

THE PASSAGE III, 3.2.21-33 IN BHAVIṢYA-PURĀṆA

The Bhaviṣya Purāṇa has a passage which has been considered as referring to Jesus, III, 3.2.21-33. As such it has played a role in support of the assertion of the Aḥmadiyya Movement that Jesus did not die on the cross but survived and after the crucifixion travelled as far as Afghanistan and Kashmir. For basic reference see Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad: « Jesus in India », Rabwah, Pakistan W. 1962, originally written in Urdu 1899.

The question arises as to what extent this passage can be taken in support of a theory diverging from another, totally different, historical tradition.

The story says that once the king of the śaka went to the snowy mountain and in the centre of the Hūṇa land he met a man dressed in white who claimed to be *masīhā*, Messiah. To the king's question who he was he answered gladly: « Know me as *īsaputra* and *kumārīgarbhāsarṅbhava* ». The man is described as *puruṣa śubha*, *gaurāṅga*, *śvetavastraka* and as such evidently considered remarkable in the Hūṇa country. Points for consideration are among others that *gaurāṅga* is known as a term used for Viṣṇu and that *śvetavastraka* is a reminder of Śvetāmbara Jinas. Terms familiar in Indian setting are also *mlecchadharmasya vaktāraṇ*, a teacher of the Barbarian Dharma, and *satyavrataparāyaṇam*, which may lead the reader's thoughts to Bhagavadgītā IV.

Of more special significance is his presentation of himself as *īsaputra* and *kumārīgarbhāsarṅbhava* and also as *masīhā* and as having reached *masīhatvam*. The last two words are seemingly related to Hebrew *mashiah*. *Īsa* is naturally connected with Sanskrit. A word of more ambiguous meaning is *īsamāsī*, by some interpreted as a name of a goddess, by others left unexplained. As a marginal remark the ending *masī* may be referred to a goddess black-painted, *unmīlita*, with black pigment *añjana* removing *ajñāna*, ignorance as per the opening lines of Uttarakaraṇāgama. The interpretation is still more complicated through the

words: « I obtained her ». Did he take over her power or did he conquer her?

Some of the terms of identification of the man whom the king met can reasonably be taken to originate in a Christian background and some have evidently different connotations. The term *kumārīgarbhasaṁbhava* could refer to the virginbirth of Jesus, but the interpretation is also qualified by genuine Indian references such as the concepts of *mala* and *śubhāśubha* which appear less likely to fit in with Hebrew thinking. The same may be said about *manasaikyā*, if taken to mean « the identity of the human soul with the Deity » (Apte, Sanskrit - English Dictionary, sub Aikyam). Words of similar character are *mānasaṁ nirmalaṁ kṛtvā* and *naigamaṁ* as related to the Veda.

Another aspect on the passage is brought in by reference to Sun-worship which is considered to lead on to Iranian Suncult with Indian terms, however, such as *īśa* and *pūjā*. See further Das Bhaviṣyapurāṇa, von Adam Hohenberger, Introduction by Helmut Hoffmann, p. X. Dr. V. Raghavan in his article on « Worship of the Sun » in « Sankara and Shanmata », 1969, makes it clear that passages of the text like « The Sun is immovable » and « dragging all beings that by nature are moving » indicate Persian and Indian concepts and not Christian. Significant is his quotation of Rig Veda I, 115. 1, « The Sun is the soul of all that moves and is stationary ».

Concepts that apply to Indian more than to Hebrew tradition may be found in verses 30 and 31, as just mentioned *tattvānām calabhūtānām karṣaṇaḥ* and also *īśamūrtirhr̥ḍi prāptā*, if compared with Bhagavadgītā 18, 61, *īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hr̥ḍdeśe' rjuna tiṣṭhati / bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā*, « The Lord dwells in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, and by His Māyā causes all beings to revolve as though mounted on a machine ». Quoted from The Bhagavadgītā by Swami Chidbhavananda, 1965. *Nityasuddhā* and *śivaṁkarī* also have a definite Indian tinge.

