during the period between the fourth century B. C. and the fourth century A. D.,<sup>3</sup> nevertheless it contains not only portions which originated before this period but also single additions of a later date. Georg Bühler's opinion that the Mahâbhârata had attained the final form in which we now have it by the sixth or seventh century is hardly disputed to-day. Accordingly the historical possibility that Christian elements might have entered into our Mahâbhârata text is granted without hesitation; but there is only one

<sup>1</sup> Authorized translation from the German manuscript by Lydia G. Robinson. In the bibliographical references the following abbreviations will be observed: ERE, *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*; IA, *Indian Antiquary*; JAOS, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*; JRAS, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

<sup>2</sup> Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, I, 427 ff., especially 439, 440.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 389 ff.; especially 396, 403.

single portion that can be said with any certain degree of probability to betray acquaintance with Christian doctrines and Christian worship. This is the legend of the Shvetadvîpa, the "White Island," or the "Island (i. e., the land) of the White People" (Mbh. XII, Chapters 337, 338, ed. Calc.).

All competent critics agree that judging from its whole character this passage must belong to the latest interpolations of the great epic. Kennedy<sup>4</sup> places it in the fifth or sixth century; on account of considerations to be given later on I feel compelled to decide in favor of the sixth, and lay stress on the fact that this date which is essential for my explanation of the passage can not be assailed on critical grounds. If this portion really contains an evidence of contact between Brahmanism and Christianity it at the same time provides a proof of the fact that at the time and in the country where the final redaction of the Mahâbhârata took place—in the interior of Northern India—there was as yet no knowledge worth mentioning of the teachings, the worship and the communal life of Christianity; for otherwise this religion would not have seemed so strange and wonderful to the author of the Shvetadvîpa episode.

#### THE SHVETADVIPA EPISODE.

I must say in advance that not by any means all specialists acknowledge the Christian basis of the Shvetadvîpa legend, but that Barth,<sup>5</sup> Hopkins<sup>6</sup> and others see in it merely an evidence of poetic fancy. I myself formerly advocated this standpoint<sup>7</sup> and have only recently reached

<sup>4</sup> JRAS, 1907, 481.

<sup>5</sup> *Religions de l'Inde*, 132.

<sup>6</sup> *Religions of India*, 431, 432. Nevertheless in *India Old and New*, 161, Hopkins regards as possible a purely external relation with the Christians in Herat or Merv which was brought about by travels.

<sup>7</sup> Translation of the Bhagavadgîtâ, Introduction 30.

the conviction that Lassen,<sup>8</sup> Weber,<sup>9</sup> Grierson,<sup>10</sup> Kennedy,<sup>11</sup> etc. are right in finding in this portion the traces of an acquaintance with Christianity.

Briefly stated the content of the legend is as follows: The Mahâbhârata relates in the first of the two chapters under discussion that the wise Nârada has been to Shvetadvîpa and from there has brought back the Pâncharâtra doctrine proclaimed by the god Nârâyana (which must be discussed later). In the second chapter the three sons of the god Brahma, Ekata, Dvita, and Trita (i. e., Nos. 1, 2, and 3) took the same journey together with the seven Rishis. Shvetadvîpa is more than thirty-two thousand miles (*yojana*) northeast (Mbh., XII, v. 12703) or north (v. 12774) of the mountain Meru on the northern bank of the Milky Sea. The white luminous inhabitants of this land are supernatural beings; they have no sense organs, they live without nourishment, they exhale rare perfumes and are without sin. With their glance they blind the eyes of sinful men and are endowed with other fabulous peculiarities, such as four testicles, sixty normal teeth, and eight fangs (v. 12706). These superhuman beings worship in their hearts the *one* invisible God Nârâyana with softly murmured prayers and hands always folded (v. 12787) and are filled with supreme love for him (v. 12798). None among them occupy exalted positions but all enjoy equal consideration (v. 12790). These latter statements indeed make the impression that they are based upon contact with a Christian community, but I have not been able to discover a description of the eucharist service which Grierson tries to find in this chapter.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Indische Altertumskunde*, II, 2d ed., 1118-1119.

<sup>9</sup> In many passages; see my translation of the Bhag. Intro. 30 note.

<sup>10</sup> ERE, II, 549a and elsewhere.

<sup>11</sup> JRAS, 1907, 481 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Pratâpa Chandra Rây's translation of the Mahâbhârata, Shântiparvan, II, 752 note; Grierson, JRAS, 1907, 316.

The entire legend of Shvetadvîpa is full of unheard-of fancies, behind which however there seems to lurk an actual knowledge of a Christian country. In favor of this view we have, besides these features relating to worship and society which we have just mentioned, the account of the direction (northeast or east) in which Shvetadvîpa is supposed to lie. In spite of this distinct statement Albrecht Weber with almost incomprehensible stubbornness has for decades maintained the assertion that the account of the Mahâbhârata becomes intelligible only when it is recognized to contain traditions of the journeys of pious Indians to Alexandria and the acquaintance with Christianity which they gained there. Because of its location Alexandria cannot of course be considered, and I will not stop to waste words with regard to other utterly foolish localizations. Lassen, who at any rate came nearer to the truth than Weber, probably had Parthia in mind,<sup>13</sup> where some Brahmans may have become acquainted with Christianity and from where they may have brought Christian doctrines to India; but his argument, based on the age of the tradition that St. Thomas had spread the Gospel in this country, will not hold good.

Kennedy has recently made an attempt to determine more exactly the location of Shvetadvîpa.<sup>14</sup> He proceeds from the fact that the statements about its location are too definite for an entirely imaginary country; they could only indicate a land on the other side of the great mountain ranges, Bactria or probably a region lying still farther north, perhaps the banks of Lake Issyk-Kul "where there is an abundance of frozen sea," by which evidently the mythical Milky Sea is to be understood. Kennedy bases the last assumption on the fact that numerous Nestorian communities had dwelt on the southern shore of Issyk-Kul.

<sup>13</sup> Page 3, Note 3.

<sup>14</sup> JRAS, 1907, 482.

But Issyk-Kul can not come into consideration in our attempt to identify the Indian Milky Sea, for the following reasons. In the first place this lake is not so far from India as we would expect from the statements of the Mahâbhârata with regard to the immense distance; in the second place it is not so large as to give the impression of an ocean; and in the third place it never freezes over because of its surprisingly warm water. The Kirghiz name *Issyk-Kul* denotes "warm lake" as does also its Chinese name *She-chaj*. The "abundance of frozen sea" can therefore in no wise suffice to give the lake in winter the appearance of a milky surface.

It seems to me that the more remote Lake Balchash<sup>15</sup> has a much greater claim to identity with the Indian Milky Sea, for to-day it covers about twenty thousand square kilometers or about the same size as the kingdom of Württemberg. *Balchashi Nor* is a Kalmuck expression and means "great water." Various indications go to show that once in earlier times a much larger lake spread over where now Lake Balchash lies.

