

# Harivansa's Introduction

Translated by Gilles Schaufelberger  
from Harivansa's French translation  
by A. Langlois (2 vol. 1834-1835)

First of all, I owe a fair tribute of gratitude to the honourable Society under whose patronage my work is now brought into the world. By deigning to adopt a foreigner's work so that it be published under its auspices, it proves a truly liberal spirit which, irrespective of person or nation, has been able to establish a new dealing, a precious reciprocity, through which are assembled in a shared content for the good of the science, on the one hand the encouragement of the most enlightened esteem, on the other hand the fruits of the most arduous night labours. So, in the whole course of my work, I have never let out of my sight the double obligation which was imposed on me: answering as well the hopes of the French erudition as the confidence of the English committee.

At the moment, the Sanskrit literature attracts the attention of the learned world, which seems to wait impatiently for the light coming from the East. Nobody appreciates more than me the great work accomplished by the English scholars in the vast field of Indology. But it seemed to me that the ideas of those who have dealt with Indian history have always been lacking of sound basis, and that we, summoned to be their judges without having in front of us the supporting documents of the case they alone had consulted, we were forced to grant their assertions an implicit faith, often undermined by the very contradictions of their various systems. I have hoped it would be possible to provide the critics with the proofs they need to give India this history that is until now disputed to this country.

I have never believed that this people, who have lived for so long a time and occupied so vast a space on the globe, and in the ages, and on earth, could remain deprived of its age-old annals: I have thought they were to be found in its own books where they lie merged with all kinds of fables, and that it would be fair, by translating these writings, to hand over to the criticism, frankly and without systematization, the material which may serve this work of rehabilitation.

It was then that, wishing myself to help bring about this great result, I started to translate a work which was pointed out to me by the very esteem it enjoyed among the Indians. The Harivansa is a poem regarded as sacred, and that is read with reverence at the time of solemn gatherings: the most brilliant promises for this life and the other are done to those who hear its reading. In the country of Camaon, it is

put on the head of him who testifies, and in other countries, it is honoured as much as Sâlagrâma and toulasi leaves; the judges present it to him who declares under oath before the court. Lastly, the Djênas, wishing probably to take advantage of the veneration inspired by this book, have usurped its title for one of their books that is apparently different from the orthodox one.

Usually, the Harivansa constitutes an appendix to the Mahâbhârata: same kind of story, same interlocutors, same presumed author. Yet this poem is not original, and, as many other Sanskrit books, it is only a collection, rather clumsily compiled, of precious passages, of scattered remnants of a more or less ancient literature that times' misfortune had probably dispersed and that a more modern hand has been careful to gather. Here are to be found verses borrowed from the Laws of Manou or the Bhagavad-Gîtâ, quotations and extracts perhaps from the Pourânas, but nothing discloses the compiler's name.

A mere conjecture should not take the place of a truth that I do not know: I would only point out as very unusual that, among the five hundred authors who adorned Sri Bhodja's court, one was named Harivansa and that among the nine king Vicrainâditya's gems there was a poet named Ghatacarpara. Could not these two names, the titles of two famous works, have become the honour names of the two writers who had composed them? The admitted purpose of Harivansa's author is to tell the story of Chrichna's family: he goes back in time until the origin of things, points out the various royal lines' genealogies, and comes to his hero, regarded as a god Vichnou's avatar. Meanwhile, he gives himself to some digressions about Indian mythology, religious philosophy and cosmogony. The expansion that will take from day to day study of the Sanskrit language will make necessary to know all the fictions begotten by the impassioned imagination of Indian poets who were clever at personifying the whole nature, giving life to all the beings, either material or metaphysical. The Harivansa will introduce its reader to part of this fabulous story, source of continual comparisons and endless allusions, but above all, it will present to him the beginnings of a political history that I wish to see established on little more sound foundations. Unfortunately, it will show this to him surrounded with poetic embellishments that always spoil and distort the truth. But if only the hand of an impartial criticism would snatch out all these misleading veils, if only reason would explain these frivolous tales, I believe that the scholar will be left with historical materials whose value will astound him. To prove that, I will summarize in a few words the main facts told in the Harivansa.

