Research article

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Daśaratha's Horse Sacrifice in the Rāmāyaṇa

Abstract: This article discusses Daśaratha's horse sacrifice at 1.8–16 in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Daśaratha's rite seems to be a horse sacrifice, then a son-producing rite, then a porridge-eating rite. The text has been seen as composite, but it works as a unit, using poetic registers and narrative symbols alive in the textual world of its historical location – that is, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* alongside the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, and earlier texts such as the Upaniṣads. The brahmin Ṛśyaśṛṅga, key officiant at Daśaratha's rite, is predisposed, by the narration, to inseminate Daśaratha's wives. This article discusses Daśaratha's rite gradually, with digressions and examples. Topics include Draupadī's conception, the *putrikā* or 'appointed daughter', the horse sacrifice and the human sacrifice, the *niyoga* or 'appointment' (of a man to inseminate a woman), the ways in which the texts present sex, semen, and the masculinity of the inseminator, and the ways in which they present gods taking human form.

Keywords: *Harivaṃśa*, horse sacrifice, human sacrifice, insemination, *Mahābhārata*, masculinity, *Rāmāyaṇa*, semen

Introduction: Drupada's Rite

This article is not about Drupada or his offspring, but it is about the getting of special offspring. The way Drupada gets his special offspring is interesting and entertaining, and serves as an entry and reference point for what follows.

King Drupada has fallen out with and been humiliated by his old friend, the brahmin Droṇa. I skip the details and cut to the chase (for the full story, see Brodbeck 2006; Brodbeck 2009).

Drupada desperately wants to get back at Droṇa, but he does not have the power. As he sees it, Droṇa, as a brahmin, has a natural advantage.

> *droṇena vairaṃ drupadaḥ saṃsmaran na śaśāma ha* |
> *kṣātreṇa ca balenāsya nāpaśyat sa parājayam* ‖
> *hīnaṃ viditvā cātmānaṃ brāhmaṇena balena ca* |
> *putrajanma parīpsan vai sa rājā tad adhārayat* |

> Drupada, brooding on his feud with Droṇa, did not find peace; nor did he see how to vanquish him with royal power, knowing it and himself to fall short of brahmin power. Waiting for the birth of a son, the king bore his grudge …

> (*Mahābhārata* 1.128.16–17d, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 283)[1]

1　In this article I quote repeatedly from translations of the *Mahābhārata* [Mbh] and the *Rāmāyaṇa* [Rām], and to avoid repetition I sometimes do not mention whose translation I am quoting. Unless otherwise stated, if it is a passage from the *Mahābhārata*, the translation is from the University of Chicago Press translation (van Buitenen 1973 or 1975); and if it is a passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the translation is from Goldman 2005 – the Clay Sanskrit Library reprint, with re-paragraphed English and added Sanskrit, of the *Bālakāṇḍa* translation earlier published by Princeton University Press (Goldman 1984). When quoting Goldman and van Buitenen's translations I have made some silent cosmetic adjustments; for example, I have adjusted the presentation of Sanskrit names in the Clay Sanskrit Library volume. *Harivaṃśa* [Hv] translations are my own, after Brodbeck 2019.

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putrajanma parīpsan vai śokopahatacetanaḥ |
nāsti śreṣṭhaṃ mamāpatyam iti nityam acintayat ‖
jātān putrān sa nirvedād dhig bandhūn iti cābravīt |

He was seeking to obtain the birth of a son, for, his mind being obsessed with his hurt, he was always thinking, "I have no outstanding children." Of his own sons when they were born he said in despair, "Accursed brood!"

(*Mahābhārata* 1.155.2–3b, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 316)

So Drupada starts looking for a brahmin to administer a ritual solution to his problem. One brahmin is himself unwilling, but says his brother Yāja might do it. Drupada says to Yāja:

droṇāntakam ahaṃ putraṃ labheyaṃ yudhi durjayam |
tat karma kuru me yāja nirvapāmy arbudaṃ gavām ‖

I want to obtain a son, unvanquishable in battle, who shall be the death of Droṇa. Perform the rite for me, Yāja, and I shall give you a myriad cows!

(*Mahābhārata* 1.155.29, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 317)

Yāja agrees, makes preparations, and the rite takes place.

yājas tu havanasyānte devīm āhvāpayat tadā |
praihi māṃ rājñi pṛṣati mithunaṃ tvām upasthitam ‖
devy uvāca |
avaliptaṃ me mukhaṃ brahman puṇyān gandhān bibharmi ca |
sutārthenoparuddhāsmi tiṣṭha yāja mama priye ‖

At the end of the offering, Yāja summoned the queen: "Stride forward to me, Queen Pṛṣatī! The time for cohabitation has come!"
 The queen said: "My face is anointed, brahmin, I wear the holy scents. For the sake of a son I am im‐portuned – stay, brahmin, favorable to me."

(*Mahābhārata* 1.155.34–35, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 318)

It is to be a sex rite, and this is made explicit by the use of the word *mithuna*. The oblation that Yāja has prepared is made, and the results are Dhṛṣṭadyumna, who does indeed go on to kill Droṇa, and Draupadī. Draupadī might seem to have been somewhat incidental, since Drupada did not request any daughters; but she marries the Pāṇḍava brothers and plays a lead role in driving events towards the Kurukṣetra war in which her brother kills Droṇa. As the narration has it, Dhṛṣṭadyumna was born from the ritual fire (1.155.37), and Draupadī was born from the middle of the ritual ground (*ved-imadhyāt*, 1.155.41; on the *vedi*, see Thite 1975: 110–12).

 Who is the *devī* or *rājñī* – the 'queen' or 'goddess'? Her name, Pṛṣatī, is a patronymic from the name of Drupada's father Pṛṣata. Drupada is also called Pārṣata, 'son of Pṛṣata' (e.g., at 1.188.4b), and Monier-Williams says that Pṛṣatī is equivalent to Pārṣatī, 'the daughter of Prishata' (Monier-Williams 1899: 647 col.2). Thus Pṛṣatī would not be Drupada's wife, but his sister, daughter, or niece. Her ap‐pointment to her role is not narrated as Yāja's is to his. In any case, the son is for Drupada.

Main Theme: Daśaratha's Rite

King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā's rite, like Drupada's, is in order to get male progeny.

> *tasya tv evaṃ prabhāvasya dharmajñasya mahātmanaḥ |*
> *sutārthaṃ tapyamānasya nāsīd vaṃśakaraḥ sutaḥ ‖*
> *cintayānasya tasyaivaṃ buddhir āsīn mahātmanaḥ |*
> *sutārthaṃ vājimedhena kimarthaṃ na yajāmy aham ‖*

> Even though the great man [Daśaratha] knew all the ways of righteousness and reigned in such magnificence, he suffered for the lack of a son, for he had no son to carry on his dynasty. And as the great man brooded over this, a thought occurred to him. "Why do I not perform the Horse Sacrifice to get a son?"

> (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.8.1–2, trans. Goldman 2005: 81, adjusted)[2]

The *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) is not usually a son-getting rite, hence Goldman and Sutherland note that "Daśaratha's choice of this particular rite is peculiar" (Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 292).[3] The *aśvamedha* is "normally employed in the epics to sanctify a king's acquisition of sovereignty over his neighbors' territories" (Goldman 1984: 74; see also Sutherland Goldman 2004: 58). In the *aśvamedha*, which will be described further below, the king's horse must roam celibate for a year, then be suffocated and seemingly copulate in death with the chief queen. Bhattacharyya says of the horse sacrifice that "its central ritual was the *union* of the queen with the horse" (Bhattacharyya 1975: 3; on this central ritual see Jamison 1996: 65–88, 99–110).

As soon as Daśaratha voices his plan for a "Horse Sacrifice to get a son", his minister Sumantra tells him the story of the brahmin Ṛśyaśṛṅga.

The immediate switch to the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga is striking, and in this connection comments have been made concerning the editorial prehistory of the text. In their notes to the Princeton translation, Goldman and Sutherland speak of "an awkward gap in the narrative" here, and of "the relatively late and rather imperfect interpolation of [the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga] into the Rāma story" (Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 292).

When they say "relatively late", Goldman and Sutherland are speaking of relative chronology between parts of the critically reconstituted text. But are they justified in doing so? The basic method for discriminating relative chronology within the *Rāmāyaṇa* textual tradition is the comparative method that was already applied, more or less, by the critical editors in Baroda (on this method see generally Katre 1941; cf. Sukthankar 1933). The Baroda editors surveyed the extant manuscripts and discriminated the reconstituted text (the latest common ancestor of all known manuscript versions) from the apparatus passages and variants (the later additions or changes found only in some manuscript versions). But that method cannot comment on what may or may not have happened prior to the latest common ancestor. Speculations about the relative chronology of different parts of the reconstituted text are more or less educated, and once expressed they may be repeated or even independently made by others on the basis of similar education and assumptions. But no systematic, non-question-begging method seems to justify them, and perhaps it never could.

There is also the question of understanding the reconstituted text as a literary object. That is the research agenda to which I seek to make a contribution here. As a matter of methodological principle,

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2   Here Goldman 2005 has "Horse Sacrifices". The Princeton translation (Goldman 1984) has the singular, matching *vājimedhena* in the Sanskrit. The change from the singular in the Princeton translation to the plural in the Clay Sanskrit Library version may not just be a typo, since as discussed below, Daśaratha's sacrifice may seem to be a composite affair.

3   See also Biardeau: "Le sacrifice de cheval que le roi décide de faire pour se procurer un fils est un peu surprenant: ce n'est pas le «fruit» habituel d'un sacrifice de cheval" (Biardeau 1999: 1441).

and for the sake of methodological simplicity, I assume that this literary question is independent of the historical question of how the hypothetical reconstituted text – the archetype of the surviving *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript tradition – was anciently built. I do not assume that either question necessarily has any implications for the other. So as a working assumption I effectively treat all parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (and also all parts of the *Mahābhārata* including the *Harivaṃśa*) as if they are uniformly contemporaneous.[4] I know they will not have been, but for now I make this assumption in order to make space for the literary question. There is time for that question, since the jury is out regarding higher criticism. It might not return, and even if it does it will have been discussing a different question.

Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā

Sumantra allegedly tells Daśaratha the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā exactly as that story was foretold long previously, in the future tense, by the eternal seer Sanatkumāra (Rām 1.8.5–6). I switch it into the past tense, since its predicted events have already come to pass some years before Daśaratha hears it (see also Sutherland Goldman 2004: 56–57).

King Romapāda was king of Aṅga, but there was a drought in his realm. His ministers told him about a chaste seer named Ṛśyaśṛṅga who lived in a remote forest with his father Vibhāṇḍaka. The ministers told Romapāda:

> *vibhāṇḍakasutaṃ rājan sarvopāyair ihānaya* ‖
> *ānāyya ca mahīpāla ṛśyaśṛṅgaṃ susatkṛtam* |
> *prayaccha kanyāṃ śāntāṃ vai vidhinā susamāhitaḥ* ‖

> Your majesty, you must by some means or other bring Vibhāṇḍaka's son here. And, protector of the earth, once you have had Ṛśyaśṛṅga brought with all due honor, you must, with due ceremony and unwavering mind, offer him to your daughter Śāntā.

> (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.8.15c–16, trans. Goldman 2005: 83)

So King Romapāda had Ṛśyaśṛṅga fetched "by means of prostitutes" (*gaṇikābhir*, 8.21b), and the rains came, and he gave him to Śāntā. And that's the story. After hearing it, Daśaratha asks for, and is told, more details of how Ṛśyaśṛṅga was fetched, which I do not repeat here. When Ṛśyaśṛṅga is fetched, the rains arrive as he arrives (8.23–9.32; Feller 2009: 6).

