

THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS
OF
SRI KRISHNA

BY
M. R. SAMPATKUMARAN, M.A.

Second Edition
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THE UPANISHADS

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BY

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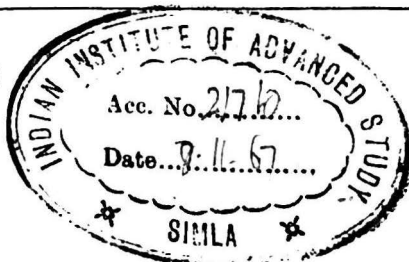


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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE main difficulty that faces anyone who tries to write on Sri Krishna is not lack of material but the very reverse of it. Books on Sri Krishna are legion and of varying value and worth. And so it is the question of proper choice and selection that has to be solved. Hence, when Mr. G. A. Natesan very kindly invited me a few months ago to write a brochure on Sri Krishna in the series of books on world teachers that he is bringing out, naturally enough, I asked myself the question: What does Sri Krishna mean to us—to us in modern India who are neither saints nor scholars? It is by way of an answer to this question that this little book is written. We all know a great many stories about Sri Krishna. I have endeavoured to collect them together, more especially those hailing from a respectable antiquity. I have also tried to answer some of the

problems raised by these stories for the historian as well as for the critic of morals and of art. As for Sri Krishna's teachings, we are fortunate enough in having them expounded in so early and celebrated a work as the *Bhagavat-gita*, surely one of the greatest and most influential works of the human mind. But precisely because it is great and influential, it has been diversely interpreted. Here too my point of view has been determined by the question just what it means to us in modern India. I do not expect that my answers to these questions will be either complete or satisfactory: but this little book will have served its purpose if it provokes further thought and interest in one who is, perhaps, the greatest single force that has moulded our faith throughout its long, recorded history.

It is hardly necessary to say that no originality is claimed for the facts recorded or conclusions arrived at in this work. I have laid under contribution many writers,

both ancient and modern, and in the course of the work, I have freely acknowledged my indebtedness. My views on the teachings of the *Gita*, I may add, have been greatly influenced by a study of the lectures delivered by my father of revered memory, the late Prof. M. Rangacharya, on the subject.

It remains for me now to render thanks wherever they are due for help and assistance received in the writing of this work. Mr. G. A. Natesan, whom I have known since my childhood as an old friend of my father, took a deeply personal interest in this work and is in great measure responsible for the form that it has finally assumed. Mr. B. Natesan of his office, who read through the manuscript and the proofs, made many invaluable suggestions for which I am happy to be in his debt.

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LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF SRI KRISHNA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE sun rose on a busy world. Housewives were bustling about, even before the faint streaks of dawn lighted the eastern sky. And the men-folk, though they might rise up a little later, had still a full day before them. The children woke up to find their dream-world becoming real, with their mothers and sisters preparing an endless variety of delicacies, and their fathers and brothers reconstructing out of toys and images and improvised decorations the scenes amidst which God had come down to earth long ago and lived and played and taught. For it was the day of Sri Krishna's

Nativity, a day of universal rejoicing for men and women and children throughout the length and breadth of India.

The programme lasts till late in the night. Many fast till the temple bells announce sometime after dusk the birth of the Lord: and many read or listen to the story of His coming as told in the *Bhagavata*. Lights are waved and incense is burnt before the shrine in the house and a canopy of leaves and fruits sends out a wholesome fragrance. The next day, at least in South India, the images in the temples are taken out in procession, and typical rustic sports are enacted.

Thus for more years than men have cared to keep count of, has the advent of Sri Krishna been celebrated and the memory of His gracious mission kept alive. And it is not difficult to infer from the part played in these celebrations by children and bucolic rustics, that Sri Krishna's devotees are not an exclusive aristocracy. They come from all ranks and

conditions and include the simple of heart as well as the mighty of intellect, boys and girls as well as scholars and savants. For, as Sister Nivedita says of Him:

The Grand Personality that towers above Kurukshetra and enunciates the body of doctrine which all India knew to be the core of *dharmā*, combines in himself the divinity of the Indian Shiva, the virility of the Greek Heracles, the simplicity of the Judæan Christ, the tenderness of Buddha and the calm austerity and learning of any teacher of the *Upanishads*.*

Indeed, Sri Krishna's appeal is so universal that the late Dr. Besant observed in one of her eloquent discourses on the Hindu "Avatars":

Shri Krishna is the God of the household, the God of family life, the God whose manifestations attract in every phase of His Self-revelation; He is human to the very core; born in humanity, as He has said, He acts as a man. As a child, He is a real child, full of playfulness, of fun, of winsome

* Sister Nivedita's *Footfalls of Indian History*.

grace. Growing up into boyhood, into manhood, He exercises the same human fascination over the hearts of men, of women, and of children; the God in whose presence there is always joy, the God in whose presence there is continual laughter and music. When we think of Shri Krishna, we seem to hear the ripple of the river, the rustling of the leaves in the forest, the lowing of the kine in the pasture, the laughter of happy children playing round their parents' knees. He is so fundamentally the God who is human in everything; who bends in human sympathy over the cradle of the babe, who sympathises with the play of the youth, who is the friend of the lover, the blessing of the bridegroom and the bride, who smiles on the young mother when her first born lies in her arms—everywhere the God of love and of human happiness; what wonder that His winsome grace has fascinated the hearts of men!

The devotion inspired by Sri Krishna has often tended to intoxicate. Unlike Rama, the other great *avatar* of Hinduism who is distant and great and ideal and who inspires reverence from afar, Krishna has

managed to entwine himself round the hearts of countless generations of Hindus. Valmiki writes very little about Rama's childhood, and we do not know whether he was mischievous or quiet. But of Krishna's bewitching naughtiness, how many stories and poems! Perhaps every Hindu mother sees in the escapades of her children some dim memories of Yasoda's Young Nuisance. And what a picture of passionate devotion is seen in the *gopas* and *gopis* of Brindavan, abandoning their all for the love of a divine boy, drawing heavenly music from a mere flute. Even as the noble Charioteer of Arjuna, He asked for nothing more than sincere devotion. "Completely renouncing all duties," He told His cousin on the battle-field, "seek Me as the sole refuge. Grieve not I shall free you from all sins".

Whether as a result of the religion of love that He preachod, or for some other reason, there has grown round the figure of Sri Krishna much fascinating poetry and

hymnody that have made Him throughout the centuries the most impassioned object of adoration in India. And He still continues to inspire poets and mystics. It is not easy task to sift this wide and varied literature and attempt a critical reconstruction of Sri Krishna's life and teachings. Even if we exclude from consideration all myths and legends and doubtful historical material and reach down to the nucleus of evidence, of undoubted value, we find it susceptible of varied interpretation. But no attempt to re-state the story of one of the greatest formative influences in Indian thought and religion, however inadequate and inconclusive, need prove entirely futile. For, as an ardent devotee has observed, it is a story which belongs to no dead past, but one, which read in the light of reason and spiritual experience, must awaken a rich response from the modern mind. "Krishna is the Immortal of Indian history."

CHAPTER II

BIRTH OF SRI KRISHNA

66 **T**HERE are at least ten thousand works in the various Indian languages," writes Dhirendranath Pal, "that contain the story of Sri Krishna either in songs and sonnets or in poems and dramas." But the chief sources of the traditional account of Sri Krishna's life are not many and may be easily enumerated. They are the great epic, the *Mahabharata*, its reputed sequel, the *Harivamsa*, and the *Vishnu*, *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas*. The *Mahabharata* deals mainly with Sri Krishna as king and statesman, while the *Harivamsa* and the *Puranas* supply details about those portions of his life neglected by the great epic. We may now proceed to draw a composite picture of Sri Krishna's career, as may be gleaned from these divergent but more or less complementary source-books.

These ancient chronicles tell us that towards the end of the *dvapara* age (that is, a little more than five thousand years ago) there ruled over the kingdom of Mathura (the modern Muttra)* on the banks of the Jumna a prince of the name of Ugrasena. He had a son called Kamsa and a brother called Devaka. It came to pass that his brother's daughter Devaki was given in marriage to one Vasudeva. After the wedding had been duly solemnised, the bride and the bridegroom drove in state to their new home. Kamsa, as the beloved cousin of Devaki, held the reins, and was happily urging the chariot along, when suddenly a voice from the heavens addressed him and said: "Fool

* An account of Muttra may be found in "India's Sacred Shrines and Cities" (G. A. Natesan & Co.) from which the following passage is extracted:—"Sri Krishna's actual place of nativity is now marked by a temple built and dedicated to him. There is a well near this temple with the water of which Krishna's mother is said to have washed the Divine Baby's clothes. The well is known as Patala Kunda and is resorted to by pilgrims for purificatory bath."

that you are so lovingly to escort your dear cousin, for you are destined to die at the hands of her eighth child." Kamsa, who was by nature ambitious and cruel, at once stopped the chariot. Drawing his sword, he seized Devaki by the hair and was about to slay the frightened girl, when Vasudeva intervened. He argued and pleaded with Kamsa and persuaded him to spare fair Devaki by undertaking to deliver to him, as soon as born, all her children.

In due time, Devaki conceived and brought forth her first child. When the little one was taken to Kamsa, He decided in a temporary fit of kindliness to save it, reasoning that his death had been predicted at the hands of the eighth and not the first child of Devaki. But soon Kamsa was in a different frame of mind. Learning from the sage, Narada, that he and his boon-companions were the *asuras* of old in a new birth, while Vasudeva and Devaki and their friends were incarnations of their

old foes, the *devas*, Kamsa determined to declare again a state of war against the gods. He threw his old father, Ugrasena, into prison, usurped the throne and set up a relentless tyranny. Many fled the land: others, like Devaki and Vasudeva, suffered captivity: yet others including the first-born of Devaki, whom Kamsa had only recently decided to spare, were killed.

And so while Kamsa reigned, Vasudeva and Devaki continued to languish in prison. Long years passed, and six of their children were delivered over to death. And when Devaki was in her seventh conception, her foetus was miraculously transferred to the womb of Rohini, another wife of Vasudeva, living at that time, out of fear of Kamsa, at Vraja,* a pastoral hamlet under a local chief, Nanda. The child thus born to Rohini was called

* *Vraja* means a pastoral hamlet, though in its modern form *Braja* it has become a proper noun. *Brihat-vana* appears to have been the name of the place where Nanda's hamlet was located. But it is more convenient to call it Vraja and so it will be referred to in this book.

Rama, Bala, and also Sankarshana (from having been transferred from one womb to another).

Sometime later, Devaki became pregnant for the eighth time. Kamsa's anxiety increased and he grew ever more careful and watchful. There was a majesty and radiance about Devaki, which impressed and over-awed Kamsa. He awaited the birth of his destined destroyer with ill-concealed fear. Says the *Bhagavata* : "Sitting or standing, moving or resting, eating or drinking, every moment of his life, Kamsa was thinking of the God who would descend into the world as the son of Devaki and kill him ; and he perceived the world as full of God. The time at last arrived for the auspicious advent of the Lord, 'and all the heavens and earth were filled with signs of gladness—trees and forests blossomed and fruited, pools were filled, the gods rained down flowers, and *gandharvas* played on drums and pipes'." Heralded by the praise of

gods and sages, a miraculous child was born to Devaki, four-armed, dark like a rain-bearing cloud, robed in amber, bearing divine weapons and bedecked with jewels from head to feet.

At the moment of His birth, the prison was filled with a soft light, streaming out from the Babe Himself, and as He lay back in His mother's lap, they saw shining out from behind Him four arms. One hand held the *shank* or battle-trumpet; another the discus; a third the mace; and in the fourth was a lotus on its stem.*

Devaki and Vasudeva worshipped and praised this supernatural son of theirs. He told them of a promise He had made to them in a previous birth to be born of them.† And He added that their salvation would be assured whether they

* CRADLE TALES OF HINDUISM. By Sister Nivedita.

† The purpose of this 'descent' was to destroy Kamsa and other evil-doers and relieve the sore burden of Mother Earth. As the Lord says in the *Gita*: "For the protection of the good and the destruction of the wicked, and for the maintenance of the moral law am I born from age to age."

treated Him as God or child. Finally He bade Vasudeva take Him to Vraja beyond the Jumna and exchange Him for the baby girl just born to Yasoda, wife of Nanda. There would be no difficulty in effecting the transfer, as the doors would open of themselves, the guards would not oppose and the Jumna would allow an easy crossing. So saying, even while His parents were looking on, He assumed the form of an ordinary child. Vasudeva's fetters then gave way of themselves: the doors of the prison, though fastened with bolts, opened as if impelled by an unseen agency: and the guards fell into a deep sleep. Vasudeva walked out of the prison with the baby in his arms. It was raining then and the Jumna was in floods. But the thousand-hooded serpent spread out its heads like an umbrella and protected the child from the downpour, while the waters of Jumna parted of themselves to give a clear passage to the Lord. Vasudeva passed

on and entered Vraja. Everyone was sleeping in Nanda's house and beside Yasoda lay her new-born child. Quickly exchanging the babies, Vasudeva returned to his prison and put on his shackles. The doors closed behind him, and the guards woke up suddenly and heard the cry of a new-born baby. Immediately they carried the news to Kamsa, who ran over to the prison to take charge of the dangerous child. Devaki pleaded once again in vain for some mercy. After all it was a girl, she argued, fit to be given in marriage to Kamsa's own son. But the ambitious tyrant was in no mood to listen to such appeals. He snatched the child from its mother and dashed it against a stone. But it slipped from his hands and rose up in the sky, assuming the wondrous form of Yoga Maya and spoke thus to the astonished Kamsa: "Fool, of what avail is your killing me, when your slayer has been born elsewhere?"

Kamsa's immediate reaction to this miracle was one of repentance and despair. He released Vasudeva and Devaki from their prison and begged their pardon for all the injuries that he had done them in the past. Soon, however, he sought the advice of his ministers, and at their instance, he ordered, so the *Puranas* tell us, a Massacre of the Innocents. All children were to be killed so that the future destroyer of Kamsa might not escape.

Returning now to Yasoda—she woke up from her sleep to find a baby son sleeping by her side. She had no clear recollection of the sex of her new-born child, and she, therefore, did not entertain the slightest suspicion that a 'changeling' lay beside her. And so, the child—Krishna as it came to be called—grew up in the pastoral hamlet as the son of Nanda and Yasoda.

Such is the pseudo-historical legend of Krishna. This story, whatever its origin, has sunk deep, as Dr. Coomaraswamy says, "into the heart and imagination of India".

CHAPTER III

STORIES OF CHILDHOOD

IT will be fruitless to examine too minutely the mass of legends that has gathered round a historical figure, who is at once human and divine. Time takes its own measure of things, and the unfailing human touch inseparably linked with heroic and legendary attributes gives to the name and figure of Krishna an immortality as that of the gods—and the fascination of a romance to which countless poets and minstrels have given of their best—in feeling, in thought and imagination.

Many stories are related of the miracles that happened during his childhood and boyhood, miracles such as those recorded of Christ, Buddha, and other prophets and saints. Several attempts were made to kill the divine child. The first of these was by one Putana, belonging to the retinue of Kamsa, in the course of a career

of indiscriminate infanticide. Dressed as a lovely woman, she came and mingled with the crowd who wished to see Yasoda's child. She took the little one on her lap and fondled it and gave it her poisoned breasts to suck. Sri Krishna drank away her life along with her milk and Putana fell dead with a terrible cry.

Then came the episode of the demon (Sakatasura), who had entered a cart near the child's cradle with the object of encompassing its death at a favourable opportunity. Krishna kicked the cart in childish fretting, and it crashed down into a thousand fragments. But Krishna remained unhurt.

Another time, a fiend in the shape of a whirlwind (Trinavarta) carried the child up into the skies and tried to kill it. But Krishna came down to earth once again, miraculously uninjured with the demon crushed to death.

As a child, Krishna was mischief incarnate. One of the little fellow's tricks was to

make His way into the dairies of His village friends and help Himself, on behalf of His friends, the monkeys and birds, to cream and butter and other good things. Every one liked Him] to do this.

He used to take away the pots of curds when the *gopis* were asleep; when he saw anything on a high shelf he would climb up and pull it down and eat some of it, and spill or hide the rest. The *gopis* used to go and complain of him to Yasoda, calling him a butter-thief; and she found him, and told him he must not take the food from other people's houses. But he made up a plausible story, and said the *gopis* had fed him themselves or asked him to do some work for them; and now, he said, "they are telling tales of me". So, Krishna always got the best of it.

Once Yasoda tied him up to a mortar to restrain him. But he went about on all fours, dragging the heavy mortar behind him and passed between two *arjuna* trees standing close to each other. The mortar pulled the trees down, and

from the wreck—so the story runs—rose up two demi-gods (*Yakshas*) who had become transformed into the trees on account of a curse.

