without it, when the dog turns out to be no other than the god of Justice himself, having assumed that form to test Yudhishṭhira’s constancy. But, finding neither his wife nor his brothers in heaven, and being told that they are in the nether world to expiate their sins, the king insists on sharing their fate, when this, too, proves a trial, and they are all reunited to enjoy perpetual bliss.

The complete work consists of upwards of 100,000 couplets— its contents thus being nearly eight times the bulk of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. It is divided into eighteen books, and a supplement, entitled Harivaṃśa, or genealogy of the god Hari (Kṛishṇa-Vishṇu). In the introduction, Vyāsa, being about to dictate the poem, is made to say (i. 81) that so far he and some of his disciples knew 8800 couplets; and farther on (i. 101) he is said to have composed the collection relating to the Bhāratas (*bhārata-saṃhitā*), and called the *Bhãratam,* which, hot including the episodes, consisted of 24,ooo slokas. Now, as a matter of fact, the portion relating to the feud of the rival houses con­stitutes somewhere between a fourth and a fifth of the work; and it is by no means improbable that this portion once formed a separate poem, called the *Bhärata.* But, whether the former statement is to be understood as implying the existence, at a still earlier time, of a yet shorter version of about one-third of the present extent of the leading narrative, cannot now be determined. While some of the episodes are so loosely connected with the story as to be readily severed from it, others are so closely inter­woven with it that their removal would seriously injure the very texture of the work. This, however, only shows that the original poem must have undergone some kind of revision, or perhaps repeated revisions. That such has indeed taken place, at the hand of Brahmans, for sectarian and caste purposes, cannot be doubted. According to Lassen’s opinion,@@1 which has been very generally accepted by scholars, the main story of the poem would be based on historical events, viz. on a destructive war waged between the two neighbouring peoples of the Kurus and Pan- chälas, who occupied the western and eastern parts of the Madhyadeśa (or “ middle land ” between the Ganges and Jumna) respectively, and ending in the overthrow of the Kuru dynasty. On the original accounts of these events—perhaps handed down in the form of lays or sagas—the Pāṇḍava element would subsequently have been grafted as calculated to promote the class interests of the Brāhmanical revisers. It is certainly a strange coincidence that the five Pāṇḍava princes should have taken to wife the daughter of the king of the Panchãlas, and thus have linked their fortunes to a people which is represented, in accordance with its name, to have consisted of five (pancha) tribes.

The earliest direct information regarding the existence of epic poetry in India is contained in a passage of Dion Chrysostom (c. **A.D.** 80), according to which “ even among the Indians, they say, Homer’s poetry is sung, having been translated by them into their own dialect and tongue ”; and “ the Indians are well acquainted with the sufferings of Priam, the lamentations and wails of Andromache and Hecuba, and the prowess of Achilles and Hector.” Now, although these allusions would suit either poem, they seem to correspond best to certain incidents in the *Mahabharata,* especially as no direct mention is made of a warlike expedition to a remote island for the rescue of an abducted woman, the resemblance of which to the Trojan expedition would naturally have struck a Greek becoming acquainted with the general outline of the *Rāmāyaṇa.* Whence Dion derived his information is not known; but as many leading names of the Mahābhãrata and even the name of the poem itself@@2 are mentioned in Pāṇini’s grammatical rules, not only must the Bhārata legend have been current in his time (? *c.* 400 B.C.), but most probably it existed already in poetical form, as undoubtedly it did at the time of Patanjali, the author of the “ great commentary ” on Pāṇini (*c.* 150 b.c.). The great epic is also mentioned, both as *Bhärata* and *Mahābhārata,* in the *Gṛihya-sūtra* of Āśvalāyana, 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 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 *Mahabharata* itself the transmission of epic legend is in some way connected with the Sūtas, a social class which, in the caste- system, is defined as resulting from the union of Kshatriya men with Brāhmaṇa women, and which supplied the office of charioteers and heralds, as well as (along with the Mãgadhas) that of professional minstrels. Be this as it may, there is reason to believe that, as Hellas had her *άοιδοί* who sang the *κλέα 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. 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 Brãhmanical 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 Brāhmanical code and pretensions—*e.g.* the polyandric union of Draupadī and the Pāṇḍu princes—the reason probably is that such features were too firmly rooted in the popular tradi­tion to be readily eliminated; and all the revisers could do was to explain them away as best they could. Thus Draupadī’s ab­normal position is actually accounted for in five different ways, one of these representing it as an act of duty and filial obedience on the part of Arjuna who, on bringing home his fair prize and announcing it to his mother, is told by her, before seeing what it is, to share it with his brothers. Nay, it has even been seriously argued that the Brãhmanical editors have completely changed the traditional relations of the leading characters of the story. For, although the Pāṇḍavas and their cousin Kṛishṇa are con­stantly extolled as models of virtue and goodness, while the Kauravas and their friend Karṇa—a son of the sun-god, borne by Kuntï before her marriage with Pāṇḍu, and brought up secretly as the son of a Sūta—are decried as monsters of depravity, these estimates of the heroes’ characters are not unfrequently belied by their actions—especially the honest Karṇa and the brave Duryodhana (*i.e. “*the bad fighter,” but formerly called Suyo- dhana, “ the good fighter ’’) contrasting not unfavourably with the wily Kṛishṇa and the cautious and somewhat effeminate Yudhishṭhira. These considerations, coupled with certain peculiarities on the part of the Kauravas, apparently 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 a connected narrative by some Buddhist poet—most likely at the time of the emperor Aśoka (c. 250 **B.c.),** whom the Kaurava hero Suyodhana might even seem to have been intended to represent—and that this poem, 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 Brãhmanical reaction, by votaries of Vishṇu, when the Buddhist features were generally modified into Śaivite tendencies, and prominence was given to the divine nature of Kṛishṇa, as an incarnation of Vishṇu. As this theory would, however, seem to involve the Brãhmanical revision of the poem having taken place subsequent to the decline of Buddhist predominance, it would shift the completion of the work to a considerably later date than would be consistent with other evidence. From inscriptions we know that by the end of the 5th century a.d. the Mahãbhãrata was appealed to as an authority on matters of law, and that its extent was practically what it now is, including its supplement, the Harivaṃśa. Indeed, everything seems to point to the probability of the work having been complete by about A.D. 200. But, whilst Bhãrata and Kuru heroic lays may, and probably

@@@1 Lassen, *Indische Altertumskunde,* i. 733 sqq.

@@@2 Viz. as an adj., apparently with “ war ” or “ poem ” understood.