This work does not talk about the Flood as we understand it, but of an imaginary flood that comes at the end of each era, like the rainy season at the end of each year. Indian monarchy, once established, was divided right from the start into two collateral branches referred to by the names of solar line and lunar line, one of which, growing toward the east, established its capital at Oude, and the other one,

stopping in the west, established its capital opposite Allahabad. Yet, before these two dynasties, an other one was existing, but I doubt whether the center of its empire was really in India: the name of “Tchâkchoucha” given to one of its chiefs seems to indicate that it reigned on the banks of the Oxus (Tchakchous).

Under the influence of national princes, India fills up and organizes itself, states are formed all over the place and civilization grows in the peninsula. The kings have to fight against nature and the mountain barbarians, against the Ganges’ floods and the Western peoples’ invasions.

A power emulating the royal one grows inside the states, priests are in command and princes are exiled. The second king of the solar line is almost deprived of the throne which was waiting for him: one of his successors, threatened to see his son take up his place, saves his crown only by means of a schism, and throws himself in the arms of a warrior who dares to make himself a priest: Later on, a Brahman does not content himself with the excommunication’s weapon, he takes the lethal axe, and, tremendous exterminator of Kchatriyas, he disregards the throne and gives away the earth he has conquered.

This event occurred on the west coast of the peninsula. Shortly after, a king, starting from the town of Oude, came down the same peninsula following its east coast and went as far as the island of Ceylan to punish his royal spouse’s abductor.

The privilege of suzerainty does not seem to have been established in favour of any princely family. Victory, uncertain and changeable, decided by turns the preeminence among all these rivals; the winner, having triumphed over his neighbours, took proudly the precarious title of ruler of the world and claimed he has subdued the seven “dwipas” or continents.

Since the beginning, the Yâdava family, coming from the lunar line, has gone and looked for a settlement in the north of the peninsula: gradually, it has known a strong growth, and has divided itself in various branches still closely united by ancient family ties. Later, one of these branches settled on the banks of the Jumna, having the town Matra for capital: it is there that Crichna was born. At his birth’s time, the throne was held by an ambitious prince who, having overthrown his own father, maintained himself, inside by terror, outside by the powerful alliance with Bahar’s king whose he was a son-in-law. Crichna, brought up among shepherds, opened his glorious career by the tyrant’s death, gave back the throne to his father, put himself at the Yâdava’s head and did eighteen times battle with the Bahar’s king and his confederates, battles he won every time. But his strength was weakened by his victories, and when a king from the West, called by his enemies, came and attacked him, he was forced to leave Matra and seek refuge at the far end of the gulf of Cuch, where he founded a town flourishing for some time, now engulfed by the sea.

However, his powerful enemy chasing him, he let him enter the Bindh's defiles where the mountain people wiped him out.

Some time after, a violent war took place between the heirs to the Delhi's throne. Crichna took part in this quarrel and secured the victory for Youdhichthira. Elected and revered by his comrade-in-arms, he was then chosen by a sect of contemplative devout persons as the divine object of their ascetic meditations; and his warrior's life was distorted by the strange pastiches of mysticism.

Such are the most salient features the Harivansa presents as a summary to us and that other books will tell at greater length. It is not to be denied that the elements of a serious and true story are to be found there. I do not even think another nation could pride itself on having a more ancient one, since almost all the events recorded in the Harivansa date back before Youdhishthira's time, which various calculations and documents included in various places of Asian Researchs allow us to put boldly at 1000 to 1200 years BC. Even in the middle of the tales that often make these ancient stories obscure, there is in the narration such a tone of ingenuousness, in the genealogies' exposition such a detailed precision, that it is very difficult to be resigned to close entirely this precious mine and to reject such a rich metal only because it is combined with a poetic alloy that often reduces its price.

I am well aware that grounds of mistrust will always exist against this story, as it does not possess a guarantee of veracity provided by our Western writers. Strange condition of India ! Everything indicates that it has been rich and therefore early civilized. Since time immemorial, sages, merchants and conquerors have turned their steps toward this country that raised so much passions: they brought back, some of them philosophical systems, others rich treasuries and the last some laurels dearly earned. No one of them has deigned to convey authentic details on a country whose wisdom or opulence they coveted.

