

Bhāratas and Sāgaras

Recurrent Motives in the Sanskrit Genealogies¹

Abstract

The burning of Sagara's sons and the fall of the Kauravas are probably the most famous dynastic collapses in Indian mythology. Although Sagara and his sons belonged to the Solar lineage, while the Kauravas belonged to the Lunar lineage of the kṣatriyas, in this article, I have tried to show that there are many similarities between the dynastic crises. These points of connection seem to me to be so deep as to suggest that these stories emerged from a common story matrix and were later crystallised in the legends of the Solar and Lunar lineages.

Introduction

The Sanskrit genealogical lists occasionally report the birth of extremely large numbers of children, such as hundreds and more. Although the proliferation of offspring seems to foreshadow the rise of the dynasties, the available sources indicate that they usually fade away soon after their enormous growth.

For example, Nīpa was vainly blessed with a hundred sons; his family disappeared within a few generations, when one of the princes, Janamejaya, destroyed his own lineage (*Harivaṃśa* 15,19–36). Reva also had a hundred sons, but they were scattered everywhere after the fatal attack of the *puṇyajana rākṣasas* (*Harivaṃśa* 9,32–34). Kuvalāśva's hundred sons (or brothers)² were burned to death by Dhundhu, a subterranean monster, after digging up the surface (*Harivaṃśa* 9,47–77, *Mahābhārata* 3,192.6–195.39). Their tragic end may be seen as a precursor or abridged form (Doniger O'Flaherty 1971: 20) of the more familiar story of Sagara's sixty thousand sons, who

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² The *Harivaṃśa* first introduces these princes as Kuvalāśva's brothers (*Harivaṃśa* 9,47–49), but later refers to them as his sons (*Harivaṃśa* 9,64).

were killed in the same way by fire after they had gone below the surface of the earth (*Harivaṃśa* 10,48–49, *Mahābhārata* 3,106.2–3, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1,39.27–28). Apart from the fall of the Sāgaras, the most famous and detailed dynastic collapse in the Indian mythology is that of the hundred Kauravas, the anti-heroes of the *Mahābhārata*. Since these last dynastic collapses are better documented than the others, in what follows, I will examine and compare them in the following pages.

In fact, there have already been some scholarly investigations which have touched upon the similarities between the sons of Sagara and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. For example, the destructive fire plays an important role in both stories. Although the Kauravas were not physically reduced to ashes, they are often conceptualised as oblatinal victims of the great war sacrifice performed at Kurukṣetra (Feller 2004: 290). It is also noteworthy that both devastations were presided over by Viṣṇu, for in the case of the Sāgaras, their destroyer, the sage Kapila, is identified with him (*Harivaṃśa* 10,48, *Mahābhārata* 3,106.2, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1,39.24), while in the case of the Kauravas, it is his *avatāra*, Kṛṣṇa, who organised the war sacrifice (Feller 2004: 279), and thus directed the flames of the weapons to their victims.

Furthermore, it is not only their tragic downfalls but also their similar birth stories that provide an additional point of connection between the two stories. Both the sixty thousand sons of Sagara and the hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra were born from gourds produced by their mothers as a result of Śiva's blessing (Brodbeck 2009: 170–171).

In this paper, I intend to take a further step in the comparison of the Sāgaras and the Kauravas and to point out some other, generally neglected, common motifs between the legendary traditions. First, I will examine the sixty thousand sons of Sagara and the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, paying particular attention to their mothers (Sumati, Gāndhārī) and their maternal uncles (Garuḍa, Śakuni). I will then devote the second part of this article to study the inheritance in the two royal families.

Textual matters of comparison

After my introductory remarks, the second step in this investigation is to define the textual matters to be compared. Since the main theme of the *Mahābhārata* is the dynastic collapse of the Kauravas, on the one hand, it is obvious that the great epic should be considered.

