

## 6. PROF. KIELHORN ON THE VIKRAMA ERA.

Edinburgh,

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SIR,—In the *Nachrichten* of the Göttingen University for June, Prof. F. Kielhorn, C.I.E., has published a very ingenious theory of the origin of the designation of the Vikrama era, which ought to attract attention.

When the late James Fergusson broached his hypothesis that it might have derived its name from Vikramāditya of Malwa, about A.D. 543, no earlier dates in this era were known than the tenth century. Since then the Dholpur inscription has been found, dated in the 898th year elapsed *kālasya-vikramākhyasya*, and at least two earlier dates in “the era of the Mālava kings,” which must belong to the same era. It hence appears that between the sixth and ninth centuries the designation had been changed, though even in the ninth century it was only the “*vikrama* time.” No allusion is necessarily made to a king Vikrama. But the years of this era then always dated from the month Kārttika (October-November). Now this was the time when kings went out to war; autumn was thus specially the *vikrama-kāla*. This the poets, as Prof. Kielhorn remarks, know as well as the writers of the *Niti-* and *Dharma-Sāstras*. Raghu undertakes his *digvijaya* in autumn. Autumn (*sarad*), decorated with lotus flowers, approaches him as a second Rājālakshmi, inviting him to set out even before Raghu himself had taken the resolution. In autumn also the bulls seek to equal him in *vikrama*; and as Kalidāsa, so Bhāravi speaks of autumn at the marching out of Arjuna. In autumn Rāmā sets out to slay Rāvāna and regain Sītā. In the *Gāūdavaho*, Yasovarman goes out at the end of the rainy season, in autumn, to subject the world to his sway. In the *Harshacharita*, Bāna compares the beginning of autumn (*saradārambha*), white with flowering grasses, to a cup drunk at war-time (*vikrama-kāle*).

From autumn (*sarad*), as the true *vikrama-kāla*, it is but a short step to the year (*sarad*), according to the *vikrama-*

*kāla*; and Prof. Kielhorn believes that the Hindus had taken this step, and that the later reckoning of the Mālava era, as that of a king Vikrama, owes its origin to a misunderstanding. If they were accustomed to speak of autumn as *vikrama-kāla*, the connection of *vikrama-kāla* with the notion of "year" followed; and the practice of denoting the year as *vikrama-kāla* was the more natural as it expressed the distinction between the Mālava and the Saka year—namely, the fact that the Mālava year begins in autumn. When they had been accustomed to speak of years as *vikrama-kāla* or *vikrama* years, nothing was more natural than that later ages should seek to interpret this in the manner of their time, and so ascribed the establishment of the era to a king Vikrama, who, like their own kings, had counted the years from his accession.

Such is Prof. Kielhorn's argument, and its naturalness and probability will commend it as an ingenious and most plausible explanation of the designation. How the Mālava era itself originated is, of course, a different matter.

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