The story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā is also told in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh 3.110–13).[5] There it is said that Ṛśyaśṛṅga performed a "great miracle" (*adbhutaṃ mahat*, 110.4d), and that Śāntā was given to him "in thanks for the return of the crops" (*nivartiteṣu sasyeṣu yasmai śāntāṃ dadau nṛpaḥ* | 110.5ab, trans. Smith 2009: 180). The *Mahābhārata* story is much the same as the *Rāmāyaṇa* one, with the extra detail that Ṛśyaśṛṅga's father is inconvenienced by his son's removal

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4   On the relative dating of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* see, e.g., Jacobi 1960: 54, 64; Goldman 1984: 33–39 (*Rāmāyaṇa* was earlier); Brockington 1998: 473–84 (*Rāmāyaṇa* was mostly earlier); Hiltebeitel 2009 (*Rāmāyaṇa* was later).

5   For Smith's translation of Mbh 3.110–13, see Smith 2009: 180–87. In the reconstituted *Mahābhārata* (and *Harivaṃśa*) the king of Aṅga is called Lomapāda, but in the reconstituted *Rāmāyaṇa* he is Romapāda. Goldman and Sutherland note that manuscripts of both texts may contain either version, depending on their geographical origin. Lomapāda is the northern variant, Romapāda the southern (Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 293). For convenience, I use Romapāda throughout this article, as G. H. Bhatt the editor of the *Bālakāṇḍa* did. In the manuscripts there is also variation between Ṛśyaśṛṅga (northern) and Ṛśyaśṛṅga (southern), where the reconstituted *Mahābhārata* preserved the southern variant – the "correct and original spelling" (Bhatt 1982: 438) – and so there is no discrepancy between the two texts, unless one follows the uncorrected *Rāmāyaṇa* first edition (see Bhatt 1982: vii, 438; Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 292).

and complains to Romapāda, and that as a result, once Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā have had a son, Ṛśyaśṛṅga moves back to live with his father, taking Śāntā with him.[6]

As it narrates the line of the Aṅga kings (descending from Kakṣeyu Paurava), the *Harivaṃśa* presents the lineal arrangement without the story:

> *atha citrarathasyāpi putro daśaratho 'bhavat* |
> *lomapāda iti khyāto yasya śāntā sutābhavat* ‖
> *tasya dāśarathir vīraś caturaṅgo mahāyaśāḥ* |
> *ṛśyaśṛṅgaprabhāvena jajñe kulavivardhanaḥ* ‖
> *caturaṅgasya putras tu pṛthulākṣa iti smṛtaḥ* |
> *pṛthulākṣasuto …*

> Citraratha's son was Daśaratha, who was known as Romapāda. Romapāda's daughter was Śāntā, and his lineage continued through the celebrated hero Caturaṅga Dāśarathi, who was produced with Ṛśyaśṛṅga's assistance. And Caturaṅga's son was known as Pṛthulākṣa, and Pṛthulākṣa's son …

(*Harivaṃśa* 23.36–38c)

We shall return to the appearance of the name Daśaratha in these lines. For now, think about Romapāda, for this is he, in the lineage. Observe that in the *Harivaṃśa*'s lineal terms, Romapāda's problem – elsewhere a drought – was apparently a lineal problem, and what he needed was a son. This suspicion with regard to Romapāda is supported in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* account by the detail that Ṛśyaśṛṅga moved back to the forest with Śāntā only *after* Śāntā had had a son. It is also supported in the *Rāmāyaṇa* account by the ministers' initial suggestion that Romapāda bring the seer *and give him to his daughter Śāntā*, where unless the problem is actually a lineal problem, the connection between the alleged problem (drought) and the solution is obscure. Nonetheless, in the narrated accounts the problem is not presented as a lineal problem, and so it can be solved magically, without so much as a *mantra*, by the seer's mere arrival, and then the king can seem to give him his daughter's hand in marriage as a reward. But if the rains came *before* Ṛśyaśṛṅga was given to Śāntā, then why did Romapāda's ministers have to specify in advance that he must be given to Śāntā (Rām 1.8.16)? Why would *this* have to be the reward, and not just cows?[7]

Thus the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā obliquely portrays the solution of a lineal problem by means of a *putrikā* or 'appointed daughter'. This is a legally sanctioned mechanism whereby a man with no son can appoint his daughter to produce his lineal son for him.[8] The matter is important beyond landholding circles because of the necessity for a son (and his son, and his) to perform the *śrāddha* rites to keep the ancestors of any patriline alive. One difficulty of the *putrikā* mechanism is that it deprives a genital father of a lineal right to his son that he might in other circumstances have had.

The story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā resembles the aforementioned story of Drupada in that the brahmin is brought in to impregnate a woman with a male child. If we suppose that Pṛṣatī was Drupada's daughter, then the male child is produced for its maternal grandfather in both cases. In the

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6   The *Mahābhārata* version also explains Ṛśyaśṛṅga's name, 'Deerhorn'. Ṛśyaśṛṅga's mother was a doe, and he has a single horn on his head. On the history of the story (which also appears in several Purāṇas and in Buddhist literature), see Schlingloff 1973; van Buitenen 1973: 188–93; Nanavati 1982: 34–48; on the unicorn in general, see Wood 2018: 11–48; on the honey trap, cf. the taming of Enkidu (Sandars 1972: 62–69).

7   In the *Āraṇyakaparvan* account, the use of the locative absolute to suggest that the drought was over *before* the couple coupled (*nivartiteṣu sasyeṣu yasmai śāntāṃ dadau nṛpaḥ* | Mbh 3.110.5ab) is similar to the use of the locative absolute at *Harivaṃśa* 10.20 to suggest that the drought in Ayodhyā was over *before* Viśvāmitra installed Triśaṅku as king, when reading between the lines the chronological separation seems artificial – here the problem of "drought" was apparently the lack of a king, which was solved *by* Viśvāmitra installing Triśaṅku (Brodbeck 2018: 270–71).

8   On the *putrikā* principle, see Jolly 1885: 147–50; Kane 1974: 435–36; Sutherland 1990: 84; on Śāntā as a *putrikā*, see Brodbeck 2009b: 82–83; Brodbeck 2012: 147–48.

story of Drupada the need is specifically for a son brahminic enough to kill Droṇa, rather than the more basic royal need for a worthy heir to the kingdom; but still it is the need for a good enough son.

The Ritual Framework

In Drupada's rite the sexual act is presented in conjunction with, and seemingly at the end of, other ritual activity performed by Yāja the priest. The context is a ritual context. The Ṛśyaśṛṅga story also has a ritualised aspect in that Śāntā's father gives her to Ṛśyaśṛṅga "with all the proper ceremony" (*yathāvidhi*, Rām 1.9.31b). This would presumably be the standard ceremony of marriage.

Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā's story involves them being husband and wife long-term, both in the *Mahābhārata* (where they subsequently relocate to the forest) and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (as we shall see below). But Yāja and Pṛṣatī's story is over by the time Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī have appeared, so perhaps theirs was a rather more brief affair, without what we would think of as a marriage ceremony. But there is ritual in both cases, and before continuing to discuss Daśaratha's rite it is worth comparing these sex rites, in symbolic terms, with other descriptions of ancient Indian ritual as we know it from this and other texts. There is sometimes sexual double-entendre as a constitutive conceptual aspect.

The gods and ancestors are pleased when oblations are made for them. In the standard form of animal sacrifice, the oblation would be a part of the animal which the guests themselves might not appreciate eating (e.g., the *vapā* or 'omentum'), and would be made into the fire, for the fire-god Agni to transport to its recipient. The Vedic sacrificial descriptions often speak in terms of oblations of curds or ghee; such descriptions give the impression of vegetarian sacrifice, but they also provide some approximation to semen.[9] In the case of offerings to the ancestors the connection with semen is clearer, because the way one repays one's debt to the ancestors is explicitly by having children (Olivelle 1993: 47–52; Hara 1996: 236–39), and so the ritual act of casting an oblation into a fire is glossed with the physical sex act. A woman is a general analogue of the sacrificial fire. In the *Mahābhārata* the woman is compared with the fire, and in the Upaniṣads she is equated with it:

> *homakāle yathā vahniḥ kālam eva pratīkṣate |*
> *ṛtukāle tathā nārī ṛtum eva pratīkṣate |*

> As the sacred fire waits for libations to be poured upon it when the hour for *Homa* arrives, even so a woman, when her functional period is over, expects an act of congress with her husband.

> (*Mahābhārata* 13.148.15a–d, trans. Ganguli 1970: 383)[10]

> *yoṣā vā agnir gautama | tasyā upastha eva samil lomāni dhūmo yonir arcir yad antaḥ karoti te 'ṅgārā abhinandā visphuliṅgāḥ | tasminn etasminn agnau devā reto juhvati | tasyā āhutyai puruṣaḥ saṃbhavati |*

> A young woman is a fire, Gautama. The loins are her fuel; the body-hairs her smoke; the vagina her flame; what one does inside, her embers; the pleasures her sparks. In that fire the gods offer the seed. From that offering a person arises.

> (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.13, trans. Roebuck 2003: 93)[11]

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9 See *Atharvaveda* 9.4.1–7; Doniger O'Flaherty 1980: 20–26. Doniger notes that "sacrifice into the fire is … often in the Upaniṣads … a metaphor for impregnation", and suggests that "there is a deep, perhaps even subconscious, level on which the rituals are created and accepted because of their resonances with the basic processes of human physiology" (pp. 30, 31).

10 Ganguli may perhaps translate a variant here.

11 Cf. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.8.

tasyā vedir upastho lomāni barhiś carmādhiṣavaṇe samiddho madhyatas tau muṣkau |

> Her loins are the altar; her body-hairs the strewing-grass; her skin the Soma-press; her labia the fire in the middle.

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.4.3, trans. Roebuck 2003: 98)

Though this analogy might be seen as a poetic flight of fancy, it is repeated beyond the context of the five fires doctrine (e.g., at *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 2.13; cf. Thite 1975: 244–54 on the Brāhmaṇas), and I see it as a key to the conceptual operations of some aspects of ancient Indian textual discourse on sex. In such discourse, different registers of narration are superimposed and juxtaposed, and they seem to be mutually interpretive, such that no one register is necessarily the master register. One might perhaps like to think of one register as basic, and of another – or others – as metaphorical or analogical. Thus, for example, Selvanayagam discusses these Upaniṣadic passages in terms of "allegorical interpretation of the ritual sacrifice" (Selvanayagam 1996: 112). But sometimes one might equally think of the apparently basic register as symbolic or euphemistic, and of the apparently metaphorical register/s as explaining the symbolism and the euphemism.

> The machinery of "figures of meaning", taught for centuries as part of the now-lost tradition of rhetoric, is fun to play with, but at bottom it's eyewash. Polysemy, homonymy, homophony, metaphor and metonymy aren't terms that help to understand how words mean, they're just fuzzy ways of holding down the irresistible desire of words to mean something else … [T]he semantics of words is an intellectual mess.

(Bellos 2011: 87)

Words are not the names of things, and hierarchising different registers is artificial. To label one register basic and another metaphorical or euphemistic begs the question of meaning and naturalises a partial interpretation. Doniger says that "Although there are certainly important differences between the semantic levels of metaphorical discourse and ordinary discourse, there must be some continuity between them if language is to express religious ideas at all" (Doniger O'Flaherty 1980: 17). But ordinary discourse is so metaphorical that one wonders how the alleged "important differences" could really be formulated.

Sexual matters are treated euphemistically in many cultural contexts. Perhaps this is partly because they are weird and complicated matters that are difficult to explain to children. Perhaps it is partly because sexual matters, insofar as they occur between one couple, are not necessarily discursive – they are, in a way, private, and so their correlations even with adult public discourse are not straightforward.