On another occasion, Krishna was accused of eating mud. "No, mother," he protested, and asked her to look inside his mouth. She looked, and lo and behold,

she saw there revealed, as if within Him, all the worlds, in all their manifold gradations of existence. The whole infinite Universe within that one Babe Krishna! And the mortal, unable to bear the revelation, closed her eyes, trembling, till the kind gods drew over her sight once more the veil of illusion, and she was able to look upon the Divinity before her as if He were nothing but her Son.—*Cradle Tales*.

She forgot the incident soon after and did not regard the child other than what it purported to be.

The series of accidents Sri Krishna met with, alarmed the people of Vraja. They decided to migrate to a safer and more auspicious place. According to the

Harivamsa, the immediate occasion for this decision was provided by packs of wolves invading Vraja and its environs. So began the great exodus, and Nanda and his clan settled down in a new home, Brindavan, near the Govardhana hill. Here Krishna grew up to be a somewhat unruly boy, but he managed at the same time to become a popular favourite. Rama, his step-brother (though not known as such at the time) was his constant companion and playmate. Life in Brindavan was by no means uneventful. The *Bhagavata* mentions nine *asuras* at least, who came in various disguises to Brindavan only to meet destruction at the hands of Krishna. Two such adventures may be here related in the words of the authors of the "Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists":

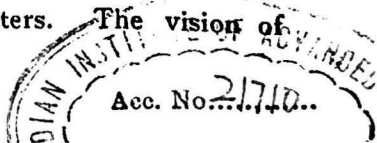
When Krishna was five years old, he took the cattle out into the woods to graze; that day Kamsa sent a demon in the shape of a crane, and he came to Brindavan and sat on the river-bank like a mountain. All the herd-boys were

frightened; but Krishna went up to the crane and allowed it to take him up in its huge beak. Then Krishna made himself so hot that the crane was glad to put him out, and then he held open the crane's jaws and tore them apart; and collecting the calves, the herd-boys all went home with Krishna, laughing and playing.

Another time Kamsa sent a dragon named Aghasur; he came and hid himself in the woods with his mouth open. The herd-boys thought this open hole was a mountain cave, and they all went near and looked in. Just then the dragon drew in his breath and all the *gopas* and calves were swept into his mouth and felt the poisonous hot vapour, and cried out in distress. Krishna heard that and jumped into the dragon's mouth too, and then the mouth was shut. But Krishna made himself bigger and bigger till the dragon's stomach burst, and all the herd-boys and calves fell out unhurt.

In addition to this, Sri Krishna also succeeded in driving away from the Jumna a many-hooded serpent, Kaliya, which poisoned its waters.

The vision of



Sri Krishna's dance on the hydra-headed reptile in the dark waters of the Jumna has provided Hindu artists for thousands of years with an apt symbol of the rhythm of life in the universe.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE IN BRINDAVAN

SRI KRISHNA'S life in Brindavan and his relations with the *gopis* are marked by incidents which have given rise to endless controversy among the purists. The accounts of his amours, which are partly mythical and partly mystical, have puzzled the Puritans. Reserving to a later stage a fuller discussion of the subject, we may mention here that he is pictured in the *Puranas* as playing and dancing and singing with the girls and young women of the place. The memory of the divine music that he drew from his flute still lingers in India, and its irresistible charm has been the theme of countless songs and poems.

Krishna used often to play his flute in the woods; all the herd-girls in Braj, when they heard it, would go out and look for him; but they could not find him, and had to wait till he came back again in the evening. So they sat down together on the road and talked of the

flute. One said: "Just see how that bamboo tube is honoured; drinking the nectar of Krishna's lips all day, it resounds like a cloud and pours out delight. Why is it more beloved than we? This thing made before our very eyes has become like a rival wife! Even the gods attend when Krishna plays his flute. What discipline has it performed that all things are obedient to it?" Another *gopi* replied: 'First, when it grew in the bamboo stem, it remembered Hari; then it endured heat and cold and water; and lastly, cut to pieces, it breathed the smoke of its own burning. Who else performs such mortifications? The flute was made perfect and has its reward.' Then another Braj woman exclaimed: 'Why did not the lord of Braj make flutes of us, to remain with him day and night?'—*Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists.*

The call of his flute made every creature near by, man, woman or beast, abandon everything for experiencing the joy of drinking in its swelling melody. And in autumnal nights, under a clear and effulgent moon, the *gopis* danced the *rasa* dance.

The dancers formed a great circle, and under the spell of a divine illusion, each *gopi* saw Krishna by her side.

So they spent the time and even the gods came down from heaven to see the dancing, and wind and water stood still to hearken. But when four watches yet remained of the night, Krishna said it was time for the *gopis* to go to their homes, and to comfort them he said: "Do you ever meditate upon me, as *yogis* do, that I may always be near you." So they were satisfied and returned to their homes, and no one knew they had been away.

It was a love without any selfishness. In the words of Nivedita:

When Krishna was near, they felt themselves lifted into a golden atmosphere, where all was gaiety and lightness of heart; nothing seemed serious or troublesome: and their happiness bubbled over in the form of gentleness and play. If one were eating some delicious fruit, and suddenly saw the luminous form of Krishna, she would unconsciously offer it, for the next bite, to His lips, instead of to her own.

Yet each was only kinder and more faithful to all others, by reason of this wonderful play. For it is written that the homes of the *gopis* never suffered, their husbands and their children never cried on them in vain, they never fled from any duty, in order to indulge in the company of Krishna. And not those of the *gopis* only, but also all the humble homes about Brindavan, were made happy by His presence.

Leader of all the *gopis* was Radha, and to her specially was it given to realise the intensity of sweetness.

Hers was the frank and instant recognition, the deep understanding, and the constant vision of His glory. And she it was who reached the unutterable depths of sorrow, when the simple joys of that peasant-world could hold Him no longer, and He left Brindavan for ever, to return to the life and responsibility of kings, freeing His people from the Tyrant of Mathura. Wherefore, because of this wondrous union between the human soul of Radha and the Divine in Krishna, all love has come to be summed up in Their love.

CHAPTER V

CONTESTS WITH GODS

SRI KRISHNA also engaged during this period in two contests with the gods. Brahma, the creator, once hid away the cows and cowherd companions of Krishna, while they were out grazing. Here is the story as told in the fascinating account of Sri Krishna in the "Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists":—

Krishna went to look for them and did not find them, but he created another herd just like them. Then he came back to the feasting-place and found the boys gone too, and he made others in their likeness and went home in the evening with the changeling boys and calves, and nobody but Krishna knew that the real children and calves had been hidden by Brahma in a mountain cave. Meanwhile a year went by; it was only a moment of time as it seemed to Brahma, but it was a year for men. Brahma remembered his doings and went to see what had happened.

He found the boys and the calves asleep in the cave; then he went to Brindavan, and found the boys and the calves there too. And Krishna made all the herd-boys into the likeness of gods, with four arms and the shape of Brahma and Rudra and Indra. Seeing this, the Creator was struck with astonishment; still as a picture, he forgot himself, and his thoughts wandered away. He was afflicted like an unworshipped, unhonoured stone image. But Krishna, when he saw that Brahma was thus afraid, drew back all those illusory forms into himself, and Brahma fell at Krishna's feet and prayed his pardon, saying: "All things are enchanted by thy illusion; but who can bewilder thee? Thou art the creator of all, in whose every hair are many such Brahmas as I. Thou compassionate to the humble, forgive my fault." Then Krishna smiled, and Brahma restored all the herd-boys and calves. When they awoke, they knew nothing of the time that had passed, but only praised Krishna for finding the calves so quickly; then they all went home.

On another occasion, Sri Krishna had a tussle with Indra. Once when Nanda

and other elders of the community began to make preparations for the annual feast in honour of Indra, Sri Krishna protested. There was no use in worshipping Indra, he argued. The cows and their pastures were their gods. Let them all do homage to their kine and to the hill, Govardhana. Indra was furious at this affront to his dignity and sent the doomsday clouds under his command to drown Brindavan. For seven days and nights, torrential rains poured down from the skies ceaselessly. But with the little finger of his hand, Sri Krishna held up the Govardhana hill over the pastoral hamlet (quite in the manner of Jesus stopping the winds that were "contrary" and taking Peter safely over the water). Indra's clouds exerted themselves in vain. In the end, Indra acknowledged defeat, and begged Sri Krishna's forgiveness. The Lord said to him in reply:

O Lord of the Devas, you were greatly intoxicated by your glory and

greatness, therefore out of compassion for you (in order to open your eyes) I stopped the sacrificial offering to you; now you take refuge in Me. Those who get blinded by their power, do not see Me holding the staff of punishment; among such people, one on whom My grace descends, I deprive of his property, so that he may be cured of his inebriety.

CHAPTER VI

KILLING OF KAMSA

WHILE Krishna was growing up in Brindavan, the sage Narada went to Kamsa one day and told him the whole truth about the birth of Devaki's eighth child and his upbringing among the cowherds of Nanda. Kamsa was shocked. He began to utter furious threats against Vasudeva and Devaki and was restrained from killing them only with difficulty by Narada. Their freedom was, however, ended and once more the hapless Devaki and her husband found themselves within the four walls of a prison. This done, Kamsa decided to take immediate steps against Krishna. He sent first, one Keshin, an *asura* in the form of a horse, to destroy his enemy, but Keshin died in the attempt. Then he invited Krishna, Rama and Nanda to Mathura with the object of meting out death to them.

One Akrura carried the message to Krishna, who had meanwhile learnt of Kamsa's plan through Narada. Akrura himself told the whole story fully revealing Kamsa's intentions. Krishna at once accepted the challenge and started for Mathura with Rama and Akrura and Nanda.

The capital was in a festive mood. A solemn sacrifice, *Dhanurmakha* (the Sacrifice of the Bow), was in progress, and Kamsa's invitation to Krishna was on this pretext. Arrived at the city and warmly greeted by the citizens, Sri Krishna and Rama moved along the gaily decorated streets. Meeting the washerman of the palace, they demanded suitable dresses for themselves. Kamsa's servant replied with insult and met swift punishment at the hands of the princes. Sudama the florist and Kubja, a young but hunch-backed woman employed by Kamsa for making sandal-paste, treated the brothers with respect, and were suitably rewarded. Kubja in particular

became miraculously straight and erect. The princes then visited an arsenal where Krishna broke a bow. Commotion ensued and attempts were made to capture them, but to no purpose. Rama and Krishna safely returned to their camp outside the city.

The next day was the day of the great tournament. The great amphitheatre was filled with spectators of all classes and ranks. Rama and Krishna arriving at the place found their way barred by a huge elephant, Kuvalayapida. Krishna caught the mighty creature by the tail, and dragged it backwards, "as some great bird might drag a snake". Krishna then made short work of the pachyderm and entered the arena.

How different were the feelings of those who looked upon Him in that moment! The soldiers saw in Him, it is said, a mighty general. Women saw a beautiful youth. The people saw simply a great man. Nanda and his subjects saw the beloved Cowherd of Brindavan. Devaki and Vasudeva, from

their place near the King's person, saw their Babe of one stormy night twelve years before. Saints saw the Lord Himself appear on earth in human form. And Kamsa, on his high seat trembled, for in the beautiful Lad before him, without armour, weapons, or followers, he, seated on his throne and surrounded by his armies, saw only his own destined Destroyer.

Then a powerful wrestler, Chanura, engaged Sri Krishna, while Rama found himself opposed by Mushtika, another professional champion. These men who had orders to kill the boys from Brindavan by fair means or foul, soon found the task laid on them by Kamsa beyond their powers. Chanura and Mushtika were easily killed. Others tried to take their place, but none could stand before the princes. Thoroughly frightened and desperate, Kamsa shouted that they should be killed, that Vasudeva, Ugrasena and Devaki should all die and that Nanda should be imprisoned and all his property confiscated. On hearing these wild orders, Krishna jumped on to the

throne of Kamsa and killed the tyrant after a short struggle. Meanwhile the eight younger brothers of Kamsa rose in his defence; but each as he threw himself forward to kill Krishna, was met by Balarama with a blow of his club that laid him low.

Then came a scene of weeping. Even those who had hated Kamsa were struck with consternation and pity, and all the royal women came, each to lament at the side of her dead husband. But Krishna and Balarama went forward quietly to find their parents, Devaki and Vasudeva, and when they had struck off their fetters—still worn at Kamsa's orders, though they sat amongst the royal guests—they touched their feet with their heads, as dutiful children. But Devaki and Vasudeva, it is said, recognising these sons of theirs as the Lord Himself, stood before them with folded hands, until there fell upon their minds once more the veil of Maya, and they could forget their greatness, to offer them the love and tenderness of long-lost parents.—*Cradle Tales*.

CHAPTER VII

KRISHNA AND KUCHELA

THE ordering of the affairs of the state now came into Krishna's hands. He released his parents from their prison and greeted them with affection. The old King Ugrasena, Kamsa's father, was also released from captivity and placed on the throne. Krishna then persuaded Nanda to return home to his pastoral hamlet. Having established a new order in Mathura, Krishna and Rama began a course of formal education under one Sandipani. According to the *Vishnupurana* what was learnt was mainly military science, but the *Bhagavata* says that all the sixty-four arts were mastered.

It was here that Sri Krishna met with the Brahmin boy Sudama and began a lifelong friendship with him. Sudama, known otherwise as Kuchela, grew up into a pious Brahmin, but had to endure the

miseries of poverty. As the father of many children, his distress became acute. At last, pressed by his wife, he travelled to Dwaraka and tried to secure an interview with Krishna. Indeed, in the whole of the *Bhagavata*, there is no more moving story than that of the Lord going out to receive his old classmate, introducing him to his wife, doing him the honours of the host, and chatting and recalling old boyish pranks. Sudama had brought as a present to his whilom classmate a handful of fried rice, tied in a rag. And when he felt ashamed to offer it to the great ruler of Dwaraka, Krishna took it from him almost by force and tasted it with great relish. And though Sudama, overcome by love and devotion, took leave of Krishna without asking for any favour for himself, he found on his return home that he had been blessed with untold riches by the grace of the Lord.

Krishna's studies under Sandipani did not last long, for the boy proved amazingly

precocious. And the time soon came for the royal princes to offer their *guru-dakshina*, the fee to their preceptor. It was the custom in the good old days for the pupils to live with their teachers during the course of their training and in the end show their gratitude to their masters by handsome gifts. Krishna and Rama discharged their debt to their *guru* by restoring to him a child whom he had lost long ago in the sea near Prabhasa. In the course of this adventure, they had to slay a demon called Panchajana. He was a marine monster, in the form of a conch-shell, and had the ocean for his home. Out of his bones, Sri Krishna made his famous war-trumpet, the *Panchajanya*, the conch which sounded terror to his enemies.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOUNDING OF DWARAKA

RETURNING back to Mathura after completing his education, Sri Krishna found himself face to face with a difficult problem. Kamsa's death at the hands of Krishna had created for the state of Mathura a powerful enemy in Jarasandha, King of Magadha, who had married the daughters of Kamsa. Jarasandha was, perhaps, the most formidable prince India had at that time, and the Yadhus had a serious situation to tackle. Seventeen or eighteen times, the ancient chronicles relate, Jarasandha attacked Mathura: and every time he returned back discomfited. While engaged in this endless feud with Jarasandha, the Yadhavas suddenly found themselves attacked by another powerful enemy. One Kalayavana, a barbarian king, hurled his forces against Mathura for the sole purpose of satisfying his inordinate ambition for conquest.

The prospect of fighting two powerful foes simultaneously or even one after another in succession worried the rulers of Mathura. And so Sri Krishna conceived and carried out a plan for the mass migration of the people to Dwaraka, an island fortress in the western sea. "It thus became the capital of Krishna's ideal kingdom, the place whence He, the God incarnate, showered his love and blessings on all who were pure and devout of heart." After ensuring the safety of his people, Sri Krishna came back to Mathura and sallied out of the city all alone and unarmed to meet, Kalayavana. The *mlechcha* chief thought that he had an opportunity of meeting Krishna in single combat and rushed out at him. Krishna pretended to fly from Kalayavana and provoked the latter to a hot pursuit. And thus decoyed, Kalayavana entered a cave, where Muchukunda, an ancient hero, who had helped the gods in their fight against the demons, was resting after his

martial labours. Mistaking him for Krishna, the barbarian prince tried to kick him awake. But he did not know that the man whom he was kicking had obtained a boon from the gods to the effect that whoso should interrupt his well-earned rest must perish in flames. And thus Kalayavana met his doom. Krishna who was an interested spectator of this incident, then showed himself to Muchukunda and blessed him. Krishna then returned to Mathura, dispersed the army of the barbarian prince and took away all his wealth to Dwaraka. According to the *Bhagavata*, he had at this time to face an attack from Jarasandha. Once again he fled, taking Rama with him, and disappeared in the heights of the Pravarshana hill. Jarasandha piled up fuel round the hill and set fire to it. And thinking that he had burnt out the Yadhava princes, he retired to his city in contentment. Meanwhile, Rama and Krishna escaped from Jarasandha's trap and reached Dwaraka in safety.

