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WHERE WAS ŚĀKADVĪPA IN THE MYTHICAL WORLD-VIEW OF INDIA?

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AN ARTICLE of rare interest on the above question, from the pen of Professor W. E. Clark of Chicago University, is presented in the October, 1919, issue of this JOURNAL. In it is given the result to date of long and wide researches. It must be confessed that the result is far from satisfying. In a single sentence we are given the largely conflicting conclusions of nine prominent Orientalists, and then the names of fourteen other scholars who, despairing of success in locating 'the illusive isle', simply assign it to 'the realm of fancy.'

The present writer cannot claim linguistic qualification to take a part in this high debate, but he has in mind a few questions, which very possibly may aid the better qualified in discovering one reason for the many failures of the past.

1. What kind of a region is this which we wish to locate?

Obviously it is a 'dvīpa', whatever that may mean, and it must be a place fitted to serve as the abode of certain finite intelligences.

2. Is it one of the notable 'seven' dvīpas which are represented as severally surrounded by one of the seven concentric seas?

Probably, for it is often so listed.

3. Which is the first, and which the last, of the seven as listed in the Purāṇas?

The first is Jambudvīpa, the last Pushkaradvīpa.

4. Where does the Viṣṇu Purāṇa locate the seven?

After naming them it says, 'Jambudvīpa is *the centre* of all these, and the centre of Jambudvīpa is the golden mountain Meru.'

5. And what is Jambudvīpa, according to the same Purāṇa? Our Earth, 'a sphere', the abode of living men.

6. Where does the Sūrya Siddhānta locate Mount Meru? At the north pole of the Earth sphere.

7. What extra-terrestrial bodies, according to Plato and the astronomers of his time, center in our Earth and revolve about it?

Seven homocentric globes, each solid, yet so transpicuous that though we dwell inside them all, we may gaze right through the whirling seven every cloudless night and behold the vastly more distant stars unchangeably 'fixed' in or on the outermost of all the celestial spheres, the eighth. Reread the memorable cosmographical passage in Plato's Republic.

8. How were these seven invisible globes supposed to be related to the planets that we see?

The moon we see was represented as in some way made fast to the 'first' or innermost of the seven, and the movement of the visible Luna enables us to infer that one month is the time required by the invisible 'Lunar Sphere' in the making of one revolution. Of course, as every schoolboy should know, the Lunar Sphere incloses the whole Earth, shutting it in on every side. The second of the seven, far out beyond the lunar on every side, was supposed to be the Sphere of Helios, the Solar Sphere. Then at ever increasing distances revolved the concentric spheres of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. In each case the luminary we study with the telescope is as distinct from the sphere to which it is attached as a locomotive's headlight is from the engine which bears it. Indeed, Milton calls the visible planet the 'officious lamp' of its invisible sphere. The 'Music of the Spheres', as so often explained, was supposed to result from their diverse rates of motion in revolution, and from their harmonic adjustment as to distance from each other.

9. If now in Hindu thought the seven concentric dvīpas are (or originally were) simply the concentric invisible spheres of the ancient Babylonian and Greek astronomers, and the seven concentric seas that separate them simply the intervening concentric spaces, oceanic in magnitude, what passages in the Kūrma Purāṇa are at once seen to need no further harmonizing?

The passages cited by Professor Clark in last line of note on page 218 and line following. The two 'surroundings' by one and the same sea are no more difficult of conception than is a surrounding of the spheres of Jupiter and Mars by the sphere of Saturn. So also it is now plain how Śākadvīpa can be 'north' of Meru and at the same time 'east' of it. It is both.

10. Has this view of the dvīpas and of the seven concentric seas ever been proposed?

Certainly, more than thirty years ago. See page 459 of *Paradise Found*, by W. F. Warren, Boston, 1885. Also his *Earliest Cosmologies*, New York 1909, page 91, n. *et passim*.

11. What does Professor Clark say of the distance of Śākadvīpa from the abodes of men?

'The distance was never traversed by human feet, it was travelled through the air.' Note eight, page 210.

12. When Nārada starts for Śākadvīpa, what direction does he take?

Not a northward, not an eastward, not a southward or westward; simply *upward*. He 'soars into the sky.' Page 231.

13. If he keeps on in his upward flight until he reaches the last heaven this side of Pushkaradvīpa what kind of tenants will he there find?

Beings 'white' and 'sinless.' See the description in article of Professor Clark, pages 234ff. One statement reads: 'The effulgence which is emitted by each of them resembles the splendor which the sun assumes when the time comes for the dissolution of the universe.' Unearthly to say the least.

14. What is the weight of the garments of one of these beings according to the Buddhist scriptures?

Divide one ounce into one hundred and twenty-eight parts and one of these parts will balance the garments in weight. In the ascending order of the heavens it is the last in which clothing of any kind is *en règle*.

15. Name of this heaven, next below Pushkara, in what seems to have been the orthodox Purāṇic list?

ŚĀKADVĪPA.

Small wonder that our results are unsatisfactory so long as we place polar Meru somewhere among the Himalayan ranges, and unremittingly scan all procurable maps of Asia for a region which is measureless miles above our heads.