



The Great Epic of India, Its Character and Origin (Classic Reprint)

E. Washburn Hopkins

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Excerpt from The Great Epic of India, Its Character and Origin

The sub-title of this book places analysis before speculation. In recent studies of the great epic this order has been reversed, for a method calling itself synthesis has devoted itself chiefly to dwelling on epic uniformity, and has either discarded analysis altogether or made it subject to the results of "synthetic" speculation.

The best way, of course, to take up the historical investigation of a literary product the origin of which is well known is to begin with the source and afterwards to study the character of the completed whole. But if the origin be unknown, and we wish to discover it, we must invert the process, and begin our study with an examination of the character of the work. When the results of our analysis become plain, we may group together those elements which appear to have existed from the first, and thus, on the basis of analysis, reconstruct the past. To begin with a synthesis (so called) of whatever is preserved in the product, and so to postulate for the beginning exactly what we find to be the completed whole, is a process that leads us only to the point from which we started. As vaguely incorrect as is the designation synthesis for the method so called is the method itself, which thus does away with all analysis. Analysis is an examination of constituents. As a method it is, like an other, obnoxious to error, but it is not on that account an erroneous method. It is in fact, as turned upon history, nothing but inevitable critique; and synthesis without such critique becomes merely the exploitation of individual opinion, which selects what pleases it and rejects, without visible cause, what is incompatible with the synthetic scheme.

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