The idea that Lake Balchash is the Indian Milky Sea becomes intelligible from its Kirghiz name *Ak-Dengis*, "white ocean."<sup>16</sup> This name is scarcely derived from the fact that the lake is covered with ice from the end of November until the beginning of April, but may be accounted for in the following way. Lake Balchash is extraordinarily shallow and, according to the measurements of the Russian geographer L. S. Berg who for the first time examined the lake with some precision in the summer of 1903, it has a maximum depth of only 11 meters. This greatest depth of Berg's measurements is to be found in the western half, and although according to other apparently

<sup>15</sup> My information with regard to this lake I owe to the kindness of my geographical colleagues, Gradmann and Uhlig.

<sup>16</sup> Egli, *Nomina Geographica* (Leipsic, 1872) in the article "Balkaschi Noor."

reliable information there are said to be places in the eastern part as much as twenty meters deep, yet taking the lake on the average, it is not nearly so deep; particularly the southwestern corner and the whole southern bank are extremely low. Berg characterizes the water as muddy,<sup>17</sup> earlier informants call it clear. But this contradiction signifies nothing, for the water of so shallow a fresh-water lake would be stirred by the wind to its very bottom and would *assume a milk-white color*. This, combined with the size and the position of Lake Balchash, makes it correspond excellently with the Indian Milky Sea.

Then when we consider that the most important of the ancient trade-routes of Central Asia led from Samarkand over Tashkent to Kuldsha and Turfan on the south side of Lake Balchash and that the Nestorians had long before sent their missionaries far into Central Asia, then nothing hinders the assumption of Nestorian settlements on Lake Balchash in the sixth century—about a century and a half after the establishment in the year 411 of the Christian church of the Sassanid empire from which such colonies must have proceeded. The land of seven rivers, once famous for its fertility, on the southeast bank of the lake was densely inhabited in earlier times; especially on the Karatal and Ajagus rivers there are said to be many ruins of ancient civilization. The assumption is obvious that in later days these old settlements fell as a sacrifice to the nations of the Steppes or even to the advancing encroachment of the sand.

Prof. Th. Nöldeke wrote me November 6, 1911: "In the region south of Lake Balchash Nestorian communities of some size existed as late as in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. We know this from the very numerous gravestones inscribed with Syriac characters and for the most part in the Syriac language—though dreadfully cor-

<sup>17</sup> A. Woeikow in *Petermann's Mitteilungen*, XLIX (1903), 285.

rupted—and partly in Turkish, as the people without doubt spoke Turkish and knew the Syriac only as the language of the church.”<sup>18</sup> The two places containing Nestorian churchyards, Pishpek and Tokmak, lie on the slopes of Mt. Alexander quite close to the southern point of Lake Balchash.

That Nestorian communities with a regular clergy existed in these regions at so late a period is evidence at any rate that Nestorians found there in earlier times a flourishing abiding place.

From all I have adduced, the identity of Lake Balchash with the Indian Milky Sea gains at least as much probability as can be attained under the circumstances.<sup>19</sup> Therefore I do not hesitate to state my conviction that Nestorian colonies which originated in the sixth century on the shore of Lake Balchash furnished the foundation for the Shvetadvîpa legend of the Mahâbhârata.

Since Bardesanes,<sup>20</sup> as early as the beginning of the third century, mentions the presence of numerous Brahmans in Bactria, there is no objection to assuming that the account upon which is based the fabulous description of Christian worship and communal life on the banks of the Milky Sea was brought through Bactria to northwestern India. But this information has not been of special significance for the religious life of India, for no new ideas are involved which might have come with it into India. As we shall see later, the idea of divine love and submission to God is traceable in India at a much earlier time. In the story of Shvetadvîpa the author has intended to give only

<sup>18</sup> Chwolson, *Syriscbe Grabschriften aus Semirjetschie*, Mémoires de l'Ac. Impér. des Sciences de St. Pétersbourg. VII Series, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4, St. Petersburg, 1886, and *Syrisch-nestorianische Grabinschriften aus Semirjetschie*, new series presented to the academy February 28, 1896. St. Petersburg, 1897.

<sup>19</sup> If my identification is correct the older Indian legends of the Milky Sea, especially of its whirling, must be based upon obscure information with regard to Lake Balchash.

<sup>20</sup> In Eusebius, *Praepar. Evang.*, VI, 10 (ed. Gaisford, Vol. II, p. 83, l. 2).

one proof from outside for the doctrine that divine love is the most certain way to supreme salvation. Nor has the Shvetadvîpa story exerted any actual influence on later Indian literature; only in one legend of the Kûrmapurâna, according to which Shiva in the Himalayas had propounded the Yoga system to his four disciples Shveta, Shvetâshva, Shvetashikha and Shvetalohita, and in a very similar story of the Vâyupurâna, can remote echoes of our episode be found.<sup>21</sup> In connection with these legends we can scarcely think with Weber<sup>22</sup> of a Syriac-Christian mission which might have settled in the Himalayas. Still less significant than these legends is the fact that in the modern Krishna and Râma ritual and in the quite late commentary of Svapneshvara to the Shândilyasûtras attention is given to the Shvetadvîpa story.<sup>23</sup> It is a reckless overvaluation when Weber<sup>24</sup> says that there can hardly be any doubt that the worship of Krishna in India to-day is essentially based upon those pilgrimages accounts of which are preserved to us in the Shvetadvîpa story.

#### THE ATTITUDE OF E. WASHBURN HOPKINS.

I have said above on page 322 that the Shvetadvîpa legend is the only part of the Mahâbhârata in which Christian influence can be assumed with any degree of probability. Hopkins<sup>25</sup> sees a whole series of further possibilities which however do not stand closer inspection, and rest moreover upon the erroneous assumption that Christian missionaries had already been actively engaged in northwestern India ever since the first century. There is no proof of the presence of Christians in India before the first half of the third century.

<sup>21</sup> Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, 2d ed., II, 1119; Wilson, *Selected Works*, III, 148 f.

<sup>22</sup> *Indische Studien*, I, 421, note; II, 398; *Krishnajanmâshtamî*, 322.

<sup>23</sup> Weber, *Krishnajanmâshtamî*, 321.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 319, 320.

<sup>25</sup> *India Old and New*, 152 ff.