With regard to the Sagara legend, however, both the *Mahābhārata* (3,104.6–108.19) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1,37.2–43.18) contain their own versions of the story, which differ in some important respects. Although in such cases it is usually quite

difficult to decide which source contains the older version, here it is strongly suggested that the Sagara legend of the *Rāmāyaṇa* may be more archaic than that of the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is deeply concerned with the Sūryavaṃśa, the so-called Solar line of the *kṣatriyas* (Thapar 1987: 337), to which its hero, Rāma Dāśarathi, belonged. Since the succession in this royal house, unlike the Somavaṃśa or Lunar line of the heroes of the *Mahābhārata*, is governed by strict primogeniture (Thapar 1978: 337), it is quite expected that Sagara's first wife, Vaidarbhī (Vidarbhan) Keśinī would have given birth to the heir apparent, while her co-wife, named Sumati, would have received the boon of bearing sixty thousand sons.

munes tu vacanaṃ śrutvā Keśinī Raghunandana|
putraṃ vaṃśakaraṃ Rāma jagrāha nṛpasamnidhau||
śaṣṭiṃ putrasahasrāṇi Suparnabhaginī tadā|
mahotsāhān kīrtimato jagrāha Sumatiḥ sutān|| (Rāmāyaṇa 1,37.13–14)

O Rāma, descendant of Raghu! After listening to the sage's speech in the presence of the king, Keśinī chose the son who would perpetuate the dynasty, while Suparna's sister, Sumati, received the sixty thousand powerful and glorious sons.

However, these roles of Sagara's wives are reversed in the *Mahābhārata*, according to which Vaidarbhī had sixty thousand sons while Sumati, here called Śaibyā, gave birth to the heir to the throne.

tasyātha manuśaśreṣṭha te bhārye kamalekṣaṇe|
Vaidarbhī caiva Śaibyā ca garbhīṇyau sambabhūvatuh||
tataḥ kālena Vaidarbhī garbhālābuṃ vyajāyata|
Śaibyā ca suśuve putraṃ kumāraṃ devarūpiṇam||
tadālābuṃ samutsraṣṭuṃ manaś cakre sa pāṛthivaḥ|
athāntarikṣāc chuśrāva vācaṃ gambhīranisvanām||
rājan mā sāhasaṃ kārṣiḥ putrān na tyaktum arhasi|
alābumadhyān niṣkr̥ṣya bījaṃ yatnena gopyatām||
sopasvedeṣu pātreṣu ghṛtapūrṇeṣu bhāgaśaḥ|
tataḥ putrasahasrāṇi śaṣṭiṃ prāpsyasi pāṛthiva||
Mahādevena diṣṭaṃ te putrajanma narādhipa|
anena kramayogena mā te buddhir ato 'nyathā||
Lomaśa uvāca
etac chrutvāntarikṣāc ca sa rājā rājasattama|
yathoktaṃ tac cakārātha śraddadhad Bharatarṣabha||
śaṣṭiḥ putrasahasrāṇi tasyāpratimatejasah|
Rudraprasādād rājarṣeḥ samajāyanta pāṛthiva|| (Mahābhārata 3,104.17–105.2)

O best of men! Then [Sagara's] lotus-eyed wives, Vaidarbhī and Śaibyā, became pregnant. After some time, Vaidarbhī gave birth to a gourd-shaped offspring, while Śaibyā gave birth to a son who looked like a divine prince. As the king was leaving the gourd, he heard a deep voice from the sky: O king, do not be rash! Please, do not abandon your sons. Take out the seed[s] from the inside of the gourd, and keep them carefully, one by one, in moistened vessels filled with ghee. [If you do this], you will have sixty thousand sons, o king. This means for the birth of your sons was commanded by Śiva (Mahādeva), so do not change your intention.

Lomaśa says:

O best of the kings! When the king heard this from heaven, he had faith and then did as he was told. [Thus] with the help of Śiva (Rudra), the royal sage had sixty thousand sons, each of whom possessed incomparable power.