Regarding sexual ritual: in the marriage ritual as traditionally known in my culture, the ceremony is followed by a sexual act, supposedly the first time the couple have had sex. This sexual act happens after the larger part of the ceremony (e.g., the giving away, the vows, rings, wreath, cake, speeches, and first dance), and it might appear in some ways to be a different rite, but it is, nonetheless, the governing element of the whole rite, whose purpose is to make a ritual framework for the birth of legitimate children. Even after the marriage register has been signed, non-consummation is a ground for annulment of marriage.[12] Thus the eight forms of marriage, as listed in the *Manusmṛti* (3.20–35) and elsewhere, are the ways in which a man and woman can come productively to mate. Where there is a public aspect celebrating the occasion, this occurs as a preliminary stage. The sexual component, qua sexual, is final and more private, but in some cultures it also has a public correlate when the bloodied sheet is seen.

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12   See https://www.gov.uk/how-to-annul-marriage.

For many of the rituals discussed in this article, the general analogy between the ritual in the text and my traditional marriage does not work, because the first of the aforementioned stereotypical marriage components – the giving away of the bride from her patriline into the groom's patriline – is absent. Such giving away (or taking away) is implied in the standard presentations of the eight forms of marriage. As Jamison says, "in both legal and narrative texts the crucial issue in marriage is the *transfer* of the bride from the paternal to the conjugal domain" (Jamison 1996: 210). But the old Indian texts evoke a range of sexual rituals which differ from that pattern, in that the woman's people retain her and her son. Because of this difference, there is no need for the relationship between the parents to last, and although it might be possible to see the sexual aspect of what is occurring as a marriage, this is not so easy with the social aspect.

Daśaratha's Rite in Prospect

To recap. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the sonless King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā has voiced a plan to "perform the Horse Sacrifice to get a son". His minister Sumantra has then told him the story of the brahmin Ṛśyaśṛṅga and the princess Śāntā.

Sumantra now tells Daśaratha that "Ṛśyaśṛṅga … shall produce sons for you" (*ṛśyaśṛṅgas tu … putrāṃs tava vidhāsyati*, Rām 1.8.22ab). This explains the rendition of the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā. Sumantra says that Romapāda is a friend of Daśaratha's (10.3ab; see also Mbh 3.110.19b), and that Daśaratha should ask Romapāda to let Ṛśyaśṛṅga come and perform Daśaratha's rite, for the continuation of Daśaratha's lineage (*śāntābhartā mama kratum | āhareta tvayājñaptaḥ saṃtānārthaṃ kulasya ca*, 10.5bcd). As Sumantra tells it, this business too has been foretold long previously by Sanatkumāra in the future tense. Romapāda will permit the involvement of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, who can help Daśaratha to have sons (*pradāsyate putravantaṃ śāntābhartāram*, 10.6cd). Daśaratha will then "beg Ṛśyaśṛṅga … to perform his sacrifice and grant him sons and heaven" (*ṛśyaśṛṅgaṃ … varayiṣyati … ‖ yajñārthaṃ prasavārthaṃ ca svargārthaṃ ca*, 10.8c–9b). And Ṛśyaśṛṅga will oblige.

According to Chierichetti, Sumantra tells Daśaratha the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga "as a warning against the danger represented by women, and an anecdote about the power of asceticism" (Chierichetti 2011: 7). How is the story a warning? Within it the seductive power of women is used to harness the power of Ṛśyaśṛṅga's asceticism for the benefit of Romapāda and his kingdom. This is so whether the benefit is understood in terms of rainfall *or* in terms of lineal continuity. Ṛśyaśṛṅga himself has no discernible regrets, and the story can only be a warning if it is read from Vibhāṇḍaka's point of view and he is inconvenienced by his son's departure. Since in order to procure Ṛśyaśṛṅga's services Daśaratha must approach not Vibhāṇḍaka but Romapāda, the *Rāmāyaṇa* version of the story apparently does not have Ṛśyaśṛṅga taking Śāntā back with him to live with his father as the *Mahābhārata* version does (Feller 2009: 8 n.24). But equally the *Rāmāyaṇa* version gives little suggestion that Vibhāṇḍaka would be inconvenienced by his son's departure. The women who make contact with Ṛśyaśṛṅga are "fearful of his father" (*bhītas tasya pituḥ striyaḥ*, 9.22d; see also 9.18c), but this could be for a number of reasons.

What happens next in the story of Daśaratha? As suggested by Sumantra and the prophecy, Daśaratha goes to visit Romapāda in order to enlist Ṛśyaśṛṅga's services, and comes back with Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā.

At this stage, before Daśaratha's rite has begun, what do we expect to happen? Daśaratha has no drought to dispel; he just needs a son, which an *aśvamedha* would not normally provide. Given that Śāntā has come to Ayodhyā with her husband, we may hesitate to imagine that Ṛśyaśṛṅga will marry any of Daśaratha's relatives while he is there to perform the rite (as he did previously with Romapāda's daughter). But we might imagine he will act as inseminator to produce Daśaratha's son; and if the affair is to be a short one, then perhaps Daśaratha's story might diverge from those of Dru-

pada and Romapāda in terms of Daśaratha's relationship to the woman. And so it turns out: this is not a *putrikā* story, because the desired sons are born not from Daśaratha's daughter, but from his wives. Comparing the name Pṛṣatī in the case of Drupada's rite with the name of Daśaratha's eldest wife Kausalyā in the case of Daśaratha's: whereas Pṛṣatī is a patronym, Kausalyā is a toponym meaning 'woman of Kosala'. She is relatively local, and so not a princess from a different realm; but that does not make her Daśaratha's daughter. Kaikeyī, one of Daśaratha's other two wives, is certainly from elsewhere, since she is the daughter of Aśvapati of Rājagṛha (Rām 2.1, 62), which here seems to be in or beyond the Punjab (Thapar 1978: 16–17; Brockington 1998: 421).

Daśaratha's Rite: Scholarly Views

Daśaratha's rite has two main phases: a full public horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*), then a son-getting rite (*putreṣṭi*). According to Koskikallio "there are actually two rituals", but "the question of whether either of them is more 'original' in the context of the epic is not essential" (Koskikallio 1995: 170, 171). According to Chierichetti, for the task of getting sons "the *aśvamedha* will not be sufficient. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga will have to offer an additional oblation" (Chierichetti 2011: 23). Sutherland Goldman calls the rite "an *aśvamedha* cum *putreṣṭi*, the two sacrifices employed to provide the impotent or infertile Daśaratha with a long-desired son" (Sutherland Goldman 2004: 55). Feller says "the double sacrifice – horse sacrifice and *putreṣṭi* – seems problematic, and it appears that one of the two sacrifices was added subsequently" (Feller 2009: 7).

In 1841 Holtzmann the elder said *three* sacrifices were represented here – one *aśvamedha* and two *putreṣṭi*s – and that the passage thus embodies "various contradictions". Jacobi quoted Holtzmann at length in order to support his own opinion – effectively inherited from Holtzmann – that "all that occurs between the 6th and the 18th cantos is a later interpolation" (Jacobi 1960 [1893]: 41–45). In the twentieth century, scholars have more commonly identified two rituals in these chapters, and have expressed opinions about which of them was the earlier.

Bulcke considers the second ritual to be interpolated (Bulcke 1953: 330–31). Brockington concurs: "the *putreṣṭi* … is awkwardly tacked on to the end of the *aśvamedha* ritual" (Brockington 1998: 458; see also Brockington 1985: 214). Nanavati too thinks the *putreṣṭi* was a later addition. Nanavati takes seriously Daśaratha's initial intention to perform an *aśvamedha* that will get him a son (*sutārthaṃ vājimedhena kimarthaṃ na yajāmy aham* ‖ 1.8.2cd, quoted above), and argues that the *aśvamedha* was sufficient to bestow the resulting sons. Thus "Putreṣṭi is purely duplicative and useless, and therefore, very likely an interpolation in the tale". Nanavati even goes so far as to say that "Ṛṣyaśṛṅga who is specially brought in to perform Putreṣṭi is also not necessary. Any tale or episode included in his name is, therefore, spurious" (Nanavati 1982: 38).

Arguing in the other direction, Goldman disagrees with Bulcke and says that "It would, on the whole, appear more probable that Daśaratha's great Horse Sacrifice … is a later addition introduced with the purpose of firmly establishing in the mind of the audience the splendor and might of the Kosalan monarchy" (Goldman 1984: 74). On this view, the *putreṣṭi* was in the Rāma text first. Nonetheless Goldman would agree with Nanavati about Ṛṣyaśṛṅga being an addition, since Goldman also says that "the abrupt and clumsy introduction of the legend and the person of sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga into the sacrificial material is evidently the result of a secondary manipulation of the text" (Goldman 1984: 77).

The matter has not been resolved. But as soon as the interpreter suggests a later interpolation in connection with Daśaratha's rite, the task of interpretation has a new frame of reference. By implication the interpreter would take the text at face value on its own terms, until something happened to make him or her doubt the integrity of the text. Once the interpreter steps outside the text in this way, the text is torn and it is hard to step back into it; but there is the discourse about the text's historical development. Texts are obviously built up gradually (no author could compose every part at

once), and the text's historical development is a normal topic of scholarly discourse. But that discourse is foreign to the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s internal logic. So if the Baroda critical editors stepped outside the text in order to comment on its historical development by comparing the various manuscript versions, this was at least partly so that others would be able to step *back into* the reconstituted text. If one were now to stay within that text and labour to discern its logic, perhaps some of the points at which some interpreters begin to doubt its integrity would be points at which it is doing something particularly interesting, distinctive, difficult, or audacious, something particularly poetic or literary, whose appreciation on the text's own terms might be particularly desirable, or even necessary. Balkaran puts it nicely:

> [T]he scholarly eye winces when meaning is obscured by symbolism, formal acrobatics, and contradictory stances. Hence, our very mode of inquiry readily serves as a potential handicap to accepting the criteria of model readership posited by ancient … works of art. If one can turn a blind scholarly eye, so to speak, and engage the work on its own terms … we might then, ideally, be able to infuse insights into our subsequent scholarly analysis.

> (Balkaran 2019: 152)

On this view, trying to be a model reader could mean not engaging with higher criticism.

Daśaratha's Rite I and II

So to the rite. The ancient Indian *aśvamedha* has been described and discussed repeatedly elsewhere (e.g., Keith 1925: 343–47; Dumont 1927; Kirfel 1951; Kapadia 1961: 12–15; Puhvel 1970: 160–61; Bhattacharyya 1975: 3–5; Wyatt 1989: 1–2; Feller 2016: 296–302); here we are concerned just with Daśaratha's *aśvamedha*. Ṛśyaśṛṅga tells Daśaratha to release the horse, thus initiating the ritual process (Rām 1.11.14cd). A year later the rite takes place, the lion's share of the organisation having been done in the meantime by Vasiṣṭha, the family priest (*purohita*) of the old royal house of Ayodhyā (12.1–34). The first phase of the rite is a glitzy affair, with important guests and feasting. The priests led by Ṛśyaśṛṅga do everything properly:

> *abhipūjya tato hṛṣṭāḥ sarve cakrur yathāvidhi* |
> *prātaḥsavanapūrvāṇi karmāṇi munipuṃgavāḥ* ‖
> *na cāhutam abhūt tatra skhalitaṃ vāpi kiṃ cana* |
> *dṛśyate brahmavat sarvaṃ kṣemayuktaṃ hi cakrire* ‖

> Completing their preliminary worship, all those bulls among sages were filled with joy. They then performed, according to the ritual injunctions, the rites beginning with the Morning Pressing. Nothing in those rites was omitted or improperly offered, and every rite was accompanied by the appropriate Vedic recitation; indeed, they performed them perfectly.

