Oral Tradition, 36/1 (2023):3-36

"It Has Not Yet Become Pacified": Kings, Hunting, and the Murder of the Father in Sanskrit Epic[1]

Emily Blanchard West

The *Mahābhārata* and *Ramāyaṇa* present us with eight primary and embedded narratives in which an archer (usually a royal member of the *kṣatriya*, or warrior, class) causes the unintended death of a person in animal form while hunting, and for which the killer generally pays an offspring-related penalty with profound and far-reaching effects. Such duplication and adaptation of inherited thematic material is one of the hallmarks of oral composition and epic literature; when a complex theme is repeatedly used and expanded, the result is the propagation of type-scenes, multiple independent episodes adhering to the same internal structure, often provided with differentiating flourishes which provide a sense of novelty for the hearer. The function of oral-poetic processes to enable memorization and speed composition-in-performance has been exhaustively studied, but the duplication of these particular scenes in an oral but largely fixed-text composition presents us with several unique and interlinked phenomena. One is how strategically the modifications used in each occurrence of the motif exactly meet the needs of that section of narrative; a second is the way that the scenes bring together a collection of elements which combine to create a stunning depth of meaning within a Hindu worldview, culminating in a version which marks the end of the heroic age and the beginning of the "Age of Strife," the last age of the eon.[2]

In Sanskrit literature, the impulse to add to or reshape parts of an existing story often seems more commonly to have found an outlet in the creation of new iterations of the same story in subsequent generations of texts,[3] but the epics do contain a number of type-scenes, recurring themes, and repurposed narrative progressions.[4] Far more than just a simple device to assist in

[1] I am deeply grateful to *Oral Tradition*'s anonymous referees, whose generous and thorough comments were extremely useful and alerted me to valuable comparanda and scholarship of which I had been unaware. I also owe incalculable thanks to William Malandra and Jesse Knutson for their infinite patience with me in general, and for their help with the Sanskrit, the bibliography, and the refining of the argument of this paper in particular.

[2] By way of comparison, the Homeric epics offer two examples of type-scenes regularly deployed to mark the passage of time: one is the retiring scene, as described in E. West 2010, while another is its logical counterpart, the oft repeated motif of Eos arising from the bed of Tithonus to mark the onset of a new day (for example, *Iliad* 11.1, *Odyssey* 5.1, and so forth).

[3] See, for example, E. West 2017.

[4] As discussed, for example, in Brockington 1998:104-05 or E. West 2016.

the organization or expansion and contraction of a narrative, however (as repeated themes are often employed in oral literature; cf. Lord 1960:68-98), the eight variations of the "deer"-killing motif illustrate the enormous ingenuity and subtlety with which the repetition of inherited material can be employed in Sanskrit epic. The scenes provide pivotal elements within the storyline, they are frequently positioned so as to usher in a new phase of the plot, and their essential, seemingly simple, structure rests on profound cosmological underpinnings.

That a scene of accidental killing could serve as the basis of a highly productive epic motif is not surprising. From the Code of Hammurabi to modern debates on the death penalty, abortion, or animal rights, the endless drawing and redrawing of societal lines around licit and illicit killing has always taken up a large share of cultural introspection. Nowhere, however, does anxiety over killing so permeate a body of literature as it did in ancient India, where religious tenets on nonviolence and societal ideals valuing abstention from meat jostled for position with wider dietary practices, a political system that valued prowess in war, and religious requirements regarding often copious animal sacrifice. Killing is presented as an act which is necessary—even noble—in certain contexts, but also potentially fraught. In the epics, a foundational tale from the *brāhmaṇas* has been modified into a type-scene in which tensions around hunting manifest alongside anxieties about warrior-priest conflict, progeny, and the sacrifice, all of them bound up with the concept of cyclical time.

