

## Heroic India

### The Sons of the Sun and The Sons of the Moon

FROM the conquest of India by the Aryans emerged one of the most glorious civilizations the earth has ever known. The Ganges and its tributaries saw great empires and vast capitals arise, like Ayodhya, Hastinapura and Indraprastha. The epic accounts of the Mahabharata and the popular cosmogonies of the Puranas, which include the oldest historical traditions of India, speak dazzlingly of royal opulence, of heroic grandeur and of the chivalrous spirit of those vanished times. Nothing more proud nor yet more noble can be imagined than one of those Aryan kings of India standing on his war chariot and commanding armies of elephants, horses and infantrymen. A Vedic priest consecrates his king before the assembled crowd in this manner: "I have brought you into our midst. All of the people want you. Heaven is firm, earth is firm; these mountains are firm; may the king of families be firm also." In a later code of laws, the Manava-Dharma-Sastra, one reads, "These masters of the world who, eager to get rid of one another, unleash their strength in battle without flinching, after their death go directly to heaven." In fact, they consider themselves descendants of the gods and believe themselves their rivals, ready to become gods themselves. Filial obedience, military valor, with a sense of unselfish protection for all, is man's ideal. As for woman, the Hindu epic, humble servant of the Brahmans, hardly ever depicts her except with the qualities of the faithful wife. In their poems neither the Greeks nor the peoples of the North have portrayed such delicate, noble and exalted wives as the passionate Sita or the gentle Damayanti.

What the Hindu epic does not tell us is the deep mystery of the mixture of races and the slow incubation of religious ideas which brought about profound changes in the social organization of Vedic India. The Aryans, pure-blooded conquerors, found themselves in the presence of very mixed and inferior races, where the yellow and red types intermixed with blacks in many nuances. The Hindu civilization thus appears as a mighty mountain, at its base a melanian race, mixed bloods on its sides, pure Aryans on its summit. Since the separation of the caste was not rigid in primitive times, many mixtures took place among these peoples. The purity of the conquering race changed more and more with the centuries, but to this day one sees the predominance of the Aryan type in the higher classes and the melanian type in the lower classes. And, from the lower levels of Hindu society, like the miasmas of the jungle mixed with the odor of wild beasts, always arose a burning vapor of passions, a mixture of languor and ferocity. Superabundant black blood gave India her special color. It attenuated and weakened the race. The miracle is that despite this mixing and so many changes, the dominant ideas of the white race could be preserved at the peak of this civilization.

This, then, is the ethnic base of India: on the one hand, the genius of the white race with its moral sense and sublime metaphysical aspirations; on the other, the genius of the black race with its passionate energy and solvent strength. How is this double genius expressed in the ancient religious history of India? The oldest traditions speak of a solar dynasty and a lunar dynasty. The kings of the solar dynasty claim their descent from the sun. The others considered themselves to be sons of the moon. But this symbolic language concealed two opposing religious concepts and meant that these two categories of sovereigns were related to two different cults. The solar cult attributed the male sex to the God of the universe. Around it was grouped all that was purest in the Vedic tradition: the science of the sacred fire and of prayer, the esoteric conception of the supreme God, respect for woman, ancestor worship, elected and patriarchal royalty. The lunar cult attributed the feminine sex to divinity, under whose sign the religions of the Aryan cycle have always worshipped nature, even blind, unconscious nature in its violent, terrible manifestations. This cult leaned toward idolatry and black magic, preferred polygamy and tyranny, supported by the passions of the masses. The battle between the sons of the sun and the sons of the moon, between the Pandavas and Kuravas, is the theme of the great Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, a kind of

summary in perspective of the history of Aryan India before the definitive formation of Brahmanism. This battle abounds in spirited combats and strange, endless adventures. In the middle of this gigantic epic, the Kuravas, the lunar kings, become the conquerors. The Pandavas, noble children of the sun, guardians of the pure rites, are dethroned and banished. As exiles they hide in the forests, seeking refuge among the anchorites, wearing clothing made of bark, and leaning on hermits' sticks.

Will the baser instincts triumph? Are the powers of darkness, represented in the Hindu epic by the black Rakshasas, to be victorious over the enlightened Devas? Will tyranny crush the elite beneath its chariot of war, the cyclone of evil passions destroy the Vedic altar and extinguish the sacred fire of the ancestors? No. India is only at the beginning of her religious evolution. She will display her metaphysical and organizing genius in the establishment of Brahmanism. The priests who served the kings and chiefs under the name of purohitas, those placed in charge of the fire sacrifice, had already become their advisors and ministers. They had great wealth and considerable prestige. But they would not have been able to give to their caste that sovereign authority, that position above attack, even from royal power itself, without the aid of another group of men who personify the spirit of India in its most original and profound sense. These are the anchorites.

From time immemorial ascetics dwelt in retreats in the depth of the forests, beside rivers, or in the mountains near sacred lakes. They were sometimes found alone, sometimes assembled into brotherhoods, but always united in a single spirit. One recognizes in them the spiritual kings, the real masters of India. Heirs of the ancient wise men, the Rishis, they alone held the secret interpretation of the Vedas. In them lived the spirit of asceticism, hidden knowledge and transcendent powers. In order to obtain this wisdom they endured everything in the form of hunger, cold, burning sun, the terror of the jungles. Defenseless in their wooden huts, they live in prayer and meditation. With their voice, their gaze, they summon or drive away serpents, and calm lions and tigers. Happy is one who obtains their blessing, for he will have the Devas as friends! Woe to one who abuses or kills them, for their curse, say the poets, follows the guilty one to his third incarnation! Kings tremble at their threats, and, strangely enough, these ascetics themselves cause the gods to be afraid. In the Ramayana, Visvamitra, a king who became an ascetic, acquires such power through his strictness and meditation that the gods tremble for their lives. Then Indra sends him the most captivating of the Apsaras, who comes to bathe in the lake in front of the saint's hut. The anchorite is seduced by the celestial nymph; a hero is born from their union, and for several thousand years the existence of the universe is assured. Beneath these poetic exaggerations one senses the true superior power of the anchorites of the white race who, with acute divination and strong will, rule the turbulent soul of India from the depths of their forests.

From the midst of the brotherhood of anchorites was to emerge the priestly revolution that made India the most formidable of theocracies. The victory of spiritual power over temporal power, of the anchorite over the king, out of which the power of Brahmanism was born, came in the guise of a reformer of the first rank. By reconciling the two warring groups, the white race and the black race, the solar cults and the lunar cults, this divine being was the true creator of the national religion of India. Moreover, through his teaching this powerful genius introduced a new idea of immense significance into the world: the holy word, or divinity manifest in man. This first of the Messiahs, this eldest of the sons of God, was Krishna.

His legend is principally interesting in that it sums up and dramatizes all Brahmanic doctrine. But it has remained scattered and unformed in tradition because the Hindu genius entirely lacks plastic force. The confusing and mythical account of Vishnu-Pourana nevertheless contains some historic facts about Krishna which are of a personal and striking nature. On the other hand, the Bhagavad-Gita, that wonderful fragment interpolated into the great poem, the Mahabharata, which the Brahmans consider one of their most sacred books, contains in all purity the doctrine attributed to him. It was while reading these two books that the face of the great religious initiator of India appeared before me with the power of a living person. Therefore, I shall relate the story of Krishna, drawing upon these two sources, one of which represents popular tradition, the other, that of the initiates.