Only about three hundred years BC, Megasthenes, sent to India by Seleucos, has written a book which both Arrien and Diodore of Sicily<sup>1</sup> have of course consulted, but from which they could get limited information, for they do not teach us much. Let us however examine the vague and imprecise documents that we owe to them. Megasthenes reports that Indians counted hundred fifty-three kings until Sandrakotos and gave themselves an antiquity of six thousand forty-two years. Here they are in part, these genealogy tables which the Greek ambassador must have been talked about : they deny categorically his assertions. First Megasthenes seems to believe that only one Indian monarchy has existed while it is known that two main dynasties with some of their branches have ruled over this country and that none of these royal families has exercised continuous domination. Harivansa's lists, which can

---

<sup>1</sup> See Diodore of Sicily, I and II; Arrien *De reb. Ind*; Strabon, XVI; Pline , VI.

be questioned<sup>2</sup>, are not entirely exact: there is an interpolation in the solar dynasty princes' list in which the author finds them to be seventy-nine until Youdhishthira's time and a subtraction in the lunar dynasty kings' list in which he finds no more than forty of them until the same period. But even taking the figure of seventy-nine and adding the fifteen generations that could have preceded the monarchy's formation and the thirty-five kings from Youdhishthira to Sandrakotos, we will not reach the total of hundred fifty-three. If the princes' number is too high, there is also an obvious exaggeration in the calculation of the length of Indian nation's life as given by the Greek author.

But, even if misled on this point, Megasthenes has at least made known to Arrien and Diodore of Sicily a true circumstance the Harivansa teaches us nearly in the same terms as these two historians. They say that the Indian monarchy's founder, they call Herakles, begot several sons and only one daughter, that he shares his kingdom between his children, and that he wanted his daughter receiving an equal part of inheritance as his sons. The Harivansa reports also that Manou Vêvaswata begot nine sons and one daughter and that he divided his states in ten parts. This only trait would persuade me to recognise Megasthenes' Herakles in Vêvaswata, but there is more: the Indian poet and the Greek historian agree in placing his usual residence in the Doab or the peninsula formed by the Jumna and the Ganges. If the conjecture is well-founded, the beginning of the Indian history will be entirely found in the Greek historians. It seems even to me that it is still possible to go back higher in time.

I have said that I did not believe its first monarchy's origin should be related to India itself. I have pointed out a more northern country having been the seat of an empire from which a legislator or a conqueror has come. Diodore of Sicily backs up this opinion of which I had found the first element in the Harivansa. First, let us note that the ancients gave to the word "Indian" a much wider extension and that they applied it to people located on this side of the Indus. Diodore of Sicily tells us (I, 12) about an Osiris who goes to India to establish towns and among others the town of Nysa west of the Indus, and who leaves in these countries enough monuments in his glory to make the posterity doubt whether he was not an Indian. Arrien who declares that the "Hercules" called "the Indian" was a great king of the country located to the north of India, ascribes Nysa's foundation to Bacchus. The same Diodoros (II, 38) shows Bacchus arriving from the West, settling himself in a mountainous country, spreading there the beneficial effects of civilization, teaching agriculture, founding towns, bringing men together, educating them to gods' respect and justice, and deserving by his good deeds the divine honours. As I was reading this passage, I

---

<sup>2</sup> The examination of these lists and their comparison with those presented by other works will form the matter of several memoirs I intend to publish.

could not but recognize the portrait drawn by the Harivansa of a prince of Tchâkchoucha's line; this prince is Prithou, considered an incarnation of the god Vichnou or Iswara. It is him, who, making up for the evils caused by his predecessors, undertook to clear earth and civilize men, felled forests, built villages and towns, favoured trade, and taught mortals to look for food in their fields and their herds. He was a monarch strong and beneficent, a warrior, a legislator. On an other hand, if we would have assumed that Diodore's Bacchus is Swâyambhouva, we could count the fifteen generations mentioned by Arrien from this Manou's reign to Manou Vêvaswata's.