Although Hopkins prudently emphasizes "how remarkably similar may be *by mere chance* the phraseology of different religions" (p. 150), and although he confirms the warning which lies in these words by bringing forward a number of remarkable parallels between the Veda and the Old Testament,<sup>26</sup> none of which can be suspected on one side or the other of being either source or copy, yet he is not restrained by his own warning from deducing the possibility of a historical connection from the boldest combinations. He is evidently imbued with the desire to find Christian influence in the Mahâbhârata and especially in the Bhagavadgîtâ (of which we shall speak in another article) and to have Krishnaism appear dependent upon Christianity at the earliest possible date. To be sure he makes some limitations as we should expect from so thoughtful a scholar, as for instance when on page 159 he "lays no great weight upon parallels which show a possibility of Christian influence," or, on page 160, gives them "for what they are worth." Then too Hopkins is always very careful in his expression when stating the parallels, but nevertheless the whole presentation is calculated to exert a suggestive effect upon the laity and to arouse faith in a far-reaching influence of the New Testament upon the Mahâbhârata. Considering the importance of the subject and the attention which Hopkins's essay has found in wide circles, I am obliged to enter a decided protest against it and therefore may not limit myself to these general observations but must enter more closely into particulars than I would prefer.

#### BORN OF A VIRGIN.

In Hopkins (page 159) we read: "Krishna is a by-name of Vyasa, the author of the epic (in so far as the arranger of the mass may be called author), who, though

<sup>26</sup> Partly following Kaegi, *Der Rigveda*, 2d ed., 63 ff.

not identified with Krishna as Supreme God, is himself divine, and is described as '*the unborn (that is, the eternal) and ancient one, the only son of God, born of a virgin, very part, ança of God.*' He is a figure unknown till the end of the epic, and even his name Vyasas, *vyâsas*, has a certain similarity with *iêsos*."<sup>27</sup> But *Vyâsa* is a good Indian word and denotes "the arranger." The seer who bears this name is not only looked upon as the arranger of the masses of the Mahâbhârata but of the four Vedas as well and also as the author of the Purânas. Not only the conclusion of the cited passage, where the possibility of the loan of the name is derived from such an accidental and unimportant verbal similarity as can easily be alleged in hundreds of cases from the most different languages, but the whole statement lacks the objectivity and critical acumen to which we are otherwise accustomed in the works of Hopkins. In this opinion, which holds good also for the succeeding comments upon Hopkins, I have in mind mainly the passage I have italicized above, which is intended to make a Christian impression. This quotation Hopkins has pieced together from parts of three different verses of the Mahâbhârata (XII, 13640, 41, 88, ed. Calc.) in order to bring them into accord with Christian ideas! Of course for this purpose the epithet "born of a virgin" is particularly striking. But what is really the case with regard to it? I think I can give the best account of the fantastic story of the birth of Vyâsa in the words of Winternitz:<sup>28</sup>

"He was the son of a famous ascetic, the Rishi Parâshara. One day this great saint saw the maiden Satya-vatî who had come into the world in a fish and had been reared by fisher folk, and he was so enraptured by her beauty that he besought her love. She would accede to

<sup>27</sup> Of course 'Ιησοῦς is meant.

<sup>28</sup> *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, I, 268, 269.

his wishes only on condition that after bearing him a son she might again recover her virginity. The holy man granted her this wish as well as that she was to lose her fish odor and to exhale a marvelous fragrance. Directly after their union, she bore him a son upon an island in the Yamunâ and the boy was called Dvaipâyana, 'the island-born.' He grew to manhood and soon devoted himself to a life of asceticism, but Satyavatî having resumed her virginity became later the wife of Shântanu, the king of Kuru."

It is for this reason, therefore, that Vyâsa was called the "son of a virgin" (*kânîna*) although his birth was brought about by natural procreation; and yet Hopkins, who was surely acquainted with this story from his intimate acquaintance with the contents of the Mahâbhârata, tried to see in it a parallel to the legend of the supernatural birth of Christ!

#### THE DIVINE SACRIFICE.

After the sentence here criticized Hopkins continues: "Then of the God Krishna it is said: 'He, the guardian of his flock, the sinless God, the Lord of the world, consented to the death of (himself and) his race that he might fulfil the word of the seers,' where, if we had shepherds and prophets, the comparison would be very striking."

This quotation from the Mahâbhârata (XVI, 161-163; ed. Calc.) deals with the destruction which as a result of a curse of Gândhârî had befallen the Yâdava race whose leader was Krishna. The men fell to quarrelling in a drunken bout and slew each other with clubs; but Krishna himself was mistaken in the forest for an antelope by a hunter with the name Jara, "old age," and was slain by an arrow in his only vulnerable spot on the sole of his foot.<sup>29</sup> The verses quoted by Hopkins, which Vasudeva, the human father of Krishna, speaks, read as follows in a literal

<sup>29</sup> Winternitz, *op. cit.*, I, 317.

translation: "You . . . recognized Govinda (the winner of herds, i. e., Krishna) as the eternal, sinless, imperishable God; and this my son who was the mighty Vishnu himself (i. e., in whom Vishnu had become incarnate) looked upon the destruction of his own race and permitted it to take place. He, the Lord of the world, desired that the word of Gandhârî and the Rishis should not appear vain, O oppressor of the enemies." Who with unprejudiced judgment could consider Christian influence even possible in this utterance and in the act to which it refers? Hopkins inspires—unconsciously of course—the appearance of such an influence by the suggestive addition "of himself," and by the Christian coloring of the wording of his translation. Krishna did not perish with all his house for the purpose "that he might fulfil the word of the seers," but in order that a genuine Indian curse might be fulfilled as occurs in Brahman narrative literature with annoying frequency.

#### THE UTTERMOST PARTS OF THE SEA.

Hopkins continues: "Another passage . . . , close to biblical phraseology, may be found in the description of the avenging spirits: 'If thou goest into the depths of the earth, or if thou shouldst fly above, or if thou fleest to the further side of the sea, still thou shalt find no escape from them' (Mhb. IV, 428); as compared with the psalmist's words, 'Whither shall I fly . . . into heaven . . . Sheol . . . the uttermost parts of the sea?' (Ps. cxxxix. 7 ff.)."

Might not this passage in the Psalms equally well be compared with the verse, many centuries older, in the famous Varuna hymn of Atharvaveda (4, 16, 4): "Who-soever were to flee far away from heaven, could not escape from Varuna the king," and would we not have to see in this parallel a new warning against the attempt to found

a loan hypothesis upon such similarities of expression?<sup>30</sup> Here too we must not consider the verse of the Mahâbhârata apart from the situation to which it is related. Kîchaka wishes to seduce Draupadî, but she rejects him and threatens him with the revenge of her five husbands who are Gandharvas. And now just imagine how the poet in describing *this* situation could have had in mind a verse of the Psalms and have depended on that whereas throughout the whole context of these stories not a single trace of biblical influence can be found! To the possible objection that we should consider that such biblical phrases had already been adopted at this time in Brahman India, and might have been used even without remembering their source, it may be answered that, apart from the great intrinsic improbability, the extraordinary scarcity of really striking parallels in the Mahâbhârata argues against it. There is not the slightest reason to question the Indian originality of such passages.

