

## HISTORIC TRADITIONS OF INDIA

### 2.1 INDIAN ERAS

The traditional Indian calendar is based on the following divisions of time :

Six Prana periods	=	One Vighatika
Six Vighatikas	=	One Ghatika
Six Ghatikas	=	One day (human)
Thirty days	=	One month
Twelve months	=	One year

All months were not of the same length and all years did not have twelve months. Corrections were applied in the form of Kshyaya, Adhika Mas etc. to account for the solar year and the sidereal year. One human year was one day of the Devas, the Uttarayan being the day time and Dakshinayan being the night time. Long time periods were based on the following units:

30 human years	=	One Deva month
360 human years	=	One Deva year
4800 Deva years	=	Krita Yuga (1,728,000 human years)
3600 Deva years	=	Treta Yuga(1,296,000 human years)
2400 Deva years	=	Dwapara Yuga (864,000 human years)
1200 Deva years	=	Kali Yuga (432,000 human years)
4 Yugas (Krita to Kali)	=	One Mahayuga (1200 Deva years or 4,320,000 human years)
1000 Mahayugas	=	One Kalpa of Bramha
2 Kalpas of Bramha	=	One Maha Kalpa
30 Maha Kalpas	=	One Brahma month
12 Brahma months	=	One Brahma year
100 Brahma years	=	One Brahma mana

Many Brahma manas have elapsed since the creation. In the present Brahma mana (i.e. 100 years of Brahma), the 51st Brahma year is running.

In the present Kalpa, i.e. the first day of the 51st years of the present Brahma mana the following number of human years have elapsed till the year 2000 A.D.

1. since the beginning of the Kalpa 1,955,885,102 years
2. since the beginning of Vaivaswata Manwantara, i.e. in the period of the Seventh Manu 120,533,102 years
3. since the beginning of the 28<sup>th</sup> Mahayuga 3,893,102 years

These time periods are beyond the comprehension of the modern historians. However, it is interesting to note that even the longest time period given above, i.e. about 1.96 billion years, is still too small compared to the ages of the earth (about 4 billion years) and universe (about 9 billion years) estimated by the modern scientists.

The Indian eras given in the scriptures for the events of the historic period, i.e. Kali Yuga began around the Kurukshetra battle of Mahabharata or later. Some of the important ones of these eras are as follows:

<u>Name of the era</u>	<u>Beginning in Christian era</u>
1. Yudhisthira Saka, commemorating the Coronation of Emperor Yudhisthira after his victory in the Kurukshetra battle	3138 B.C.
2. Kali Yuga, commencing on the demise of Lord Krishna after 36 years of the battle	3102 B.C.
3. Jayabhyudaya Yudhisthira Saka of Kali 1st year	3101 B.C.
4. Laukikabda or Saptarshi era, commemorating the death of King Yudhisthira as well as the entry of the Great Bear from Magha to Aslesha constellation	3076 B.C.
5. Malava Gana Saka, commemorating the independence of Malwa under the leadership of a descendant of Dhunji	725 B.C.
6. Shakanrupa kala, same as the Cyrus era of Persia. However, Cyrus never ruled over India. This era was introduced during the time of Darius; just as the Christian era commencing with Emperor Augustus was introduced in India during the British rule	550 B.C.
7. Shri Harsha Saka, from the time of Sri Harsha Vikram of Ujjain. Sri Harsha was the son of Sheelavati and brother of Bharti-Hari. Later he became the disciple of Govindapadacharya	457 B.C.
8. Gupta Saka, commemorating the coronation of Chandragupta Vijayaditya at Pataliputra	327 B.C.
9. Vikram Sambat	57 B.C.
10. Shalibahana Shakabda	78 A.D.

The last two eras are still widely used in India. Shalibahana Shakabda was officially adopted, only for name sake, by the Government of independent India. Thus, the historic period and the historic tradition prevalent till today may be deemed to have started around the time of the battle of Kurukshetra.