Thereafter his life became that of a prince and the adviser of princes, though he never occupied the throne himself. Henceforth he lived in the palaces and courts and council chambers of monarchs. and as a gifted woman writer has significantly observed, "sorrow dwelt eternally in the heart of Radha".

CHAPTER IX

KRISHNA AND HIS CONSORTS

SOMETIME later, Sri Krishna sought the hand of lovely Rukmini, daughter of King Bhismaka of Vidarbha. The princess had fallen in love with Krishna on hearing reports about his enchanting presence and great deeds of prowess. And Krishna reciprocated the sentiment. But Rukmin, brother of Rukmini, did not like Krishna and persuaded his father, at the instance of Jarasandha, to betroth the princess to Sisupala, King of Chedi. Rukmini at once sent a message to Sri Krishna, confessing her love for him and imploring him to take her away when she would be visiting the shrine of Ambika on the day preceding her marriage. "Thou art a Searcher of Hearts," she wrote in memorable words, "and knowest the thoughts of all; what need I say? Thou art my refuge: my honour is in thy hands. Do thou act so

as to guard it and come and reveal thyself to thy servant." Sri Krishna told the messenger that he felt equally drawn towards her and promised to carry out her plan. In due course, he set out for Kundina, the capital of Bhishmaka, ostensibly for the purpose of attending Sisupala's marriage with Rukmini. Rama followed him with a considerable force, expecting trouble. And soon enough there was trouble. Following the suggestion of Rukmini, Krishna carried her away when she was returning from the temple of Ambika on the eve of her wedding. Sisupala and his friends at once resolved to give battle to the audacious abductor. Rukmin joined forces with them, vowing never to return to his city without killing Krishna and recovering his sister. But Krishna and Rama led their forces to victory, and Jarasandha was forced by the stress of circumstances to preach resignation to a depressed and despairing Sisupala. Rukmin was disarmed in battle

and escaped with his life only through the intercession of his sister.

Rukmin, however, being bound by his vow, could not return to his city and henceforth lived at Bhojakata, where, it may be mentioned in passing, he met his end many years later at the hands of Rama in a drunken brawl following a game of dice.

Rukmini, the eldest of Sri Krishna's queens and the heroine of a great love-story, retold a thousand times in the various languages of India, has become one of the inspiring ideals of Indian womanhood. Her most well-known rival in the affections of Sri Krishna is Satyabhama, represented in popular literature as a somewhat fiery and tempestuous character, inordinately jealous of Rukmini. She was the daughter of Satrajit and was given in marriage to Sri Krishna somewhat as a propitiatory offering under a curious set of circumstances. Satrajit had a resplendent gem, *syamantaka*, the gift of the sun, on which many people cast

covetous eyes. Once Sri Krishna asked Satrajit whether he would give the gem to him. But Satrajit would not part with it. One day, wearing the gem, Prasena, brother of Satrajit, went out on a hunting expedition and never returned. Malicious tongues began to whisper that Krishna must have murdered Prasena for the sake of the gem. To vindicate his character, Sri Krishna decided to investigate the fate of Prasena and followed the tracks of the fatal hunting expedition with a number of friends. Soon he found the unfortunate Prasena lying dead with his horse. The footprints of a lion near by showed how they had met their end. Following the spoor of the lion, he found the beast too lying dead. All around there were indications that the lion was killed by a bear. The tracks of this powerful bear led him to the mouth of a cave. Leaving his companions outside, Krishna walked boldly in. He saw there a child playing with *syamantaka* gem. Seeing a stranger, the nurse of the child

cried out in fear and Jambavan, the mighty bear who figured in the great war of the *Ramayana* against Ravana, rushed against the intruder. The combat that ensued lasted, according to the *Bhagavata*, for twenty-eight days. Finally, Jambavan felt too exhausted to continue the fight and began to suspect that he must have engaged no less a person than his old master, Rama Dasarathin. Sri Krishna then revealed himself and explained the purpose of his visit. Jambavan gladly gave Sri Krishna the *syamantaka* gem and also presented him his daughter, Jambavati as a bride.

Meanwhile, the party which waited outside the cave for Sri Krishna had returned to Dwaraka, concluding that he must have met his end somewhere in the dark labyrinths of the cave. Now that Krishna was acquitted of all blame in the matter of the gem,* the people of Dwaraka began

* For the time being only, unfortunately. For the *syamantaka* had not yet taken its full toll of life. While Krishna was paying a visit of condolence

to curse Satrajit for having been the cause of the untimely demise of so noble a hero as their Prince. Sri Krishna's return with Jambavati, therefore, provided a pleasant and thrilling surprise to the populace. Afraid of having incurred the disfavour of Sri Krishna, Satrajit offered to him his daughter Satyabhama, a famed beauty, in marriage. Satyabhama thus became Sri Krishna's third wife. There are many apocryphal stories contrasting her ostentatious, jealous and passionate love for Krishna with the humble and self-effacing devotion of Rukmini. Bhama has become the type of pompous piety even as Rukmini has come to typify true devotion.

to Dhritarashtra on hearing the news that the Pandavas had perished in a fire, one Satadhandvan, a disappointed suitor for Satyabhama's hand, killed Satrajit, and took away the gem. The murderer in due course met his doom at the hands of Krishna, but he had previously handed over the gem to Akrura, one of his accomplices, who fled to Kasi. Once more Krishna came under the suspicion of having stolen the gem, and even Rama felt angry with him. It was not till many years later that the whole mystery was cleared up with Akrura's return to Dwaraka.

CHAPTER X

SRI KRISHNA AND THE PANDAVAS

THOSE were stirring days in India, when great ambitions contended for the mastery of the continent and decisive battles were won and lost. The history of the period centred round the feud between the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras, cousins belonging to the Kuru dynasty who ruled near modern Delhi. Most of the great princes of the land ranged themselves on the one side or the other, and the warring diplomacies of many years reached a climax in the memorable Battle of Kurukshetra, which settled the history of India for many generations. Krishna's position in the powerful Vrishni state made him the foremost statesman of his time. "Kings sought his approval and the alliance of

his people. . . His presence was desired at every tournament and assembly. Under his guidance the Vrishnis and their government became one of the most important factors in the life of the period." And it is hardly to be wondered at that Sri Krishna played a notable part at every stage, whether diplomatic or belligerent, of the decisive issue of his age. The history of Sri Krishna's public life is for the most part the history of his friendship with the Pandavas and we may now try to trace the development of that memorable alliance which shaped the destiny of India for ages.

Kunti, the wife of Pandu, was Krishna's aunt, and her five famous sons were, therefore, his cousins. The old chronicles are not very clear about Sri Krishna's first meeting with the Pandavas. The *Bhagavata* mentions that soon after the killing of Kamsa, Krishna sent Akrura to his aunt with a message of condolence on the death of Pandu, which must have

been at that time a recent event. There is no record of a meeting between the cousins till the *svayamvara** of Draupadi, which the Pandava princes witnessed disguised as Brahmin youths.

We may note briefly in passing the circumstances under which the Pandavas found it desirable to adopt disguise. After the death of Pandu, his sons came under the care of his brother, Dhritarashtra. They were brought up along with Duryodhana and his brothers, the sons of Dhritarashtra. The sons of Pandu and those of Dhritarashtra were jointly entitled to the Kuru throne, but the ambitious Duryodhana from the beginning wanted to cheat the Pandavas out of their inheritance. One of his many plans to achieve this object was to decoy the Pandavas into a house built of combustible lac and to set fire to it. Fortunately the Pandavas

* Literally "self-election": an ancient institution by means of which royal princesses were enabled to choose their husbands.

escaped from this death-trap and arrived *incognito* at the capital of king Drupada, father of Draupadi. It was generally assumed that they had died in the fire which consumed their dwelling place, and they did not feel that the time had yet come to announce their continued existence in the land of the living. Thus it came to pass that Arjuna and his brothers were present at the *svayamvara* of Draupadi in the guise of Brahmins.

Sri Krishna appears to have penetrated through their disguise. Later he called on them at the potter's house where they were staying, and after their marriage with Draupadi, he played an important part in the settlement by which Dhritarashtra agreed to give them half the kingdom in recognition of their rights as the heirs of Pandu. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, had for his capital, Khandavaprastha, near the unreclaimed forest of Khandava on the western banks of the Jumna. Sri Krishna, according to the *Mahabharata*, called on

Visva-karma, the architect of the gods, to build a new city for the Pandavas, and a marvellous capital came into being and was named Indraprastha.

Some time later, Arjuna had to go out on an year's pilgrimage. In the course of his wanderings, he met Sri Krishna on the Raivataka hill near Dwaraka. Happening at the same time to see [Sri Krishna's beautiful sister, Subhadra, he lost his heart to her. Knowing that his brother Rama would oppose the match, Sri Krishna suggested to Arjuna to get Subhadra by a stratagem. Arjuna was introduced to her as an ascetic, and slowly he began to worm his way into her heart. And when at last he revealed himself and his intentions, Subhadra was ready to follow him to the ends of the earth. So one day, when most of the people were away on a near-by island celebrating a festival, Arjuna eloped with Subhadra. The Yadava princess took the reins and drove his chariot and Arjuna fought his way successfully through pursuit

and opposition back to his capital. Sri Krishna then pacified Rama and the brothers visited the formal solemnisation of Arjuna's wedding at Indraprastha. Arjuna's marriage with Subhadra only strengthened the friendship which had long been growing between him and Sri Krishna. Duryodhana, who had watched this friendship with envy, once spoke of the two friends thus: "Sri Krishna is the soul of Arjuna and Arjuna is the soul of Sri Krishna. Whatever Arjuna asks Sri Krishna to do, that he will do without doubt. Sri Krishna will give up even Paradise for the sake of Arjuna; even so, Arjuna will lay down his life for Sri Krishna."

Not long after the marriage of Subhadra, Sri Krishna and Arjuna set fire to the great Khandava forest and cleared a vast area for civilisation. The *Mahabharata* tells the story in a curious way. The god of fire, it is related, sought the help of the cousins in consuming the forest and this

they proceeded to give him in ample measure. Maya, the famous architect of the demons, whom Arjuna rescued from the great fire, decided at Sri Krishna's suggestion to build for the Pandavas a wonderful new palace. The famous sage Narada happened to call on the Pandavas at their new mansion and suggested to them the idea of performing the *rajasuya* sacrifice. The princes gave serious thought to the question and sent for Sri Krishna to get the benefit of his advice. For the performance of the sacrifice involved as a preliminary step the recognition, by all the ruling princes of India, of Yudhishtira as their suzerain overlord and emperor.

Sri Krishna, on hearing the proposal, forthwith pointed out the difficulties in the way. The proud and valiant Jarasandha would never submit to Yudhishtira and without conquering him, it would be absolutely impossible to perform the *rajasuya* sacrifice. The scheme was then hatched of challenging Jarasandha to a single combat.

and Sri Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna set out on the perilous adventure. Arriving at the city of Girivraja, the capital of Jarasandha, they gained entry into the palace and, revealing themselves, challenged Jarasandha. The proud king of Magadha chose to fight a duel with Bhima, and the great fight began. After many vicissitudes, Bhima killed Jarasandha and laid the foundations for the empire of Yudhishtira. Thereafter, the Pandava princes went on many expeditions of conquest and in a short time reduced all the rulers of India to subjection.

The time was then ripe for the performance of the great sacrifice which would formally establish the imperial dignity of Yudhishtira. And the sacrifice was duly solemnised in the presence of all the princes of India. Here Sri Krishna was accorded first honours by the Pandavas as the greatest statesman and teacher of the age. Sisupala, King of Chedi, friend of Jarasandha and whilom rival for the

hand of Rukmini, strongly objected and reviled him openly. Then a fight ensued between Sri Krishna and Sisupala in which the latter was killed. The sacrifice then proceeded smoothly and Yudhishtira was firmly installed on the imperial throne.

But he was not to enjoy that dignity for long. Duryodhana was burning with jealousy at the sight of his cousin's advancement. His resentment was further inflamed by some of the misadventures that befell him in the palace built by Maya for the Pandavas. After the sacrifice, Duryodhana found the magical skill of Maya too much for his vanity. For the haughty Kaurava was taken in by the architect's cunningly contrived illusions and became an object of ridicule to Draupadi and other women-folk. Duryodhana, therefore, brooded and planned and ultimately, on the advice of his uncle Sakuni, invited Yudhishtira for a gambling match. The Pandavas had to respond to the challenge.

For "no true Kshatriya must ever decline a challenge to combat or dice".

The brothers go to the entertainment, which is to ruin their prosperity. Bags of gold and pearls and jewels, war elephants with golden howdahs, thousands of male and female servants adorned with ornaments from head to foot, then cattle and horses and the whole kingdom (excepting only the lands which had been granted to the Brahmins) are staked and lost. Sakuni with his cleverly camouflaged foul play is more than a match for the good king. One by one, Yudishthira loses his wealth and kingdom, himself and his brothers.

After this tremendous run of ill-luck, he madly stakes Draupadi the Beautiful, and loses her. The princess is dragged away by the hair, and Duryodhana mockingly bids her come and sit upon his knee, for which Bhima the Pandava swears that he will some day break his thigh-bone,—a vow which is duly kept.

Exulting at this victory, Duryodhana ordered Draupadi to be disrobed there in public. Bound by his scrupulous sense of honour, Yudishthira watched the outrage without protest or resistance. And all the nobles assembled were too timid to restrain the arrogant Kaurava, drunk with power and success. Draupadi pleaded in vain for mercy. Duhsasana relentlessly began to strip her. Finding her position hopeless, she gave up even the weak opposition that she was offering Duhsasana and raised her hands in supplication to Sri Krishna; for "when great calamity befalls, Lord Hari (Krishna) must be thought of":

"O Lord armed with conch, discus and mace, Denizen of Dwaraka, Imperishable Lord, Lotus-eyed Govinda, protect me who has sought you as refuge.

"O Krishna, Denizen of Dwaraka, Joy of the Yadavas! Where are you? Why do you neglect this helpless being who has come to this critical state?

"Krishna, K r i s h n a, great Yogin, Soul of the universe, Creator of the universe, Govinda, save this suppliant creature, perishing in the midst of the Kurus."

Having thus contemplated upon Krishna, Hari, the Lord of the three worlds, that beautiful lady, covering her face, cried in her distress.

And it is related that Sri Krishna who was at that time in far off Dwaraka heard her prayer and came to her rescue. It is significant, as a shrewd interpreter has observed, that at every point when His presence would have frustrated the object of His coming, He goes away. He is not present at the great game of dice, for that was necessary for the working out of the divine purpose; He was away. He remained away, until Draupadi cried in her agony for help when her modesty was threatened. A veritable miracle then happened. Draupadi suddenly found herself clothed in a

thousand marvellous robes. Disrobing her became an endless task for Duhsasana who soon had to desist from sheer physical exhaustion. And thus the indecent outrage came to an end.

But not, however, the tribulations of the Pandavas. Though as a result of the divine succour to Draupadi, Dhritarashtra gave back to his nephews all that they had lost, they were not to keep it long. For the dice-play was renewed, and this time the stake was exile to the forest for thirteen years. And once again Sakuni's bag of tricks proved adequate for the occasion, and he won. The Pandavas went into exile.

They depart, Draupadi unbinding her long black hair, and vowing never to fasten it back again till the hands of Bhima, the strong man among the Pandavas, are red with the punishment of the Kauravas. "Then," she declares, "he shall tie my tresses up again, when his fingers are dripping with Duhsasana's blood."

Sri Krishna visited them once or twice in their forest home and consoled them for their misfortunes as well as he could. And once at least, to save Draupadi from embarrassment, he performed a miracle, which will recall to the modern readers the miracle of loaves and fishes related in the New Testament. A somewhat irascible sage of the name of Durvasas once came to the hermitage of the exiled princes and asked for food at an untimely hour. Draupadi prayed to Sri Krishna to come to her aid. He appeared before her in person and asked her to bring him the vessel in which food had been cooked. Tasting a tiny bit that was found in the neck of the otherwise empty vessel, Sri Krishna willed that the sage and his party should feel relieved of their appetite. And so Durvasas and his companions bathing in the river, suddenly felt as if they had sumptuously dined. The embarrassment intended for Draupadi fell to their lot. And unable to face the prospect of the

dinner with the Pandavas to which they had invited themselves, they quietly slunk away.*

And so for thirteen years the Pandava princes were in exile. The first twelve of these were spent in forests. During the last year they had to hide themselves successfully from public view. The Pandavas, therefore, adopted various disguises and lived this year at the court of King Virata without any one being the wiser about their true identity.

