do, go back to a much earlier age, it seems hardly possible to assume that the Pāṇḍava epic in its present form can have been composed before the Greek invasion of India, or about 300 b.c. Moreover, it is by no means impossible that the epic narrative was originally composed—as some other portions of the works are—in prose, either continuous or mixed with snatches of verse. Nay, in the opinion of some scholars, this poem (as well as the Rãmãyana) may even have been originally composed in some popular dialect, which would certainly best account for the irregular and apparently prākritic or dialectic forms in which these works abound. The leading position occupied in the exist- ing epic by Kṛishṇa (whence it is actually called *kārshṇa veda,* or the veda of Kṛishṇa), and the Vaishṇava spirit pervading it, make it very probable that it assumed its final form under the influence of the Bhāgavata sect with whom Vāsudeva (Kṛishṇa), originally apparently a venerated local hero, came to he regarded as a veritable god, and incarnation of Vishṇu. Its culminating point this sectarian feature attains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (*i.e.* the upanishad), “ sung by the holy one ”—the famous theosophic episode, in which Krishna, in lofty and highly poetic language, expounds the doctrine of faith (bhakti) and claims adoration as the incarnation of the supreme spirit. Of the purely legendary matter incorporated with the leading story of the poem, 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 Damayantï, and the touching legend of Sāvitrī—form themselves little epic gems of considerable poetic value.

The *Rämäyana, i.e.* poem “ relating to Rāma,” is ascribed to the poet Vālmīki; and, allowance being made for some later additions, the poem indeed presents the appearance of being the work of an individual genius. In its present form it consists of some 24,000 ślokas, or 48,000 lines of sixteen syllables, divided into seven books.

(I.) King Daśaratha of Kośala, reigning at Ayodhyā (Oudh), has four sons borne him by three wives, viz. Rãma, Bharata and the twins Lakshmaṇa and Śatrughna. Rãma, by being able to bend an enormous bow, formerly the dreaded weapon of the god Rudra, wins for a wife Sītā, daughter of Janaka, king of Videha (Tirhut). (IL) On his return to Ayodhyã he is to be appointed heir-apparent (yuva-rãja, *i.e.* juvenis rex); but Bharata’s mother persuades the king to banish his eldest son for fourteen years to the wilderness, and appoint her son instead. Separation from his favourite son soon breaks the king’s heart; whereupon the ministers call on Bharata to assume the reins of government. He refuses, however, and, betaking himself to Rama’s retreat on the Chitraküta mountain (in Bundelkhund), implores him to return; but, unable to shake Rama’s resolve to complete his term of exile, he consents to take charge of the kingdom in the meantime. (III.) After a ten years’ residence in the forest, Rãma attracts the attention of a female demon (rākshasī); and, infuriated by the rejection of her advances, and by the wounds inflicted on her by Lakshmaṇa, who keeps Rãma company, she inspires her brother Rāvaṇa, demon- king of Ceylon, with love for Sïtã, in consequence of which the latter is carried off by him to his capital Lankā. While she resolutely rejects the Rãkshasa’s addresses, Rãma sets out with his brother to her rescue. (IV.) After numerous adventures they enter into an alliance with Sugrîva, king of the monkeys; and, with the assistance of the monkey-general Hanumān, and Rāvaṇa’s own brother Vibhīshaṇa, they prepare to assault Lankā. (V.) The monkeys, tearing up rocks and trees, construct a passage across the straits— the so-called Adam’s Bridge, still designated Rãma’s Bridge in India. (VI.) Having crossed over with his allies, Rãma, after many hot encounters and miraculous deeds, slays the demon and captures the stronghold; whereupon he places Vibhīshaṇa on the throne of Lankā. To allay Rāma’s misgivings as to any taint she might have incurred through contact with the demon, Sïtã now successfully undergoes an ordeal by fire; after which they return to Ayodhyã, where, after a triumphal entry, Rãma is installed. (VII.) Rāma, how- ever, seeing that the people are not yet satisfied of Sîtã’s purity, resolves to put her away; whereupon, in the forest, she falls in with Vālmīki himself, and at his hermitage gives birth to two sons. While growing up there, they are taught by the sage the use of the bow, as well as the Vedas, and the Rãmãyana as far as the capture of Lankã and the royal entry into Ayodhyã. Ultimately Rãma discovers and recognizes them by their wonderful deeds and their likeness to himself, and takes his wife and sons back with him.