## 2.2 BATTLE OF KURUKSHETRA

The narrations of Mahabharata are based mainly on the dispute between the Kouravas and Pandavas, the sons of Dhritarastra and Pandu respectively. By the time of Dhritarastra and Pandu the suzerainty of the family of Kuru was well established over all parts of India including the neighboring areas of present day Iran, Afghanistan, Tibet and Burma. As the dispute developed between the Kouravas and Pandavas all the rulers of India took one of the two sides. The dispute ultimately culminated in the battle of Kurukshetra in the year 3138 B.C. Some of the scholars claiming to apply intricate corrections on the basis of the astronomical data and secular changes in the movements of the sun and the stars say that the battle took place towards the close of the year 3140 B.C. A few others, on the basis of planetarium software have dated it to be around 3067 BC.

These discrepancies can be attributed to the corrections of the calendars (Panchanga) which have been done from time to time after the battle of Kurukshetra.

The battle continued for eighteen days, i.e. 18 days of actual fighting and the days of rest and regrouping. For the first ten days Bheesma was the Commander-in-Chief of the Kourava armies. When he became mortally wounded - he actually died 76 days after the battle - Drona became the Commander-in-Chief. During the next eight days not only Drona, but also Karna and Salya died in succession having taken up the command of the Kourava armies. On the eighteenth day, by the time Duryodhana was killed by Bheema only Kripa, Aswatthama and Kritavarma were the important Kourava warriors alive. They attacked and destroyed the whole of the remaining Pandava army. The five Pandava brothers were among the few survivors from this attack.

The battle was one of the most disastrous battles of human history. Though it lasted for only eighteen days, the preparations for it had taken more than thirteen years.

The military mights of almost all the states of India and the neighboring areas were completely destroyed in the battle. However, the war heralded a long period of peace, unbroken for more than a thousand years during which the upper Indus valley civilization prospered.

### 2.3 **KIND YUDHISTHIRA**

After the battle of Kurukshetra Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandava brothers, became the emperor with his capital at Hastinapur. He performed the Rajasuya Yajna to establish his suzerainty over the whole of India and the neighboring areas.

He ruled for a period of thirty-six years and has been hailed as a pious and just ruler. The historical tradition which remained effective during the Kali Yuga started at the time of King Yudhisthira. By that time astronomy (and astrology) had already reached the zenith of development. Mahabharata mentions Bheesma as the master astrologer and sage Parashara as the most important star gazer (Nakshatradrasta).

The movements of the stars which have been forecast by them before 3100 years B.C. are found to be correct even today and the modern astronomers believe that these will be true for ever.

Emperor Yudhisthira appointed new kings for the states, the rulers of which had died in the battle of Kurukshetra. King Brihadbala of Ikshwaku dynasty was killed in the battle by prince Abhimanyu, the son of Arjun. In his place his son Brihadreshana was crowned as the king. Later Lord Buddha was born in his dynasty.

Jarasandha, the king of Magadha and the father-in-law of Kansa was a sworn enemy of Lord Krishna. He was killed by Bheema, with the help of Lord Krishna. His son Sahadeba became the king. Sahadeba took part and was killed in the battle of Kurukshetra. Emperor Yudhisthira crowned Marjari, the son of Sahadeba as the king of Magadha.

Jitedasti, the Kirata king of Nepal was killed in the battle of Kurukshetra and so his son Gali was crowned as the king of Nepal.

During the reign of king Yudhisthira Krishna Dwaipayana, the son of sage Parashara, was appointed as the head of a school of sages given the task of compiling and editing all the scriptures, including the Vedas. Hence Krishna Dwaipayana became known as Veda Vyasa or simply Vyasa deva. He also wrote the first version of the Mahabharata known as Jaya.

Lord Krishna, a close friend of Arjuna, the third Pandava, was the guide and most important political adviser of Yudhisthira. Lord Krishna was the king of Dwaraka. After 36 years of the battle of Kurukshetra Lord Krishna died by mistakenly being shot by a hunter. On hearing about his death King Yudhisthira abdicated the throne in favor of prince Parikshita, the grandson of Arjuna and along with his four brothers set out to go round the earth and climb the Himalayas.

After his abdication King Yudhishthira lived for 26 years more. His death took place around the time when the seven stars of the Great Bear entered the constellation of Aslesha from the constellation of Magha.