Here the vicissitudes of Draupadi as a handmaid of the queen, of Bhima as the palace wrestler, of Arjuna disguised as a eunuch, and of Nakula, Sahadeva,

* Compare the miracle attributed to Jesus who, it is said, distributed "five loaves and two fishes" among five thousand, and all were "filled".

"And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children."

and Yudhishthira, acting as herdsmen and attendants, are most absorbing and dramatic. The virtue of Draupadi, assailed by a prince of the State, is terribly defended by the giant Bhima; and when the Kauravas, suspecting the presence in the palace of their cousins, attack Virata, Arjuna drives the chariot of the heir-apparent, and victoriously repulses them with his awful bow Gandiva.*

What Sri Krishna was doing all these years, it is difficult to say. He must have reigned prosperously and peacefully at Dwaraka. Whether any of his military exploits, such as the campaign against Bana can be placed during this interval is a question admitting of no certain answer.

After the stipulated period of exile had ended, the Pandavas claimed all their territory from their cousins. Sri Krishna went as their plenipotentiary to the Kauravas. For, he was the one who in every difficulty stepped forward as

* INDIAN POETRY AND INDIAN IDYLLS. By Edwin Arnold.

ambassador. Ever striving for righteousness and peace, Sri Krishna was unwearied in his efforts to conciliate the contending parties. He

Strove to stop the war of nations
and to end the feud in love,
And to far Hastina's palace
Krishna went to sue for peace,
Raised his voice against the slaughter,
begged that strife and feud should cease!

he brought to bear upon his peace mission the same passion and thoroughness with which he later directed the war, which became inevitable. Sri Krishna was famous for his persuasive manner with the contestants and we have a glimpse of it in Romesh Chunder Dutt's metrical version of the great episode in the *Mahabharata*. Addressing the old King, he said :

"Listen, mighty Dhrita-rashtra,
Kuru's great and ancient king,
Seek not war and death of kinsmen,
word of peace and love I bring!
'Midst the wide earth's many nations
Bharats in their worth excel,
Love and kindness, spotless virtue,
in the Kuru-elders dwell,

Father of the noble nation,
now retired from life's turmoil,
Ill beseems that sin or untruth
should thy ancient bosom soil!

For thy sons in impious anger
seek to do their kinsmen wrong,
And withhold the throne and kingdom
which by right to them belong,

And a danger thus ariseth
like the comet's baleful fire,
Slaughtered kinsmen, bleeding nations,
soon shall feed its fatal ire!

Stretch thy hands, O Kuru monarch!
prove thy truth and holy grace,
Man of peace! avert the slaughter
and preserve thy ancient race,

Yet restrain thy fiery children,
for thy mandates they obey,
I with sweet and soft persuasion
Pandu's truthful sons will sway.

'Tis thy profit. Kuru monarch!
that the fatal feud should cease,
Brave Duryodhan, good Yudhishtir.
rule in unmolested peace,

Pandu's sons are strong in valour,
mighty in their armed hand,
INDRA shall not shake thy empire
when they guard the Kuru land!

Bhishma is thy kingdom's bulwark,
doughty Drona rules the war,
Karna matchless with his arrows.
Kripa peerless in his car,

Let Yudhishtir and stout Bhima
by these noble warriors stand,

And let helmet-wearing Arjun
guard the sacred Kuru land,

Who shall then contest thy prowess
from the sea to farthest sea,

Ruler of a worldwide empire,
king of kings and nations free?

But this moving appeal was in vain. Duryodhana, in his pride, was adamant and would have none of Sri Krishna's counsel of peace and amity. After making some half-hearted attempts to win over Sri Krishna himself, he flatly refused to negotiate. He also had the impudence to attempt to set a trap to Sri Krishna for effecting his capture. The great epic says that Sri Krishna confounded his would-be captors by showing them his universal form.

CHAPTER XI

SRI KRISHNA AND ARJUNA

ALL attempts at reaching a negotiated settlement having proved futile, war became inevitable. Hostilities were declared, and each side massed a huge army. The opposing forces met on the historic battle-field of Kurukshetra (later known as Panipat) where many a decisive contest in India's history had been fought. Sri Krishna preserved during this struggle a curious neutrality. He gave away his forces to Duryodhana, but he gave the benefit of his sage counsel to the Pandavas. In the words of Sir Edwin Arnold:

Duryodhana and Arjuna engage in a singular contest to obtain the aid of Krishna, whom both of them seek out. This celestial hero is asleep when they arrive, and the proud

Kaurava, as Lord of Indraprastha, sits down at his head; Arjuna, more reverently, takes a place at his feet. Krishna, awaking, offers to give his vast army to one of them, and himself as counsellor to the other; and Arjuna gladly allows Duryodhana to take the army, which turns out much the worse bargain.

For Arjuna knew full well that if Krishna was on his side, victory was certain. Truly had Drona the preceptor told Yudhishthira: "Where Dharma is, is Krishna and where Krishna is, is victory." Sri Krishna acted throughout the war as Arjuna's charioteer and suggested many important strategical moves. The *Mahabharata* makes it perfectly clear that the victory of the Pandavas was due to their having obtained Sri Krishna as their guide, philosopher and friend. Throughout the great epic, we are struck by Sri Krishna's unwearied devotion to his friends, the Pandavas. How constant his friendship, how ceaseless his protection, how careful his thought to guard their honour

and their lives, how wise and sagacious and strong !

It was at the beginning of this war that Sri Krishna taught the immoral *Gita* to Arjuna. Arjuna felt a strange reluctance to go on with the fight, when he saw standing opposite to him in battle-array friends, relatives and preceptors, men to whom he felt bound by ties of blood and love.

and the Prince.

Marked on each hand the kinsmen of his house,
Grandsires and sires, uncles and brothers and sons,
Cousins and sons-in-law and nephews, mixed
With friends and honoured elders ; some this side,
Some that side ranged : and seeing those opposed,
Such kith grown enemies—Arjuna's heart
Melted with pity, while he uttered this :
Krishna ! as I behold, come here to shed
Their common blood, yon concourse of our kin,
My members fail, my tongue dries in my mouth,
A shudder thrills my body, and my hair
Bristles with horror ; from my weak hand slips
Gandiv, the goodly bow ; a fever burns
My skin to parching ; hardly may I stand ;
The life within me seems to swim and faint ;
Nothing do I foresee save woe and wail !

It is not good, O Keshav !* nought of good
 Can spring from mutual slaughter ! Lo, I hate
 Triumph and domination, wealth and ease,
 Thus sadly won ! *Aho* ! what victory
 Can bring delight, Govinda !* what rich spoils
 Could profit ; what rule recompense ; what span
 Of life itself seem sweet, bought with such blood ?
 Seeing that those stand here, ready to die,
 For whose sake life was fair, and pleasure pleased,
 And power grew precious : grandsires, sires, and sons,
 Brothers, and fathers-in-law, and sons-in-law,
 Elders and friends ! Shall I deal death on those
 Even though they seek to slay us ? Not one blow,
 O Madhusudan !* will I strike to gain
 The rule of all Three Worlds ; then how much less
 To seize an earthly kingdom !

Thus, if we slay

Kinsfolk and friends for love of earthly power,
Ahovat ! what an evil fault it were !

Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
 To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
 To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow,
 So speaking, in the face of those two hosts,
 Arjuna sank upon his chariot-seat,
 And let fall bow and arrows, sick at heart.

—*The Song Celestial.*

Sri Krishna asks him why he will not fight and Arjuna repeats that he cannot bear to kill his kinsfolk.

* Names of Krishna.

How can I, in the battle, shoot with shafts
On Bhishma, or on Drona—O thou Chief!—
Both worshipful, both honourable men ?

Better to live on beggar's bread
With those we love alive,

Than taste their blood in rich feasts spread,
And guiltily survive !

Ah ! were it worse—who knows ?—to be
Victor or vanquished here,

When those confront us angrily
Whose death leaves living drear ?

In pity lost, by doubtings tossed,
My thoughts—distracted—turn

To Thee, the Guide I revered most,
That I may counsel learn :

I know not what would heal the grief
Burned into soul and sense,

If I were earth's unchallenged chief—
A god—and these gone thence !

Hearing this lamentation, Sri Krishna
"rebukes the recreant warrior for his
weakness, and endeavours to remove his
compunction by explaining to him the
true nature of God and the soul". He
argues that he cannot really kill them : he
may kill their bodies but he cannot kill
their souls which are immortal :

Thou grieveest where no grief should be ! thou
speakest

Words lacking wisdom ! for the wise in heart
Mourn not for those that live, nor those that die.

Nor I, nor thou, not any one of these,
Ever was not, nor ever will not be,
For ever and for ever afterwards.
All, that doth live, lives always ! To man's frame
As there comes infancy and youth and age,
So come there raisings-up and layings-down
Of other and of other life-abodes,
Which the wise know, and fear not.
Never the spirit was born ! the spirit shall cease to be
never ;
Never was time it was not ; End and Beginning
are dreams !
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the
spirit for ever ;
Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the
house of it seems !
Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth,
"These will I wear to-day !"
So putteth by the spirit
Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh.
I say to thee weapons reach not the Life ;
Flame burns it not, waters cannot o'erwhelm,
Nor dry winds wither it.

How wilt thou, then,—
Knowing it so,—grieve when thou shouldst not
grieve ?

Sri Krishna called on him to overcome
this sentimental opposition to carry out

an unpleasant duty, and incidentally taught him the meaning of duty, the aim of life and the purpose of history.

Do thy part !

Be mindful of thy name, and tremble not !
Nought better can betide a martial soul
Than lawful war ! happy the warrior
To whom comes joy of battle—comes, as now,
Glorious and fair, unsought ; opening for him
A gateway unto Heav'n. But, if thou shunn'st
This honourable field—a Kshattriya—
If, knowing thy duty and thy task, thou bidd'st
Duty and task go by—that shall be sin !
And those to come shall speak thee infamy
From age to age ; but infamy is worse
For men of noble blood to bear than death !
The chiefs upon their battle-chariots
Will deem 'twas fear that drove thee from the fray.
Of those who held thee mighty-souled the scorn
Thou must abide, while all thine enemies
Will scatter bitter speech of thee, to mock
The valour which thou hadst ; what fate could fall
More grievously than this ? Either—being killed—
Thou wilt win Swarga's safety, or—alive
And victor—thou wilt reign an earthly king.
Therefore, arise, thou son of Kunti ! brace
Thine arm for conflict, nerve thy heart to meet—
As things alike to thee—pleasure or pain,
Profit or ruin, victory or defeat :
So minded, gird thee to the fight, for so
Thou shalt not sin !

Sri Krishna, thereupon, revealed his universal form and impressed on Arjuna that the crisis of the *Bharata* war was a necessary incident in the divinely planned process of history. Arjuna could not stop the war by laying down his arms. His choice lay only between the performance of duty or its dereliction. Ultimately, Arjuna was persuaded to discharge the service that was required of him, and the great battle after lasting eighteen days, ended in a complete victory for the Pandavas.

In a brilliant chapter on the "Iliad of India", Sir Edwin Arnold thus describes the epic struggle:

The two enormous hosts march to the field, generalissimos are selected, and defiances of the most violent and abusive sort exchanged. Yet there are traces of a singular civilisation in the rules which the leaders draw up to be observed in the war. Thus, no stratagems are to be used; the fighting men are to fraternise, if they will, after each combat; none may slay the flier, the unarmed, the

charioteer, or the beater of the drum; horsemen are not to attack footmen, and nobody is to fling a spear till the preliminary challenges are finished; nor may any third man interfere when two combatants are engaged. . . .

The field glitters, indeed, with kings and princes in panoply of gold and jewels, who engage in mighty and varied combats, till the earth swims in blood, and the heavens themselves are obscured with dust and flying weapons. One by one the Kaurava chiefs are slain, and Bhima, the giant, at last meets in arms Dubsasana, the Kaurava prince who had dragged Draupadi by the hair. He strikes him down with the terrible mace of iron, after which he cuts off his head, and drinks of his blood, saying: "Never have I tasted a draught so delicious as this." So furious now becomes the war that even the just and mild Arjuna commits two breaches of Aryan chivalry, —killing an enemy while engaged with a third man, and shooting Karna dead while he is extricating his chariot-wheel and without a weapon. At last none are left of the chief Kauravas except Duryodhana, who retires from the field and hides in an island of the lake. The

Pandavas find him out, and heap such reproaches on him that the surly warrior comes forth at length, and agrees to fight with Bhima. The duel proves of a tremendous nature, and is decided by an act of treachery; for Arjuna, standing by, reminds Bhima, by a gesture, of his oath to break the thigh of Duryodhana, because he had bidden Draupadi sit on his knee. The giant takes the hint, and strikes a foul blow, which cripples the Kaurava hero, and he falls helpless to earth.

After this the Pandava princes are declared victorious, and Yudhishtira is proclaimed king. But Yudhishtira was so overwrought by the slaughter of the war that he felt no desire to assume again the responsibilities of the crown. Sri Krishna was among those who persuaded him to ascend again the throne from which he had been kept away for thirteen years. After his second coronation, Yudhishtira, accompanied by his brothers, went to the revered grandsire, Bhishma, who was lying on his death-bed, suffering from the mortal wounds he had

received in the great war, and begged him to expound the art of kingship and the science of duty. It was at the instance of Sri Krishna that Yudhishtira made this request, and the political, social and moral wisdom, enshrined in the teachings of Bhishma, as detailed in the *Santi* and *Anusasana Parvans*, bore the impress of Sri Krishna's approval.

It was while Sri Krishna was enjoying a holiday with his cousins after the war that one day Arjuna asked him to repeat the *Gita* to him. Sri Krishna professed inability to repeat what he had previously in a moment of inspiration taught, but proceeded to relate to him a series of allegorical and didactical tales tending to expound the same philosophy which is so brilliantly explained in *Bhagavat-gita*. This later dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna goes by the name of *Anugita*, a term which may be freely translated as a sequel to the *Gita*.

CHAPTER XII

RESUSCITATION OF PARIKSHIT

SRI KRISHNA then took leave of Yudhishtira and went back to Dwaraka. On the way he met a sage, Utanka, whose seclusion from the world denied him the privilege of knowing the latest news. Having been a friend of both the Pandavas and the Kauravas, he learnt for the first time with horror that the cousins had fought a war of mutual extermination and that the Pandavas had finally gained the throne after wading knee-deep through blood. He thought that Sri Krishna must be held responsible for bringing about the war; for, the sage argued, if he had really tried to bring about peace, he could have done so. Sri Krishna then soothed the angry sage and told him that the insane folly of Duryodhana was responsible for the great tragedy. Utanka was in the end

convinced and realised that Sri Krishna was an incarnation of God. It is related that Sri Krishna then showed him at his request his universal form.

Some time later, Sri Krishna received news that the Pandavas had decided to perform the great *asvamedha* sacrifice, which none but an emperor could perform. Politically, it meant perhaps the renewed recognition by the princes of India of the imperial status of Yudhishtira. Sri Krishna and Rama attended the sacrifice, which was celebrated with all possible pomp and grandeur. It was in the course of this visit to the Pandavas that Sri Krishna resuscitated the still-born child of Uttara, wife of Abhimanyu. The child was a posthumous one and had died as the result of Asvatthama's unremitting vendetta against the Pandavas and all their descendants. Sri Krishna's divine powers restored him to life, and he lived to carry on the line of the Pandavas as King Parikshit.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOOM OF THE VRISHNIS

AFTER the celebration of the *asvamedha* by the Kuru princes, Sri Krishna returned back to Dwaraka. Many years of peace and prosperity followed until at last there came the time for Sri Krishna's great career on earth to reach its conclusion, And the end, according to the old legends, came about in fulfilment of a double curse.

Immediately after the battle of Kurukshetra, the Pandavas, accompanied by Draupadi, Kunti and Sri Krishna, went to pay their respects to the blind, old, and bereaved Dhritarashtra and his queen, Gandhari. In that moment of bitter grief and agony, when Gandhari saw before her the victorious Pandavas, who had killed her sons in battle and waded through rivers of blood to the throne on which her son Duryodhana had lately sat, her heart fairly

broke under its terrible burden. But suddenly through the mists of her sorrow, she saw the vision of Truth. Death had struck not merely her sons but also many near and dear to the victors in this terrible war. "The battle appeared before her as a play in which two armies had destroyed each other. Who had been the mover of all these puppets? Who, that could have prevented, had allowed such evil to befall?" She turned slowly to Krishna and spoke to him in terrible words: "Two armies, O Krishna," she said, "have been here consumed. Whilst they thus put an end to each other, why were Thine eyes closed? Thou who couldst have done either well or ill as pleased Thee, why hast Thou allowed this evil to come upon all? Mine is it then, Thou Wielder of discus and mace, in virtue of the truth and purity of womanhood to pronounce Thy doom! Thou, O Govinda, because Thou wast indifferent to the Kurus and the Pandavas whilst they killed each other, shalt Thyself

become the slayer of Thy own kinsmen. In the thirty-sixth year from now, O Slayer of Kamsa, having brought about the destruction of Thy sons and kindred, Thou shalt Thyself perish by woeful means, alone in the wilderness. And the women of Thy race, deprived of sons, kindred and friends, shall weep and wail in their desolation, as do now of the race of Bharata!"