The next quotation, "Thou seest the faults of others, though they be no larger than mustard, but thine own faults thou canst not see though they be as large as a bilva tree" (Mbh., I, 3069) indicates only such a uniformity of *thought* with the familiar passage in the Bible, as can be accounted for on general considerations, but not the characteristic figure of the moat and beam in the eye.

#### THE SAINT ON THE STAKE.

Hopkins then brings forward at the end of the paragraph a very singular parallel: "Even the crucifixion has its analogy in the story of the Stake-Saint (impaling being the equivalent of crucifixion), who was unjustly impaled with thieves, but he did not die like the thieves and so awakened the wonder of the royal guard. They went and told the king, who was frightened when he heard of it

<sup>30</sup> See above, page 329.

and came to the Saint on the Stake and besought his forgiveness, which was granted as the king had acted ignorantly. He is besung in all the worlds as the Impaled One. . . . It is perhaps not impossible that there is here the echo of Christian story." On the contrary it is quite impossible and entirely excluded. It is only necessary to examine more closely the story in the *Mahâbhârata* (I, Chaps. 107, 108) in order to find that the only similarity to the crucifixion of Christ consists in the fact that it is an innocent man who is executed. This has happened often enough on earth, and has proved an effectual theme for narrative in the literature of all nations. In our case even the manner of death is not the same.

The Indian story is as follows: For many years Mândavya, the anchorite, has sat in front of his hermitage with upraised arms observing the vow of silence. One day robbers pursued by the police come running up and hide their booty in the hermitage, concealing themselves near by. The pursuers ask the hermit which way the robbers fled and of course receive no answer from him. Soon they catch the thieves and find the booty in Mândavya's hermitage, whereupon he is suspected of complicity with the robbers, is brought before the king, and sentenced to death. The executioners impale Mândavya, but he still continues to live by virtue of his asceticism although he receives no food, and by this same virtue he summons other saints who come at night in the form of birds and sorrowfully ask him for what guilt he is obliged to suffer the martyrdom of impaling. Mândavya answers: "Upon whom shall I lay the blame? No one else (but myself) brings this upon me." The king receives the information that Mândavya keeps alive in some miraculous way, and hastens to beg his pardon and to have the stake of martyrdom taken down. But when he tries to draw the stake from the body of the hermit he is not successful, and therefore cuts it

off at the surface of the body. Mândavya goes away bearing in his body the point of the stake during the rest of his life, and continues to practise his efficacious asceticism. But from that time on he was known throughout the entire world as Anî Mândavya, "Mândavya with the peg." One day he betook himself to the abode of Dharma, the god of justice, and asked the deity seated upon his heavenly throne for what unwittingly committed sin he now had to endure such horrible suffering. Dharma told him that the punishment was because once when he was a child he had pierced insects in the back with a reed. Thereupon Mândavya cursed the god that he should be born again as a Shûdra, because he had inflicted so disproportionately severe a punishment for a childish misdemeanor. The curse was of course fulfilled.

Is not the genuinely Indian impression of this fantastic tale most obvious? Can we conceive of a larger number of characteristically Indian features than the type of the hermit, the supernatural power of his asceticism which performs impossible miracles and in the face of which the gods themselves are powerless, the idea of unfailing retaliation for every deed and the inevitable curse at the end? How can a scholar otherwise so clear sighted, who comes to the conclusion that there is no historical connection in the hundred times greater similarity of New Testament narratives with their *Buddhist* parallels consider it even possible to find in the story just related an echo of the account of the passion of Christ?<sup>31</sup> It becomes psychologically comprehensible only through a religious temperament which is instinctively impelled to discover transmissions from Christianity. Who seeks such reasons for Christian influence on the Mahâbhârata gives the best

<sup>31</sup> In his *Religions of India*, p. 432, Hopkins has wisely declared this idea impossible: "It is not of course due to Christian influence that the great 'saint of the stake' is taken by the 'king's men,' is crucified (or literally impaled) among thieves, and lives so long that the guard go and tell the king of the miracle."

evidence by this very fact that such influence does not exist.

#### THE ORIGIN OF KRISHNAISM.

From these details I turn to a question of more general significance, namely the problem of the origin of Krishnaism, of which the oldest continuous source is the Mahâbhârata. What we learn from the great epic with regard to the development of this religion and the connection in which it belongs is briefly as follows:

In the war between the Kauravas and the Pândavas, which forms the kernel of the Mahâbhârata, Krishna, the scion of the Sâivata branch of the Yâdava tribe and the leader of this small nomadic people, stands as friend and helper on the side of the Pândavas. The conjecture that the figure of Krishna is derived from a non-Aryan nation because the name denotes "black" or "dark" and because Krishna is represented in art as a man of a dark blue color,<sup>32</sup> is untenable; for not only the name "Krishna" but also the names of his parents and of his tribe are good Aryan names.

In the oldest portions of the epic Krishna is nothing but a human—yes and all too human—person; for the Pândavas do not destroy their enemies in honorable battle but by cunning and treachery, and it is always Krishna who instigates and defends the treachery. This to be sure may find its explanation in the fact that the Mahâbhârata was originally a poem in honor of the Kauravas which attached to the friend of the Pândavas the stigma of a tricky and deceitful man, and that it was worked over at a later time into a Pândava epic in which of course the ally of its heroes must be glorified. But still it is remarkable that those features of deceit and treachery were not eradicated from the character of Krishna in recasting the

<sup>32</sup>L. D. Barnett, *Bhagavadgîtâ translated*, Introduction, 50; J. Kennedy, *JRAS*, 1907, 961.

ancient epic; for this proves that at the time when the revision took place Krishna still lived in the memory of the people as a thoroughly human personality.

I will treat later on of the probable motive of the exaltation of Krishna into the sphere of the superhuman, but first I shall give only the facts as far as we have use for them here.

From the leader of a half-savage nomadic tribe Krishna became first a demigod and then the tribal deity of the Yâdavas—a process to which an analogy in modern India may be brought forward in the exaltation of the Marâtha chief Shivaji to divine dignity.<sup>33</sup>

The descendants of the victorious Pândavas were glad to accept the new god who had promoted the advancement of their forefathers and bestowed great care upon the

<sup>33</sup> Hopkins, *India Old and New*, 105, in the essay, "A Study of Gods." In the very same passage Hopkins explains Krishna and Râma to be "originally local chieftains of northern India." His conviction of the originally human nature of Krishna could not be more definitely stated. But farther on in the book where it might be expected, i. e., in the chapter "Christ in India," Hopkins makes no use of this conviction in his treatment of Krishna and Krishnaism. The essay just mentioned, "A Study of Gods," was first published in 1899, and hence was written about the same time as his work *Religions of India* (1898), in which Hopkins on pages 467 and 468 calls Krishna an anthropomorphized god. We are surprised to read this, for a few pages earlier (page 465) Hopkins claims a historical character for Krishna and rightly identifies him "with the character mentioned in the Chândôgya Upanishad, 3, 17, 6," i. e., with a human disciple. It is evident that Hopkins's views with regard to Krishna have changed, and not only in the course of time, but mutually contradictory views are presented at the same time in the same work, yes even within a few pages.