> (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.13.5–6, trans. Goldman 2005: 103–5)

In the intervals between the various rites of the *aśvamedha*, the requisite philosophical debates are staged (13.14). There is a fire altar in the shape of a bird, as per the *agnicayana* (13.22e–23b).[13]

The many victims are sacrificed. Daśaratha's first wife Kausalyā cuts the horse with three knives (*kṛpāṇair viśaśāsainaṃ tribhiḥ*, 13.26cd), and the priests make all three queens have sex with the horse (13.27–28). According to Vedic accounts of the rite, only the chief queen should have sex with the horse. Jamison notes the *Rāmāyaṇa* anomaly (Jamison 1996: 66; see also Hiltebeitel 2011: 267–68). Sutherland Goldman says that "it is this clearly sexual component that makes the *aśvamedha* sacrifice

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13 See Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 306. Cf. Mbh 14.90.31, and Smith's note: "This is the normal shape for the fire altar in Vedic ritual" (Smith 2009: 729).

of particular interest to the author of the *Bālakāṇḍa*" (Sutherland Goldman 2004: 58). Daśaratha's horse is then butchered, cooked, and smelled, and various additional rites are performed (13.34c–35). After this, Daśaratha is described as *svakulavardhanaḥ*, "now enabled to extend his dynasty" (13.36b). After the gifts have been distributed and the incomparable rite completed (*prāpya yajñam anuttamam*, 13.44b), Daśaratha says to Ṛśyaśṛṅga: "Please act so that my line may be extended" (*kulasya vardhanaṃ tat tu kartum arhasi*, 13.45cd). This is phase two.

Ṛśyaśṛṅga says Daśaratha will have four sons (13.46cd). Ṛśyaśṛṅga "entered a trance for some time" (*dhyātvā sa kiṃcid*, 14.1ab). Then he says:

iṣṭiṃ te 'haṃ kariṣyāmi putrīyāṃ putrakāraṇāt |
atharvaśirasi proktair mantraiḥ siddhāṃ vidhānataḥ ‖
tataḥ prākramad iṣṭiṃ tāṃ putrīyāṃ putrakāraṇāt |
juhāva cāgnau tejasvī mantradṛṣṭena karmaṇā ‖

"In order to procure sons for you, I must perform the son-producing sacrifice. It must be done in accordance with the injunctions of the ritual texts and rendered efficacious by potent verses set down in the Atharva Veda."
    Thus that mighty man commenced the son-producing sacrifice in order to produce sons. He poured the oblation into the fire according to the rite specified in the Vedas.

(*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14.2–3, trans. Goldman 2005: 115)

Because the sons of Daśaratha are to be an incarnated divinity charged with a divine mission, the servant of Brahmā then appears, and gives Daśaratha a pot filled with special porridge (*pāyasa*, 15.9–13). Daśaratha tells his queens to eat it, and they do (15.24–28). After the guests and Ṛśyaśṛṅga and Śāntā have gone home, Rāma and three other special sons are born (17.6–10).

Hiltebeitel argues that Daśaratha's rite, albeit two-phase, is singular. He points out that the royal guests depart only after the *putreṣṭi* (Hiltebeitel 2011: 266 n.25). He notes that during the *aśvamedha* phase it is the *hotṛ*, *adhvaryu*, and *udgātṛ* priests – the priests of the Ṛgveda, Sāmaveda, and Yajurveda – who make sure that all three queens have sex with the horse, and that during the *putreṣṭi* phase Ṛśyaśṛṅga's son-producing rite is an Atharvaveda rite: "Rounding off with the *fourth* Veda indicates that the two rites form a whole". Likewise, "When the Iṣṭi is finished Ṛśyaśṛṅga says the Aśvamedha is now finished (*nirvṛtte tu kratau*; 17.1ab), and indicates that Daśaratha's *dīkṣā* has ended (*samāptadīkṣāniyamaḥ*; 17.2a)". Hiltebeitel says that both the poet and Daśaratha make "an elision between the Aśvamedha proper and the Putrīya Iṣṭi" – that is, they combine them as one (Hiltebeitel 2011: 268).

The story of how Daśaratha solved his lineal problem and the story of how Viṣṇu took births to deal with Rāvaṇa are superimposed in no particular order. They are the same story. So this could never have been an ordinary son-producing rite. Nonetheless, we know, as did ancient adult audiences, that eating porridge, even special porridge, cannot cause pregnancy. Our interpretation of Daśaratha's rite was set up in advance by Sumantra's narration of the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, and as a result Ṛśyaśṛṅga's sexual involvement is heavily implied. We are invited to conflate Ṛśyaśṛṅga with the servant of Brahmā, provider of the porridge.

Interlude: Daśaratha and Romapāda

Daśaratha and Romapāda both use Ṛśyaśṛṅga in order to get a son. But the equivalence between them is not just structural. In the *Harivaṃśa* it is nominal. There, as seen earlier, Daśaratha is used as another name of Romapāda, Śāntā's son by Ṛśyaśṛṅga is called Caturaṅga Dāśarathi, and the use of grandfather Daśaratha's name in *vṛddhi* form as a lineal name of the grandson emphasises the conti-

nuity of the Aṅga lineage through the *putrikā* Śāntā (Hv 23.36–37). Daśaratha 'Ten-Chariots' is a more or less formulaic royal name (there are many similar royal names ending in *ratha*), and the *Harivaṃśa* would not be confusing this character Romapāda with Daśaratha of Ayodhyā, who has already been mentioned in the solar genealogy at *Harivaṃśa* 10.74.

The mention of Romapāda and Śāntā here in the *Harivaṃśa* (23.36–37) is heard by Janamejaya after he has heard the story of Romapāda, Śāntā, and Ṛśyaśṛṅga as told earlier, in the *Āraṇyakaparvan*; and when Romapāda was introduced on that earlier occasion it was mentioned that he was a friend of Daśaratha's (*sakhā daśarathasya vai | lomapāda iti khyāto*, Mbh 3.110.19bc). We do not know whether Janamejaya has heard other stories of Rāma's birth. Rāma's birth is not the subject of any elaboration in Vaiśaṃpāyana's account of Rāma's story at *Mahābhārata* 3.257–75. In any case, the *Āraṇyakaparvan*'s mention of Romapāda and Daśaratha as friends seems to confirm that they are different people, as they certainly are in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where they are friends *and* relatives (*sakhyaṃ sambandhakaṃ caiva*, 1.10.17c). But nonetheless when the *Harivaṃśa* also uses 'Daśaratha' as another name of Romapāda this nominal link is somehow fitting, because in the *Rāmāyaṇa* the story of Daśaratha's son-production follows the story of Romapāda's, as a kind of imitative doublet.

Sastry quotes the *Harivaṃśa*'s Aṅga line, including Romapāda and Śāntā, and says:

> It is at this point that the basis for confusion in the minds of future writers and commentators is introduced by calling the Aṅga king as Daśaratha, who was also known as Rōmapāda.

> (Sastry 1940: 674)

Sastry notes that in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacarita*, Śāntā is Daśaratha of Ayodhyā's daughter, but is *adopted* by Romapāda (Pollock 2007: 66–67). Sastry does not mention anyone earlier than Bhavabhūti (early eighth century) to introduce this idea into the tradition.

Chatterjee, writing before the *Rāmāyaṇa* critical edition, notes that in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s northern recension, Śāntā is identified as the daughter of Daśaratha of Ayodhyā, adopted as the daughter of Romapāda (Chatterjee 1957: 146; see now Rām 1.*322). Chatterjee notes that the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, the *Skandapurāṇa*, and Bengali manuscripts of the *Padmapurāṇa* likewise present Śāntā as adopted by Romapāda from Daśaratha.[14] But like Sastry he argues that this is a mistake, and he musters a series of circumstantial "internal evidences" from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in support of this position.

Like Sastry, Chatterjee thinks the basis of the mistake is the use of Daśaratha as Romapāda's other name. But he says the mistake is also facilitated by the scope for interpretation that the *Rāmāyaṇa* allows at two points: first when Sanatkumāra describes Ṛśyaśṛṅga as *jāmātā*, 'son-in-law', without specifying that he means *Romapāda's* son-in-law (at what is now Rām 1.8.22ab); and then when Sanatkumāra refers to Romapāda with the word *asya* (at what is now Rām 1.10.3c), which could be equated with the *tasya* referring to Daśaratha in the previous line (Chatterjee 1957: 150–51). It is at this point (after Rām 1.10.3cd) that the northern recension adds the passage stating that Śāntā was Daśaratha of Ayodhyā's daughter (Rām 1.*322, present in manuscripts Ś1 Ñ V B D1–3.5.7.9–13 M4).[15]

As far as the old *Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned, the northern tradition on this point does indeed seem to embody a confusion or mistake. This matter has been properly dealt with in the *Rāmāyaṇa* critical-edition project, and in Goldman and Sutherland's notes to the Princeton *Rāmāyaṇa* translation (Bhatt 1982: 440; Goldman and Sutherland 1984: 294–95, 297–98). The reason for revisiting it now is because

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14 See, e.g., *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 4.18.2; Wilson 1972: 355. As Chatterjee points out, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*'s position seems to be conflicted: "Although the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* takes Śāntā to be the daughter of King Daśaratha of Ayodhyā and agrees with the North Indian tradition in fabricating the adoption story, still in the same breath it declares that Lomapāda was the other name of Daśaratha, King of Aṅga and thereby agrees with the Vāyu and the other Purāṇas [i.e., *Matsyapurāṇa*, *Brahmapurāṇa*, and *Harivaṃśa*]" (Chatterjee 1957: 150).

15 Manuscript sigla as per Bhatt 1982. For further details of differences between various pre-critical editions on this issue, but with the same overall argument as the much shorter 1957 article, see Chatterjee 1953.

in terms of the topic of this article, and within the *Rāmāyaṇa* text as critically reconstituted, the possibility of Śāntā having originally been Daśaratha's daughter would have been quite interesting.

Consider the gift of a unit of female fertility from one family to another, such as would be presented in a marriage cermony where marriage is conceived patrilocally and patrilineally, with a woman given away, to have sons in another line. What if a gift of a unit of female fertility were to be given sooner rather than later? If the girl were given away as a young child, then later, when she matured, her son might potentially be an heir of the recipient family regardless of who that heir's genital father might be, and/or she could be given away in marriage from her adopted family into a third family.

Aśvamedha and Puruṣamedha

Kapadia says that "From the description of the Aśvamedha found in the first book of the Rāmāyaṇa … we find that its main purpose was to acquire fertility. The purpose of this sacrifice appears to rouse the old King Daśaratha to produce a descendent" (Kapadia 1961: 12). Here there is apparently a thematic link between the two phases of the rite. Sutherland Goldman says that the two rites have "the same basic function" – that is, "the acquisition of a son" (Sutherland Goldman 2004: 58, 59; see also Sutherland Goldman 2018: 46–47).

After describing the ancient Indian *aśvamedha*, Kapadia compares the *puruṣamedha* sacrifice, as discussed particularly in the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasutra*.[16]

> If we were to compare our two rituals soberly, i.e. without romantic sentimentality, the Puruṣamedha was considered as more sensible and comprehensible, and it served a childless king whom the subjects considered as a god, created a descendent when it was not possible exactly like a human being. A man from the highest class is taken up for the task and is consecrated … He was then set free to pursue his wishes as he likes, was preserved from unchastity in order to protect his procreative power, and after a year's freedom was offered with great pomp, whereby he according to the belief of that time attained celestial grace. While or shortly after his sacrificial death, he was made to cohabit with the first queen of the king. As he was throttled, his penis would be made to get erected, and there will be discharge of semen. Through this type of sacerdotal procreation the queen can really be pregnant, and the god-king can have a corresponding offspring.
>
> (Kapadia 1961: 17, edited slightly)

Kapadia is here elaborating on the "Centrum genito-spinale Erektion und Samenerguß" mentioned by Kirfel (Kirfel 1951: 47 and n.1).

