



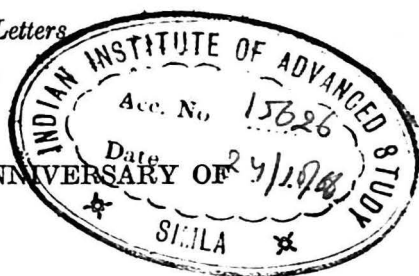
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A NOTE ON BHĪṢMĀSTAMĪ OR THE ANNIVERSARY OF
BHĪṢMA'S EXPIRY

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Bhīṣma was the true Hindu national hero. He was a *Brahmacārī* throughout his life and did not marry to help bring about his father's marriage with Satyawati or Kālī, the adopted daughter of the Dāsarāja. His father's benediction made Bhīṣma capable of controlling his death; he could die on any day only according to his free will. His original name was Devavrata and his great sacrifices made him known as Bhīṣma the dreadful. He did defeat even his preceptor the redoubtable Paraśurama.

The modern *Smṛti Sāstras* declare that the death anniversary of Bhīṣma should be performed on the eighth day of the light half of the lunar month of Māgha. This *Smṛti* rule is derived from the *Mahābhārata* itself as *Śruti* from the words of Bhīṣma:

माघोऽयं समनुप्राप्तो मासः सौम्यो युधिष्ठिर ।

त्रिभागशेषः पक्षोऽयं शुक्लो भवितुमर्हति ॥

'This lunar month of Māgha has (almost) got into the previous year. O, Yudhiṣṭhira, its three-fourths are over; this half month should properly be (or should have been) the light half', is the correct translation of these lines. Here the word, '*Samanuprāpta*' is to be understood in the sense, '*Samanupraviṣṭa*'. I have made a very critical examination of the whole set of *Mahābhārata* data for finding the year of the Bhārata battle—as in my work, '*Ancient Indian Chronology*', pp. 3-9, and in my paper, 'Some Astronomical references from the *Mahābhārata* and their significance' in the *JRASB, Letters*, Vol. III, pp. 102-105. I was compelled to say that the words of Bhīṣma cited above on which the *smṛti* rule was based, 'was a pious wish not materialized' and that, 'it was clear that Bhīṣma expired on the 8th day of the dark and not the light half of the lunar month of Māgha'. The salient ones of my reasons for the above-mentioned conclusion are set forth in the outline and I hope a succinct statement would bear repetition.

(1) Kṛṣṇa challenged Karna to begin the fight on the day of the coming new-moon at the star *Antares* or *Jyēṣṭhā*. But the Bhārata battle did not begin on this day. The last day of the battle was a *Śravaṇā* day. Now after the *Jyēṣṭhā* day, the *Śravaṇā* day would come in 4 or $(4+27=)$ 31 days. As the battle lasted full 18 days, the interval between the *Jyēṣṭhā* new-moon day and the *Śravaṇā* day was consequently of 31 days. These 31 days thus got divided into 13 days+18 days. This shows that the fight did not begin with the *Jyēṣṭhā* N.M. day, but was begun when the moon was about 14 days old. This was my first reason for setting aside the idea that Kṛṣṇa's challenge was accepted *in toto*. Here we notice that on the day of Bhīṣmā's expiry, the time interval from the *Jyēṣṭhā* N.M. day till the day of Bhīṣmā's expiry was $(13+10+58=)$ 81 days. There was no fight in the first 13 days, Bhīṣmā's generalship lasted 10 days and Bhīṣmā was on his 'bed of arrows' for 58 days. As one lunar month =

29-5305881 days, and $2\frac{3}{4}$ lunations = 81.209 days. The 81 days thus comprise $2\frac{3}{4}$ lunations as reckoned from the *Jyesthā* N.M. day with which began the lunar month of *Mārga* (*Agrahāyana*) in the Battle year. Hence Bhīṣma expired on the day of the last quarter of lunar Māgha and in the dark and not the light half of the month.

(2) On the night following the 14th day of the Bhārata battle, a crescent moon rose sometime about a quarter of the night, as the Mahābhārata says, before the next sunrise. In my calculation this happened about two hours before the sunrise.* The moon was evidently 27 days old on the 14th day of the battle in the morning. The fight lasted 4 days more. Hence there were after the *Jyesthā* N.M. day till Bhīṣma's expiry, $(27+4+50=)$ 81 days. Here Bhīṣma was still on 'bed of arrows' for 50 days after the battle was over. Thus as before Bhīṣma expired on the day of the last quarter of the dark and not the light half of the lunar month of Māgha new-moon ending.