And lo, as Gandhari ended, the Lord looked upon her and smiled! "Blessed be thou, O Gandhari," said He, "in thus aiding Me in the ending of My task. Verily are My people, the Vrishnis, incapable of defeat, therefore must they needs die by the hands of one another. Behold, O mother, I accept Thy curse." And all who listened to these words were filled with wonder and fear.*

Of the other curse relating to the destruction of the Yadavas and the death of Krishna, a curious story is told. Once

* Cradle Tales.

some thoughtless lads dressed up Sambha, son of Jambhavati, in women's clothes and led him up before some mighty sages. "This girl is expecting a child," they said. "Will it be a boy or girl?" Incensed at this practical joke, the sages replied: "She will bring forth an iron pestle which will destroy your race." And when a frightened and chastened Sambha undressed, surely enough, there was an iron pestle in the folds of his dress. All the mischief went out of the boys and they rushed to King Ugrasena with their story. Upon his advice, the weapon of doom was powdered and dissolved into the sea. But from that metal dust there grew up sturdy sea-reeds. And one small shaft, which could not be ground and was cast into the sea, was swallowed up by a fish. Jara, a hunter, caught this fish. He removed the shaft and fixed it as a sharpened tip to one of his arrows.

In due course the time arrived for the double curse to take its terrible toll.

Ominous portents appeared on all sides, and the people of Dwaraka were filled with fear. They sought Sri Krishna's advice, and he directed them to go to a place called Prabhása, a sacred bathing-ghat on the shores of the sea, and to perform some religious rites. And so all the people, including Sri Krishna, got ready to go to Prabhasa.

SRI KRISHNA AND UDDHAVA

One of Sri Krishna's intimate and trusted servants, Uddhava had his own suspicions about the impending calamity. In the days gone by, he had carried a message of friendliness and good cheer to the *gopis* of Brindavana, whom Sri Krishna had to give up for the larger life of the nation. Later he came to hold an important place in the ministry. Now, feeling premonitions that a terrible calamity was about to overtake the Yadhavas and that Sri Krishna himself might be departing from the world, he approached Sri Krishna,

voiced his fears and begged that he might be taken wherever Sri Krishna might go. In reply, Sri Krishna confirmed his worst fears. Yes, he was going, his mission on earth was done. The Yadhavas would all perish, fighting with one another, and on the seventh day thence, the sea would advance on the noble city of Dwaraka and submerge it under its waves. Uddhava, however, should not think of death immediately: he had work still to do. Sri Krishna then instructed him in the essentials of religion. "Do you renounce," so the Master taught, "everything, even including your attachment to your family and relations. Fix your mind well upon Me. Look upon all alike. In this attitude go about the world." Uddhava was then directed to go to Badarikasrama on the Himalayas to meditate on the teachings of the Lord. Of him, Sri Krishna said: "After my departure from this world, Uddhava will preserve the knowledge I have unfolded. He is in no way

inferior to me, and he will give my teachings to the world."

THE PASSING OF THE LORD

The people of Dwaraka went on their pilgrimage to the waters of Prabhasa. It was here that those wild reeds had grown from out of the powdered remains of the pestle of doom, and little did they all dream that they were on their last journey. And on the cool shores of the sea, they forgot for a while the evil omens that stirred them to this pilgrimage and entered on high revels. Wine flowed freely and heads grew confused and turbulent. Fierce quarrels broke out and a riot of extermination began. The seaweeds became instruments of death in the hands of fighting drunkards and the scene of revelry was swiftly turned to a field of slaughter. Men knew not whom they killed and how. "Those of the same blood stood ranged against one another. Son killed sire on that awful day

and sire killed son." And when this fearful drunken brawl ended, there were only a handful of survivors, Sri Krishna among them. He then took leave of his aged father and went away to a forest to meditate. And as he reclined there under a tree pondering deeply over the great mystery of life and death, Jara, the hunter, came that way. Mistaking Sri Krishna's feet for a crouching deer, he shot at them the arrow tipped with the unground shaft from the accursed pestle. And so the curse took its last toll.

Sri Krishna was fatally wounded. And the hunter, drawing nearer, realised that he had committed a crime. Overcome by fear and remorse, he fell at the feet of Sri Krishna and begged his forgiveness. And like another divine teacher many centuries later at Jerusalem, Sri Krishna forgave his slayer and blessed and comforted him. Says a great devotee of the Lord: "Krishna sitting in the *tapovan*, the Forest of Penance: Krishna pierced

with an arrow : Krishna blessing the hunter! That picture is a symbol to my mind of God's sacrifice for the Universe."

Then, with the words of compassion addressed to Jara on his lips, the Divine Lord ascended upwards filling the whole sky with splendour. "Reaching the threshold of His divine region, all the gods and their attendants advanced to meet Him, but He, filling all Heaven with His glory, passed through their midst and ascended up into His own inconceivable region. Then did the abodes of blessedness resound with His praises. All the divinities and the sages and the celestial hosts bending before Him in humility worshipped Him. The gods made salutation and the exalted souls offered worship to Him who was Lord of All. Angelic beings attended on Him, singing His praises. And Indra, also, the King of Heaven, hymned him right joyfully."*

CHAPTER XVI

A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

WE have so far summarised the salient features of Sri Krishna's life as known to our traditions. But they are not all necessarily accepted by the historian. To him, Krishna presents many difficult problems. The first question to be considered is whether Krishna was a historical person or whether he was merely the creation of the mythoeptic fancy of our ancient poets, a tribal god, a solar deity or a vegetation spirit. And if he was really a historical person, we have to consider the further question as to when he lived and try to find out the authentic substratum of fact on which poems and legends have been built up.

Several Krishnas are known to the remotest periods of our literature. Dr. Ray Chaudhary enumerates "Krishna, the

father of Visvakaya (*Rig Veda* i. 116.23, i. 117.7), Krishna Angirasa (*Kaushitaki Brahmana*, xxx. 9), Krishna Harita (*Aitareya Aranyaka*, iii. 2.6) and Kanha, the mighty seer mentioned in the *Ambatta Sutta* (Rhys David's *Dialogues of the Buddha*, I p. 118)". A Krishna is also said to be the author of a few hymns of the *Rig Veda*, x. 42-44. No attempt has been made to identify any of these with Krishna, the son of Vasudeva and Devaki and the inspired teacher of the *Bhagavad-gita*. It has, however, been suggested that the Krishna referred to in the *Rig Veda*, viii. 96.13f was identical with the epic hero, but the suggestion is speculative. The case, however, is somewhat different when we come to the Krishna Devakiputra who figures in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. The mention of Devaki is strong presumptive evidence in favour of Krishna of the *Upanishad* being the same as the Krishna of the epic. Ghora Angirasa, who is mentioned as the teacher of Krishna in

the *Upanishad* belonged to a family closely associated with the Bhojas, who were related to the Krishna of the epic. The epithet, *Achyuta* often applied to Krishna in the epic, occurs in the passage in the *Upanishad* where the son of Devaki appears. All this suggests that the epic hero appears in *statu pupillari* in the *Upanishad*.

The whole question, however, is not free from doubt. Says Dr. Keith: "The epic has a god, the *Upanishad* a man, and the means of connexion are not apparent." Indeed, several theories have been put forward to explain Krishna. According to Barth, Krishna was a popular divinity identified later on with a solar god, Vishnu. Hopkins looks upon Krishna as a sectarian god, the patron deity of the Pandavas, an unknown wild tribe from beyond the Ganges, who "attacked the stronghold of Brahmanism in the holy land about the present Delhi". Yet another view is that Krishna was a vegetation

deity, like the Semitic Adonis, the Egyptian Osiris and the Greek Dionyses. And if the *Chhandogya Upanishad* mentions a Krishna, it must be presumed either that a different person is intended, or that we have here an instance of euphemism, a reduction to human rank of a whilom god. The most complicated hypothesis of all is that of Bhandarkar, who suggested that in Krishna we have the mingling of four streams of thought—the traditions associated with the solar deity, Vishnu, those arising from the concept of Narayana, the god of philosophers, those clustering round Vasudeva, the historical founder of Bhagavata religion and those having their source in Gopala, the pastoral god of a tribe of Abhiras.

It is not possible to discuss, within the compass of this work, all such theories exhaustively. We shall merely note in passing that none of them claims to be conclusively established. Against the theory of Krishna being a solar

divinity, it may be urged that "his name seriously tells against it; the 'dark sun' requires more explanation than it seems likely to receive". The hypothesis of Hopkins rests on unproved data. Dr. Ray Chaudhary has shown that there is no good reason to believe that the Pandavas were an unknown wild tribe carrying on proselytizing work on behalf of their patron god Krishna. Those who regard Krishna as a vegetation deity base their arguments on his close connection with pastoral life, his kinship with Balarama, who is believed to be a god of the harvest, his being called Damodara or the god with a cord round his belly, a name apparently derived from wheat-sheaf, and the alleged vegetation masque in which, according to the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali, he is shown as contending with Kamsa for the possession of the sun. None of these arguments appears to be conclusive. Krishna's pastoral associations are susceptible of a

different explanation, as we shall see presently: *Damodara* has an alternative significance, meaning one whose effulgence is increate and his own and one who has self-control and great splendour: and a simple and straightforward rendering of Patanjali's reference to Krishna renders the elaborate hypothesis of a vegetation masque unnecessary. And in the end the most plausible view appears to be also what is the most natural that Krishna was a historical person, who shone both as a statesman and a teacher of religion in the remoter periods of India's hoary antiquity. The intimate association between Sri Krishna and the Pandavas and the decisive part which he is believed to have played in the most memorable episode in the ancient history of the Aryans lend support to this view. The tradition of the *Bhagavatas*, the sect with which Krishna's name is inseparably bound, points to the same conclusion. Their God is *Vasudeva* and their

scripture the *Bhagavat-gita*. Their religion was first taught, according to the *Mahabharata*, by the Adorable Himself to Arjuna. The ascription of the *Gita* to Sri Krishna suggests that at the time when the *Mahabharata* was compiled, he was remembered both as a hero and as a religious teacher. The name, *Satvata Dharma*, sometimes given to the faith of the Bhagavatas, bears further testimony to a *Satvata* Prince, Krishna, being its founder. If we discredit this tradition, it has been well pointed out, we shall be driven to the curious conclusion that the Bhagavatas forgot or deliberately suppressed the name of the Master "from whom has flowed through the centuries till to-day the stream of *bhakti* in India".

It is not, therefore, unreasonable to hold that Sri Krishna was a real historical character, who played a prominent part in both the political and religious history of India. If so, we have to attempt to answer the question about the time when

he lived. It may at once be conceded that the question is by no means an easy one. A decisive answer may not be available, but it may at least be possible to indicate certain limits between which Krishna may be placed. Let us start with the assumption that Krishna was contemporaneous with the great war of the *Mahabharata*.* It is popularly believed

* Doubts have been cast about the historicity of this ancient contest on the ground that the *Brahmanas* and the *Sutras* do not refer to it. But, as Mr. Pargiter points out: "That battle was a purely political contest, had no religious significance and (though described at great length in the epic) was a brief struggle between the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras. . . . Hence it did not concern the recluse Brahmins who composed the religious literature, and naturally they did not mention it."—(*Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, pp. 283-4.) Dr. Ray Chaudhary, while admitting that no direct independent proof of this war is forthcoming, refers to a dim allusion in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* (vi. 17. 9) and to the hint in the *Satapatha Brahmana* about unfriendly feelings between the Srinjayas and the Kurus, between whom the battle of Kurukshetra is often said to have been fought. Moreover, Vaisampayana, known as the *Mahabharatacharya* in Asvalayana's *Grihya-sutras*, is mentioned in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* and in Panini, and *itihasas* are known from the *Atharva-Veda* downwards.—(*Political History of Ancient India*, pp. 19-20.)

that this war took place a little over five thousand years ago on the ground that it was the starting-point for the era known as *Kali-yuga*. It has been calculated that this *Kali-yuga* began on the midnight of a Thursday corresponding to "the 17th-18th February, B.C. 3102, old style". There is, however, every reason to believe that this date has no more than an astronomical significance. The hypothesis of the *yugas* has been used by Hindu astronomers to help them in their computation of planetary motions. Without going into details about the immense periods of time known as the *kalpa*, the *mahayuga* and the *yuga*, it may be stated that it is now generally accepted that they are "the results of early astronomical calculations conducted backwards at some unknown time in the history of India from data previously observed and recorded or otherwise obtained". In this view the beginning of *Kali-yuga* only denotes, according to calculations conducted

backwards, a conjunction of the seven planets known to geocentric astronomy. And there is no *a priori* reason to hold that a date, assumed as a radix by Hindu astronomers for computing the mean longitudes of the planets, should fix a historical event like the *Mahabharata* war.

However there is a mythological and quasi-historical tradition about the four *yugas*, which may prove more helpful. The late Prof. M. Rangacharya, in his pamphlet on the *Yugas*, has shown that there was a historical *Kali-yuga*, considerably later in origin than the astronomical era of the same name; and that it started about the time the *Vedas* were classified and the *Taittiriya Samhita* composed. And it is to the beginning of this latter *Kali-yuga* that the *Mahabharata* war must be assigned.

Now the *Taittiriya Samhita* assigns the first place in the list of *nakshatras* to the *Krittikas* or the Pleiades. There is very good reason to believe that this refers to the vernal equinox occurring with the sun

in the *Krittika* constellation. The account of the death of Bhishma in the *Mahabharata* narrates that he died after the winter solstice, which is stated to have occurred in the first-half of the month of *Magha*. This suggests that the winter solstice must have taken place with the sun in *Dhanishta*, and correspondingly the vernal equinox with the sun in the *Krittikas*. The precession of the vernal equinox through the *Krittikas* probably lasted from about 2850 B.C. to 1400 B.C. And it is not unreasonable to infer that the *Mahabharata* war could not be placed later than 1400 B.C.

It is at the least a remarkable coincidence that certain traditions recorded in our *Puranas* fix the great battle of Kurukshetra in the fifteenth century before Christ. The *Vishnu Purana* states that a thousand and fifteen years elapsed between the birth of Parikshit and the accession of Nanda. The *Matsya Purana* gives 1050 years as the interval between these events, while the *Bhagavata* makes it 1115 years.

This Nanda appears to be the famous Mahapadma Nanda. He and his successors, the well-known nine Nandas, are said to have reigned for one hundred years. Immediately after them came the illustrious Chandragupta, who is known to have been contemporaneous with Alexander the Great. And if we calculate backwards from Chandragupta at about 320 B.C., once again we arrive at about 1400 B.C. as the date of the epic battle of Kurukshetra.*

There is yet another *puranic* tradition to which also reference may be made. The *Vishnu* and the *Bhagavata Puranas* allude to a movement of the constellation of *Saptarishis* (the Great Bear) from *nakshatra* to *nakshatra*. It is said that the *Saptarishis* move from one *nakshatra* to another in the course of one hundred years. At the

* Other dates of course have been suggested for the *Mahabharata* war. Calculating from the dynastic lists in the *Puranas*, Mr. Pargiter arrives at 950 B.C. as a reasonable date for the event. Dr. Ray Chaudhari suggests the ninth century B.C. arguing on different grounds (vide his *Political History of Ancient India*).

birth of Parikshit, the seven *rishis* were said to be in *Magha*, while at the time of the accession of Nanda (Mahapadma), they were said to be in *Purvashada*. Bentley believed that this idea of the motion of the *Saptarishis* "originated in a contrivance of the astronomers to show the quantity of the precession of the equinoxes". Anyhow here, too, we are led to the latter part of the fifteenth century before Christ as the probable date of the *Mahabharata* war.