If we can accept the principle that motifs are not repurposed without at least some mild alteration, then it is clear that all the below are variations on a theme:

Citation	Killer	Victim	Circumstance
Mbh. 1.109	Pāṇḍu	Kiṃdama	While hunting, Pāṇḍu mistakenly kills a copulating brahmin who has assumed deer form.
R. 2.57	Daśaratha	Nameless ascetic[5]	While hunting, Daśaratha accidentally kills a deerskin-clad ascetic he mistakes for an elephant.
R. 3.42 and *Mbh*. 3.262	Rāma	Mārīca	Rāma pursues and kills a golden deer which is actually an *asura* (demon) in an assumed form.
Mbh. 1.173	Kalmāṣapāda	Nameless brahmin	Hunting for food while cursed with madness, Kalmāṣapāda kills and eats a copulating brahmin.
R. 7.57	Saudāsa	Nameless *asura*	While hunting for deer, Saudāsa shoots an *asura* disguised as a tiger.
Mbh. 3.139	Parāvasu	Raivya	Parāvasu mistakes his deerskin-clad father for an animal in the dark and shoots him.
Mbh. 3.182	A Haihaya king	A son of Tārkṣya	A king shoots an ascetic wearing a black antelope skin after mistaking him for a deer.
Mbh. 16.5	Jarā	Kṛṣṇa	A hunter mistakes the meditating Kṛṣṇa for a deer and kills him with an arrow.

Table 1.

Below, each episode is treated individually, in the order shown in Table 1.

[5] The later tradition assigns this young man the name Śravaṇa.

Pāṇḍu

The origination point of the main narrative arc of the *Mahābhārata* is King Pāṇḍu's inadvertent killing of a powerful ascetic in the first book of the epic.[6] While hunting in the forest, Pāṇḍu shoots what he believes to be a particularly magnificent stag engaged in the act of copulation, but his intended target turns out to be Kiṃdama, a brahmin ascetic who had assumed deer form in order to mate (*Mbh*. 1.109.5-9):

rājā pāṇḍur mahāraṇye mṛgavyālaniṣevite
vane maithunakālasthaṃ dadarśa mṛgayūthapam 5
tatas tāṃ ca mṛgīṃ taṃ ca rukmapuṅkhaiḥ supatribhiḥ
nirbibheda śarais tīkṣṇaiḥ pāṇḍuḥ pañcabhir āśugaiḥ 6
sa ca rājan mahātejā ṛṣiputras tapodhanaḥ
bhāryayā saha tejasvī mṛgarūpeṇa saṃgataḥ 7
saṃsaktas tu tayā mṛgyā mānuṣīm īrayan giram
kṣaṇena patito bhūmau vilalāpākulendriyaḥ 8

King Pāṇḍu, in the great wilderness inhabited by deer and wild beasts,
in the forest he saw the leader of a herd of deer at the time of mating. 5
Thereupon, Pāṇḍu shot him and the doe with gold-shafted,
well feathered arrows; sharp ones, five (of them), (and) swift. 6
But (the deer), O King, was a powerful ascetic, the son of a *ṛṣi*, rich in austerities.
With his wife, this powerful one in deer form was having intercourse. 7
Still conjoined with the doe, raising a human voice,
instantly, fallen to the ground, he lamented, his senses overwhelmed.[7] 8

In a reprimand which largely centers around the immorality of interrupting the procreative act, the dying ascetic curses Pāṇḍu that he too will die the next time he has intercourse.[8] Unable to sleep with his wives, Pāṇḍu cannot father heirs, so he resigns his kingship and retires to celibacy in the forest. While his wives are ultimately able to conceive five sons by summoning an assortment of gods, Kiṃdama's revenge on the monarch nevertheless causes a disruption in the line of succession that serves as the fundamental motivator for the plot of the next ten books of the epic.

---

[6] For additional analysis of this episode, see, for example, Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:186-87 and Doniger 2009:240-41, 294-95; Dhand 2004, especially 39-41, treats the dharmic repercussions for the wives of Pāṇḍu and Saudasa (discussed below).

[7] Here and throughout the article, translations that are not otherwise attributed are my own.

[8] The same curse, with the same rationale, is given by Vālmīki to the Niṣāda hunter who kills the male of a pair of mating *krauñca* birds at *R.* 2.13-14.