The *puruṣamedha* has been compared with the *aśvamedha* also by Keith, Puhvel, Bhattacharyya, Wyatt, and others.[17] Keith's view was this:

> The human sacrifice … is based closely on the horse sacrifice … When slain, the chief queen must lie beside the victim as beside the horse … [W]e have every reason to assume that this [rite] is mere priestly imagination … [T]he rite of an actual slaying of man is not described in the Brāhmaṇas at all … its mention in the later Sūtras is consistent only with the invention of it, as a reasonable complement to the theory of sacrifice which saw an anomaly in the omission of man from the victims.
>
> (Keith 1925: 347)

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16   For the *puruṣamedha* in the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrautasutra*, see Caland 1953: 452–59; for the *puruṣamedha* in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, see Eggeling 1900: 403–17.

17   See the studies mentioned above under "Daśaratha's Rite I and II". On the *puruṣamedha* see also Sauvé 1970: 184–85; Thite 1975: 23–27 (with further references).

Keith's view (since represented by, e.g., Dumont 1963: 177) follows that of Eggeling and Oldenberg, and can be traced back to Colebrooke (Eggeling 1900: xxxiii–xlv; Oldenberg 1988 [1894]: 204; Colebrooke 1808: 436–38).

Kapadia argues to the contrary. For him the *puruṣamedha* reflects an indigenous and pre-Vedic ritual prototype of the Indian *aśvamedha* (Kapadia 1961: 19). Bhattacharyya too thinks that the *puruṣamedha* was earlier than the *aśvamedha* as depicted: "the union of the principal queen with the dead horse … is a relic, or rather a transformation, of an older ritual in which a man … had to play the [later] part of the horse" (Bhattacharyya 1975: 6, emphasis removed). This is Wyatt's view also (Wyatt 1989: 6–8). Kosambi argues that in the story of Purūravas and Urvaśī at *Ṛgveda* 10.95, "Purūravas is to be sacrificed after having begotten a son … upon Urvaśī" (Kosambi 1951: 13, continuous italics removed; see also Bhattacharyya 1975: 19). Kosambi's amazing article does not discuss the *aśvamedha* or the *puruṣamedha*, but it invokes something like the *puruṣamedha* nonetheless, and explains it in terms of old indigenous practices that were lost in the switch from matriliny to patriliny (see Knight 2011: 67–68).

Is the *puruṣamedha* a theoretical innovation or a transformation? I do not decide between these two views. Perhaps they are not necessarily incompatible. Whatever view one takes, the concept of ritual insemination that the *puruṣamedha* evokes can help us to see how Daśaratha's rite, as narrated, might have been comprehensible to its authors and immediate audiences.

Nonetheless, Daśaratha's rite is unlike a *puruṣamedha* in that Ṛśyaśṛṅga survives (Rām 1.17.5). Although its effect is as if the three wives had had sex with a man, not a horse, there would have to have been several men, or the man would have to have survived successive ejaculations. Romapāda's rite too is unlike a *puruṣamedha* in that Ṛśyaśṛṅga survives. Drupada's rite could be a *puruṣamedha* up to a point, especially as Dhṛṣṭadyumna and Draupadī are apparently twins, and Yāja is never heard of again.[18] But for those of us who do not like the idea of killing people, there is the possibility of viewing such a death not necessarily as a physical death, but as a symbol of future non-involvement in the issue. Men do often inseminate women and have no further involvement, and this fact has obtained throughout human and prehuman history, as far back as insemination existed. When this happens today, it happens in a context where a genital-paternal role is a possible concept. And that is also the case in textual history, as far back as we can tell. Perhaps some children have even been told their genital father is dead when he is not.

Niyoga

Kapadia notes as follows:

> The so-called sacerdotal procreation of offspring, who appears to be aimed at through the Puruṣamedha, corresponds to legal rules of the Indians; since in accordance to their law-books a man can on account of old age or impotence himself give a justification for the levirate (niyoga), i.e. he can authorize someone to inherit property or guarantee offsprings to manes as a result of his procreating a son on his wife. This is in full accord with the purview of the law of cultivation, that the fruit belongs to him who is the owner of the field, and not to him who sows the seed.
>
> (Kapadia 1961: 18, edited slightly)

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18   Also initially promising is the story of Vyuṣitāśva, who sired sons on his wife Bhadrā after having died (Mbh 1.112). Hiltebeitel notes that "the glory of Vyuṣitāśva's reign was an Aśvamedha", that "His name with -*aśva* means 'the Daybreak Horse,' and perhaps also 'One Who is Inhabited or Possessed by the Horse'", and that "he remained potent in death like an Aśvamedha horse" (Hiltebeitel 2011: 276, 277). Nonetheless the Vyuṣitāśva story is not a good fit for the *puruṣamedha* because Vyuṣitāśva was already married to Bhadrā, and his posthumous sex with her was regular: she had seven sons that way (Brodbeck 2013: 530).

The famous examples of *niyoga* are from the *Mahābhārata* (Jolly 1885: 152–54; Sutherland 1990; Doniger 1995: 172–80; Dhand 2004: 38–43): the conceptions of Vicitravīrya's posthumous sons in Vicitravīrya's widows Ambikā and Ambālikā as inseminated by Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa (Mbh 1.99–100), and the conceptions of Pāṇḍu's sons the Pāṇḍavas in Pāṇḍu's wives Kuntī and Mādrī as inseminated by gods (Mbh 1.109–15).

Hiltebeitel discusses the conceptions of Vicitravīrya's posthumous sons in particular. He argues that Ambikā and Ambālikā's impregnations "allude to the Aśvamedha scene where the chief queen or *mahiṣī* lies with the sacrificial horse". He says "the Aśvamedha scene most susceptible to veiled allusion is this very one", and that "one way to allude knowingly to it would be to shift planes from the Aśvamedha to other rites where a woman is called upon to secure offspring outside marriage: especially via *niyoga*, with a live man rather than a dead horse" (Hiltebeitel 1991: 259). He also says that "both epics connect their postwar Aśvamedhas with the continuity of their chief royal lines. Kṛṣṇa revives Parikṣit, and Rāma discovers Kuśa and Lava as his recovered heirs … Securing royal progeny is thus implied in these Aśvamedha scenes" (pp. 264–65).

If Ṛśyaśṛṅga were the inseminator at Rāma's conception, would that not be *niyoga*? Goldman says of Ṛśyaśṛṅga that

> The sage is perhaps viewed as serving the purpose of Vyāsa or the other *Mahābhārata* practitioners of the ancient custom of *niyojana*, or levirate, only through an act of sacrifice in place of direct sexual liaison with the king's wives.
>
> [Footnote:] Although I have as yet come across no assertion on the part of any scholar that the sacrificial role of Ṛśyaśṛṅga is, in fact, a disguised form of *niyojana*, I think that the evidence of the text leads us to serious consideration of such an underlying element. Other scholars may have advanced this thesis, for we find that one V. Panoly takes issue with them in the strongest and most colorful language. See Panoly 1961, pp. 17–19.

(Goldman 1984: 77 and n.42)

I have not been able to follow up Goldman's reference to Panoly's *The Voice of Vālmīki*, published in Kerala. But Hiltebeitel agrees with Goldman that "Ṛśyaśṛṅga's Aśvamedha has a hidden *niyoga* agenda". Hiltebeitel says further that "if a *niyoga* agenda is hidden with regard to Ṛśyaśṛṅga, it is less so with regard to Viṣṇu, who is twice said to have been 'appointed' (*ni+√yuj*) to intervene". Hiltebeitel quotes the places where the gods "appointed" Viṣṇu to be born (Rām 1.14.17c, 15.1b), and says "The Putrīya Iṣṭi effected by Ṛśyaśṛṅga is thus a *quasi-niyoga* through Viṣṇu, and calls for no genetic intervention by a smelly author" (Hiltebeitel 2011: 269).

The words "smelly author" are redolent of the "smelly ascetics" in the title of Dhand 2004, because Hiltebeitel's main focus here is on Vyāsa, who was famously unattractive to the widows Ambikā and Ambālikā. But why would Ṛśyaśṛṅga be smelly? He is a respectable husband, whether he lives in his father's house or his father-in-law's. And he does not need to be the author.

Hiltebeitel's assertion that the *niyoga* agenda is less hidden with regard to Viṣṇu than it is with regard to Ṛśyaśṛṅga is dubious. Despite the occurrences of *ni+√yuj* that Hiltebeitel cites, the appointment of Viṣṇu by the gods, to take form *as* some sons, is very different to the appointment of a proxy inseminator to *make* sons, which is the rationale of the *niyoga*. The Pāṇḍavas were conceived when the gods took bodily form and had sex with Pāṇḍu's wives.[19] The sperm in each case was that of a

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19 The earlier incident between Kuntī and Sūrya that produced Karṇa is mentioned by Hara as an example of "divine procreation" because Sūrya simply touched Kuntī's navel (*nābhī*) and she became pregnant (Hara 2009: 223). But when Sūrya touches Kuntī's navel he has already entered her (*kuntīm āviveśa vihaṃgamaḥ | svarbhānuśatrur yogātmā nābhyāṃ pasparśa caiva tām ǁ* Mbh 3.291.23bcd), so there is the idea of him touching her *nābhī* from the inside. By juxtaposing the navel-touching with Sūrya's assurance of Kuntī's future virginity (*punaḥ kanyā bhaviṣyasi | * 291.16b; *kanyā caiva bhaviṣyasi ǁ* 25d), Hara implies that she remains a virgin because they did not have sex; but more plausibly her virginity can be restored because she *has* had sex, as in the cases of Satyavatī

god. But in the case of Daśaratha's rite, who can Hiltebeitel imagine Daśaratha's three wives had sex with, apart from the horse? Not Viṣṇu. By implication only Daśaratha himself, if anyone (since Hiltebeitel has ruled out Ṛśyaśṛṅga's "genetic intervention"); or perhaps they got pregnant just by eating the porridge. The former scenario is speculative and seems unlikely, since "Daśaratha's biological role, if any, is not made clear" (Goldman 1980: 177 n.12). The latter scenario takes us into the realm of magic, as seen earlier when Romapāda's drought was ended by Ṛśyaśṛṅga's mere arrival. We know how babies are made, and the whole point is that Daśaratha needs a son. A small step sideways into a parallel aspect of the discourse is all that is required to complete the picture and deconstruct the magic. Goldman and Hiltebeitel use the words "disguised" and "hidden" to describe this *niyoga*, but the allegedly disguised or hidden aspects are in full view. Even though no "direct sexual liaison with the king's wives" is narrated (Goldman 1984: 77, quoted above), Ṛśyaśṛṅga seems to supply the sperm, as he did earlier for Romapāda, and as Yāja apparently did for Drupada.

The levirate, in its standard form (e.g., *Deuteronomy* 25.5–6), involves the brother of the deceased.

> Both levirate and sororate seem to have been universal throughout Aboriginal Australia … In the rest of the world, the tradition is so common that "it is easier to count cases where the custom is positively known to be lacking than to enumerate instances of its occurrence" (Lowie 1920: 32).
>
> (Knight 2011: 64)

The Indian variant of the levirate, the *niyoga*, as presented in the Dharmaśāstra tradition, is notable for its sometime involvement of a brahmin instead of a brother (Kane 1974: 603–5). In terms of that Indian variant and the equation between a woman and the ritual fire, it is crucial that a brahmin priest is a hired hand appointed by another for a specific ritual purpose. He does his job as best he can, receives his *dakṣiṇā* at the end of the rite, and goes home; but his ritual actions can bear great fruit for the *yajamāna* he was working for. Hence if the ritual fire into which the priest casts the offering is a woman, the basic role of working for another supplies the idea of a brahmin genitally fathering the *yajamāna*'s son. The same brahmin might also think, on other occasions, in terms of an offering for himself or his ancestors into his own wife, producing his own children.