If Sri Krishna may thus be made out to be in all probability a historical prince and teacher, who lived around 1400 B.C., is it possible to reconstruct his life on a true historical basis? The task is by no means easy, but a critical study of the available sources of his life does not seem to be entirely futile. As has been already stated, the traditional account of his life is found in the great epic, *Mahabharata*, its sequel, the *Harivamsa*, and the *Vishnu*, *Bhagavata* and other *Puranas*. These narratives are all more or

less uncritical and should be used only with caution. And practically all of them suffer from being considerably removed in time from Sri Krishna. The *Puranas* cannot be placed earlier than the third century A.D., because they all refer to Andhra kings*. The *Mahabharata* is, of course, a growth of ages. Though undoubtedly old in parts, and probably complete by the third or 4th century B.C., the final rescension might yet have been made in the golden age of the Guptas. The *Harivamsa* is later than the Greek invasion of India; for it mentions the Denarius. And there is some reason to believe that it must have existed in some form or other

* This is not to say that the *Puranas* do not contain genuine ancient bardic tradition. Mr. Pargiter writes: "Ancient tradition was compiled into the original *Purana* about the 9th century B.C., later historical tradition was added till the end of the 8th century B.C., and the chronicles of the Kali age were incorporated in the *Purana* in prophetic guise down to the early part of 4th century A.D. Such were the three main stages of the compilation of the historical tradition in the *Purana*."—(*Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*).

during the time of Asvagosha.* The original nucleus of fact, from which these poetical works have grown, is probably to be found in the incidental references of Megasthenes and Patanjali, the simple story of Krishna's student life in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, and the inferences to be drawn from certain *sutras* of Panini. The Buddhist *Ghata Jataka* and the Jaina *Uttaradhyayana Sutra* afford interesting glimpses of Sri Krishna as he appeared to heretics outside the charmed circle of his devotees.

The oldest of these sources is the *Chhandogya Upanishad*. It belongs to the oldest group of *Upanishads* and is considerably anterior to the Buddha. In it we have an account of the teachings learnt by one Krishna Devakiputra from Ghora Angirasa, a priest of the sun. Krishna learns from his preceptor

* Asvagosha refers to the story of Bhishma and Ugrayudha, which is mentioned in the *Harivamsa* but not in the *Mahabharata*.

the *purusha-yajna-vidya*, the doctrine which compares man's life on earth to a sacrifice. He was then bidden to meditate on God at the time of departure from life. The reference in the *Upanishad* to Krishna is all too brief, but seeing that the *Gita* endows the concept of sacrifice with a wide meaning, teaches the necessity for death-bed meditation on God and refers to the Supreme Reality at times in the language of the worshippers of the sun, it is not wild speculation to imagine that in the *Chhandogya Upanishad* we have a picture of Sri Krishna as a student learning the rudiments of the religion he was later to preach with so much distinction.

Next in chronological order comes the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini. The date of the greatest of grammarians is by no means certain. An interval of two centuries at least must be allowed between him and his commentator Patanjali of the second century before Christ. Panini says that the

affix *vun*, when added to the word, *Vasudeva*, gives us a word, *Vasudevaka*, meaning a person the object of whose *bhakti* is *Vasudeva*. A word, *Ajunaka*, is also similarly formed from Arjuna. Here we have sufficient evidence to suggest that Krishna and Arjuna were objects of *bhakti* in the days of Panini. Whether they were actually deified at that time and what was the degree of the reverence evinced, it is not possible to say.

Megasthenes and Arrian refer to the Sourasenoi, an Indian tribe who owned two large cities, Methora and Kleisbora, as holding in special honour Heracles. Confused stories are related of Heracles and Pandaia. It has been suggested that the Sourasenoi are the *Surasenas* or *Satvatas* and that Heracles is Krishna. Methora and Kleisbora are apparently corruptions of Mathura and Krishnapura. We have some evidence, therefore, of a possible Krishna cult in the fourth century B.C. In a famous passage in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, which,

perhaps, dates a century later, the identity of Vasudeva with Vishnu-Narayana is clearly affirmed. Patanjali, who is assigned to the second century B.C., definitely states that Vasudeva is *Bhagavan* and not a mere Kshatriya hero. He refers to temples of Rama and Kesava, who are probably only Balarama and Krishna. Patanjali also describes a primitive dramatic representation of the killing of Kamsa by Krishna. In the famous Besnagar inscription of the same century, Vasudeva is referred to as *deva-deva*. And we may take it that by this time the deification of Krishna was fully established and widely recognised.

Looked at in the light of evidence in the foregoing paragraphs, it seems likely that Krishna was a statesman and religious teacher, who was in the course of centuries accorded divine honours. We have, as Mr. Hill points out, dim pictures of Krishna the hero on the battle-field of Kurukshetra and Krishna the student learning some kind of non-conformist doctrine at the hands

of Ghora Angirasa. And we have little more of authentic history. The killing of Kamsa was probably a fact and Krishna's friendship with the Pandavas must have been one of the determining factors of ancient Aryan history. Buddhist tradition regards Vasudeva (*alias* Kanha) as the brother of an old *Bodhisattva*. The reference is probably to Sankarshana, who appears to have played an important, though somewhat puzzling, role in the early history of the *Bhagavata* religion. The Jainas, too, seem to remember *Balarama* among their early teachers. Vasudeva is represented by them as a near relative of *Arhat* Arishtanemi, who has to be placed, perhaps, in the ninth century B.C.

It is round this small nucleus of probable fact that poetic biographies of Krishna have been built. It is noteworthy that the farther we move away from Krishna in time, the more details we get about his life and activities. "It is not till he becomes a great, if not the

greatest god," says Hopkins, "that tales about his youthful performance when he condescended to be born in low life begin to rise." The Krishna story becomes an accretion epic, and a long succession of poets has handled it in an infinite variety of ways. Perhaps, the best way of studying the mass of legends that have clustered round the figure of Krishna in the course of ages is to look upon them as the result of poetic fancy. Krishna came to mean so much in our national life that poets and artists have striven time and again to recreate him for themselves. And the great adventure has not yet come to an end; for even today Krishna remains one of the abiding sources of inspiration for creative expression in India.

CHAPTER XV

SRI KRISHNA'S CRITICS

NOW, we are in a position to see how the contradictory stories about Krishna may be explained. One poet's Krishna need not be the same as another's. And there is no reason to regard every invented anecdote as sober history. When Lilasuka writes in his *Krishna-karnamrita*

*माता किं यदुनाथ देहि चषकं किं तेन पातुं
पयः, तन्नास्त्यद्य कदास्ति वा निशि निशा कावा-
ऽन्धकारोदयः । आमील्यक्षियुगं निशाप्युपगता
देहोति मातुर्मुहुः, यक्षोजांशुककर्षणोद्यतकरः
कृष्णस्स पुष्पातु नः ॥ :

*"Mother "

"What, Lord of Yadus?"

"Give me the cup".

"What for"?

"For drinking milk".

"Not now".

"When then?"

"At night".

"What is night?"

"The rise of darkness".

Closing his eyes, Sri Krishna (then said): "The night has come. Give me now, and kept ceaselessly pulling the garment on his mother's breast—may He protect us."

he gives us exquisite poetry. But we have no reason to suppose that the poet is relating here for the first time an authentic incident from Krishna's childhood, forgotten for thousands of years before him. And if we try to look at the various stories dealing with Krishna and the *gopis* in this spirit, we shall perhaps be able to understand their true significance. Lupanarian images are common enough in mystical literature, and but for the pother that has been raised by hostile critics of Hinduism over the alleged depravity of Krishna and his worshippers, it would not have been necessary to write at length on what appears to be in the last analysis a question of rhetoric rather than one of morals. But as criticisms have been made and harsh charges framed, it will not be out of place to suggest how the whole subject should be viewed in proper perspective.

The provocation for most of the criticisms against Krishna lies in the stories

centering round his relations with the *gopies* of Brindavan. Though the *Mahabharata* is silent on the theme, from the *Harivamsa* onwards we have descriptions in greater or less detail about Sri Krishna's sports with the young cow-herdresses. And here too we may observe the curious fact that the farther we move in time from Krishna, the greater the details that are vouchsafed to us. The silence of the *Mahabharata* on this aspect of Sri Krishna's life deserves attention. Except for a single epithet, *gopijana-vallabha*, which occurs in Draupadi's prayer to Sri Krishna in the disrobing scene, there is absolutely no reference to these famous bucolic beauties in the great epic. Even in the reviling scene in the *Sabha-parvan*, where Sisupala exhaustively enumerates all that can be said against Krishna, there is no mention of friendship with the fair girls of Vraja. But the *Harivamsa* and the *Puranas* give us in progressive detail pictures of the young

women of Brindavan falling madly in love with Krishna and abandoning their all for that love. And late in the history of this literature we are introduced to Radha as Krishna's favourite among the *gopis*.

What significance are we to attach to these stories? Do they really make out Krishna to be symbolical of "all that is amorous, sensuous and meltingly voluptuous"? It may at once be conceded that, interpreted literally and unimaginatively, they are rather candid descriptions of love-making. But there is every reason to believe that they were not meant to be so interpreted. In the first place, it is not generally realised that Krishna is represented as having spent only his childhood at Brindavan. The killing of Kamsa, which occurred immediately after his departure from Brindavan, is placed in his eleventh or twelfth year,* and it is worthy

* In *Bhagavata* III. ii. 26, we are told that Krishna "lived in the home of his adoptive father Nanda, tending cows, stealing butter, romping with girls and battling with wild animals till only the eleventh

of note that Sri Krishna's formal education under Sandipani began only after the death of Kamsa. It is absurd to read a carnal significance into a lovely child being fondled by young women. No doubt, the luscious imagery of the veritable Song of Songs that portrays Krishna's sports with the *gopis* tends to impose on simple and biassed minds. And yet it means nothing, more than that the love of the individual soul to God is like the love of a woman to her lover and that the bliss of divine communion is comparable to the joy of union between lovers. "Hence the soul's devotion to the deity," writes Sir George Grierson,

"is pictured by Radha's self-abandonment to her beloved Krishna, and all the hot blood of Oriental passion is encouraged to pour forth one mighty flood of praise and prayer to the Infinite Creator, who waits with loving outstretched hands to receive the worshipper into His bosom

year of his life". See also Mr. V. K. Ramanujachariar's illuminating analysis of Sri Krishna's childhood in his *Sri Bhagavatam* Part X, pp. 125-7.

and to convey him safely to eternal rest across the seemingly shoreless Ocean of Existence. . . . Yet I am persuaded that no indecent thought entered their minds when they wrote those burning words.*"

What is true of Radha is also true of every *gopi*, who is represented as loving and being loved by Krishna.

The use of such imagery is frequent enough in religious literature and is by no means the peculiar crime of writers on Krishna. Miss Evelyn Underhill observes: "Those for whom mysticism is above all things an intimate and personal relation—the satisfaction of deep desire—will fall back on imagery largely drawn from the language of earthly passion." Jesus Christ in one of his parables spoke of God as the bridegroom and the aspiring souls as virgins waiting for their spouse. Dating even earlier than Christ, we have Solomon's famous Song of Songs, which is traditionally understood to describe spiritual emotion

* Introduction to the *Satsaiya* of Biharilal.

in terms of earthly passion. Many saints of medieval Christendom looked upon themselves as 'brides of Christ', and in relating their experiences, spoke often of 'spiritual marriage' and 'the hide-and-seek of love.' St. Joan prays to Christ: "Make me Thy bride. I will rejoice in nothing till I am in Thy arms." St. Francis, when he saw a vision of Christ on Mt. Alvernia, sang: "My Spouse, the Beloved Lamb, has wed me with the nuptial ring." William James wrote of the renowned St. Theresa that "in the main her idea of religion seemed to have been that of an endless amatory flirtation between the devotee and the deity". A less famous sister, St. Gertrude, was wont to record the caresses and intimacies with which she was favoured by Christ. St. Catherine of Sienna used to say that as a mark of her betrothal to Christ, she always had on her finger a ring received from Him.

Such instances may be multiplied endlessly. But, surely, enough has been said

to show that to look upon Sri Krishna's sports with the *gopis* as a grand allegory of spiritual experience is no far-fetched modern attempt to defend an indefensible ancient scandal. There is in fact a very old tradition which refuses to interpret literally the love of the *gopis* for Sri Krishna. A western student has admitted that even so early a work as the *Vishnu-purana*, when dealing with this aspect of Sri Krishna's life, suggests "an interpretation of sexual love upon the higher plane of the relation of the soul to God". It speaks of a *gopi* who "contented herself with meditating on Krishna with closed eyes and entire devotion : all acts of merit were then effaced by rapture and all sin was expiated by sorrow at not beholding him". Others again, "reflecting on the Most High Brahman as the cause of the world obtained final Deliverance". And thus, "the illimitable Being, assuming the character of a youth pervaded the herdsmen's wives with his own essence,

all-diffusive like the wind". In a similar strain the *Bhagavata* states: "The Lord sported with the beauties of Vraja like a child playing with its own shadow." (X. 33.17.) The *Bhagavata* also makes it clear that what is important about the milk-maid 'brides of Krishna' is their mental attitude towards him. On one occasion, Sri Krishna tells his romantic playmates: "You have on my account disregarded the world, for you have not considered what is proper or improper in its eyes. You have set at naught the *Veda*. . . . I am unable to make a proper return for your good deed—you have cut asunder the strong chain of home and have come to me only for myself." The *gopis* are thus represented as typical of ideal devotion to the Lord.

Was ever love so free from taint? Let us hear Swami Vivekananda's spirited interpretation of this most significant phase of Sri Krishna's life at Brindavan:

Ah, that most marvellous passage of his life, the most difficult to understand and which none ought to attempt to understand until he has become perfectly chaste and pure, that most marvellous expansion of love, allegorised and expressed in that beautiful play at Brindavan, which none can understand but he that has become mad and drunk deep of the cup of love! Who can understand the throes of love of the *gopis*—the very idea of love, love that wants nothing, love that even does not care for heaven, love that does not care for anything in this world, or the world to come?

A great landmark in the history of religion is here, the ideal of love for love's sake, work for work's sake, duty for duty's sake, for the first time fell from the lips of the greatest of incarnations, Krishna and, for the first time in the history of humanity, upon the soil of India. The religions of fear and of temptation were gone for ever, and in spite of the fear of hell and temptation to enjoyment in heaven, came the grandest of ideals, love for love's sake, duty for duty's sake, work for work's sake.

Once Parikshit asks Sukha: "The *gopis* regarded Sri Krishna as a lover but not as the highest *Brahman*. Their minds were fixed on sense-objects: how can *samsara* come to an end in their case?" The reply is given: "Those that continuously feel towards Sri Krishna love (as of a woman towards her lover), anger, fear, attachment or goodwill and those that think that they belong to the same group as himself attain his likeness." (X. 39) Chaitanya, the purest of men, rejoiced in the *Rasalila*, which he regarded as a 'reminder of God'. "Of the soul's most intimately pure relationship with God," declares Sadhu Vaswani, "I know no nobler symbol in literature or religion than what is indicated in some of the Krishna-Radha songs." There is thus every reason to think that the *lila* of Brindavana was conceived in the beginning and has been understood all along as a beautiful allegory of religious experience.

One particular story told of Sri Krishna's boyhood has been the theme of much adverse comment. It is the story of *vastra-harana*, the snatching away of clothes. One day while the milkmaids were bathing in the river, Sri Krishna (it is said) took away their clothes and climbed up a tree. He insisted on their coming out of the river nude to receive back their garments from him. As to what this curious story, which has shocked so many Philistine consciences means, we cannot do better than quote Sadhu Vaswani's illuminating remarks: "Concerning Sri Krishna," he writes, "the critics forget that the incident of *vastraharan* (snatching away the clothes) is related of Him when he is only a few years of age. It is absurd to attribute—as the critics do—immoral desires to the boy Krishna. Personally, I interpret that incident as *poetry* rather than *history*: and poetry, too, has its *truth*. . . . Each aspiring soul having passion for the Ideal is a *gopi*, and must come to Krishna as one

naked—at His feet must be surrendered everything. The *vastras* we are in, the ‘clothes’ under whose burden our life is stifled must be renounced, if the Self in us is to shine in glory.”

Indeed, the image of the soul approaching God in a state of complete nudity constantly recurs in the literature of religious experience. To cite but one or two instances at random. In one of the *New Sayings* of Christ, we read: His disciples said unto Him: “When wilt thou be manifest to us and when shall we see thee?” And He replied: “When he shall be stripped and not be ashamed.” Of the last stage of the journey of the soul towards God, Behemen writes: The soul here sayeth: “I have nothing, for I am utterly stripped and naked. I can do nothing, for I have no manner of power, but am as water poured out.”* It does not seem therefore fanciful to regard stories of undressing as

* Quoted by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

accounts of the casting off of impurities by the soul. And is it so very unreasonable to think that the poet who represented a seven-year old Krishna* as mischievously hiding the discarded dresses of bathing beauties must have sought to emphasize that the soul must be utterly stripped and naked before it can reach God?