This transposition may be explained by the textual context in which the redactors of the *Mahābhārata* inserted the myth. According to this, the sage Lomaśa told the story of the tragic downfall of Sagara's sons to console Yudhiṣṭhira after his banishment. Thus, in Lomaśa's mouth, the myth of the Solar line is transformed into a parable representing the juvenile branch that inherits the throne after the destruction of the first-born sons. Moreover, the authors of the *Mahābhārata* seem keen to emphasise the parallel between the tragic fates of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's and Sagara's sons, since, in contrast to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and most of the *purāṇas*,³ they portray the sixty thousand princes as Kaurava-like villains.

te ghorāḥ krūrakarmāṇa ākāśaparisarpiṇaḥ
bahutvāc cāvajānantaḥ sarvāṃl lokān sahāmarān
tridaśāṃś cāpy abādhanta tathā gandharvarākṣasān
sarvāṇi caiva bhūtāni śūrāḥ samaraśālinaḥ (Mahābhārata 3,105.3–4)

They were terrible, cruel and could move in the sky. Since there were many of them, they despised all of the people and the deities. These warlike heroes oppressed the gods, the *gandharvas*, the *rākṣasas* and all living beings.

The bad fame attributed to Sagara's son in the *Mahābhārata* removes the basic conflict of the *Rāmāyaṇa* version, in which Sagara may have suffered from having sixty thousand virtuous sons, but the only bad one had to inherit the throne. The absence of

³ The Sagara-legend is found in the *Agni-* (272,28–30), the *Bhāgavata-* (9,8.4–9.13), the *Brahma-* (78,3–77) the *Brahmāṇḍa-* (2,63.153–169), the *Garuḍa-* (1,138.31–32) the *Kūrma-* (1,20.5–10), the *Linga-* (1,66.14–20), the *Matsya-* (12,39–44), the *Nārada-* (1,8.1–138) and the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* (4,4.1–25), among which only the *Nārada-* and the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa* follows the *Mahābhārata* in introducing the sixty thousand brothers as sinners.

Sagara's dilemma may make it more plausible to suppose that it was the authors of the *Mahābhārata* who adopted and reused the story of Sagara from the *Rāmāyaṇa* for their own purposes.

Before proceeding, however, it should be mentioned that in addition to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Harivaṃśa* (10,46–66) also touches on Sagara's sons. Although this version is much shorter than the previous ones, and appears to be a summary of the legend, it contains some peculiar elements, such as the appearance of Aurva as the boon-giver in place of Śiva, and of Pañcajana and his four brothers, who, among Sagara's sons, survived the massacre.

Gāndhārī and Sumati

The supposition that the *Rāmāyaṇa* contains an older version of the Sagara-myth than the *Mahābhārata* does, means in practice that in what follows I will consider Śaibyā Sumati as a possible counterpart to Gāndhārī. Although the enormous number of sons they had is often cited as a striking similarity, I believe that there are two additional features that link these queens even more closely.

First, both Gāndhārī and Sumati are, more or less, from the same region. Although the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not clarify Sumati's homeland, the *Mahābhārata* (3,104.8.d) refers to this figure by the name of Śaibyā indicating a woman from Śibi, a peripheral kingdom to the Northwest. The *Mahābhārata* (3,190.82*21.153–240) associates this land with a king who sacrificed his own flesh to a kite to save a dove. Since this legend has its roots in the Greek mythology (Gaál 2017: 33), it is suggested that Śibi may have been a meeting point between the Indian and the Hellenistic cultures. This is also true of Gāndhārī's homeland, Gandhāra, which served as a common territory for the Indo-Greek rulers. Moreover, based on the accounts of the Chinese travellers, namely Faxian and Xuanzang, Śibi has been identified with the Swat valley (Dey 1927: 187), which belonged to the historical area of Gandhāra (Dey 1927: 61).