In note 31 I have already mentioned one case in which Hopkins has replaced an earlier correct view at a later time by an incorrect one. Since he does this in silence we must assume that the earlier exposition has escaped his memory to the detriment of the subject in hand. Exactly the same thing may be observed of another passage. In *Religions of India*, page 429, Hopkins says that "the teaching of Christianity certainly may be suspected, but it can not be shown to exist in the Divine Song" (the Bhagavadgîtâ) and on page 430 he declares the Christian influence on this text to be "doubtful to the last degree." Three years later in *India Old and New* (pp. 152 ff.) he expresses himself—without reference to his former view—on the ground of a number of parallels which on closer consideration prove nothing under the circumstances, very decisively *in favor of* the dependence of the Bhagavadgîtâ on the doctrines of Christianity: "They [the parallels] present a body of evidence that is, I think, almost conclusive in favor of one of the religions having borrowed from the other" (p. 155), which according to the context can only mean borrowing from Christianity. Cf. also page 158 where the Fourth Gospel is called "peculiarly suitable to influence the Hindu divines." In this case too the Hopkins of 1898 is to be preferred to the Hopkins of 1901.

worship of the powerful and popular figure. To the Brahmans, who at first could not have approved this god who was avowedly a patron of warriors, and was originally the tribal deity of un-Brahmanized nomads, nothing remained but to make friends with the new cult if they wished to extend their influence to the worshipers of Krishna. They could do nothing better than, by making use of the convenient theory of incarnation, explain Krishna as an incarnation (*avatâra*) of the god Vishnu.<sup>34</sup>

That this occurred at the latest in the fourth century B. C. has been contested, to be sure, by Kennedy;<sup>35</sup> nevertheless it certainly follows from the well-known fact that Megasthenes, who lived as the ambassador of Seleukos Nikator at the court of Pâtaliputra from 302 to 288 B. C., unmistakably recognizes Krishna in his accounts as an *avatâra* of Vishnu under the name Heracles by the side of Dionysos (= Shiva).<sup>36</sup>

In the later portions of the Mahâbhârata Krishna's exaltation has made greater progress, for there he appears as the All-God, as one with the world-soul, the Brahman.

How genuinely Indian was this entire development we recognize from the fact that it is demonstrated in exactly

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Grierson, ERE, II, 541b: "The incorporation was carried out in exactly the same way as that in which we see Brahmanism extending its frontiers at the present day. The process is going on now before our eyes. Local or aboriginal deities are discovered to be identical with Shiva or some other member of the Brahmanical pantheon, and the distinction of caste is conferred upon the converts. Usually they are declared to be Râjputs, or, in other words, of the Kshatriya class. The aboriginal customs and beliefs are at first left untouched, and in a couple of generations no more ardent supporters of the claims of the Brâhmanical priesthood are to be found than those who are still fetish-ridden savages."

<sup>35</sup> That his reasons (JRAS, 1907, 962 ff.) prove nothing, has been shown by A. Berriedale Keith (*ibid.*, 1908, 170 ff.). Kennedy's reply to this (505 ff.) has not changed the situation.

<sup>36</sup> Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, II, 2d ed., 1107, 1226. Nârâyana and Vâsudeva (two by-names of Krishna) and Vishnu have already been identified in Taittiriya Aranyake, X, 1, 6; i. e., in a passage which belongs at the latest to the third century B. C. but is probably still older. Cf. Weber, *Ind. Stud.*, XIII, 353, Note 1; A. Berriedale Keith, JRAS, 1908, 171, Note 2. J. Kennedy in JRAS, 1907, 974, places the identification of Krishna and Vishnu not earlier than in the time of Kâlîdâsa, that is to say, in the fifth or sixth century after Christ!

the same way in a second instance, namely in the hero of the Râmâyana, Râmâ, who originally was also purely human, and who likewise became transformed first into a demigod and finally into the All-God and who like Krishna was regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu. Although the euhemeristic conception has otherwise seldom proved true in the realm of the history of religion, yet in India from earliest antiquity down to the present time, it has often proved to be correct. Not only heroes and founders of sects but also a large number of poets and authors on non-religious subjects have been identified with gods or simply deified in India.<sup>37</sup>

It has therefore never seemed quite intelligible to me that many such scholars as Tiele, Senart, Barth, Kennedy, A. Berriedale Keith—really also A. Weber and Hopkins in the greater part of his utterances—could in spite of the clear evidence of our sources, have described Krishna as originally a purely mythical figure, as a sun-god or a vegetation spirit. Against this conception speak the human character of Krishna in the oldest parts of the Mahâbhârata and the entire development traceable throughout the great epic. Then too the humanization of a primitive deity which these scholars accept in agreement with Indian mythology, would have succeeded too well with the Indian poets to be credible. Krishna is not a humanized god but a deified man, and mythology has reversed the actual relation, as has also been done to be sure in other instances in the transformation myths.

It is easy enough to understand that later when Krishna had become the most popular divinity of the Indian pantheon and his worshipers related more and more wonderful stories about him, all sorts of features entered

<sup>37</sup> H. Jacobi at the close of his paper, "Kultur-, Sprach- und Literaturhistorisches aus dem Kautiliya," *Sitzungsberichte der K. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 1911 (XLIV), 973; Hopkins, *Religions of India*, 522, note, after JA, XI, 56, 149.

into his cycle of myths and legends which originally belonged to the ancient sun-god and other deities. The transference of solar myths upon Krishna was a necessary consequence of his identification with Vishnu who was primarily a solar god. Grierson<sup>38</sup> places a rather high value, though without adducing this reason, on the influence of the solar cult, but in other respects takes throughout the standpoint here presented. Moreover, local divinities may also have been entirely fused with Krishna and have been absorbed in him.<sup>39</sup> This seems to be verified by the fact that Dvârakâ, the capital of the mature hero Krishna, is on the west coast of Gujerat, whereas all the legends referring to his childhood and youth are laid in the interior of the country towards Mathurâ on the Yamunâ (near the present Agra) and their vicinity. Of course we may draw no *basis* for an explanation from all such *later additions* to the cycle of Krishna legends.