Daśaratha

The *Ramāyaṇa* contains three iterations of the motif. The first of these is presented at *sargas* 63-64 of the *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa*, in which King Daśaratha relates the sad tale of his long-ago, accidental murder of a young ascetic.[9] The boy is clad in deerskin (and bark; he is *valkalājinavāsasaḥ*, *R.* 2.57.21), but in this text it is the sounds he makes fetching water that cause Daśaratha to mistake him for an elephant (*R.* 2.57.16-18):

athāndhakāre tv aśrauṣaṃ jale kumbhasya paryataḥ
acakṣur viṣaye ghoṣaṃ vāraṇasyeva nardataḥ 16
tato 'haṃ śaram uddhṛtya dīptam āśīviṣopamam
amuñcaṃ niśitaṃ bāṇam aham āśīviṣopamam 17
tatra vāg uṣasi vyaktā prādurāsīd vanaukasaḥ
hā heti patatas toye vāg abhūt tatra mānuṣī
katham asmadvidhe śastraṃ nipatet tu tapasvini 18

In the darkness then I heard in the water (the sound) of a pot being filled,
(but) not in range of the eyes—a sound like an elephant rumbling. 16
Then I, having drawn up an arrow gleaming like a poisonous snake,
I released the sharp dart, gleaming like a poisonous snake, 17
there, a voice at dawn manifested audibly, of a forest dweller;
there arose a human voice of one falling in that water (crying), "Alas, alas!"
"How would (anyone) shoot a weapon at someone like me, an ascetic?" 18

There is no associated sexual activity or sexual component to the curse in this version, but the parallel construction with Pāṇḍu's misadventure and punishment is clear: where Pāṇḍu killed a man engaged in the act of conception and lost the ability to safely perform that act himself, Daśaratha killed a young man and is cursed by the dead boy's father to lose his own beloved son in young manhood, a prophecy which has just come true at the point in the epic when the tale is related. Here again the occurrence of the motif signals an end and a beginning: the imminent death of Daśaratha, the loss of Rāma's succession to the kingship, and Rāma and Sītā's removal to their eventful sojourn in the forest.[10]

Rāma

The second occurrence of the motif in the *Ramāyaṇa* comes at *sargas* 42-44 of the

[9] This episode has been widely treated, most relevantly at Ramanujan 1972, Goldman 1978, and Doniger 2009:240-41. This scene is not included in the *Mahābhārata*'s retelling of the *Ramāyaṇa*.

[10] Daśaratha only survives long enough to see Rāma depart, after which he promptly dies of grief. While the motif most commonly marks beginnings, as we will see below in the context of the death of Kṛṣṇa in *Mbh.* 16.5, in the context of Hindu conceptions of time, every beginning is also necessarily the end of the phase before it.

Āraṇya Kāṇḍa.[11] This iteration again departs slightly further from the template; in this instance the alteration is likely intended to protect Rāma's image as the perfect prince and hero and prevent the ignominy of having him receive a curse. The deer that Rāma kills is actually a *rākṣasa* (demon), named Mārīca, who is disguised as a bejeweled and precious-stone-encrusted deer and specifically tasked with drawing Rāma away from his hermitage. When Rāma's wife Sītā sees Mārīca's lovely deer form, she begs her husband to catch the animal for her. Although Rāma suspects a trap, at the continued pleading of Sītā, he pursues the deer (*R*. 3.42.10-13):