The other point of connection between Sumati and Gāndhārī relates to their genealogies, more accurately their brothers. According to the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1,37.14), Sumati was the sister of Garuḍa (*Suparṇabhaginī*) who also appears in the story, and manifests himself as an important supporter of the sixty thousand princes, telling Sagara's grandson, Aṃśumat, the method by which the Sāgaras could attain heaven.

visārya nipunāṃ dr̥ṣṭim tato 'paśyat khagādhipam|
pitṛṇāṃ mātulaṃ Rāma Suparṇam anilopamam||
sa cainam abravīd vākyaṃ Vainateyo mahābalaḥ|

mā śucaḥ puruṣavyāghra vadho 'yaṃ lokasaṃmataḥ||
Kapilenāprameyeṇa dagdhā hīme mahābalāḥ|
salilaṃ nārhasi prājña dātum eṣāṃ hi laukikam||
Gaṅgā Himavato jyeṣṭhā duhitā puruṣarṣabha|
bhasmarāśīkṛtān etān pāvayel lokapāvanī||
tayā klinnam idaṃ bhasma Gaṅgayā lokakāntayā|
saṣṭiṃ putrasahasrāṇi svargalokaṃ nayiṣyati|| (Rāmāyaṇa 1,40.16–20)

O Rāma, then [Aṃśumat] turned his wise eyes about and saw Garuḍa (Suparna), the king of the birds, the maternal uncle of his fathers, who was like the wind. The very powerful son of Vinatā gave the following advice: Do not be sad, o tiger of men, the destruction [of your fathers] will be highly esteemed by the people. These very strong [heroes] were burnt up by the immense [sage], Kapila. O wise man, please do not offer terrestrial water to your [fathers]. O bull of men, [only] Gaṅgā, the elder daughter of the Himalaya, who purifies the worlds, will be able to purify [your fathers], who have become a heap of ashes. If the ashes are moistened by the Gaṅgā, who is pleasing to all, she will lead the sixty thousand sons to heaven.

In the case of the Kauravas, the importance of the maternal uncle should not be discussed for too long. Śakuni is evidently the chief ally of the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who arranged for the exile of the Pāṇḍavas, the members of the rival juvenile branch. In name, at least, he is also a bird. Joking aside, there is indeed some evidence to suggest a relationship between the maternal uncles of the Kauravas and the Sāgaras. It was perhaps Madeleine Biardeau who first drew attention to this. According to her, Garuḍa's theft of *soma* in his servitude of Kadrū's thousand serpent sons bears a resemblance to Śakuni's help to the Kauravas in excluding the Pāṇḍavas (Biardeau 1980–1981: 237). She also understood the name Śakuni to mean an ominous bird (*oiseau de mauvais augure*, Biardeau 1980–1981: 236), and recognised him as a false counterpart of Garuḍa (Biardeau 1980–1981: 237). To substantiate this assumption, Biardeau examined Śakuni's genealogy and claimed that the name of Subala for Śakuni's father may have been a deliberate choice to strengthen the correspondence between him and Garuḍa (Biardeau 1980–1981: 237) since one of the latter's sons was also known by the same name:

Vainateyasutaiḥ sūta ṣaḍbhis tatam idaṃ kulam|
Sumukhena Sunāmnā ca Sunetreṇa Suvarcasā||
Surūpapakṣirājena Subalena ca Mātale| (Mahābhārata 5,99.2–3.b)

O Mātali, this family is extended by the six sons of Garuḍa, namely Sumukha, Sunāman, Sunetra, Suvarcas, Subala, and the king of the birds called Surūpa.

However, neither Biardeau explains why the name Subala was chosen for this purpose among Garuḍa's sons, nor does the *Mahābhārata* provide any further information about these mysterious birds. In any case, the appearance of Garuḍa in Sumati's genealogy makes it still tempting to investigate whether the mention of the name Subala is a mere coincidence, or, as Biardeau suggested, a deliberate choice to link the Gandhāran kings with the mythical birds. To begin with, it would be necessary to consider where the ancestors of Śakuni and Gāndhārī came from.

