not only certain that the Bharata legend must have been current in his time (*?c.* 400 b.c.), but most probable that it existed already in poetical form, as undoubtedly it did at the time of Patanjali, the author of the “great comment­ary” on Pânini *(c.* 150 b.c.). The great epic is also mentioned, both as *Bhârata* and *Mahâbhârata,* in the *Grihya-sûtra* of Âśvalâyana, whom Lassen supposes to have lived about 350 B.C. Nevertheless it must remain uncertain whether the poem was then already in the form in which we now have it, at least as far as the leading story and perhaps some of the episodes are concerned, a large portion of the episodical matter being clearly of later origin. It cannot, however, be doubted, for many reasons, that long before that time heroic song had been diligently cultivated in India at the courts of princes and among Kshatriyas, the knightly order, generally. In the *Mahdâhârata* itself the transmission of epic legend is in some way connected with the Sûtas, a social class which, in the caste-system, is defined as resulting from the union of Kshatriya men with Brâhmana women, and which supplied the office of charioteers and heralds, as well as (along with the Magadhas) that of professional minstrels. Be this as it may, there is reason to believe that, as Hellas had her *άοιδοι* who sang the *κλϵα άνδρων*, and Iceland her skalds who recited favourite sagas, so India had from olden times her professional bards, who delighted to sing the praises of kings and inspire the knights with warlike feelings. But if in this way a stock of heroic poetry had gradually accumulated which reflected an earlier state of society and manners, we can well understand why, after the Brâhmanical order of things had been definitely established, the priests should have deemed it desirable to subject these traditional memorials of Kshatriya chivalry and prestige to their own censorship, and adapt them to their own canons of religious and civil law. Such a revision would doubtless require considerable skill and tact; and if in the present version of the work much remains that seems contrary to the Brâhmanical code and pretensions—*e.g.,* the polyandric union of Draupadî and the Pându princes—the reason probably is that such legendary, or it may be historical, events were too firmly rooted in the minds of the people to be tampered with ; and all the clerical revisers could do was to explain them away as best they could. Thus the special point alluded to was represented as an act of duty and filial obedience, in this way, that, when Arjuna brings home his fair prize, and announces it to his mother, she, before seeing what it is, bids him share it with his brothers. Nay, it has even been suggested, with some plausibility, that the Brâh- manical editors have completely changed the traditional relations of the leading characters of the story. For, although the Pandavas and their cousin Krishna are con- stantly extolled as models of virtue and goodness, while the Kauravas and their friend Karna—a son of the sun- god, born by Kunti before her marriage with Pându, and brought up secretly as the son of a Sûta—are decried as monsters of depravity, these estimates of the heroes’ characters are not unfrequently belied by their actions,— especially the honest Kama and the brave Duryodhana contrasting not unfavourably with the wily Krishna and the cautious and somewhat effeminate Yudhishthira. These considerations, coupled with certain peculiarities on the part of the Kauravas, suggestive of an original con­nexion of the latter with Buddhist institutions, have led Dr Holtzmann to devise an ingenious theory, viz., that the traditional stock of legends was first worked up into its present shape by some Buddhist poet, and that this version, showing a decided predilection for the Kuru party, as the representatives of Buddhist principles, was after­wards revised in a contrary sense, at the time of the

Brâhmanical reaction, by votaries of Vishnu, when the Buddhist features were generally modified into Śaivite tendencies, and prominence was given to the divine nature of Krishna, as an incarnation of Vishnu. The chief objec­tion to this theory probably is that it would seem to make such portions as the *Bhagavad-gîtâ* (“song of the holy one”)—the famous theosophic episode in which Krishna, in lofty and highly poetical language, expounds the doctrine of faith (bhakti) and claims adoration as the incarnation of the supreme spirit—even more modern than many scholars may be inclined to admit as at all necessary, considering that at the time of Patanjali’s *Mahâbhâshya* the Krishna worship, as was shown by Prof. Bhandarkar, had already attained some degree of develop­ment. Of the purely legendary matter incorporated with the leading story not a little, doubtless, is at least as old as the latter itself. Some of these episodes—especially the well-known story of Nala and Damayanti, and the touching legend of Sâvitrî—form themselves little epic gems, of which any nation might be proud. There can be no doubt, however, that this great storehouse of legendary lore has received considerable additions down to comparatively recent times, and that, while its main portion is considerably older, it also contains no small amount of matter which is decidedly more modern than the *Râmâyana.*

As regards the leading narrative of the *Râmâyana,* while it is generally supposed that the chief object which the poet had in view was to depict the spread of Aryan civilization towards the south, Mr T. Wheeler has tried to show that the demons of Lankâ against whom Rama’s expedition is directed are intended for the Buddhists of Ceylon. Prof. Weber, moreover, from a comparison of Rama’s story with cognate Buddhist legends in which the expedition to Lanka is not even referred to, has endeavoured to prove that this feature, having been added by Vâlmîki to the original legend, was probably derived by him from some general acquaintance with the Trojan cycle of legends, the composition of the poem itself being placed by the same scholar somewhere about the beginning of the Christian era. Though, in the absence of positive proof, this theory, however ably supported, can scarcely be assented to, it will hardly be possible to put the date of the work farther back than about a century before our era; while the loose connexion of certain passages in which the divine character of Rama, as an avatar of Vishnu, is especially accentuated, raises a strong sus­picion of this feature of Rama’s nature having been intro­duced at a later time.

A remarkable feature of this poem is the great variation of its text in different parts of the country, amounting in fact to several distinct recensions. The so-called Gauda recension, current in Bengal, which differs most of all, has been edited, with an Italian translation, by G. Gorresio; while the version prevalent in western India, and pub­lished at Bombay, has been made the basis for a beautiful poetical translation by Mr R. Griffith. This diversity has never been explained in a quite satisfactory way; but it was probably duo to the very popularity and wide oral diffusion of the poem. Yet another version of the same story, with, however, many important variations of details, forms an episode of the *Mahâbhârata,* the relation of which to Valmiki’s work is still a matter of uncertainty. To characterize the Indian epics in a single word though often disfigured by grotesque fancies and wild exaggerations, they are yet noble works, abounding in passages of remarkable descriptive power, intense pathos, and high poetic grace and beauty; and, while, as works of art, they are far inferior to the Greek epics, in some respects they appeal far more strongly to the romantic