Brahmin Semen

We return briefly to Drupada's rite. As the climax approaches, after Yāja has summoned Pṛṣatī for *mithuna*, Yāja says:

> *yāja uvāca |*
> *yājena śrapitaṃ havyam upayājena mantritam |*
> *kathaṃ kāmaṃ na saṃdadhyāt sā tvaṃ vipraihi tiṣṭha vā ||*
> *brāhmaṇa uvāca |*
> *evam ukte tu yājena hute haviṣi saṃskṛte |*
> *uttasthau pāvakāt tasmāt kumāro devasaṃnibhaḥ ||*

"The oblation has been cooked by Yāja, has been enchanted by [his brother] Upayāja. Why should it not bestow the wish? Stride forward or stay!"

After having spoken, Yāja offered the well-cooked oblation in the fire; and from the sacrificial fire there arose … [Dhṛṣṭadyumna, plus Draupadī from the altar].

(*Mahābhārata* 1.155.36–37, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 318)

(*kanyaiva tvaṃ bhaviṣyasi ||* Mbh 1.99.12d), Draupadī (*babhūva kanyaiva gate gate 'hani ||* 1.190.14d), and Mādhavī (*kanyaiva tvaṃ bhaviṣyasi |* 5.114.11b). On virginity, see also Dumézil 1973: 117–29.

Here Yāja seems to suggest that his oblation will produce the son whether or not he actually has sex with Pṛṣatī. Did they do it? Were they both keen enough on each other? You decide. Yāja's last word (*vā*) means that when the oblation is cast into the fire we cannot tell whether he ejaculated inside her (as per the Upaniṣadic passages), or whether he cast an oblation into an actual fire with a ladle and did not have sex with her at all. The text reserves the right to interpret the rite non-sexually – that is, as noted above, effectively magically, and possibly euphemistically.

Other scenes are explicitly sexual. In this section I mention a variety of interesting impregnations, concentrating on the bodily fluid from the male. If Daśaratha's wives were to have sons without being inseminated, we might like to know what they were missing, from Ṛśyaśṛṅga in particular.

Sometimes there is a discourse of semen strength. In the story told at *Harivaṃśa* 3.97–109, Diti asks her husband, the brahmin Kaśyapa, to give her a son who could kill Indra, and he agrees, providing she can gestate the child for a hundred years. She agrees to do so, and they have sex. The semen is described:

> *tato 'bhyupagamād dityāṃ garbham ādhāya kaśyapaḥ |*
> *rocayan vai gaṇaśreṣṭhaṃ devānām amitaujasām ‖*
> *tejaḥ saṃbhṛtya durdharṣam avadhyam amaraiḥ sadā |*
> *jagāma parvatāyaiva tapase saṃśitavrataḥ ‖*

> By winning favours from the highest echelons of inexhaustibly potent gods, Kaśyapa had prepared fearsome semen that the immortals would never kill. And after he had deposited the embryo inside Diti as promised, he set off back for the hills, ready for a vow of austerity.

> (*Harivaṃśa* 3.103–4)

In Diti's last year of pregnancy, Indra manages to enter her womb and smash her son into pieces, and they became his storm-gods, the Maruts (cf. Rām 1.45.1–46.9). Mighty seed.

Skanda is born from Agni's sperm as ejaculated separately for or into seven different women and combined in a golden basin on Mount Śveta (Mbh 3.214). Here the discourse seems to be of semen strength by quantity as well as by origin. The semen of the god is presented as proxy brahmin semen, since the seven women are the wives of the seven seers. By implication those seers have been playing hard to get, but at the same time their abstinence (*tapas*) – they are not gods – is what makes their semen powerful and copious.

When the brahmin Agastya is told by his ancestors that he must have a son, he finds no suitable woman, and so, compiling the best bits of every being, he creates a girl-child, and has her adopted by a king (Mbh 3.94–97; Thieme 1963; Thomas 2009). When she, Lopāmudrā, is of age, he receives her in marriage. When they are ready for each other she says: "Now beget on me at once a child of the greatest power" (*utpādaya sakṛn mahyam apatyaṃ vīryavattaram ‖* Mbh 3.97.17cd). Agastya asks whether she wants a thousand sons, or a hundred each with the power of ten, or ten each with the power of a hundred, or one with the power of a thousand. She chooses the latter, saying that "one wise and virtuous son is better than many of no virtue!" (*eko hi bahubhiḥ śreyān vidvān sādhur asādhubhiḥ ‖* 20cd). So they have sex, "and when he had planted the seed, he went to the forest" (*tata ādhāya garbhaṃ tam agamad vanam eva saḥ |* 22ab). The son is a truly glorious seer, and everyone is happy. The implication is that Agastya produced semen with a thousandfold potency, which Lopāmudrā could carry because of the way he had made her.

When Vyāsa inseminates Ambikā and Ambālikā (Mbh 1.99–101), he asks that they perform a one-year preparation rite first.[20] But their mother-in-law Satyavatī is in too much of a hurry for grandsons for that. Ambikā closed her eyes on seeing Vyāsa, and Ambālikā went pale, so Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu

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20 *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.4.7–9 says a widow may not be subjected to *niyoga* until a year after her husband has died.

are blind and pale respectively, and so begins the dynastic lead-in to the Kurukṣetra war (Dhand 2004; Hiltebeitel 2011: 269–75; Hiltebeitel 2012: 121–23). When Vyāsa visits Ambikā for a second time, she substitutes her maidservant,[21] they have a lovely time, and Vidura results: the god Dharma embodied, the wisest man in the family, but not of royal birth. By implication, if Vyāsa's semen had found a good reception in a prepared royal womb, the son would have been a great king.

At *Mahābhārata* 1.98, after Rāma Jāmadagnya has killed all male *kṣatriya*s, their ranks are replaced after *kṣatriya* women have sex with brahmin men standing in for their deceased husbands. By implication, and as per King Drupada's comments on brahmin power and royal power as quoted at the start, such replacement sperm should result in better *kṣatriya*s in future. As Sutherland puts it, "To reassert Brāhmans as the true means of propagation is tantamount to inaugurating a new golden age" (Sutherland 1990: 93).

Brahmin sperm entering non-brahmin families is a natural implication of householders and their families habitually hosting brahmin guests properly. Damayantī's father King Bhīma hosted the brahmin Damana, and Damayantī and her brother resulted (Mbh 3.50.5–10; cf. 3.197.7–40, where the hostess prioritises her husband). The hostess Oghavatī gave herself sexually to a brahmin guest at the guest's request, and her husband the householder came home, found them at it, and did not mind (Mbh 13.2; Jamison 1996: 153–55). Kuntī is such a good young hostess that the brahmin guest Durvāsas gives her a special spell to have sex with any god she likes (Mbh 1.104.4–7; 1.113.32–36; 3.287–89).

When Pāṇḍu realises that he must still have sons despite being cursed to die if he has sex (Mbh 1.90.65; 109.27–30), he asks Kuntī to conceive from a brahmin, supporting the legitimacy of this move with reference to several precedents. He cites the precedent of Śāradaṇḍāyanī, "whom her elders instructed to bear a child. Ritually pure and bathed, she stood in the night at a crossroads and with a flower chose an accomplished brahmin" (*yā vīrapatnī gurubhir niyuktāpatyajanmani ǁ puṣpeṇa prayatā snātā niśi kunti catuṣpathe | varayitvā dvijaṃ siddhaṃ*, Mbh 1.111.33c–34c). Pāṇḍu also cites the precedent of King Kalmāṣapāda's wife, who conceived from Vasiṣṭha, the family priest (Mbh 1.113.21–22). As we later find out, Kalmāṣapāda's wife was pregnant for twelve years, split her side with a stone, and it was Aśmaka (Mbh 1.168.21–25); and the reason Kalmāṣapāda could not have sons for himself was that like Pāṇḍu, he was cursed with what we might call the *puruṣamedha* curse: to die if he has sex (Mbh 1.173).

In the *Mahābhārata*, Ṛśyaśṛṅga himself was born from a doe (3.110.14–16; n.6 above). His father Vibhāṇḍaka, sighting the *apsaras* Urvaśī, ejaculated into water that the doe later drank. There is no sexual congress, but nonetheless this story is revealing about the power of brahmin semen, since despite the semen being watered down and orally taken, Ṛśyaśṛṅga is seemingly fully human but for his single horn.

These examples are reviewed by way of potential peripheral relevance to Daśaratha's rite, and the invitation of the brahmin Ṛśyaśṛṅga to facilitate it – and to facilitate in particular its *putreṣṭi*. Ṛśyaśṛṅga performs the *putreṣṭi* for Daśaratha: "He poured the oblation into the fire according to the rite specified in the Vedas" (*juhāva cāgnau tejasvī mantradṛṣṭena karmaṇā ǁ* Rām 1.14.3cd). Like Yāja's offering for Drupada, this act permits of a non-sexual interpretation; but if Ṛśyaśṛṅga's semen is involved, it is here. The porridge does the rest.

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21 Cf. King Balin's wife Sudeṣṇā. Told to take semen from Dīrghatamas, she substitutes her maidservant because Dīrghatamas is old and blind (Mbh 1.98.25). Dīrghatamas fathers eleven sons from the maidservant, then one (Aṅga) for Balin from Sudeṣṇā.

The Porridge

A woman's nutrition before, during, and after pregnancy can crucially affect the health and character of the child. Her being inseminated is one brief element of the larger project of producing a son. That is what allows it potentially to be marginalised by that project. The porridge in the story of Daśaratha's son-production provokes us to link the food that feeds the childbearer and the semen that inseminates her (on "seed as food", see also Doniger O'Flaherty 1980: 26–28, 48–53).

In this connection we revisit and review the interesting passage at *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.4, which contains the aforequoted comparison of woman and fire ("her loins are the altar", etc.). This passage apparently supplies the sexual knowledge that a man ought to have – presumably a brahmin man of the White Yajurveda, to which this Upaniṣad belongs. It tells him what to do with spilt semen, what kind of woman to go for and when, how to get her to consent, and what to do "If he wants her to love him", or "If he does not want her to become pregnant", or "If, on the other hand, he wants her to become pregnant" (trans. Olivelle 1998: 157). It tells him how to curse any lovers she may have, and then it continues on the subject of getting her pregnant.

After his wife has had her period and a bath, he must eat cooked rice with her, mixed with ghee. Depending what kind of son is desired (a one-Veda, two-Veda, or three-Veda son, a daughter, or a prize four-Veda son), different other things should be cooked in with the rice (milk, curd, water, sesame, or meat, respectively).

> *athābhiprātar eva sthālīpākāvṛtājyaṃ ceṣṭitvā sthālīpākasyopaghātaṃ juhoty agnaye svāhānumatye svāhā devāya savitre satyaprasavāya svāheti | hutvoddhṛtya prāśnāti | prāśyetarasyāḥ prayacchati | ...*

> Then, toward morning, following the same ritual procedure as at the cooking of the pot of milk-rice, he should prepare melted butter and offer portions from the pot of milk-rice in the fire, saying: "To fire, svāhā! To assent, svāhā! To the divine Savitṛ, faithful in procreation, svāhā!" After making these offerings, he takes the rest out and, after first eating himself, gives some to his partner ...

> (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.4.19, trans. Olivelle 1998: 159)[22]

The Upaniṣad then describes how he gets physical with her. That passage consists largely of the beautiful poetry he is to address to her as he does so. His success in vaginal entry is presented as verbal, and sets the bar quite high. There are further details of what to do and say before she goes into labour, and after she has had a baby boy. This is the brahmin having his own son.