The Lunar line of the *Mahābhārata*, just like the genealogy of the Bible, serves as a universal family tree of humanity (Thapar 1978: 339–341), in which King Yayāti plays the role of Noah as the ancient progenitor. According to the mythological sources, Yayāti became unexpectedly old as a result of the curse of his father-in-law, Kāvya Uśanas (Śukra), and he asked his sons to give him their own youth. Among his sons, only the youngest one, Pūru, complied, and so the king cursed his other miserly sons, namely Yadu, Turvasu, Druhyu and Anu, making their descendants become impure barbarians (*Mahābhārata* 1,79.1–80.27). In this context, the people of Gandhāra are concerned with the line of Druhyu (*Harivaṃśa* 23,130–132), whose successors, however, do not mention those heroes and heroines such as Śakuni, Subala, Ulūka, Gāndhārī and Satyā (Nagnajitī), with whom the epics associate the region. Since Gandhāra of the *Mahābhārata* emerges as such a land, where brāhmaṇic culture flourishes, and with which the house of the Bhāratas finds the marital alliance fruitful, it is less surprising that Gāndhārī's line is not related to the state founder Druhyu, but it is unusual that, unlike Pāṇḍu's wives, she does not appear to be related to the Lunar line.⁴

The late Vedic (*Aitareya-brāhmaṇa* 7,34, *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* 8,1.4) and the Buddhist (*Kumbhakāra-jātaka*, *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* 408, p. 377) and Jaina sources (*Uttarādhyayana-sūtra* 3, p. 321) associate the land with a certain Nagnajit (Naggaji, Naggāī), with whom both the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Mahābhārata* show familiarity. The *Harivaṃśa* (80,15.ef) claims that Nagnajit was an ally of Jarāsaṃdha in the war against Kṛṣṇa, while the *Mahābhārata* (1,57.93.ab) introduces him as a disciple of Prahrāda. In the latter case, however, it is not decided whether this Prahrāda is the son of Hiranyakaśipu (*Mahābhārata* 1,59.17–18) or the Bāhlīka king mentioned in the

⁴ Pāṇḍu's first wife, Pṛthā, was a Yādava princess, the sister of Vasudeva (*Mahābhārata* 1,104.1), while his second wife, Mādrī, may have been his second cousin (Száler 2019: 117–119).

genealogy of the *Mahābhārata* (1,61.29.cd). Since Nagnajit is also identified with a demon called Iṣupad in the Vulgate version of the *Mahābhārata* (*Vulg.* 1,67.20.c–21.b), perhaps the previous explanation is more likely.

On the other hand, although the epic references are rather brief, they do reveal some relationship between Nagnajit and Subala. On the basis of the *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* (8,1.4) which mentions a certain Svarjit as the son of Nagnajit, they may have been independent characters who were identified with each other in the epic sources. In this regard, some scholars claim that they were the same person (Mani 1975: 515, Shastri 1991: 92), while others recognise the reborn form of Nagnajit in Subala (Parvatīya 1995: 974).

In any case, the occurrence of the name Nagnajit in relation to Subala can be taken as an additional indication of the affinity of the royal house of Gandhāra with the mythical birds. The word “*nagnajit*” literally means “the conqueror of the naked ones”, and so it may allude to Garuḍa who is famous as the enemy of snakes. This is also confirmed by some linguists who suggest that the word *nāga* referring to snakes is derived from the word “*nagna*” (Mayrhofer 1996: 33).

Finally, the influence of the birds is also reflected in Nīlakaṇṭha’s explanation of the verse introducing Subala’s children:

tasya prajā dharmahantrī jajñe devaprakopanāt||

Gāndhārarājaputro 'bhūc Chakuniḥ Saubalas tathā|

Duryodhanasya mātā ca jajñāte 'rthavidāv ubhau|| (Mahābhārata 1,57.93.c–94)

His clever children were born of the wrath of the gods. Both of them transgressed the law.

The son of the king of Gandhāra was called Saubala Śakuni, while [her daughter] became the mother of Duryodhana.

There seems to be no allusion to the mythical birds in this connection, but Nīlakaṇṭha added the following gloss:

tasya Subalasya prajā puṃrūpaiva śakunirūpā| (Nīlakaṇṭha comm. ad

Mahābhārata Vulg. 1,63.11 = Mahābhārata 1,57.93)

The children of Subala have the form of a man and the form of a bird [at the same time].

These words seem to confirm the supposed relationship between Gandhāra and the birds, otherwise what else could explain Nīlakaṇṭha’s allusion to the bird form of Subala’s children.