#### 2.4 **KING PARIKSHIT**

Parikshit was the son of Abhimanyu who was killed in the battle of Kurukshetra. He was born in the same year. At the age of 36 years he was crowned the emperor by Yudhishthira, who abdicated the throne. The year of coronation of King Parikshita is taken as the first year of Kali Yuga.

King Parikshita continued the consolidation of the empire started by King Yudhishthira. During his reign the work of compilation and edition of scriptures by the school of sages of Vedavyasa continued. Sage Shuka, the son of Vedavyas narrated Bhagavata Purana incorporating the details of the life of Lord Krishna.

In the 19th year of his reign King Parikshit killed Gonanda II of Kashmir in a battle and included Kashmir in his empire. He crowned his second son Harnadeva as the king of Kashmir at the time of his death. Thus Pandava dynasty was established in Kashmir in the year 3041 B.C.

King Parikshit ruled for nearly sixty-one years, and died of snake bite.

#### 2.5 **KING JANMEJAYA**

After the death of King Parikshit, his son Janmejaya became the emperor. Because his father had died of snake bite, he performed the Sarpa Yajna to destroy as many snakes as he could.

King Janmejaya had made two gift deeds for the worship of Lord Rama and Seeta, and God Kedarnath. The temple of Rama and Seeta was on the bank of river Tungabhadra. The temple of Kedarnath was in north Himalayas. These gift deeds were made in the 29th year of his reign, i.e. Kali 89th year or 3012 B.C. These deeds inscribed on copper plates are the oldest inscriptions known to have used Jayabhyudaya Yudhishthira Saka.

During the reign of King Janmejaya sage Vaishampayana, belonging to the school of Vedavyas, had narrated the Mahabharata. This was the second narration made under the name Bharata and included the events upto the time of King Janmejaya.

## 2.6 KING SHATANIKA

After King Janmejaya his son Shatanika became the emperor. By the time of his rule there was spreading among the population a tendency to accept the materialistic Charbak Philosophy of Brihaspati. This spread of materialism and disregard for the Vedic culture was caused by the disgust of the common man for the large scale fratricide of Mahabharata war committed in the name of Dharma Yuddha.

During the three generations after the war the people were also disgusted towards the practice of animal sacrifices on religious occasions.

To stop this spread of materialism, King Shatanika convened a conference of all the prominent sages in the forest known as Naimisharanya. Sage Shaunaka presided over it. This Naimisharanya conference of sages also concluded the work of the edition of the scriptures started by Vedavyasa. All the Puranas were retold at this conference by a narrator known as Suta. The Mahabharata was then narrated for the third time and this narration has remained till today.

The Naimisharanya conference of sages also laid down the tradition of the future narration of history in the form of conversations between the sages and Suta.

The history was to be recorded in future tense. Here it is important to note that the deification of Lord Krishna was completed at this conference. It was declared that narration, hearing and discussions of the glory of Lord Krishna were virtuous.

## 2.7 PURANIC ASTRONOMY

The astronomical tradition of Indian is attributed to the seven sages who crowned Vaivaswata Manu. Thereafter corrections are made from time to time and six major corrections are mentioned in the scriptures. It is the custom to cast the horoscope of every one and refer to it for occasions like marriage, construction of a new house, long voyage etc. to determine auspicious days and moments. The horoscopes of the important persons like Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Lord Buddha, Shankaracharya etc. have been recorded. These are foolproof guides to verify the dates of birth of such important persons.