> *dṛṣṭvā rāmo mahātejās taṃ hantuṃ kṛtaniścayaḥ*
> *saṃdhāya sudṛḍhe cāpe vikṛṣya balavad balī* 10
> *tam eva mṛgam uddiśya jvalantam iva pannagam*
> *mumoca jvalitaṃ dīptam astrabrahmavinirmitam* 11
> *sa bhṛśaṃ mṛgarūpasya vinirbhidya śarottamaḥ*
> *mārīcasyaiva hṛdayaṃ vibhedāśanisaṃnibhaḥ* 12
> *tālamātram athotpatya nyapatat sa śarāturaḥ*
> *vyanadad bhairavaṃ nādaṃ dharaṇyām alpajīvitaḥ*
> *mriyamāṇas tu mārīco jahau tāṃ kṛtrimāṃ tanum* 13
>
> Having seen (the deer), the hero Rāma resolved to kill him.
> Having engaged the sturdy bow, and having drawn it back, that powerful mighty one, 10
> having aimed directly at the deer (an arrow) blazing like a snake,
> he released the blazing, flaming weapon created by Brahma. 11
> That best of arrows, violently split deer-formed
> Mārīca's heart, like the splitting of a lightning bolt. 12
> Then, having leapt as high as a palm tree, he fell down, pained by the arrow.
> He screamed out a horrible cry, on the ground, barely living;
> now dying, Mārīca abandoned his simulated form. 13

As in the deaths of Kiṃdama and of Daśaratha's young ascetic victim, the fatal shot produces a horrible cry and the utterance of fateful words that change the course of the hero's life. The dying *rākṣasa*'s impersonation of Rāma calling for help leads to an argument between Rāma's wife and brother as to whether they should wait for Rāma or go to help him. Ultimately, Sītā is left unguarded to be kidnapped by Rāvaṇa, king of the *rākṣasas*, Rāma's true antagonist in the scene, who has disguised himself "in the garb of a brahmin" (*dvijātiveṣeṇa*, *R*. 3.44.31) in order to approach Sītā while the hero is distracted by the hunt for the deer.

The "typical" victim in this scene is a brahmin or a religious ascetic (such as those shot by Pāṇḍu, Daśaratha, Kalmāṣapāda, Parāvasu, and the Haihaya king), and the substitution of a *rākṣasa* in disguise is a substantial variation, but it is also an expedient way to allow Rāma to reenact this seminal motif without ever actually killing a brahmin, a serious crime in its own right, and fundamentally incompatible with his particular virtuous heroic persona. While there is

[11] An abbreviated version of this scene is also found within the *Mahābhārata*'s retelling of the *Ramāyaṇa*, but as it contains no noteworthy departures, it does not need to be addressed separately.

no curse, the consequence of the killing—the abduction it enables—is functionally the same as Pāṇḍu's or Kalmāṣapāda's: the loss of access to his wife, and the transition to a new phase of the hero's life, as Rāma must now leave the forest and prepare for the war to free Sītā.

Kalmāṣapāda

Both epics employ embedded narratives[12] to present the story of King Kalmāṣapāda (referred to by his patronymic Saudāsa in the *Ramāyaṇa*).[13] This unfortunate king was an ancestor of both sets of epic protagonists, and each of the epics includes the story of his commission of a hunting-associated murder. Though there are elements common to each version, in each text the details of his crime are individually tailored to reflect the differences in the killings perpetrated by Pāṇḍu and Rāma.

The version which is functionally a doublet of Pāṇḍu's killing of Kiṃdama is presented in the first book of the *Mahābhārata* during the Pāṇḍava brothers' encounter with the Gandharva king Aṅgāraparṇa (*Mbh*. 1.158ff.), shortly before Draupadī's *svayamvara*, the bridal contest in which Arjuna wins the wife he shares with his brothers. While discussing the family's origins, Aṅgāraparṇa explains that the dynastic connection between the Pāṇḍavas and the seer Vasiṣṭha is the result of an ancestor of theirs with problems similar to Pāṇḍu's (though a direct equation of Pāṇḍu and Kalmāṣapāda's circumstances is never explicitly stated in the text). At *Mbh*. 1.166, Aṅgāraparṇa relates that King Kalmāṣapāda, an avid hunter, is cursed with cannibalistic madness through a complicated chain of events.[14] At *Mbh*. 173, the deranged king leaves his city to run amok in the wilderness where, like Pāṇḍu, he kills a copulating ascetic while hunting for prey. Unlike Pāṇḍu though, he does so without the plausible deniability of the brahmin or his wife being in animal form, and to further compound the atrocity, he goes on to devour his victim as if the brahmin were a prey animal (*Mbh*. 1.173.8-9, 14):

sa kadā cit kṣudhāviṣṭo mṛgayan bhakṣam ātmanaḥ
dadarśa suparikliṣṭaḥ kasmiṃś cid vananirjhare
brāhmaṇīṃ brāhmaṇaṃ caiva maithunāyopasaṃgatau 8