Summing up the relevances drawn from the verbal formulations of the text some Christian background seems to be evident along with Indian concepts. As a general remark in the matter of historical investigation it can be said that the presentation of the incident is neither as a whole genuinely Biblical Christian nor altogether inherently Indian because of references to Sun worship in Persian form. The composition will have to be explained under several aspects. In as much as references to the Bible from the book of Genesis are also found in the Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa the statement made by A. Hohenberger is justified: « The author of the Bhaviṣya knew how to connect Biblical and Indian concepts » (*op. cit.*, p. 5).

The historical question as to what incident is referred to leads on to a study of the composition and style of the Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa and secondly to wider issues of contemporary historical records.

Regarding composition and style of the Purāṇa literature, authorities agree that « they are no guides in a historical point of view » to quote K. M. Banerjea, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Calcutta, 1851, or as it is said in *L'Inde Classique*, 1947, I, p. 416: « Aucun de nos Purana n'est absolument authentique ». More specifically W. Kirfel states in *Das Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa*, Bonn, 1927, « dass unsere Purāṇas nur Rezensionen von älteren Werker derselben Gattung sind ».

The time for the composition of the Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa in its final shape is to be considered as late in view of references to historical events of 17th and 18th centuries. Fixing the date in regard to part III as late as the 18th or even 19th century does not, however, solve the question of historicity of the passage in question, but it can be a very late tradition in view of the availability of Bible translations being a comparatively late phenomenon, but contact with Semitic languages may indicate a much earlier date. A sample of such contact may be the transcription of « Henoch » in Genesis 5, 21, by « Hanuka », for which see Hohenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 12. The writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and his followers would support early Semitic, Biblical and Christian presence in the Indian borderlands such as the Afghans being of Hebrew origin.

A support to the existence of Christianity as such could be had through an interpretation of *mlecchāpūjakam*, « Barbarian-worshipping » or « Religion for the Barbarians », which the king established « in the rough Barbarian country ».

A passage a few lines further on introducing *mahāmada* may again raise the question of what actually took place. No more than Jesus or Muhammad be considered for an actual appearance in person in the borderland of India, but the incident could reasonably be located in time before the Islamic conquest of India. The attribute *paśācakṛtita-parah*, « Foremost in devil's work », could hardly be applied to him at the time of the Moghul empire.

One more point for consideration is the use of *masihā* for the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in the 1890th. If this is behind the use of the word in our passage it could, perhaps, explain the accusation of « literary fake » made by Theodor Aufrecht. See Hohenberger, *op. cit.*, p. VI. This is considered superficial judgement and is refuted by other scholars. In order to complete the picture, however, the note made by Mohd. Yasin in his « Mysteries of Kashmir » may be taken notice of: « Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa, firstly printed in 1910 under orders of Maharaj of Kashmir ».

The final question is if the incident related in the passage can be located in other annals. The grandson of Vikramāditya could be Skanda Gupta whose reign ended about 467. Facts concerning the king Śāli-vāhana seem to dissolve according to the statement made in Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta « An Advanced History of India », p. 115: « This legendary hero seems to have appropriated to himself the glorious

deeds of several distinguished members of a long line of emperors of Deccan ».

The mentioning of the Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa in the Āpastambīya Dharmasūtra from the 4th century B.C. supports the fact that Purāṇas as a literary branch have an old tradition in spite of the, in many cases, very late composition of the existing texts. It might be possible to connect with the events of our passage facts about the Nestorian mission which in the 5th and following centuries extended into the Far East. The Hūṇas are particularly mentioned as one people where the mission and church was established (G. Rosencrantz in RGG, IV, 1405). Five hundred years of Śālivāhana rule could cover the time from Jesus to Muhammed, who appears a few lines further down in the text, but it is a long time for only ten kings and seems not to be corroborated in other sources of history.

There is no question here of evaluating historical data except to the extent that contact may have taken place with Christian concepts leaving a trace in our passage. The time for it to be integrated into our text may, however, be very late or be intermingled with component parts of an earlier date leaving no room for the doubtful conclusions caused by the remark in « Mysteries of Kashmir » by Dr. Mohd. Yasin, already referred to: « Bhaviṣya Purāṇa, firstly printed in 1910 under orders of Maharaj of Kashmir ». It leaves an open question for historical research and may fit in with these notes which are presented just as questions and not as final conclusions but meant to deserve to be considered as relevant questions.