It is now apparent that there are many reasons for suspecting that "most writers on the life of Krishna have begun at the wrong end with the late epic and *Puranic* legends instead of at the right end with the early *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads*". The austere pupil of Ghora Angirasa and the providential ally of the Pandavas in the decisive battle of Kurukshetra became in the course of ages the divine flute-player of Brindavan and the romantic playmate of pastoral beauties. And the transformation

* For the age of Krishna at the time of this incident, see Mr. V. K. Ramanujacharya's *Sri Bhagavatam*. Part X, pages 125-7.

is not perhaps half so surprising as it seems at first sight. Krishna taught, as we shall see, a religion of love and devotion to a Personal God. The fervour of faith inspired by such a teacher, especially after he came to be looked upon as God incarnate, may have led to a blossoming of mystical poetry around his figure. And here we have fruitful soil for the birth of those milkmaid brides of Krishna, all so many symbols of the individual souls struggling for union with God. The image of the Lord, as the shepherd of the souls, is also well known to Christianity, and it need not cause any surprise if Indian poets should have thought of Krishna in a similar light. And it is just possible that Krishna might have spent his childhood in a pastoral hamlet. In *Balacharita*, an old play on the boyhood of Krishna attributed to Bhasa, we have a picture of the young Yadava Prince, gaily playing with the bucolic lads and lasses around him. But there is no

suggestion of mystical eroticism | yet : and the *hallisaka* of the play is an innocent village dance without any of the love-laden atmosphere of the *hallisa-krida* of the *Harivamsa*. Here, perhaps, we have a simple and earlier version of Sri Krishna's life in Nanda's *gokula* from which all later romance might have grown. But speculation apart, it is interesting to note that the banks of the Jumna were renowned for their kine even during the age of the *Vedas*, and Vishnu with whom Krishna is identified, is referred to as *gopa* (herdsman or protector of cows) in the *Rig Veda*. In a well-known verse in the *Rig Veda*, the "supreme abode of the wide-stepping, vigorous" Vishnu is described as a place "where the many-horned and swiftly moving cows abide". (I. 154. 6). Here we have a possible origin for the pastoral associations of Krishna which might have been later elaborated under the influence of mystical symbolism. That there has been some such growth and elaboration is

admitted by the *Harivamsa* and the *Puranas* themselves which proclaim that they deliberately set out to supplement the story of Sri Krishna as told by the *Mahabharata*.

However all this may be, it is fairly certain that the vivid details of the *Puranas* are hardly reliable guides for giving us an insight into the personality of Krishna. It would in fact be more helpful to try to arrive at the Master from his remarkable teachings. And to these we may now turn.

CHAPTER XVI

SRI KRISHNA'S TEACHINGS

THE world knows Sri Krishna's teachings mainly through the *Bhagavat-gita*, one of the most memorable testaments of the human spirit. Two other works are also known—the *Anugita* and the *Uddhavagita*—in which Sri Krishna is represented as giving formal instruction on religion and philosophy. The *Bhagavat-gita* and the *Anugita* form parts of the *Mahabharata*, while the *Uddhavagita* is found in the *Bhagavata*. Besides these, throughout the epic and the *Puranas* we find many instances of Sri Krishna giving short discourses on metaphysics and ethics. We are therefore not without material for learning the basic principles of Sri Krishna's thought.

The *Gita* is, as is well known, in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna

and Arjuna on the eve of the great *Bharata* war. Just before the hostilities commence, Arjuna is overcome by pity and grief and refuses to take up arms. Sri Krishna, as the divine charioteer of the Pandava hero, discourses to him on duty and devotion, 'fate, foreknowledge and freewill absolute', and persuades him to do his duty in the war.

An excellent summary of the teachings of the *Gita* is found in the third volume of Prof. Rangacharya's Lectures on the *Bhagavat-gita*,* and we cannot do better than extract it here. After stating that the main purpose of the *Gita* is to resolve Arjuna's doubts about his duty and to induce him to play his part in the *Mahabharata* war, the Professor goes on to observe:

The reasons for Arjuna's refusal to fight may be gathered in part from his own words and in part from Sri Krishna's remorseless

* THE HINDU PHILOSOPHY OF CONDUCT. Being Class Lectures on the *Bhagavat-gita*. By Prof. M. Rangacharya, M.A. In 3 Vols. Price Rs. 5 each. G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras.

analysis. Arjuna feels that it is wrong to kill at all and wrong particularly to kill friends and kinsmen. He thinks that he will incur sin by becoming responsible for such inevitable consequences of war as the wide-spread social confusion it will leave in its wake. And he argues that the right duty for him in the circumstances in which he is placed is to obey the scriptural commandment to renounce by becoming a *sannyasin*. Sri Krishna meets these arguments by teaching that every one has his duties in life determined for him according to his natural fitness and qualifications and the environment in which he is placed; that this duty is quite determinate and cannot be evaded by any one except at peril to his own soul; that bondage and sin arise from the disposition with which any work is performed and not from the nature of the work itself; that, when work is performed without attachment to results, it cannot bind the soul; that passive inaction, which is what complete renunciation of work would mean, is an impracticable, and even if practicable, an undesirable ideal; that the scriptural injunction to renounce must be understood to mean a command to renounce the fruits of one's work and not work itself; that the life of mendicant asceticism is not suited to a man of Arjuna's birth and breeding and will result in unnatural repression and end in a calamitous recoil; and that the guiding hand of God has brought the forces of history to the crisis of war—a crisis which Arjuna cannot avert by any act of commission or omission on his part and in which it is his duty to fight for the vindication of justice, irrespective of the consequences it involves to him and in a spirit of serene detachment and devoted dutifulness.

Here is the thread of Sri Krishna's direct reply to the problem presented by Arjuna. The answer is complete and coherent. But it implies

certain metaphysical foundations and raises certain questions as regards the practicability of the code of conduct prescribed and these are dealt with off and on in the glancing play of this memorable dialogue.

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Following the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* declares that the binding influence of *karma* is created not by actions as such but by the disposition with which they are done. At the root of the production of *karma*, therefore, lies our attachment to the fruits of our work. Now, the life of work and achievement in the world of *samsara* is essentially a life of the body; and with the fruits of such work our souls can have no concern. By claiming the fruits of such work, we merely place ourselves at the disposal of the material contacts caused by the association of our souls with their physical embodiments and confirm and continue our bondage. These contacts with their associated pleasures and pains are of the very stuff of our experience. They naturally give rise in turn to likes and dislikes and it is by becoming a slave to these that one tends to live a life of selfish attachment. We can, however, manage to maintain the mastery of our will over these likes and dislikes by wisely directing our inborn potentialities. An unnaturally planned life cannot lead us to perfection. Hence it is that the *Gita* teaches that there is an inviolable rule of choice in regard to our duties and that these are determined by our fitness for service and by the environment in which we are placed.

Having discovered our duties, we must see that they are performed without any possessive interest in their fruits.

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To enable us to carry out our duties in this manner and thus to attain the ultimate salvation of soul-emancipation and God-attainment, Sri Krishna places before us in the *Gita*, three, or according to some, four paths of moral discipline.

There is first *karma-marga* or the path of work, in which we do our duties simply because they happen to be our duties. There is then the path of philosophic wisdom and realisation, *jnana-marga*, which requires of us self-realisation, so that we may be in a position to discriminate between the self and the not-self and distinguish the appropriate aims and objects of the self from the tendencies and promptings of the not-self. Thirdly, we have *bhakti-marga* or the path of divine devotion, where intense attachment to God weans us from attachment to all worldly objects whatsoever. The fourth, which is also sometimes given, is the way of *prapatti*, of trustful confidence in and absolute self-surrender to God. Any of these paths of moral discipline can effectively kill the selfish feelings of *i-ness* and *mine-ness* and make it possible for us to lead lives of *samatta* and service. It is not necessary to regard these paths as mutually exclusive or antagonistic.

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You are now in a position to see how the teachings of Sri Krishna harmonise human civilisation and its institutions and place before us an ideal which aims at organising the component communities that make up mankind in all their different grades of development into an amicable and interdependent family. If I may repeat here what I said in the very first of this series of lectures: "Impressed in all probability by His varied racial and social environment He (Sri Krishna) propounded His religion of harmony and synthesis, and constructed for the good of mankind a plan of life, wherein while the actual differences among men and among human communities in colour and creed are not wholly ignored, as they well cannot be, the way to attain that highest ethical and spiritual perfection which is possible for man, is freely open to all, irrespective of all such differences. Universal harmony, cosmopolitan love and tender

concern for and loving sympathy with those weaknesses of man, which are due to unfinished growth and incomplete development, constitute the conspicuous moral feature of the grand religious synthesis taught by Sri Krishna." To-day more than ever, the world, grown smaller by the inventions of modern science and with its animosities, racial and religious, political and economic, all grown bitterer, stands in need of the synthetic vision and divine insight of the *Bhagavat-gita*.

Much more can be written about the *Gita*, but what has been extracted above gives a fair idea of the teachings of the immortal poem. The *Anugita*, which, as its name admits, is professedly a sequel to the *Bhagavat-gita*, occurs in the *Asvamedha-parvan* of the *Mahabharata*. As we have seen already, this work sets out that after the Battle of Kurukshetra had been fought and won, one day Arjuna asked Sri Krishna to repeat to him the teachings of the *Gita*. Sri Krishna replied that he was not equal to go over the same ground again in the same manner. The *Gita* was taught in a mood of *yoga*, and it was not possible to recapture that inspiration. "But," says Krishna, "I shall relate an ancient story on the subject, so that by

adhering to this knowledge you may attain the highest goal." And thereupon he proceeds to relate a series of didactic tales, woven together on the Chinese box pattern. As in the *Panchatantra* and the *Arabian Nights*, we have here a complicated framework of tales within tales. It is not necessary to refer to them at any great length here as they do not throw much fresh light on Sri Krishna's teachings or personality. Telang has shown that the *Anugita* must be placed some centuries later than the *Bhagavat-gita*, and though many of its stories recall the *Upanishads* and may be of high antiquity, they do not reveal that glow of devotion and depth of feeling that distinguish the *Bhagavata* theism and make the *Bhagavat-gita* one of the deathless works of the human spirit.

The *Uddhava-gita* is admittedly a much later work. It is found in the eleventh *skandha* of the *Bhagavata* and claims to be the last message of Sri Krishna before he departed from this world. It is without

doubt an elaboration of the teachings which Sri Krishna is stated to have given Uddhava at the very end of his life in some of the earlier works like the *Vishnu-purana* and the *Mahabharata*. In this work, the idea of *bhakti* is emphasised and given a more colourful aspect than in the austere *Bhagavat-gita*. "The lessons (taught here)," says Swami Madhavananda, "comprise a variety of subjects, but in and through all the necessity of seeing the Lord in everything and living a life of perfect self-surrender and non-attachment is passionately inculcated." But the *Uddhava-gita* is admittedly a later work and presupposes a long development of the school of *bhakti*. Historically therefore it can throw little light on the founder of the religion of devotion or the teachings originally propagated by him.

We are thus left with the *Bhagavat-gita*, the *Chhandogya Upanishad* and sundry hostile references to the heterodoxy of the *Bhagavata-Pancharatra* system as the only

sources of the religion of Vasudeva. And speculative as any venture to appraise the contribution of Sri Krishna to the religious and philosophic thought of India must admit itself to be, there are a few facts on which we may safely proceed to build. Let us start with the similarity between the teachings of the *Gita* and those of Ghora Angirasa which we have already noticed. Ghora Angirasa's enlarged concept of sacrifice is still further broadened in the *Gita* so that ultimately *yajna* becomes synonymous with worship of any kind. Here we have a hint that Sri Krishna might have taken a leading part in that memorable revolt against the sacerdotal religion of the *Brahmanas*, which we find recorded in the *Upanishads*. It is possible that Sri Krishna's protestant movement might have been directed not merely against the time-worn cult of animal sacrifices, but also against the unreasonable excesses of fellow non-conformists. There is a tendency in many of our *Upanishads* to think of the

Supreme Reality as a metaphysical absolute to be comprehended through knowledge rather than sought after through the heart. The *Bhagavad-gita* differs from many of the *Upanishads* in the stress that it lays on the personality of God and His accessibility to devotion. It is noteworthy that *bhakti-yoga* is referred to in the *Gita* as a royal secret and a royal mystery and that Sri Krishna's final adjuration to Arjuna to practise *bhakti* and *prapatti* is prefaced by the remark that it is *sarva-guhyatama*, most secret of all. Should we not understand from this that the *Gita* is representing *bhakti* and *prapatti* as Sri Krishna's special contribution to the thought of his age? If we can suppose the *Bhagavata* theism to be slightly later than the early *Upanishads*, we may look upon Sri Krishna as recording a protest against the ascetic and metaphysical zeal of the older movement. Here perhaps we have a natural explanation not merely for the rise of the school

of *bhakti*, but also of its original heterodoxy.

It is probable that there might have been another point of dissent between Sri Krishna and the forest hermits, who led the *Upanishadic* movement. Sri Krishna was not merely a religious teacher but also a practical man of action who was one of the makers of the history of his age. He could not therefore have looked with favour on any attempt to decry life as evil and regard retirement and renunciation as the only worthy ideals. It is interesting to find in the *Gita* several spirited protests against the idealisation of ascetic retirement and passive inaction. In the eighteenth chapter of the *Gita* Sri Krishna specifically refers to different views on the subject and states it as His settled conviction that works of charity, penance and worship should never be given up. As in the case of sacrifice, so here also in the case of renunciation, Sri Krishna deepens and broadens the

significance of an older idea so as to make it endure for all time.

We may also take note in passing of the vexed question of the origin of the doctrine of incarnation in Indian thought. We find in the *Bhagavat-gita* that doctrine in a well-developed form, but its earlier history is somewhat shrouded in mystery. Western critics with a pro-Christian bias have sought to derive the Indian doctrine from its Christian counterpart, but it is now generally recognised that India developed the idea long before the advent of Christ. And so eminent a divine as Cardinal Newman is stated to have held the view that Christianity borrowed the concept from India. Be that as it may, the idea of incarnation appears to be *Vedic* in origin. It is an old Vedic idea that the whole universe is an incarnation of God. In the famous *Purusha-sukta*, the Supreme Being is conceived as having sacrificed Himself and evolved the universe out of a portion of Himself. And four

at least of the reputed incarnations of Vishnu, the fish, the dwarf, the tortoise and the bear, may be traced to *Vedic* literature. The theory of the successive apparitions of the Buddha appears to be a mere development of an old Brahminical idea.

The roots of the doctrine of divine incarnation may thus be traced to a very remote past. But it is reasonable to think that the doctrine gained in strength and fired the popular imagination only when it could point to concrete instances. And the question arises: did Sri Krishna claim to be one such? Naturally it is impossible to answer such a question. But if the reviling scene in the *Sabhaparvan* represents any ancient tradition and refers,—like the statement in the *Gita* that fools refuse to recognise that He is divine, though in human form,—to some contemporary criticism of Krishna, it is not fanciful to suppose that He claimed some kind of divine authority for His mission. There is no reason to regard such claims.

as either extravagant or unusual. It is true that, speaking of similar claims made by Jesus Christ, Strauss has written: "But a man could never, if his heart and head were sound, have written such speeches about himself." But Strauss seems to ignore the fact that prophets are not as the average enlightened, sceptical citizens of the nineteenth century. Mystical experience and the 'evolutionary appetite' of which Mr. Shaw speaks are as much facts as the unimaginative rationalism of the average educated man. And judged by the pragmatic test of historical consequences, Sri Krishna's claim to divine inspiration is abundantly justified.

CHAPTER XVII

KRISHNA WORSHIP

THE growth of the worship of Krishna in India is closely associated with the spread of Vaishnavism and the religion of *bhakti*. The roots of this movement may be traced to the *Vedas*, but it is probable that it gained in strength and assumed a definite shape only through the labours of Krishna. The early history of the cult is obscure, as we have seen, by the time of Panini, Sri Krishna was an object of *bhakti*. And Megasthenes in the fourth and Patanjali in the second century before Christ give ample proof of the prevalence of Krishna-worship. And there is good reason to think that his influence was felt even in the dissenting movements of Jainism and Buddhism. Dr. Keith points out that the Krishna legend has been taken over and re-worked in a

tedious shape by the Jains and that the story of Mahavira's birth is entirely derived from that of Krishna's birth. According to Dr. Macnicol, the sect of Mahavira may have learnt something of democracy and universalism from the worship of Vasudeva-Krishna. And Buddhist tradition, in the view of Senart, 'certainly moves in a Krishnaite atmosphere'. Asvagosha, the great Buddhist poet, appears to have been deeply influenced by the *Bhagavat-gita*. Even the famous *Saddharma-pundarika*, which sets out Buddhist ethics in a most fascinating form, probably owes much of its inspiration to Krishna's Divine Lay.