The last book, as will be noticed from this bare outline, presents a somewhat strange appearance. There can be little doubt that it is a later addition to the work; and the same is apparently the case as regards the first book, with the exception of certain

portions which would seem to have formed the beginning of the original poem. In these two books the character of Rãma appears changed: he has become deified and identified with the god Vishṇu, whilst in the body of the poem his character is simply that of a perfect man and model hero. As regards the general idea underlying the leading story, whilst the first part of the narrative can hardly he said to differ materially from other historical and knightly romances, the second part—the expedi­tion to Lankã—on the other hand has called forth different theories, without, however, any general agreement having so far been arrived at. Whilst Lassen and Weber would see in this warlike expedition a poetical representation of the spread of Aryan rule and civilization over southern India, Talboys Wheeler took the demons of Lankã, against whom Rāma’s campaign is directed, to be intended for the Buddhists of Ceylon. More recently, again, Professor Jacobi@@1 of Bonn has endeavoured to prove that the poem has neither an allegorical nor a religious tendency, but that its background is a purely mythological one— Rāma representing the god Indra, and Sïtã—in accordance with the meaning of the name—the personified “ Furrow,” as which she is already invoked in the Rigveda, and hence is a tutelary spirit of the tilled earth, wedded to Indra, the Jupiter Pluvius. Moreover, from a comparison of the narrative of the poem with a popular version of it, contained in one of the Pali “ birth- stories,” the Dasaratha-jātaka, which lacks the second part of the story, Professor Weber tried to show that the expedition of Lankã cannot have formed part of the original epic, but was probably based on some general acquaintance with the Troy legend of Greek poetry.

A remarkable feature of this poem is the great variation of its textual condition in different parts of the country, amounting in fact to at least three different recensions. The text most widely prevalent both in the north and south has been printed repeatedly, with commentary, at Bombay, and was taken by Mr R. T. H. Griffith as the basis for his beautiful poetical transla- tion.@@2 The so-called Gauḍa or Bengal recension, on the other hand, which differs most of all, has been edited, with an Italian prose translation, by G. Gorresio;@@3 whilst the third recension, recognized chiefly in Kashmir and western India, is so far known only from manuscripts. The mutual relation of these versions will appear from the fact that about one-third of the matter of each recension is not found in the other two; whilst in the common portions, too, there are great variations both in regard to the order of verses and to textual readings. To account for this extraordinary textual diversity, it has been suggested that the poem was most likely originally composed in a popular dialect, and was thence turned into Sanskrit by different hands trying to improve on one another; whilst Professor Jacobi would rather ascribe the difference to the fact that the poem was for a long time handed down orally in Sanskrit by rhap- sodists, or professional minstrels, when such variations might naturally arise in different parts of the country. Yet another version of the same story, with, however, many important variations of details, forms an episode of the *Mahābhārata,* the *Rämopäkhyäna,* the relation of which to Vālmīki’s work is still a matter of uncertainty. In respect of both versification and diction the Rāmāyaṇa is of a distinctly more refined character than the larger poem; and, indeed, Vãlmïki is seen already to cultivate some of that artistic style of poetry which was carried to excess in the later artificial Kāvyas, whence the title of ā*di-kavi*, or first poet, is commonly applied to him. Though the political conditions reflected in the older parts of the Rāmāyaṇa seem to correspond best to those of pre-Buddhistic times, this might after all only apply to the poetic material handed down orally and eventually cast into its present form. 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,

*@@@1 Das Rāmāyaṇa* (Bonn, 1893).

@@@2 London, 1870-1874; there is also an English prose translation by M. N. Dutt (Calcutta, 1894) ; and a condensed version in English verse by Romesh Dutt (London, 1899).

@@@3 Turin, 1843-1867.