Is the food here a stand-in for semen? Insofar as it is consumed orally by both partners, probably not. Insofar as at the first climax of the passage it is consumed by the singular fire, possibly. Though then there would be a kind of temporal doubling; for taken as a straightforward descriptive narrative the Upaniṣad says that the offering to the fire happens *and then* they have sex, and so if the offering into the fire *is* them having sex, then they have sex twice. Is the problem here with a modern audience's desire for a "straightforward descriptive narrative", perhaps prompted by familiarity with the realistic and/or documentary narrative traditions of the press, the novel, and the cine-camera? Ancient Indian narratives are not straightfowardly descriptive, for they routinely describe things that could never happen, and that thus cannot be straightforwardly described. What if this text and/or others deliberately include multiple descriptions of the same event in different registers, sequentially juxtaposing but intentionally superimposing those descriptions?[23]

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22   Roebuck's translation differs in the first part of this quotation: she has "Towards morning ... the man should stir ghee in the manner of the *sthālīpāka*, and make a touch-offering, saying: ...". Her notes add: " *sthālīpāka*: 'Cooking in a dish'. *Sthālī* is familiar in its Hindi form as the *thālī* tray of indian cuisine ... *touch offering*: ... The food is symbolically offered to the gods by touching the dish before the couple eat" (Roebuck 2003: 101, 410).

23   The *Harivaṃśa*'s description of the Tārakāmaya war between the gods and the demons employs meteorological metaphors throughout (Hv 32–38), and perhaps the effect of this battery of signposts could alternatively have

I mention this Upaniṣadic passage in connection with the porridge at the end of Daśaratha's rite (*pāyasa*, trans. Goldman, Rām 1.15.9–28) – the porridge whose appearance plays, in part, on the doubt over who, if not the horse, inseminated Daśaratha's wives. What other such porridge is there? Elsewhere the word *pāyasa* is not used in any potentially sexual scenes. But there are other words.

When Bhīṣma explains to Yudhiṣṭhira how it was that Viśvāmitra, born a *kṣatriya*, was able to become a brahmin, he also explains, in the same story, how it was that the brahmin Rāma Jāmadagnya was so much like a *kṣatriya* (Mbh 13.4; Fitzgerald 2002: 94–95; Sathaye 2015: 96–99). King Gādhi had no son, but he did have a daughter, and she married the brahmin Ṛcīka. Ṛcīka planned to have a brahmin son from his wife, and for his parents-in-law to have a *kṣatriya* son. His plan was for his mother-in-law to embrace an *aśvattha* tree and for his wife to embrace an *udumbara* tree, and for each of them to consume a special *caru* morsel that he had prepared.[24] But the mother-in-law thinks that Ṛcīka would want the best son for himself and his wife, and because she desires the best son for herself, she makes her daughter agree that the two of them will each embrace the other's tree and eat the other's *caru*. So they do, and the result is the famous double instance of *varṇasaṃkara*: in Ṛcīka's brahmin line there is the violent Rāma Jāmadagnya, and in King Gādhi's royal line there is Viśvāmitra, a brahmin.

Here the metaphor of embracing a tree and consuming a morsel is conspicuously sexual – a woman embracing a man/tree and consuming his morsel may do so vaginally – especially as the function of the morsel is a function ascribed to semen in the discourse: it determines, at least partially, the nature of the child. But then, and notwithstanding other examples of female Indian 'tree-hugging', the metaphor of the two different trees makes it hard to imagine how the semen switch could have occurred. Surely the mother-in-law did not actually have sex with the brahmin, and the daughter with her own father? As observed above in the rites of Drupada, Romapāda, and Daśaratha, where there is a block on the sexual metaphor being narrated out front, it forces instead a magical aspect, as one might tell in front of children.

With regard to the slippage between vaginal and oral consumption, the conception of Ṛśyaśṛṅga himself – mentioned above – is interesting. The doe got pregnant by drinking the water the semen fell in, "for fate cannot fail and the will of the gods must be" (*amoghatvād vidheś caiva bhāvitvād daivanirmitāt* ‖ Mbh 3.110.15cd, trans. Smith 2009: 181). Here the slippage between vaginal and oral consumption occurs everywhere except on the very surface of the narration, where it is marked by the quoted line. That slippage is a form of the slippage that Goldman discusses in his article on the general analogy between food and sex – and between hunger and lust, two basic forms of desire – in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Goldman 2001). The Sanskrit verb *bhuj* means to eat and to have sex with. Those two registers of consumption are imbued with all manner of parallel Dharmaśāstric restrictions and ascetic self-deprivations. They are parallel registers.[25] Thus it is that, as mentioned above, the rite of hospitality, the offering of food, is a direct link to the guest's sexual behaviour.

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been essayed by describing the war without those metaphors, and by then describing a sequence of meteorological events on the same pattern. Thus the two registers would have been placed in narrative series rather than in parallel. Compare also the descriptions of the River Yamunā, where the description of a river and the description of a woman are superimposed by being juxtaposed feature by feature: Yamunā the river's *p* was Yamunā the woman's *q*, Yamunā the river's *x* was Yamunā the woman's *y*, and so on. The first scene that features the Yamunā in this dual-register capacity is when Kṛṣṇa is roaming the river on his own with the cows (Hv 55.28–39). One imagines his sexual feelings, and whatever waterside encounters his adolescent mind might have had to work with. The second scene is when Baladeva later visits their childhood haunts, gets drunk in the woods, and implicitly or metaphorically sexually assaults Yamunā (Hv 83; Brodbeck in press). After a brief reprise of the earlier, dual-register, feature-by-feature description (83.35–38), Yamunā the river explicitly becomes Yamunā the woman and speaks to Baladeva as a woman to a man. The metaphor comes alive within the narrative, and the registers are united.

24 The *Mahābhārata*'s other versions of this story include the tree-hugging but not the *caru* morsels (3.115.23–24), or the *caru* morsels but not the tree-hugging (12.49.8–15), or are so brief they include neither (13.56.13ab).

In the story of Māndhātṛ's birth, the childless Yuvanāśva inadvertently drinks an enchanted potion that a brahmin has prepared for Yuvanāśva's wife, and as a result Yuvanāśva gets pregnant and bears Māndhātṛ himself (Mbh 3.126.8–24). The potion impregnates apparently in the manner of semen, whether or not the recipient has a womb. There is then the story of Jantu, an only son who, at a brahmin's suggestion, is sacrificed into the ritual fire in order to be replaced by a hundred sons.[26] His father's hundred wives become pregnant merely by inhaling the smoke produced by the offering (Mbh 3.127.17–128.5). These two examples provide two more ways in which the power of semen is represented in displaced terms. Seminal discourse is common and fluid in these texts.

Male brahmins are credited also for giving a second birth when some people graduate to become *dvija*, 'twice-born'. In the *dvija* concept, the basic difference between the first birth and the second is that the first is the birth of males and females from a female, but the second is the birth of (usually brahmin) males from a male (Smith 1989: 91–104). Much more could be said in this connection. The female partners who produce the great brahmin teachers Kṛpa and Droṇa are a thicket of reeds and a pot, respectively (Mbh 1.120–21). When Vyāsa produces Śuka his semen falls on the firestick he is using to make fire, and he keeps going with it.

> *yathādhvare samiddho 'gnir bhāti havyam upāttavān |*
> *tathārūpaḥ śuko jajñe prajvalann iva tejasā ||*
> *bibhrat pituś ca kauravya rūpavarṇam anuttamam |*
> *babhau tadā bhāvitātmā vidhūmo 'gnir iva jvalan ||*

As in a sacrifice a blazing fire sheds its effulgence all around when libations of clarified butter are poured upon it, after the same manner did Śuka take his birth, blazing with effulgence in consequence of his own energy. Śuka, of cleansed Soul, assuming the excellent form and complexion of his sire, shone like a smokeless fire, O son of Kuru.

<div align="right">

(*Mahābhārata* 12.311.10–11, trans. Ganguli 1970: 84, adjusted)[27]

</div>

Here Śuka almost seems to *be* the fire that Vyāsa produces.

In terms of the Viṣṇu porridge at the end of Daśaratha's rite as a child-making factor potentially additional to genetic contributions, one might try to compare the *gandharva*, which according to some Buddhist texts is necessary in order that a child be conceived (Held 1935: 131–38; Wayman 1997; Hara 2009: 220–21). If a new body originates in the aftermath of a heterosexual event, the *gandharva* represents the need for a certain transmigrating *ātman* or *cittasaṃtāna* ('continuity of consciousness') to associate with a new body. The *gandharva* is effectively the child's karma. The word

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25 "[I]n myths and dreams, and in rules of marriage, the act of eating symbolizes the sexual act" (Eliade 1977: 16). And there is a special connection between sex and eating meat. The legitimation of sex to make children (as a duty to the ancestors) resembles the legitimation of occasional meat eating (as at a feast), and in both cases the legitimation is in terms of a ritual exception. As the slaughterman said to the brahmin: *agnayo māṃsakāmāś ca ity api śrūyate śrutiḥ | yajñeṣu paśavo brahman vadhyante satataṃ dvijaiḥ | saṃskṛtāḥ kila mantraiś ca te 'pi svargam avāpnuvan || yadi naivāgnayo brahman māṃsakāmābhavan purā | bhakṣyaṃ naiva bhaven māṃsaṃ kasya cid dvijasattama || atrāpi vidhir uktaś ca munibhir māṃsabhakṣaṇe | devatānāṃ pitṝṇāṃ ca bhuṅkte dattvā tu yaḥ sadā | yathāvidhi yathāśraddhaṃ na sa duṣyati bhakṣaṇāt || amāṃsāśī bhavaty evam ity api śrūyate śrutiḥ | bhāryāṃ gacchan brahmacārī ṛtau bhavati brāhmaṇaḥ ||* "Revelation reveals that the fires are hungry for meat, and at sacrifices brahmins always kill animals, which, being sacramentalized by the incantations, then go to heaven, as we hear. Now, brahmin, if the old fires had not been so hungry for meat, no one would eat it now. Even now the hermits rule in the matter of eating meat: 'He who always eats only after having offered to deities and ancestors according to the Ordinance and with faith does not incur guilt by eating the remainder.' Revelation reveals that one thus equals a meat abstainer: a scholar of the Veda who goes to his wife at her season remains a brahmin" (Mbh 3.199.9–12, trans. van Buitenen 1975: 623–24, adjusted).

26 Crooke said that "Women in performance of a vow used to throw a first-born son to the crocodiles at the mouth of the Hooghly in the hope that such an offering would secure them additional offspring" (Crooke 1926: 377).

27 As above (at n.10), Ganguli may perhaps translate a variant here.

gandharva comes from the superhuman beings who transport, as it were from the accounts department, the karmic pulse enabling the zygote to be implanted within the womb, seven days after intercourse.

This idea is not found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. By implication something like the *gandharva* provision must occur when *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* characters are conceived, to the extent that the law of karma works through them; but when the topic is discussed it seems that the karma of the child, rather than being a third item, is already present in the semen at the time of intercourse.

> *dhātaiva khalu bhūtānāṃ sukhaduḥkhe priyāpriye |*
> *dadhāti sarvam īśānaḥ purastāc chukram uccaran ‖*

> It is the Lord Placer alone who sets down everything for the creatures, happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and sorrow, before even ejaculating the seed.

> (*Mahābhārata* 3.31.21, trans. van Buitenen 1975: 280)[28]

It seems unlikely, then, that the porridge for Daśaratha's wives could represent the arrival of a karmic wad, or any kind of divine wad overtaking it, *but not* semen.