"The history of the *Bhagavata* religion from the first to the third century A.D. is at present," according to a reliable authority, "in a state of utmost confusion and darkness." The Saka and Kushan sovereigns who reigned during the time were either Buddhists or Saivites, and probably as a rule not well disposed to the religion of Vasudeva. When the veil of darkness

lifts again in what is regarded by many as the golden age of Indian history, we find the great Gupta emperors as patrons of the *Bhagavata* creed. Some of them describe themselves as *parama-bhagavatas*, great devotees of *Bhagavan*. After the fall of the Guptas, Vaishnavism lost its pre-eminence in Northern India. It survived, however, in many of the outlying provinces of the disintegrated empire, especially in Central India. And down in the far south, it had already established itself. Inscriptional evidence shows that it must have reached the Krishna District in the second century A.D. The Tamil saints, *alwars*, on whose inspiration South Indian Vaishnavism mainly rests, probably flourished between the first and the eighth centuries. In their mystical poetry, they sang of Krishna and other incarnations of Vishnu and the shrines where He was worshipped. They were followed by a group of teachers known as the *acharyas*, of whom Nathamuni made the sacred collection of the four thousand

hymns of the *alwars*. His grandson was the famous Yamunacharya, who prepared the way for Ramanuja's mission.

The philosophy of Vaishnavism received its classical exposition at the hands of Ramanuja, who is assigned to the eleventh century. According to a Christian critic, the writings of Ramanuja show the highest intellectual reaches of Indian theism. Against the metaphysical monism of the *Upanishads*, as expounded by Sankara, Ramanuja preached a religion of loving devotion to a God with an infinity of auspicious and beneficent qualities. Here he may be said to have brought to a climax the protest of the yearning heart against making God into a metaphysical dream—a protest recorded as early as in the *Bhagavat-gita*.

While the influence of Ramanuja consolidated Vaishnavism in the southern peninsula, other teachers were carrying the torch in other parts of the country.

Nimbarka, probably a younger contemporary of Ramanuja and an advocate of the doctrine of *bhedabheda*, taught that the path to freedom lies through self-surrender to Krishna. Shortly afterwards rose Madhva, the great exponent of dualism in Indian philosophy. He too taught *bhakti* and to him the *Bhagavata Purana* was a pre-eminent authority. Vishnusvamin, who according to tradition inspired Vallabha to found yet another school of *bhakti*, could not have been much later than Madhva. Vallabha developed the philosophy of *suddhadvaita*, monism, pure and simple. In his teachings, Krishna is identical with the Supreme *Brahman* and has to be worshipped with devotion. Chaitanya was a younger contemporary of Vallabha in the fourteenth century and his preaching of devotion to Krishna made an abiding impression on the people and gathered into his fold men of every caste and creed. "What gave him power over other minds," writes

Dr. Carpenter, "was his impassioned religious consciousness, his vivid sense of the personal presence of God and his conviction that the whole world was the scene of the divine love."

Along with the prophets and the philosophers came the poets: Jayadeva, Chandi Das, Vidyapati, Sur Das, Mira Bai, Tukaram, Narsimha Mehta and others who had their own contribution to make to the swelling stream of devotion to Krishna. In fact, one may trace most of the medieval movements of *bhakti* to poetry—the poetry of the *Bhagavata Purana* and of the other great poets who followed its tradition. And so, poets and prophets acted and reacted on each other until the whole of India from the north to the south throbbed with devotion to the old Master of the *Bhagavatas*, pictured as the romantic flute-player of Brindavan.

It may be noted in passing that the cult of *bhakti*, though very probably originating from Krishna's inspiration came to

include others besides Krishna among its objects of worship. The idealisation of Rama was one early example of this. When Ramananda, a leading figure in the South Indian Vaishnavism of the fourteenth century rebelled against the rigid orthodoxy of his brethren in faith and founded a new sect in Northern India, he chose Rama as the *avatar* to be worshipped. Kabir was his reputed disciple and Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion, came under Kabir's influence. And thus we have a link, though remote and roundabout, between the Charioteer of Arjuna and the protestant movement of the Sikhs. There can also be little doubt that Vaishnavism influenced Saivism and that both these cults tended to cultivate among their followers piety and fervour of the same kind.

Thus through the ages has Krishna ruled the heart and mind of India. The religion of devotion to a personal God, which he probably founded in protest both

against the ritualism of the *Vedas* and the metaphysical musings of forest hermits, has gained in strength through the centuries and is to-day in one form or other the faith that inspires the mass of the Hindus. It appeals to the heart; it has brought the Deity and the worshipper into intimate contact and has made the intervention of priest and ritual largely unnecessary: it has tended to dissolve social distinctions based on birth and tried to create in the saints an aristocracy of piety; and it has become a widely pervasive influence on the masses, inspiring devotion, inculcating morals and spreading sweetness and light in every nook and corner of the land.

CHAPTER XVIII

SRI KRISHNA IN INDIAN LITERATURE

THE earliest and most notable literary pictures of Krishna are found in the *Mahabharata*. The editor of the epic has transformed some ancient ballads about feuds between royal princes of the Kuru family into a monumental expression of the moral genius of the race by informing them through and through with the brooding spirit of incarnate God. The artistic unity of this gigantic work, encyclopaedic in its range and the product of centuries of thought and composition, is derived primarily from the pervasive influence of Sri Krishna. By his presence the Battle of Kurukshetra assumes a universal significance and becomes one of the major crises of history. It is in this light that we have to understand the full significance of the tradition which begins a new epoch, *Kaliyuga*, with the passing of Krishna.

The *Harivamsa* and the *Vishnu Purana* are probably not widely separated in date and may belong to the early centuries of the Christian era. Doubtless they embody traditions considerably older. They are important as the earliest complete biographies of Krishna, now extant.

The *Vishnu Purana* describes the *rasa* dance and the sports at greater length, but at the same time hints that they are to be read in the light of the spirit. In respect of other aspects of Sri Krishna's life, both these works show perhaps a slightly more conscious art than is found in the epic. But they deal very sketchily, if at all, with his activities as a teacher of religion.

Magha's *Sisupalavadha* (circa 8th century) is the only considerable poem on this subject in the classical period. As the name implies, the poem treats of the death of Sisupala at the hands of Krishna. It is a long and elaborate composition in the *mahakavya* style.

The *Yadavabhyudaya* of Sri Vedanta Desika and the *Rukmini-parinaya-kavya* of Rajachoodamani Dikshita belong to the fourteenth and the late seventeenth centuries respectively. They are average specimens of the classical Sanskrit *kavya* and though distinguished by many minor felicities in detail, cannot rank as outstanding compositions of the first order. And in between we have a remarkable dearth of literary works on Krishna (if we except the *Puranas* and the *Gita-govinda*, which will be presently dealt with).

Meanwhile the worship of Krishna had established itself in the far south. And it is in the Tamil songs of the *alvars* that we have to find the immediate continuation of the literary record of the *Bhagavatas*. Most of them deal with the story of Sri Krishna.

Vishnuchitta, known as the 'great' *alwar*, has written on Krishna's childhood with true feeling and tender

grace. His foster-daughter, Andal, has given a fascinating picture of life at the pastoral colony at Brindavana during the days of Sri Krishna in her *Tiruppavai*. Of this lovely poem there is a saying current that the earth bears in vain the weight of him who does not know its thirty stanzas. Her *Nachiyar Tirumozhi* contains beautiful lyrics addressed to Krishna. Another *alwar*, Kulasekhara, has some fine verses on Krishna's childhood. One particular poem describing Devaki's lament that, though the mother of Krishna, she has been denied through a cruel fate the pleasures of motherhood, is specially noteworthy. He is also the reputed author of *Mukundamala*, a 'garland' of prayerful verses addressed to Krishna in Sanskrit. Tirumangai, the most copious writer among the *alvars*, has not neglected this most fascinating theme. Satagopa (otherwise known as 'our' *alwar*), the greatest mystic of them all, occasionally deals with Sri Krishna's wonderful exploits. Taken

together, the *alwars* have dealt with the life of Sri Krishna with a fine poetic sense.

The next important work in the literature on Krishna is the great *Bhagavata Purana*. This remarkable poem, which expounds with magnificent eloquence the religion of devotion to God and has made the bewitching flute-player of Brindavan the most adored *avatar* in India, is generally considered to be a late work.

Jayadeva in his *Gita-govinda* has immortalised the loves of Radha and Krishna. Sir Edwin Arnold has aptly styled this poetic drama as the Indian Song of Songs. It is a musical extravaganza in which the story of the divine lovers is told with every grace of language and unequalled poetic power. Jayadeva's gift for melody is simply astounding. Another late work in Sanskrit, *Sri Krishna-Karnamrita*, attributed to Lialsuka, celebrates Sri Krishna's childhood and boyhood in a series of melodious hymns. Radha and the *gopis*

figure largely in these verses, but there is more than a hint that Sri Krishna's amours should not be interpreted literally.

Of Chandidas and Vidyapathi, who popularised the grand passion of Radha and Krishna in Bengali songs and sonnets, Dr. J. E. Carpenter observes: "They brought all the resources of art to tell of the dawn of love, of its messages, of the meetings and partings of lovers, of the pains of yearning and the peace of union. The dark-blue complexion attributed to Krishna was the colour of the sky, itself the emblem of infinity. Brindavana was no village on the map beside the Jumna, it was the mind of man where the deity had his abode and deigned to enter into converse with his worshippers."

Mira Bai, the 'sweet singer of Rajputana', has been described as the best woman-poet of India before the nineteenth century. Her devotion to Krishna cost her a throne, but has immortalised her in the annals of literature.

Sur Das, the blind poet of Agra, writes movingly of the thrilling beauty of his Shyam Sunder. It is said that having beheld the vision of Krishna's transcendent beauty, he was content to remain blind to everything else. His *Sursagar* describes with vivid beauty the story of Sri Krishna till his arrival at Mutra to meet the challenge of Kamsa's wrestlers.

So the movement spread all over the country. Poets in every language took up the theme. Nam Dev and Tukaram in the Maharashtra, Narasimha Mehta, Nakar and Premanand in Gujerat are among the 'sons of light', who have glorified Krishna. And the long procession of poets and writers on Krishna has not yet ceased. For to millions in modern India, as to Chaitanya, the name of Krishna is a veritable poem.

APPENDICES

i. THE GOSPEL OF SRI KRISHNA

BY SISTER NIVEDITA

KRISHNA, like Rama and like Buddha, is considered to be a special incarnation of Vishnu, God the Preserver. It is therefore pertinent to appeal to Him for the goods of life, consolation in sorrow, for deliverance from fear. He is known as the Holy Child, born in humility amidst cowherds by the Jumna; the Gentle Shepherd of the People, the Wise Counsellor, the Blessed Lord, tender Lover and Saviour of the human soul; and by other names not less familiar to ourselves. It is an image of the Baby Krishna that the Indian mother adores as the Bambino, calling it "Gopala", her cowherd. His name fills gospels and poems, the folk-songs of all Hindu races are full of descriptions of Him as a cowherd wandering and sporting amongst His fellows; and childish literature is full of stories of Him, curiously like European tales of the Christ-child. To the ecstatic mystic, He is the Divine Spouse.

If we dip into His history we shall think it a strange medley. So many parts were never surely thrust upon a single figure! But through it all we note the predominant Indian characteristics—absolute detachment from personal ends, and a certain subtle and humorous insight into human nature.

His main spiritual significance for India does not, perhaps—with one exception—attach to that part of His life which is related in the

Mahabharata, but rather to what is told of Him in the Puranas—works not unlike our apocryphal Gospels. But the one exception is important. It consists of no less an incident than that conversation with the chieftain Arjuna which comprises the Bhagavad Gita, or Song of the Blessed One. Of this little poem—only some three, or four times the length of the Sermon on the Mount, and shorter even than the Gospel of St. Mark—it may be said at once that amongst the sacred writings of mankind there is probably no other which is at once so great, so complete, and so short. It provides the worship of Krishna—and incidentally all "kindred" systems—with that open door upon abstract philosophy without which no cult could last in India for a week. But it is by no means the property of the Vaishnavas exclusively. From Kashmir to Cape Comorin it is bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of all forms of religious thought.

Its ideas are unmistakably Indian in colour: its *feeling* is just as unmistakably universal. The voice that speaks on the field of Kurukshetra is the same voice that reverberates through an English childhood from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. We read the gracious words: "Putting aside all doctrines, come thou to Me alone for shelter—I will liberate thee from all sins, do not thou grieve." "Fixing thy heart on Me, thou shalt, by My grace, cross over all difficulties," and we drop the book, lost in a dream of One who cried to the weary and heavy laden: "Come unto Me." We certainly now understand, and cannot again forget, that for the Indian reader the eyes of the Lord Krishna are most kind, His touch infinitely gentle, and His heart full of an exceeding great compassion, even as for us are the eyes and the hand and the heart of Him Who spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd.

Like our own Gospels, the Gita abounds in quaint and simple metaphors. "As a lamp in a

sheltered spot, not flickering," must be the mind. All undertakings are surrounded with evil, "as fire with smoke". The round of worship is "as a wheel revolving". So great is wisdom that though thou shouldst be "even the most sinful of all sinners, thou shalt cross safely to the conquest of all sin by the bark of wisdom alone". One of the most beautiful, referring to those perceptions which constitute the Universe as we know it, says: "All this is threaded upon Me as gems upon a string," Nothing is mentioned that would not be familiar to the poorest peasant, living on a fertile plain, diversified only by a river and an occasional walled city.

And indeed it was for these, labouring men, unlettered and poor, that the Gita, with its masterly simplicity, was written. To those who had thought salvation and the beatific vision as far beyond their attainment as a knowledge of the classics—to these humble souls the Divine Voice declares that, by worshipping God and doing at the same time the duty of his station, every man may attain perfection. "Better for one is one's own duty, however badly done, than the duty of another, though that be easy." Again and again, as we read the Gita, we are driven to the conclusion that we hear an infinite mercy addressing itself to a people who had imagined the knowledge of God to be the monopoly of priesthoods and religious orders, and bidding them be of good courage, for the true monk is he "who neither hates nor desires", the true worshipper—any one who "offers to Me with devotion even a leaf or a flower or a cup of water". No wonder that the Indian people, saluting a Divine Incarnation, call Him *the Physician of the world-disease*!

—*The Web of Indian Life.*

ii. THE LORD'S SONG

By DR. ANNIE BESANT

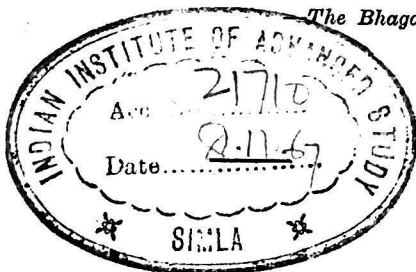
AMONG the priceless teachings that may be found in the great Hindu poem of the *Mahabharata* there is none so rare and precious as this—"The Lord's Song." Since it fell from the divine lips of Shri Krishna on the field of battle and stilled the surging emotions of his disciple and friend, how many troubled hearts has it quieted and strengthened, how many weary souls has it led to Him! It is meant to lift the aspirant from the lower levels of renunciation where objects are renounced, to the loftier heights where desires are dead, and there the Yogi dwells in calm and ceaseless contemplation while his body and mind are actively employed in discharging the duties that fall to his lot in life. That the spiritual man need not be a recluse, that union with the divine Life may be achieved and maintained in the midst of worldly affairs, that the obstacles to that union lie not outside us but within us—such is the central lesson of the BHAGAVAD-GITA. * * *

As though to make the lesson more impressive, it was given on a field of battle. Arjuna, the warrior prince, was to vindicate his brother's title, to destroy a usurper who was oppressing the land; it was his duty as prince, as warrior, to fight for the deliverance of his nation and to restore order and peace. To make the contest more bitter, loved comrades and friends stood on both sides, wringing his heart with personal anguish and making a conflict of duties as well as physical strife. Could he slay those to whom he owed love and duty and trample on ties of kindred? To break family ties was a sin; to leave the people in cruel bondage was a sin; where was the right way? Justice must be done; else law would be disregarded;

but how slay without sin ? The answer is the burden of the book: Have no personal interest in the event; carry out the duty imposed by the position in life, realise that Ishvara, at once Lord and Law, is the doer, working out the mighty evolution that ends in bliss and peace, be identified with Him by devotion and then perform duty as duty, fighting without passion or desire, without anger or hatred; thus activity forges no bonds, Yoga is accomplished and the soul is free.

Such is the obvious teaching of this sacred book. But as all the acts of an Avatara are symbolical, we may pass from the outer to the inner planes and see in the fight of Kurukshetra the battle-field of the soul, and in the sons of Dhritarashtra enemies it meets in its progress; Arjuna becomes the type of the struggling soul of the disciple, and Shri Krishna is the Logos of the soul. Thus the teaching of the ancient battle-field gives guidance in all later days and trains the aspiring soul in treading the steep and thorny path that leads to peace. To all such souls in East and West come these divine lessons, for the path is one though it has many names, and all souls seek the same goal though they may not realise their unity.

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