---

[12] Embedded tales in the *Mahābhārata* are frequently presented by narrators attempting to reassure the protagonists regarding events in their own storylines, or as instructive examples around which they base advice. *Mbh*. 1.173 is actually the second time that part of Kalmāṣapāda's story is presented within the text. His name is first invoked by Pāṇḍu at *Mbh*. 1.111-13, during a larger conversation with Kuntī about their fertility options, in the context of brahmins fathering *kṣatriya* children and stories of employing brahmins as surrogates for men unable to father children (such as that of Śāradaṇḍāyinī, a female *kṣatriya* who stood at a crossroad in a state of ritual purity and chose a brahmin to father her children).

[13] This episode is also discussed at Doniger O'Flaherty 1981:186-87.

[14] Out hunting, Kalmāṣapāda bullies a brahmin ascetic who blocks his way on a narrow path in the woods, and the ascetic curses Kalmāṣapāda that he will become a cannibal. Another seer, seeing an opportunity to further an intra-brahmanic feud, then causes a *rākṣasa* to possess the king. In his cursed and possessed state, Kalmāṣapāda promises a meal to another brahmin, but having forgotten and postponed the obligation, instructs his cook to feed human flesh to the ascetic, which leads to a re-pronouncement of the original curse, which Kalmāṣapāda promptly consummates by seeking out and eating the brahmin who originally pronounced it.

tau samīkṣya tu vitrastāv akṛtārthau pradhāvitau
tayoś ca dravator vipraṃ jagṛhe nṛpatir balāt 9
. . .
evaṃ vikrośamānāyās tasyāḥ sa sunṛśaṃsakṛt
bhartāraṃ bhakṣayām āsa vyāghor mṛgam ivepsitam 14

One day, he, affected by hunger, hunting for his food,
he, grievously afflicted, saw at a certain forest cataract
a brahmin woman and man, come together for lovemaking. 8
The two, having seen (him), and terrified, ran away, their objective incomplete,
and as the two ran, the lord of men violently seized the brahmin. 9
. . .
Thus while she cried out in terror, he very cruelly
ate the husband as a tiger eats yearned-for prey. 14

Kalmāṣapāda’s punishment, this time decreed by the murdered brahmin’s wife, is the same as Pāṇḍu’s, namely the loss of his ability to have sex or father children (*Mbh*. 1.173.16-18):

tataḥ sā śokasaṃtaptā bhartṛvyasanaduḥkhitā
kalmāṣapādaṃ rājarṣim aśapad brāhmaṇī ruṣā 16
yasmān mamākṛtārthāyās tvayā kṣudranṛśaṃsavat
prekṣantyā bhakṣito me 'dya prabhur bhartā mahāyaśāḥ 17
tasmāt tvam api durbuddhe mac chāpaparivikṣataḥ
patnīm ṛtāv anuprāpya sadyas tyakṣyasi jīvitam 18

Then, burning with grief over the calamity to her husband,
the enraged brahmin woman cursed the royal *ṛṣi* Kalmāṣapāda. 16
“Because, with my objective not having been accomplished, by you, O Vile Degenerate,
even as I was watching, my powerful and glorious husband was eaten today, 17
therefore, you also, O Ignorant One, shall be wounded by a curse from me:
having come to your wife at the time of conception, at that very moment you will lose your life. 18

Kalmāṣapāda seeks help from the seer Vasiṣṭha (the father of the brahmin he had eaten first), and Vasiṣṭha agrees to father children on the queen and even frees the king after twelve years of suffering. The narrative has been altered sufficiently to give it a fresh and disturbing impact, yet its kinship with Pāṇḍu’s killing of deer-formed Kiṃdama is unmistakable.