Having examined Subala’s position as head of the royal house of Gandhāra, his children should be considered. Although the verse quoted above suggests that Subala had only two children, Gāndhārī and Śakuni, the *Mahābhārata* shows familiarity with

some of his other sons. On the one hand, Acala and Vṛṣaka are also acknowledged as the sons of the king of Gandhāra (*Mahābhārata* 7,29.2) and as Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son-in law (*Mahābhārata* 7,29.9; 8,4.39).

On the other hand, the *Bhīṣmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (6,86.22–24) mentions another group of princes, six of whom are also closely associated with Subala. In their case, however, it is unclear whether they are the sons of Subala or of Śakuni. The reconstructed text of the critical edition is somewhat inconsistent here, first introducing the six princes of Gandhāra as Saubala's (*Mahābhārata* 6,86.22.c), who are most likely Śakuni's sons, and then, after a few verses, referring to them as Subala's descendants (*Mahābhārata* 6,86.30.d; 6,86.35.d; 6,86.39.b). Among the modern scholars, both Biardeau (1980–1981: 236) and Hildebeitel (1995: 450) regarded these heroes as sons of Subala and thus brothers of Śakuni, a view supported by the fact that one of the princes is called Vṛṣaka, as is Śakuni's brother mentioned above. In any case, whichever interpretation we prefer, the six Saubalas, like Subala, provide additional points of connection with Garuḍa and the birds.

The number of the Saubalas alone recalls the six sons of Garuḍa. Although this can again be seen as a coincidence, the *Mahābhārata* nevertheless maintains that the princes are somehow related to the king of birds. According to this, the appearance of the Saubalas on the side of Śakuni called forth Irāvata, Arjuna's *nāga*-born son, one of Garuḍa's natural enemies. As soon as the half-snake warrior entered the fray, he killed five of the Saubalas, while their sixth brother, Vṛṣaka, narrowly escaped. But the story does not end there. After the fall of the Saubalas, a *rākṣasa*, Ārśyaśṛṅgin, came into view to avenge their deaths. He took the form of Garuḍa and killed Arjuna's son.

Ārśyaśṛṅgis tato dṛṣtvā samare śatrum ūrjitam|
kṛtvā ghoram mahad rūpaṃ grahītum upacakrame|
saṃgrāmaśirasō madhye sarveṣāṃ tatra paśyatām||
tām dṛṣtvā tādrśīm māyām rākṣasasya mahātmanaḥ|
Irāvān api saṃkruddho māyām sraṣṭum pracakrame||
tasya krodhābhibhūtasya saṃyugeṣv anivartinah|
yo 'nvayo mātrkas tasya sa enam abhipedivān||
sa nāgair bahuśo rājan sarvataḥ saṃvṛto raṇe|
dadhāra sumahad rūpaṃ Ananta iva bhogavān|
tato bahuvīdhair nāgaiś chādayām āsa rākṣasam||
chādayamānas tu nāgaiḥ sa dhyātvā rākṣasapuṅgavaḥ|
Sauparṇam rūpaṃ āsthāya bhakṣayām āsa pannagān||
māyayā bhakṣite tasminn anvaye tasya mātrke|

vimohitam Irāvantam asinā rākṣaso 'vadhīt|| (Mahābhārata 6,86.64–70)

Recognising his mighty enemy in the battle, [the *rākṣasa* called] Ārśyaśrīgi (*sic*) made a terrible, enormous form and then attacked to capture him. As everyone in the middle of the battle front watched, Irāvāt realised the illusion of the eminent *rākṣasa*. He was also angry, and began to use his own magic power. [Irāvāt], who was famous for never turning back in battle, was overcome with rage when the [serpents], the members of his maternal line, stood before him. O king, the *nāgas* surrounded him on the battlefield, while he possessed a form as enormous as that of the serpent Ananta. Then he covered the *rākṣasa* with various snakes. When the bull of *rākṣasa* was attacked by the snakes, he meditated and then took the form of Garuḍa and destroyed the snakes. Having thus destroyed his mother's relatives, the *rākṣasa* killed the confused Irāvāt with his sword.