Methods of Divine Descent

Daśaratha's wives got pregnant from Daśaratha himself, or from Ṛśyaśṛṅga, or from unmentioned men, or from the porridge, and/or by magic. Whatever the case may be, the porridge conveys Viṣṇu into all four sons. Here we will compare other instances in which gods take form on earth.[29]

As one kind of contrast to the Viṣṇu porridge, we recall the impregnation of Kuntī and Mādrī by the gods (Mbh 1.114–15). When five gods descended as the Pāṇḍavas, their *avatāraṇa* (descent) was by genital transmission. The idea of *avatāraṇa* by genital transmission is helpful for envisaging a 'part' (*aṃśa*) of the god in the human world as separate from the god him or herself. As a general statement the gods say that while in character on earth, they can also still be present in their usual forms in heaven (*antarikṣagatā ye ca pṛthivyāṃ ye ca pārthivāḥ ‖* Hv 49.9cd). But Daśaratha's rite differs from Pāṇḍu's because Viṣṇu does not have sex with Daśaratha's wives as those five gods have sex with Pāṇḍu's wives Kuntī and Mādrī.

Another kind of contrast to the Viṣṇu porridge is the depositing of Viṣṇu within two embryos conceived by Devakī from Vasudeva – the embryos that become Kṛṣṇa (Hv 47.10; 48.9) and Baladeva. In the *Harivaṃśa* there is nothing to disturb the idea that Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva are Vasudeva's genital sons, but there is no need for any porridge. Viṣṇu seems just to enter these embryos directly, as by implication any number of other gods in the *Mahābhārata*'s general divine *avatāraṇa* also enter *their* chosen embryos directly – Agni the embryo of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Śrī the embryo of Draupadī (Mbh 1.61.87, 95), and so on.[30]

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28 See also Mbh 13.112.32ab: *jīvo dharmasamāyuktaḥ śīghraṃ retastvam āgataḥ |*. Doniger says that "karmic tendencies are transferred from parents to children in the seed" (Doniger O'Flaherty 1980: 43). For the idea that the soul is in the semen, see also the five fires doctrine at *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.7–8; 5.10.6; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 6.2.16; *Mahābhārata* 6.25.14 (= *Bhagavadgītā* 3.14).

29 See Kātre 1934: 46–48: Viṣṇu descends by "mere transformation without birth", or by "birth … after the human course". The second category is subdivided: "In some cases Viṣṇu is said to have first entered, or associated himself with, the body of the father and thence to have been transferred in the natural course to the mother's womb. In some cases Viṣṇu is said to have made his way into the mother's womb through some food eaten by her. In some cases he seems to have directly entered the mother's womb without any middle link."

30 There is also the scene where Duryodhana is encouraged in his struggle against the Pāṇḍavas by the demons, after which we hear that Karṇa became possessed by Naraka (Mbh 3.240.19, 32), that the Saṃśaptakas became possessed by *rākṣasas*, and that "Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and the others were no longer so friendly toward the sons of

With Viṣṇu's birth as Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva there is also this story in the *Ādiparvan* in connection with the divine plan (Couture 2015):

sa cāpi keśau harir udbabarha
    śuklam ekam aparaṃ cāpi kṛṣṇam |
tau cāpi keśau viśatāṃ yadūnāṃ
    kule striyau rohiṇīṃ devakīṃ ca |
tayor eko baladevo babhūva
    kṛṣṇo dvitīyaḥ keśavaḥ sambabhūva ‖

God Hari plucked two hairs;
One hair was white, the other was black.
These hairs then went into the Yadu women,
Into Rohiṇī and Devakī.
The one of them became Baladeva,
The other, the black one, Keśava.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.189.31, trans. van Buitenen 1973: 373, adjusted)[31]

We do not know how the hairs got into the women. When brahmin Raibhya uses two hairs to make two obedient people with, one male, one female, he puts the hairs into his ritual fire (Mbh 3.137.9–12). But as we hear later in the *Harivaṃśa*, the embryo that became Baladeva was conceived by Devakī, and transferred to the womb of Rohiṇī in the seventh month of the pregnancy (Hv 47.30; 48.2–6). Perhaps the white hair did not affect Baladeva before he was transferred.[32]

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* the purpose of the *avatāraṇa* is to kill Rāvaṇa. This agenda intrudes as soon as Ṛśyaśṛṅga has poured the son-producing oblation into the ritual fire.

juhāva cāgnau tejasvī mantradṛṣṭena karmaṇā ‖
tato devāḥ sagandharvāḥ siddhāś ca paramarṣayaḥ |
bhāgapratigrahārthaṃ vai samavetā yathāvidhi ‖
tāḥ sametya yathānyāyaṃ tasmin sadasi devatāḥ |
abruvaṃl lokakartāraṃ brahmāṇaṃ vacanaṃ mahat ‖

… [Ṛśyaśṛṅga] poured the oblation into the fire according to the rite specified in the Vedas. At that the gods, *gandharva*s, perfected beings, and supreme seers assembled in the proper order to receive their shares of the offering. And when the gods had gathered in the sacrificial enclosure, in the customary order, they spoke grave words to Brahmā, creator of the world.

(*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.14.3c–5, trans. Goldman 2005: 115)

They tell him about Rāvaṇa. Brahmā says it is all already in hand, and that Rāvaṇa will be killed by a human being. Viṣṇu arrives, and the gods ask him to be that human being. He agrees, and chooses without further ado to become the son of Daśaratha, at whose son-getting rite they are assembled.

Pāṇḍu, now that their minds had been taken over by the Dānavas" (*bhīṣmadroṇakṛpādyāś ca dānavākrāntacetasaḥ* | *na tathā pāṇḍuputrāṇāṃ snehavanto viśāṃ pate* ‖ 240.34a–d). This kind of demonic possession seems to be different again from the non-genital *avatāraṇa* of the gods. In other cases, it can be hard to say at what stages of their pre- or post-natal life the various demonic characters who oppose Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva, and the Pāṇḍavas became demonic. This point is potentially significant when comparing the divine plan as presented at Mbh 1.58–61, 1.189, and Hv 41–45.

31 Van Buitenen has "God Hari had plucked two hairs of his head", but Couture thinks they might not have been from there (Couture 2015: 133–43). This scene recalls the wager between Kaśyapa's wives Vinatā and Kadrū over what colour the horse Uccaiḥśravas's tail is (Mbh 1.18).

32 Wayman's investigations around the Buddhist *gandharva* theory suggest that different *gandharva*s may have delivered different kinds of karma at different stages of pregnancy (Wayman 1997: 3–5, 48–75).

This business of the gods seems to be merely incidental to Daśaratha's immediate purpose with the rite, which would presumably have borne fruit thanks to Ṛśyaśṛṅga regardless. But there and then, at that very rite, the servant of Brahmā emerges from the ritual fire, gives Daśaratha the porridge, and tells him to feed it to his wives, and hence Daśaratha's sons, most particularly Rāma, are Viṣṇu, who kills Rāvaṇa.

Brahmā then tells the gods to be born to aid Viṣṇu. Their *avatāraṇa* method differs from Viṣṇu's, and is put into practice presumably subsequent to Daśaratha's rite. It is akin to the method of the five gods who sired the Pāṇḍavas. The gods and other superhuman male beings couple with superhuman female beings and sire upon them a massive army of "apes, monkeys and langurs" (*ṛkṣavānaragopuc-chāḥ*, Rām 1.16.10c; on *ṛkṣa*s, see Goldman 1989). "Each god's son was born equal to his father in build, beauty and valor" (16.11).

In Daśaratha's rite, the descent of Viṣṇu to earth, which in the *Mahābhārata* would seem not to need any oral or ritual accompaniment, is provided with both, in the form of the porridge. And with the narrative lead-in through Ṛśyaśṛṅga as priest of the rite, the porridge also serves as a symbolic substitute for Ṛśyaśṛṅga's semen deposit. The semen deposit is otherwise slightly occluded because although all of Daśaratha's wives explicitly have sex with the horse and eat the porridge, Ṛśyaśṛṅga's offering is singular, and is simply made into the fire (*juhāva cāgnau*, 14.3c).

Hara's article on "Divine Procreation" discusses a range of alleged methods known from Sanskrit literature – "touching (*sparśa*), thinking (*saṃkalpa*), addressing (*ullapana*), smiling (*upahasana*), etc." (Hara 2009: 217) – by which divine beings can produce offspring without having genital sex.

> [A] glance at the list of organs which participate in divine procreation invites us to a conjecture that all the authors of these treatises try to eliminate from divine procreation the sexual element (*saṃsarga, maithuna, ajjhācara, sannipāta*) which characterizes the human procreation.
>
> (Hara 2009: 236)

Hence, for example, Hanumat is produced without genital contact between his father (the god) Vāyu and his mother Añjanā (Rām 4.65.8–19). But more generally in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* the whole point is that the divine children are human: in the *Rāmāyaṇa* because only a human can kill Rāvaṇa, and so the divine *human* is the solution, and in the *Mahābhārata* because the problem occurs in the human realm, and so only divine *humans* can arrange the ritual sacrificial solution.

The drama for the human audience, as conducted by Vālmīki and Vyāsa (and by Kṛṣṇa who knows the most), is in three forms. It is in how the more grotesque of the ordinary operations at the human level are contextualised by (some refracted image of) the superhuman level. It is in how and how much the divine plan takes advance account of the propensity of the secret divine agents "in the world of men" (Pollock 2006) to go native and not remember their mission.[33] And it is in how this might impact upon all audience humans as possible forgotten divine actors. In any case, the featured divine humans in the narrated drama are necessarily humans; and so we can let them be conceived in the magical mechanical way that human beings are. Considering the alternatives (as spelled out by Hara in the realm of plant reproduction), who in the audience would not want to have been made through the friction of human sexual intercourse? Is sexual pleasure something we would deny to our parents?

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33 See Kṛṣṇa's words to Baladeva at Hv 58.35: *aho 'yaṃ mānuṣo bhāvo vyaktam evānugṛhyate | yas tvaṃ jagan-mayaṃ guhyaṃ guhyād guhyataraṃ gataḥ ‖* "Aha! You have clearly accepted the human condition! You are a se-cret that contains the whole world, but now you have become even more secret than a secret."

Conclusion

The contribution of this article is in the literary interpretation of Daśaratha's rite in the *Rāmāyaṇa* text (Rām 1.8–16). In an attempt to make Daśaratha's rite comprehensible to us as it was to its ancient audiences, text-historical speculations have been sidelined and the text's account of the rite has been illuminated from several related internal and external angles, facilitated by Ṛśyaśṛṅga's role having been signalled – in advance at least – as that of inseminator.

Examples may have been adduced that the reader would have wished for more details of, and more discussion of. I apologise. But the genre of ritual son-production is clear, through various lenses, however briefly those lenses have been provided; and Daśaratha's rite presents a particularly ramified example of the genre. Biology differentiates male and female roles in reproduction, and so discourse differentiates male and female roles with regard to reproduction, and as we have it here reproduction is viewed largely through the male role and the disguised masculinity of the sheer inseminator, the masculinity of the knowledge of lost children. But because Ṛśyaśṛṅga is already happily married and goes home after his visit to Ayodhyā (1.17.5), the loss is easily filled by the incidental Vaiṣṇava influx into Daśaratha's sons through the magic porridge. That influx is in turn contextualised by the general *avatāraṇa* of the gods in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* stories, and by the different ways – including direct insemination – in which gods come to play as humans.

The divine business presents a prism though which to view sorry and glorious human business, but since the divine angle is as apparently androcentric as the human angle, if not more so (Brodbeck 2006b), the idea of masculinity provides an overarching frame of reference. There is a specifically male understanding of human procreation done from within, by facts of biology, and these texts contribute to that understanding, and the cultural images they cast are cast from that biology (Brodbeck 2007). The texts and their cultural images are human in terms of the evolutionarily recent high-level technologies that allow androcentric discourse to exist in that form, but some aspects of that discourse can be categorised as mammalian male. Fathers are dispensable after insemination in many species, but long infancy in the mammalian style increases the parental gender gap, provoking cultural repercussions, of which androcentrism could be one. But how would I know? I see as implanted within the male of the species biology.

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

Hv   *Harivaṃśa*
Mbh   *Mahābhārata*
Rām   *Rāmāyaṇa*

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