Saudāsa

In the *Ramāyaṇa,* a version of this tale occurs in the *Uttara Kāṇḍa* and contains several of the same elements as its counterpart in the *Mahābhārata* (delayed revenge, Vasiṣṭha, a curse lifted after twelve years, and a brahmin tricked into committing cannibalism), but their forms and

the order in which they transpire are different. The cannibalism of Saudāsa (Kalmāṣapāda) is absent in the *Ramāyaṇa* version, as are important elements shared with the cursing of Pāṇḍu (for example, the victim is not copulating, and the curse does not involve the denial of progeny). Rather, the tale shares features with the other hunting-murder scenes in the *Ramāyaṇa*: like Rāma, Saudāsa kills an *asura* (rather than a brahmin), this one in the form of a tiger, and as with Daśaratha's transgression, the event occurs in King Saudāsa's youth. While there is no progeny component to this version, the *asura*'s companion is heartbroken and vows an eventual revenge (*R*. 7.57.10-16):

sa bāla eva saudāso mṛgayām upacakrame
cañcūryamāṇaṃ dadṛśe sa śūro rākṣasadvayam 11
śārdūlarūpiṇau ghorau mṛgān bahusahasraśaḥ
bhakṣayānāv asaṃtuṣṭau paryāptiṃ ca na jagmatuḥ 12
sa tu tau rākṣasau dṛṣṭvā nirmṛgaṃ ca vanaṃ kṛtam
krodhena mahatāviṣṭo jaghānaikaṃ maheṣuṇā 13
vinipātya tam ekaṃ tu saudāsaḥ puruṣarṣabhaḥ
vijvaro vigatāmarṣo hataṃ rakṣo 'bhyavaikṣata 14
nirīkṣamāṇaṃ taṃ dṛṣṭvā sahāyas tasya rakṣasaḥ
saṃtāpam akarod ghoraṃ saudāsaṃ cedam abravīt 15
yasmād anaparāddhaṃ tvaṃ sahāyaṃ mama jaghnivān
tasmāt tavāpi pāpiṣṭha pradāsyāmi pratikriyām 16

Once, when he was a mere child, Saudāsa set off on the hunt;
that valiant one saw two prowling *rākṣasas*. 10
In horrible tiger forms; many thousands of deer
they ate insatiably, and never reached satiety. 12
Indeed, he, having seen the two *rākṣasas*, and the forest made bereft of deer,
possessed by great anger, he killed one with a large arrow. 13
But having killed that one, the hero Saudāsa,
free from anxiety, his wrath departed, looked at the dead *rākṣasa.* 14
Having seen him looking at his friend, the *rākṣasa,*
experiencing terrible grief, said this to Saudāsa: 15
"Because you killed my friend who committed no wrong,
therefore, Most Sinful One, I will pay you back in kind!" 16

The *rakṣasa*'s eventual retaliation takes the form of impersonating Vasiṣṭha and demanding a meal of human flesh, which Saudāsa dutifully agrees to provide. When the real Vasiṣṭha is later presented with the cannibalistic meal, he flies into a rage and curses Saudāsa to become a cannibal himself. With the assistance of his wife, the king is able to explain the mix-up, and Vasiṣṭha reduces the duration of his curse to twelve years.

The Haihaya Prince

Returning to the *Mahābhārata*, only one version allows a hunting king to avoid serious consequences for the killing, and it does so by replacing the usual curse component with a seer's enjoyment of the king's bewilderment when his accidental victim is unexpectedly resurrected.