In summary, it seems that Sumati and Gāndhārī are closer to each other than the most striking parallels, such as the large number of offspring and Śiva's blessing, would suggest. Apparently, not only the queens, but also their brothers can be considered as counterparts. Although the exact relationship between Śakuni and Garuḍa is not clear, there is much evidence to suggest strongly that there is some connection between the epic kings of Gandhāra and the birds led by Garuḍa. This can immediately shed new light on Janamejaya's decision to perform his snake sacrifice in Takṣaśilā (*Mahābhārata* 18,5.29), the capital of Gandhāra. While Christopher Minkowski (1989: 404) has drawn attention to Greek works that report on snake-worship in the region, the sources on display suggest that it is not the snakes but their enemies, Garuḍa and the birds, that may have had particular significance there.

The heirs to throne

Having examined the destroyed branches, the next step is to look at the succession in the two mythological traditions. In the Sagara legend of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the person of the heir seems to be out of the question, since Śiva's blessing clearly names Keśinī as the mother of the future king. Her son, Asamañja, however, failed to live up to expectations and was excluded from the kingdom even before he took the throne:

sa ca jyeṣṭho naraśreṣṭha Sagarasyātmasambhavaḥ|

bālān grhītvā tu jale Sarayvā Raghunandana|

prakṣipyā prahasan nityaṃ majjatas tān nirīkṣya vai||

paurāṇām ahite yuktaḥ pitrā nirvāsitaḥ purāt|| (Rāmāyaṇa 1,37.20–21)

O best of men, descendant of Raghū! Sagara's oldest son took the children and threw them into the waters of the Sarayū. As he saw them sinking, he laughed and laughed. [Because] he was engaged in harming the citizens, his father banished him from the city.

In the case of the Kuru house, there are two characters in whom Asamañja's traits can be seen. On the one hand, his villainy is reminiscent of Duryodhana who, like him, tried

to drown Bhīma in his youth (*Mahābhārata* 1,119.24–35). On the other hand, Asamañja’s role in the succession is very similar to that of Arjuna. Although none of the available sources give any information about Asamañja’s fate after his banishment, it is said that his virtuous son, Aṃśumat inherited the throne of Sagara.

kāladharmaṃ gate Rāma Sagare prakṛtījanāḥ|

rājānaṃ rocaṃyām āsur Aṃśumantaṃ sudhārmikam|| (Rāmāyaṇa 1,41.1)

O Rāma! When Sagara passed away, the subjects elected the very virtuous Aṃśumat as king.

This actually reflects Arjuna’s position among the Bhāratas. Although Arjuna was a blameless hero, he was also banished from his kingdom. Although, unlike Sagara’s son, he had no real hope of becoming king, it was his grandson, Parikṣit whom Kṛṣṇa revived after the destruction of the warrior order at Kurukṣetra (*Mahābhārata* 14,69.1–11).

With regard to the role of Asamañja, while the *Mahābhārata* follows the narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* version, the *Harivaṃśa* omits the character of Asamañja altogether, claiming that Keśinī’s only son and immediate heir to Sagara was called Pañcajana.⁵

teṣāṃ Nārāyaṇaṃ tejaḥ praviṣṭānāṃ mahātmanām|

ekaḥ Pañcajano nāma putro rājā babhūva ha|| (Harivaṃśa 10,63)

After the virtuous [brothers] entered the fiery energy of Nārāyaṇa, [Sagara’s] only son, Pañcajana became king.

Although some manuscripts of the *Harivaṃśa* tend to identify Pañcajana with Asamañja (*Harivaṃśa* 10,63*220), this is probably due to a later attempt by the transmitters who may have been anxious to harmonise with Sagara’s widely known genealogy. Unlike Asamañja, Pañcajana’s succession seems never to have been challenged. He did not suffer from exile and, although the *Harivaṃśa* is not very forthcoming in connection with him, he may have occupied his father’s throne without hindrance.

As a counterpart to Pañcajana among the Bhāratas, I believe that the five sons of Pāṇḍu may appear. The name of Pañcajana literally means ‘five men’, which seems to parallel the alliance of the five sons of Pāṇḍu, led by Yudhiṣṭhira, who came to power after the fall of the Kauravas. Although the Pāṇḍavas were five individuals, it is not uncommon in genealogical lists for groups of brothers to be replaced in some cases by a single individual whose name is preceded by the number of the group.