That of all the heroes of the Mahâbhârata Krishna alone has been exalted in so remarkable a manner is hardly due to an incalculable chance, but must have had a particular cause. In the Mahâbhârata there is no lack of chieftains and successful warriors who would have been equally well or better suited for deification. For the explanation of the distinction of Krishna, R. G. Bhandarker, the most eminent Sanskritist among the natives of India, has proposed a conjecture<sup>40</sup> in whose favor much may be said, and which has later been verified by others with further proofs.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> In his important article "Bhaktimârga," ERE, II, 540, b.

<sup>39</sup> J. Kennedy, JRAS, 1907, 960 ff., with whose confused mythological speculations, however, I in no wise agree.

<sup>40</sup> In two places consistently: (1) In his *Report on the search for Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Bombay Presidency during the year 1883-84*, Bombay, 1887, p. 74; and (2) In the essay, "The Râmanujiya and the Bhâgarata or Pâncharâtra Systems" in the *Verhandlungen des VII. Internationalen Orientalisten-Kongresses, Arische Sektion*, Vienna, 1888, pp. 101 ff., especially 107 ff. Cf. also G. Bühler, JA, 1894, 248.

<sup>41</sup> Introduction to my translation of the Bhagavadgîtâ, 19 ff.; Grierson,

According to this view Krishna, the son of Vasudeva and Devakî, was not only a tribal chieftain but also the founder of a religion which first gained a footing among the Yâdavas but soon spread beyond the boundaries of the tribal community and became of immense importance in the evolution of religious life in India. This religion is the originally un-Brahmanic *monotheistic religion* independent of Vedic tradition whose adherents were called Bhâgavatas and later Pâncharâtras and who worshiped the supreme Being under the epithets Bhagavat, "the Exalted One,"<sup>42</sup> and Purusottama, "the supreme spirit." When the founder of this religion was deified in Indian fashion he became identified with the god he had proclaimed; and so Krishna, his patronymic Vâsudeva, "son of Vâsudeva," and Nârâyana, "son of man," came to be other names of this god. The result then of the later Brahmanization of the sect, as we have said before, was that Krishna was also made one form of the god Vishnu.

The Bhâgavata religion from which according to this conception Krishnaism arose, was primarily a popular Kshatriya religion and probably preached the doctrine of divine love from the beginning and emphasized the ethical side to a much stronger degree than Brahmanism, especially the requirement to do one's duty. In proof of this many passages from the Mahâbhârata may be adduced.<sup>43</sup>

The point of departure from the assumption that Krishna was the founder of this religion is furnished by a passage of the old Chândôgya Upanishad (3, 17, 6) in which Krishna, "the son of Devakî," is mentioned as the pupil of a famous sage, the Angirasid Ghora, in connection with doctrines which bear a pronounced ethical character, namely asceticism, liberality, uprightness, doing no one

JRAS, 1908, 603 ff.; "The Nârâyaniya and the Bhâgavatas," IA, 1908, 251 ff., especially 253; "Bhakti-mârگا," ERE, II, 539 ff. and elsewhere.

<sup>42</sup> From this is derived *Bhâgavata*, "worshiper of the Bhagavat."

<sup>43</sup> Introduction to my translation of the Bhagavadgîtâ, 24.

harm and speaking the truth (v. 4)—these requirements are to take the place of the sacrificial fee due to the priests, and the sacrifice itself is to be represented in the kind of life to be led.

If we bear in mind at the same time the fact that Krishna is the son of Devakî also in the Mahâbhârata, and appears in its older portions as warrior, councilor, and *promulgator of religious doctrines*, then the identity of the personalities can not be questioned and the character of Krishna as a religious teacher is as well corroborated as can be expected from the nature of the sources. The religion proclaimed by Krishna in the Mahâbhârata is precisely the Bhâgavata religion, and its chief text-book is the Bhagavadgîtâ, the "Song of the Exalted One," (i. e., of Krishna, who is revealed in it as the All-God) the most famous episode of the Mahâbhârata.

The entire conception here submitted gains in probability from the fact that Krishna's patronymic Vâsudeva as the designation of a god, is authenticated by Bhandarkar especially in the tribe to which Krishna, according to all tradition, belongs.

The Chândôgya Upanishad in which Krishna is mentioned dates from pre-Buddhistic times, and since there must surely be a historical basis for the war between the Kauravas and Pândavas, described in the Mahâbhârata, in which Krishna took part, the period of Krishna's life must be set considerably earlier than that of Buddha. Indian mythology places the incarnation of Vishnu as Krishna in the interval between the ages of Dvâpara and Kali, i. e., before the beginning of the present eon.<sup>44</sup> As early as the sixth century before Christ the Krishna cult must have flourished in its fullest bloom, because the ruins of the temple discovered in December, 1896, by Führer at Rummindêi on the southeastern border of Nepal, bear

<sup>44</sup>Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, II, 2d ed., 1128, Note 4.

witness that the ancestors of Buddha worshiped among other objects of their devotion Krishna's favorite wife, Rukmini.<sup>45</sup> The local name Rummindêi is the vernacular corruption of Rukminî devî, "the goddess Rukminî."

At any rate Krishna belonged to an age in which the Kshatriyas had a more important share in the promotion of the spiritual life of India than the Brahmans, who in those centuries squandered their strength mainly in the development of the sacrificial system and in speculations on the significance of the sacrifices, until they were seized by the loftier ideas which proceeded from the Kshatriya caste and were aroused to more worthy manifestation of their abilities. Krishna, the founder of a theistic religion, probably preceded by some centuries the atheistic founders Buddha and Mahāvîra, the originator of the Jaina sect; but all three were Kshatriyas, as were also the founders of the monistic doctrine of the Brahman-Atman, according to the evidence of the older Upanishads.<sup>46</sup>

I was obliged thus far to discuss these preliminary points about Krishna and the origin of Krishnaism in order to be able to approach the most important question in this chapter.

#### THE CHILD KRISHNA.

That Christian elements entered into the *later* phases of Krishnaism is undeniable and will not be contradicted by any Indologue. This will be further discussed later on. But there is lack of unanimity as to the time from which the Christian influence must be assumed, especially whether it is to be already found in the later parts of the

<sup>45</sup> Karl Eugen Neumann in the introductory preface to A. Paul, *Krishnas Weltengang*, Munich, 1905, 6, 7. When Neumann at the conclusion of this preface says "that all essential and many of the unessential parts of the legend of Krishna are derived from the epoch of the ancient Vedic hymns," a statement is made, without any attempt at proof, which is contradicted by the entire character of the Krishna legend. Not in any case does it extend back to the ancient Vedic period.

<sup>46</sup> See my *Beiträge zur indischen Kulturgeschichte*, Berlin, 1903, 1 ff.