An important data associated with the horoscope is the Ayanansa, i.e. the distance of the position of the Vernal equinox from the first point of Aries. Since the rate of the precession of equinoxes is known, from Aynansa the approximate time of an event can be determined. The positions of the vernal equinox at the time of certain events are given below as illustration:

<u>Name of the event</u>	<u>Constellation position of Vernal equinox</u>
1. Battle of Kurukshetra	Rohini fourth pada
2. Birth of Lord Buddha	Krittika second pada
3. Rise of Mahapadmanand	Krittika first pada
4. Rise of the Andhras	Bharani second pada
5. Birth of Adi Shankaracharya	Asvini fourth pada
6. Rise of Gupta Dynasty	Asvini third pada
7. Invasion of Md.Ghori	Revati first pada
8. Position in 1980 A.D.	Uttara Bhadrpada

Another important information, though not associated with the horoscope, has been given for certain memorable events. It is the position of the two pointer stars of Great Bear (Saptarshi). The Great Bear resides (i.e. by the position of the pointers) for 100 years in each of the 27 constellations. Thus, the position is repeated after every 2700 years. The positions of the Great Bear during the first 2700 years after the battle of Kurukshetra are as follows:

<u>Name of the constellation</u>	<u>Initial year of century</u>
01. Megha	3177 B.C.
02. Aslesa	3077 B.C.
03. Pushyami	2977 B.C.
04. Punarvasu	2877 B.C.
05. Ardra	2777 B.C.
06. Mrigasira	2677 B.C.
07. Rohini	2577 B.C.
08. Krittika	2477 B.C.
09. Bharani	2377 B.C.
10. Aswini	2277 B.C.
11. Revati	2177 B.C.
12. Uttara Bhadrpada	2077 B.C.
13. Purba Bhadrpada	1977 B.C.
14. Satabhisha	1877 B.C.
15. Dhanistha	1777 B.C.
16. Shravana	1677 B.C.
17. Uttara Asadha	1577 B.C.
18. Purva Asadha	1477 B.C.
19. Mula	1377 B.C.
20. Jyestha	1277 B.C.
21. Anuradha	1177 B.C.
22. Visakha	1077 B.C.
23. Swati	977 B.C.
24. Chitra	877 B.C.
25. Hasta	777 B.C.
26. Uttara Phalguni	677 B.C.
27. Purva Phalguni	577 B.C.

The positions of the Great Bear at the time of certain important events are given below:

<u>Name of the event</u>	<u>Position of Great Bear</u>
01. Battle of Kurukshetra	Magha
02. Death of Yudhisthira	Magha-Aslesa transition
03. Rise of Mahapadmananda	Shrabana
04. Rise of the Andhra dynasty	Chitra
05. End of the Andhra dynasty	Aslesa
06. Decline of the Guptas	Punarvasu
07. End of the Guptas and rise of the Pala kings	Purva Bhadrapada
08. Position in 1980 A.D.	Hasta

The nomenclature given above is according to Vriddha Garga. According to Varahamihira the cycle starts from Krittika, i.e. Magha of Vriddha Garga is Krittika of Varahamihira.

The tradition of referring to the positions of the stars and planets was fortified during the period of Mahabharata by Bheesma and Parashara. Though the predictive value of the astronomical charts for determination of auspicious moments can be disputed, the charts provide useful tools for the purpose of chronology.

## 2.8 SPREAD OF AGRICULTURE

Cultivation based mostly on snatch crop pattern and slash and burn technique was known for a few millennia earlier. By the time of the battle of Kurukshetra systematic agriculture was well spread but the population was dependent to a large extent on the forest products and domesticated animals. Mahabharata states livestock as an important wealth. Upanishads mention King Janaka giving large number of heads of cattle as gifts. Bhagavata mentions King Nanda of Gopa as a wealthy king because of his cattle population. When King Jarasandha of Maghadha attacked Yadavas of Mathura, the cattle population was an important booty he wanted. The fight between King Virata and the Kouravas ensued because of the latter's attempt to take away the cattle of the kingdom of Virata.

Around the time of the battle of Kurukshetra, agriculture was still spreading fast, because of the migration of population and deliberate efforts to popularize agriculture. Lord Balaram. The elder brother of Lord Krishna is credited with the spread of agriculture in far off lands carrying the plough as his weapon. By the time of the great battle, the Yadavas, the descendants of Yadu, the son of Yayati, were living at Mathura. Lord Krishna was born among them. Because of the death of King Kansa in the hands of Lord Krishna, King Jarasandha of Magadha who was the father-in-law of Kansa attacked and plundered Mathura. The Yadavas fled and settled in Dwarka where they became dependant on agriculture and trade.