In the face of the evidences stated in the outline given above, it would be wholly wrong to assert that the Bhārata battle was begun on the *Jyesthā* new-moon itself and that Bhīṣma expired on the 8th day or the first quarter day of the new-moon ending Māgha and in the light half. Karna did not begin the fight at all, he kept himself aloof from the fighting line for the first ten days in which Bhīṣma was the general. Kṛṣṇa did not fight at all, but acted as the charioteer of Arjuna. The fight was begun by Bhīṣma himself. There are, however, some other arguments which show that Bhīṣma expired on the day of the last quarter of the lunar month of Māgha.

The post-battle events of the Pāṇḍava history as found in the *Āśvamedha Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* are:

(a) The birth of Parikṣit took place one year after the Bhārata battle was over. His mother Uttarā, gave up taking food in her extreme misery for a considerable period of time. Her childbirth was delayed and she gave birth to an asphyxiated baby who was restored to life by the will-force and benediction of Kṛṣṇa as alleged in the *Mahābhārata*.

(b) When Yudhiṣṭhira became king, on termination of the fight, he grew very disconsolate at the staggering loss of life which he thought, was his doing. He was advised to expiate for his sin by performing the *Āśvamedha* sacrifice. To meet the necessary expenses he with his four brothers led an expedition to the foot of the Himalayas to fetch gold in an enormous quantity from the place. He with his brothers returned to Hastināpura one month after the birth of Parikṣit.

(c) The date for his consecration to the *Āśvamedha* sacrifice was then seriously considered, and Vyāsa declared that Yudhiṣṭhira should get consecrated on the next *Citrā* full-moon day.†

These events point to the conclusion that the date for Yudhiṣṭhira's consecration as the *Citrā* full-moon day was taken most correctly at two years, two lunations and two days after the winter solstice day of the Battle year. Bhīṣma's expiry happened one day after the winter solstice day of the Battle year—it was a well-defined day of the year in those days. The dating of the year was unknown in that period; the days of the months were named as *Jyesthā* day, *Anūrādhā* day, *Māgha* day, *Kṛtiṅkā* day, etc. cf. Aśoka's Inscriptions.

I. If we now suppose that Bhīṣma expired on the day of the first quarter or the 8th tithi day of lunar Māgha new-moon ending, we cannot

* P. C. Sengupta, *Ancient Indian Chronology*, p. 18, ll. 6-14.

† P. C. Sengupta, *Ancient Indian Chronology*, pp. 167-68; also *JRASB, Letters*, Vol. IV, 1938, No. 16, pp. 425-426. *Taittirīya Samhitā* quoted.

get the said date for the consecration of Yudhiṣṭhira on the *Citrā* full-moon day as set forth below.

The observational year by the method of the *Brāhmaṇas*, viz., the winter solstitial year, was evidently of 365·2422 days, which comprises 12 lunations and 11·0481 *tithis* or equal to 12 lunations+11 *tithis*. In two years there would be 24 lunations+22 *tithis*. Hence if on the day of Bhīṣma's expiry, the day following the W.S. day of the Battle year, the *tithi* was the 8th of the light half of Māgha, in two years on the *same day of the year*, the *tithi* would be $(8+22 =)$ 30th; it would be the new-moon day of Māgha ended. Here by the *Brāhmaṇa* * rule the consecration would fall on one day after the *Caitra* new-moon day and not on the *Citra* or *Caitra* full-moon day as settled.

II. If, on the other hand, we take that Bhīṣma died on the last quarter day or the 8th *tithi* of the dark half of lunar Māgha then on the same day, i.e., the day following the winter solstice day, two years later, the moon's *tithi* would be the $(15+8+22 =)$ 45th. It would be the full-moon day Māgha, which would come probably one day later, and the *Citrā* full-moon day would come in two more lunations which would be the beginning of the Indian Spring, the true day for Yudhiṣṭhira's consecration to the Aśva-medha sacrifice, as settled by the high priests. Vide *Ancient Indian Chronology*, pp. 32-33.

It is now proved to the hilt that the *Smṛti* rule for the Bhīṣmāṣṭami is totally unjustified, displays utter thoughtlessness on the part of its giver and his total lack of knowledge of Vedic Astronomy as known to the sacrificial high priests the *Brahmāṇas*. Would not our *Pañcāṅgs* make the necessary change in the Hindu calendars by declaring the day of the 8th *tithi* of the dark half of lunar Māgha as the real anniversary day of Bhīṣma's expiry?

* P. C. Sengupta, *Ancient Indian Chronology* and in *JRASB, Letters*, Vol. IV, No. 16, respectively on pp. 163-164 and pp. 422-23, in the work and the paper where the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* rule is quoted.