Mahâbhârata serving to glorify Krishna. J. Kennedy, one of the champions in favor of the affirmative, in harmony with earlier expositions of Wilson and Weber, speaks of a complete change in the conception of Krishna.<sup>47</sup> He says that until about 500 A. D. Krishna was a thoroughly warlike god, a destroyer of giants and dragons; but that then his character suddenly and completely changed; that all at once he became an idyllic pastoral god, a child growing up to young manhood and also a god of love; that the Krishna *child* especially threw the older Krishna and other deities in the shade and everywhere made victorious headway. This last observation is correct and verifies a fact whose significance for the history of religion is greatly underestimated by Oldenberg when he asks<sup>48</sup> what ultimate significance the idyll of the Krishna child has for Hinduism. In a later essay<sup>49</sup> Kennedy explains this alleged sudden change by the assumption that about that time Scythian (i. e., Central Asiatic) nomads brought the "child-god" from the north to Mathurâ and with him a Christian legend and a Christian festival.

This entire theory fails under critical investigation. The sudden change in the conception of Krishna was really a very gradual transformation the beginnings of which take us back to a very much earlier time than Kennedy supposes. Since this scholar places particular weight upon the significance of Krishna as a child, I will first take up this point in detail.

The earliest connected narrative of Krishna's birth and childhood<sup>50</sup> is to be found in the Harivamsha, "the genealogy of Hari, i. e., of Vishnu," an appendix to the

<sup>47</sup> JRAS, 1907, 486.

<sup>48</sup> *Indien und die Religionswissenschaft*, 20.

<sup>49</sup> "The child Krishna, Christianity, and the Gujars," JRAS, 1907, 951-992, especially 976, 981 ff., 989. Similarly also Hopkins in *India Old and New*, 162.

<sup>50</sup> Two subordinate features are briefly mentioned in Mbh., II, 1439, 40, in a passage acknowledged to be a late interpolation.

Mahâbhârata which as early as the fifth century A. D. was considered a component part of the great epic<sup>51</sup> and can not have been written essentially earlier. The Harivamsha in its second part—which is the greatest and most important of its three divisions—treats of Vishnu incarnated as Krishna, but not of the ally of the Pândavas and the promulgator of religious doctrines as does the Mahâbhârata proper; rather does it offer a legendary biography of Krishna from his birth together with all the heroic deeds, adventures and love stories which we find also in the later Purana literature. Especially the fifth book of the Vishnupurâna<sup>52</sup> and the tenth of the Bhâgavatapurâna which indeed is much more extensive, agree pretty well in substance with the Krishna part (Vishnuparvan) of the Harivamsha.

I shall give only the beginning of this biography of Krishna, which has special importance for us, as told in Winternitz's summary,<sup>53</sup> and sum up the rest in a few words.

“In the city of Mathurâ there reigned a wicked king Kamsa. Nârada told him that he would meet death at the hands of the eighth son of Devakî, the sister of his father and the wife of Vasudeva. Thereupon Kamsa determined to slay all the children of Devakî. He had his servants keep a strict watch on Devakî, and six of her children were put to death as soon as they were born. The seventh child—who was that brother of Krishna later known as “Râma with the ploughshare,” “Balarâma” or “Baladeva”—was rescued by Nidrâ, the goddess of sleep, who took the child from his mother before his birth and transferred him to Rohini, another of Vasudeva's wives. But the eighth son,

<sup>51</sup> Winternitz, *Geschichte der indischen Litteratur*, I, 395.

<sup>52</sup> Translated into German by A. Paul, *Krishnas Weltengang*, Munich, 1905.

<sup>53</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, 381.

who was Krishna, Vasudeva himself, in order to save him from Kamsa, exchanged as soon as he was born for the daughter who had been born at the same time to the shepherd folk, Nanda and Yashodâ. So the shepherd's daughter was hurled against a rock by Kamsa while Krishna was thought to be the son of a shepherd and grew up among the herdsmen. To the guardianship of the herdsman's family, Vasudeva entrusted Râma also, and the two boys grew up together as herdsmen."

While yet an infant Krishna gave evidence of his superhuman power, and when a boy performed miraculous and heroic deeds which caused him to be considered the special guardian of pastoral life. For instance he overcame a terrible snake-demon in the Yamunâ and compelled him with all his train to withdraw into the ocean; and during a frightful storm he held a mountain as a protection over the shepherds and their flocks for seven days so that they remained uninjured. Although the shepherds wished because of these deeds to worship him as a god, he preferred to pursue his life among them simply as their friend and kinsman. Now for the first time are described his nocturnal revels, frolics and dances with the shepherd girls who are all in love with him and sing of his heroic deeds.

Of all these deeds in which Krishna overcomes a vast number of men and demons and once even the god of death in the lower world, we need mention here only one, the revenge he took on his wicked uncle Kamsa. In his residence at Mathurâ, this king heard of the deeds of valor of the two young herdsmen Krishna and Râma, and because he was afraid of them he concluded to put them out of the way by strategy. He invited them to his capital to a festival and a contest with two of his strongest wrestlers. The two young heroes came and killed the powerful wrestlers, and when King Kamsa in his wrath commanded the victors to be driven from the country, Krishna laid hold of

the king, drew him on to the place of combat and killed him.

In the beginning of this legendary biography of Krishna, Kennedy sees, as others have seen before him, an imitation of Christian prototypes. The slaughter of Vasudeva's children is thought to have been copied from the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem, and the early life of Krishna in a shepherd community from the birth of Christ among the shepherds. The agreements in the two parallels are certainly not so remarkable as to make at first sight the dependence of these features of the Krishna legend upon the New Testament narratives very probable. Still in this case we do not need to establish our position upon such general considerations but are so fortunate as to be able to prove positively the incorrectness of the loan hypothesis.

In Patañjali's *Mahâbhâshya*, the great commentary on the grammar of Panini which was written in the middle of the second century B. C., we find several examples of Krishna's hostile relation to his uncle Kamsa: "Krishna was hostile to his uncle" (2, 3, 36), "Vâsudeva, as everybody knows, slew Kamsa" (3, 2, 111), and in 3, 1, 26, the *Kamsavadha*, "the slaying of Kamsa," and the *Balibandha*, "the capture of the demon Bali," that is to say, two well-known acts of Krishna, or Vishnu, are mentioned as familiar material for rhapsodies, dramatic presentations and paintings.<sup>54</sup> That enmity existed between Krishna and his uncle Kamsa and that the latter had met his death at the hands of his nephew, were accordingly features of the Krishna legend knowledge of which could be assumed to be general at the time of the *Mahâbhâshya*. This requires a further line of argument. The features of the legend we have given represent at any rate such a remarkable di-

<sup>54</sup> A. Weber, *Ind. Stud.*, 13, 353 ff., 488 ff.; A. Berriedale Keith, *JRAS*, 1908, 172 ff.

vergence from the usual state of things between near relatives, that where a story was in circulation in which the nephew is the foe of his uncle and slays him, the cause of this abnormal relation must also have been a part of the story. Whoever was acquainted with these features must also have been familiar with the attempts of the uncle to put out of the way the nephew whom he feared. Whence it follows that at the time of the Mahâbhâsha those circumstances too were already generally known which according to the narrative of the Harivamsha had taken place before, at and after the birth of Krishna, and that especially the story of the slaughter of Vasudeva's children is older than the story of the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem.