⁵ In addition to the *Harivaṃśa*, there are brief allusions to Pañcajana in the *Brahma-* (8,73) and the *Matsya-purāṇa* (15,18).

On the basis of the *Harivaṃśa*, it appears that the royal house of Aṅga adopted Rāma Dāśarathi, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, from the Solar line of the *kṣatriyas*:

atha Citrarathasyāpi putro Daśaratho 'bhavat|

Lomapāda iti khyāto yasya Śāntā sutābhavat||

tasya Dāśarathir vīraś Caturaṅgo mahāyaśāḥ|

Ṛṣyaśṛṅgaprabhāvena jajñe kulavivardhanaḥ|| (Harivaṃśa 23,36–37)

Citraratha's son was Daśaratha. He was also known as Lomapāda. He had a daughter named Śāntā. His son, the very glorious Caturaṅga, who made his family great, was born by the power of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga.

The allusions to Śāntā, as Daśaratha's daughter, and to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's assistance in the birth of his heir recall the exposition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1,8.1–14.21). Although this Daśaratha has only one son, his name may echo the four sons of Daśaratha of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, since the word Caturaṅga refers to one who has four bodies. Perhaps, such an analogy can be made between Pañcajana and the Pāṇḍavas.

With regard to the branches of the heirs, it is also noteworthy that the stories of both the Bhāratas and the Sāgaras end in the time of the third generation after the dynastic collapse. Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, was involved in performing a horse sacrifice which, like Sagara's, was destroyed by Indra. Although Janamejaya was eager for revenge, he eventually realised that the fate was inevitable and gave up his rivalry with the king of the gods (*Harivaṃśa* 118.11–41). Sagara and his children went the opposite way, for in this case, the king could not forgive Indra for interrupting the sacrifice, and this led to the tragedy of the Sāgaras. Here, the order was restored by Bhagīratha, the great-grandson of Asamañja, who was able to cause Gaṅgā to descend to earth and thus could purify his ancestors (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.41.11–43.18).

These parallels suggest that not only can the sixty thousand sons of Sagara be regarded as the counterparts of the Kauravas, but that the main dynastic conflict of the *Mahābhārata* is indeed reflected in the Sagara legend.

Conclusion

The similarities shown on the previous pages may reveal a deep connection between the two stories, and thus lead us to the story matrix hypothesised by Pollock (1986: 39–43) regarding the parallels between the *Sabhāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and by Collins (2003: 659) between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Vessantara-jātaka*. According to this, both the *Mahābhārata* and the Sagara-legend may have emerged from a single matrix created by the collective memory of

ancient Indians and then manifested themselves in different forms because they were transmitted in the legends of either the Solar or the Lunar line of the *kṣatriyas*.

On the basis of such a story matrix, Collins (2003: 665) claimed that the absence of the Rāma story in the Pāli literature could be explained by the fact that the *Vessantara-jātaka* elaborated on the same theme and thus made it unnecessary to repeat the already known narrative. With regard to this theory, the parallels between the *Mahābhārata* and the Sagara-legend can provide a similar explanation for that why the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the epic of the Solar line was unconcerned about alluding to the characters of the *Mahābhārata* (Brockington 1998: 481). Although the mythological thinking solved this problem by backdating the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* before the dynastic crisis of the Lunar line, it seems more likely that the two epics, as well as the characters of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa originally came from separate traditions (Brinkhaus 1992: 103). In the light of this assumption, the presumed story matrix suggests that the traditions of both the Lunar and the Solar lineages were familiar with the same dynastic collapse of the past, although they ascribed different meanings to it. On the one hand, the story, as the main theme of the *Mahābhārata*, was expanded and combined with additional topoi of the Indian mythology, such as the birth-story of Bhīṣma, which echoes that of Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, the compilers of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were anxious to glorify the heroic deeds of Rāma Dāśarathi and thus used the story of the collapse as an etiological myth to explain the appearance of the holy Ganges on earth.

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