The result of these compared documents is that the Indian civilization's cradle has to be looked for toward the northwest of the Indus, where from it came down in the Ganges' plain to improve one day its beliefs and craft. But to which time could these events be related ? The Western historians, by these names of "Bacchus" and "Hercules" point to an ancient time, but vague and indetermined, for they say that it is question here neither of the Theban Hercules nor of the Tyran or Egyptian one, but of an Indian Hercules. As for Bacchus, in spite of Arrien's assertion pretending that Nysa was founded by Greeks, I believe that if he was really to be looked for toward the West, he would rather be found in Egypt than in Greece where the Theban Bacchus was but a poor copy of Osiris<sup>3</sup>, above all when one thinks that, long before he was living, the Assyrian Semiramis let herself be tempted by the wealth and power of India where civilization was already flourishing (Diod. Sic., II, 16). But all these conjectures could not give us a date and the question will be well established only when the Indian genealogies will rest on a firm foundation: it will then be possible to go back from Sandracotus to this Hercules and this Bacchus by an indisputable series of princes to whom criticism will have fixed, according to the general rules of chronological hypothesis, a suitable place in the ages' series.

I express my warmest wishes for this result and it is toward it that I have turned my work. I wish to use in this research elements coming only from the Haricansa. If I had accepted other proofs, I would have contradicted myself, since I hope to see the systems which will be proposed from now on based only on documents open to every judge. I hope others will follow my example, and, as the number of translations will increase, the discussion circle will be able to grow. My work, that extends only to Youdhishthira's reign, needs to be supplemented, confirmed or even contradicted, and this is how the publication of the Bhâgavatapourâna due to the tireless zeal of M. E. Burnouf, a scholar honoured as well for his knowledge's variety and depth as for his judgement's soundness, could soon be of help to science.

---

<sup>3</sup> I believe it would be possible to prove with the Harivansa's help that Prithou came rather from the south than from the West. For more, see Diodore of Sicily (I, 35) and the eighteenth J.F. Champollion's letter from Egypt.

I am the first to be aware of my work's very imperfection. It was carried out on a text formed from three manuscripts not too accurate, two of which, one in Bengali, the other in devanâgari, belong to the Paris' Library, and the third, given by M. Tod to the Asiatic Society of London has been very kindly passed on me. But none of them had comments, which I missed too often ! Particulary concise sentences, incomprehensible allusions, unknown words have stopped me many times, and I can not pride myself on avoiding every time the pitfalls appearing before me.

I have made errors, but I dare hope the scholars, who alone will be aware of them, will pardon me, appreciating with honesty all the difficulties I had to overcome.

I have given a special attention to the names' spelling: the system I have generally followed is to reproduce them in the absolute.

However, I have adopted some exceptions, for the feminine names, for the names already known, as "Brahmâ", for the masculines that could be confused with neuters, like the words ended in "mân" or "vân", and so on. Almost all the names will be collected in an alphabetical table. I have not reproduced the division in "slocas". because I had not the possibility to publish the text itself and because a book, already unattractive by itself, would have appeared even more strange in this form.

I have changed a few titles which were too vague and added some other ones wherever they were missing.

Lastly, I have done all my possible best so that this work be not unworthy of the Society which deigned to publish it and of the distinguished master who supervised my Sanskrit studies, M. de Chezy, a teacher as modest as learned, whom a fatal death has taken away from humanities and from my friendship at the very moment when this book's printing was about to begin. Others will achieve, by their publications, this wide-ranging edifice to which I bring today my stone, they will complete this story of India of which I never despaired. They will reveal things I have not heard of. While they will ascertain synchronisms and homonyms, they will throw light on obscure questions and modify *idées reçues*. They will even reveal my errors, however the honour to have open the road for them will remain mine, and, while they will be correcting my errors, they will deign to remember that I had some merit, deprived as I was of my aknowledged master's advices, far from the Pandits' comments and opinion, to undertake so long and so difficult a task like the Harivansa's translation.

### **Modern Spellings of some words**

Bahar = Magadha  
Bhodja = Bhoja  
Bindh = Vindhya  
Camaon = Kumaon(?)  
Chrichna = Krishna  
Cuch = Kutch  
Djênas = Jains  
Ghatacarpara = Ghatakarpara  
Harivansa = Harivamsa  
Jumna = Yamuna  
Kchatriya = Kshatriya  
Manou = Manu  
Matra = Mathurâ  
Oude = Ayodhya  
Pourânas = Puranas  
Prithou = Prithu  
slocas = slokas  
Swayambhouva = Swayambhuva  
Tchâkchoucha = Cakshusha  
Toulasi = Tulasi  
Vêvaswata = Vivaswata  
Vichnou = Vishnu  
Vicrainâditya = Vikramaditya  
Youdhichthira = Yudhishtira