Accordingly in the second century before Christ, not only the powerful hero Krishna, but even the Krishna child already played a significant rôle in Brahman India, and indeed the *divine child* since (as we have seen above, pages 338 and 342) Krishna had been worshiped as God as early as the sixth century B. C. in Buddha's native land,<sup>55</sup> and his identification with Vishnu was established by the fourth century B. C.

The divine child Krishna accordingly does not appear in India suddenly about 500 A. D. as Kennedy tells us, but was known there at least 700 years earlier, and indeed in his particular relation to pastoral life. Therefore his veneration is of genuinely Indian origin.

Hence it would not be necessary to examine critically Kennedy's assumption that it was the Gujars (Sanskrit, *Gurjara*) who brought the worship of the Christchild from Central Asia to Mathurâ about 500 A. D. But the absolute untenability of the theory just refuted becomes even

<sup>55</sup> The Brahmanic Hindus who emigrated to the western part of further India in the second century A. D. were also worshipers of Vāsudeva; and the same is to be assumed of those who settled on the island Madura near Java. Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde*, II, 2d ed., 1112.

clearer when we recognize that the speculations upon which Kennedy found his standpoint hang entirely in midair. We are not clear either with regard to the ethnological position nor the original home of the Gujars, who first appear in the northwest part of the Punjab in the middle of the sixth century A. D. and later extend farther south especially over the peninsula named for them Gujarât. Nor have we any account that the Gujars—and indeed as early as about 500 A. D.—reached the region of Mathurâ; nothing that we know about them speaks in favor of this. But before all else we shall ask whether the Gujars were Christians or were so imbued with Christian conceptions that we may assume that through their influence the Krishna legend was transformed in the Christian meaning. And would the Brahmanic Indians in Mathurâ, who belonged to a much higher grade of civilization, have been very ready to accept instruction from a crude race of immigrant nomads? As an answer to the first question we find Kennedy<sup>56</sup> suggesting the hypothesis that the Gujars “*might have* acquired some tincture of Christianity, either from their neighbors in Central Asia or from their connection with Christians among the Hûnas.” For the Gujars are mentioned in connection with the Huns and probably penetrated into India together with them.<sup>57</sup> Somewhat farther down Kennedy says (p. 990): “Probably the nomads who brought the new god to Mathurâ knew little of Christianity except the stories of the Infancy.” Hence men who knew so little of Christianity, and possibly not even that, who according to Kennedy at best—“*might have*” shows how insecure Kennedy feels the basis of his reasoning to be—had come only into the most external contact with Christianity, are supposed to have had sufficient interest in it to carry the doctrine of the Christchild to other nations!

<sup>56</sup> JRAS, 1907, 989.

<sup>57</sup> Hoernle and Stark, *History of India*, 61.

To spread religious teachings among foreign people and those of another faith usually requires a zeal enkindled by the strongest conviction.

But enough! It may be maintained with absolute certainty that Christianity, the Gujars, and the date 500 A. D. have nothing to do with the appearance of the Krishnachild in the religious life of India. The appearance of Christian features in the legends of Krishna's birth and childhood and in the Krishna cult did not take place at the earliest until two centuries later and must be placed to the account of the Nestorian missions.

As with the beginning of the Krishna legend the case is the same with another of its features which is referred by Hopkins to a Christian prototype in a way entirely incomprehensible to me.<sup>58</sup> I refer to the flirtations of Krishna with the shepherdesses in which Hopkins sees a reflection of "eternal Christianity" which he declares to be as "palpable" as it is "shocking." What in Christianity is meant spiritually is, according to Hopkins, interpreted in India physically and carnally. "The love of the Bridegroom is sensual; the brides of God are drunken dancing girls."

The truth is we have the same development on both sides. Sensual love which is celebrated in the Old Testament marriage songs of Canticles is raised to a spiritual sense by Christian symbolism when it is made to represent the longing of the human soul for the Saviour under the image of the bridal relation. In like manner in India the much celebrated love of the shepherdesses for Krishna later became spiritualized and was given a new meaning in the sense of the ardent love of man for the deity.

It would be too strange for a legend relating the life of Krishna among the shepherds to have contained nothing of the love and admiration felt by the rustic maidens for the hero and of his love affairs with them; for in the

<sup>58</sup> *Religions of India*, 430.

popular view all heroes of extraordinary strength are inexhaustible in the enjoyment of love, and in spite of all renunciation of the world and asceticism, the erotic element plays a much larger part in the life of the highly sensually organized Hindus than in the Occident. Therefore this feature of the Krishna legend has not originated by the adoption and degradation of a Christian idea, but it is genuinely Indian and is precisely demanded by the situation; moreover it is older than the entrance of Christian influences into Brahman India. For even though Krishna's flirtations are treated in poetic form for the first time in the *Harivamsha*<sup>59</sup> yet their conception dates from a much earlier time. As early as in the *Mahâbhârata* (2,2291) Krishna is addressed by Draupadî as the "lover of the shepherdesses" (*Gopîjanapriya*) in a passage belonging to one of the older portions of the great epic, where there can be no question of the possibility of a Christian influence which in the opinion of Hopkins is supposed to be "obvious."

There now remain for our consideration only two more features of Krishnaism which are found as early as in the *Mahâbhârata* and whose derivation from Christianity has been not infrequently asserted or surmised. These are the conception of Krishna as the god who loves mankind and the requirement to render to Krishna a believing love. These two features appear most distinctly in the *Bhagavadgîtâ*, the most splendid portion of the *Mahâbhârata*, and they have found there their most significant expression. Since the *Bhagavadgîtâ* on account of its unique position in India which has been maintained down to the present day, and on account of its many parallels with the New Testament, requires a separate investigation, the divine love which this song celebrates in its twofold sense

<sup>59</sup> This is done later most extensively in the tenth book of *Bhâgavatapurâna*, and in an esthetically complete fashion in Jayadeva's *Gîtâgovinda*.

will best be treated in an article on the Bhagavadgîtâ. But even here it is well to point out that for reasons which will then be duly considered the assumption of Christian influence upon the Bhagavadgîtâ is impossible. Therefore I come back to what I have said in the beginning, that the fantastic account of Shvetadvîpa in the twelfth book of the Mahâbhârata must be characterized as the only portion of the epic in which a remote echo of Christianity is to be found with any degree of certainty.

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