Another embedded narrative told by the seer Mārkaṇḍeya during the heroes' Book 3 tour of various sacred bathing spots reworks the theme as an illustration of the awesome spiritual powers accessible to brahmins and the necessity of *kṣatriya* humility. The tale is solicited by the Pāṇḍavas through a request to regale them with a story about Brahmin superiority: "Then the sons of Pāṇḍu said / 'We want to hear about the high-mindedness of the best of the twice-borns; let it be told!'" (*ūcuḥ pāṇḍusutās tadā / māhātmyaṃ dvijamukhyānāṃ śrotum icchāma kathyatām*; *Mbh*. 3.182.1). In the ensuing tale, a nameless king of the Haihayas accidentally shoots a young antelope-skin-clad brahmin after mistaking him for a deer (*Mbh*. 3.182.3-4):

haihayānāṃ kulakaro rājā parapuraṃjayaḥ
kumāro rūpasaṃpanno mṛgayām acarad balī 3
caramāṇas tu so 'raṇye tṛṇavīrut samāvṛte
kṛṣṇājinottarāsaṅgaṃ dadarśa munim antike
sa tena nihato 'raṇye manyamānena vai mṛgam 4

An ancestor of the Haihayas, a king, conqueror of enemy cities,
a powerful young man endowed with beauty, went hunting. 3
While he was ranging in the grass- and vine-enveloped forest,
he saw an ascetic nearby whose upper cloak was the skin of a black antelope.
By that king, truly believing him to be a deer, the ascetic was shot in the forest. 4

Here ends the similarity to the other tales of brahmin-killing kings. Devastated, and certain that he has killed the boy, the king sorrowfully confesses the deed to his subjects. He and his retinue attempt to find the boy's family in a search which leads them to the ascetic Tārkṣya. Tārkṣya demands to see the body, and to their chagrin the courtiers discover they cannot find it. With a magician's flourish, Tārkṣya brings forth a living young man and asks if this might be the person they are looking for. Clearly gratified by their astonishment, Tārkṣya reveals that the boy is his son, and that he is still very much alive. This is followed by a brief teaching on the powers brahmins accrue through their ascetic practices, because of which, he smugly informs them, "Death does not hold sway over us, Kings" (*nāsmākaṃ mṛtyuḥ prabhavate nṛpāḥ*; *Mbh*. 3.182.16).

While the scene does not serve as the marker for a major transition point, it preserves the most salient feature (the murder of an ascetic mistaken for a deer) and showcases elements that support the reading that class-conflict and the father-son relationship are both integral to this theme.

Parāvasu

Another embedded variant in the *Mahābhārata*'s *Vanaparvan* adds a new dimension to the father-son aspect and further strengthens the evidence that warrior-priest conflict underpins part of the construction of the tale by altering the usual pattern of victim and killer. In *Mbh*. 3.139, the killer is a young ascetic named Parāvasu, the son of a powerful brahmin named Raivya. While Parāvasu is away presiding over a royal sacrifice, his wife is assaulted by the son of a rival seer. She tells her father-in-law about the attack, and Raivya sends avenging demons to kill the rapist. However, when the rival ascetic learns that his son has been killed, he in turn curses Raivya to die by his own son's hand. As a result, Parāvasu, returning home for a visit on a dark night, encounters his father walking on their hermitage grounds wrapped in a black antelope skin. Mistaking his father for a *mṛga* (a deer or other animal),[15] he kills him, presumably with an arrow, though the weapon is not specified (*Mbh*. 3.139.4-6):

athāvalokako 'gacchad gṛhān ekaḥ parāvasuḥ
kṛṣṇājinena saṃvītaṃ dadarśa pitaraṃ vane 4
jaghanyarātre nidrāndhaḥ sāvaśeṣe tamasy api
carantaṃ gahane 'raṇye mene sa pitaraṃ mṛgam 5
mṛgaṃ tu manyamānena pitā vai tena hiṃsitaḥ
akāmayānena tadā śarīratrāṇam icchatā 6

Then, wishing to see (his wife), Parāvasu went home alone to visit.
He saw his father in the forest wrapped in a black antelope skin: 4
it was the end of the night (and) he was blinded by exhaustion, and in the remnant darkness
he thought his father moving through the dense jungle was an animal. 5
Alas! By him, thinking it was an animal, indeed his father was killed,
not through wanting to at that time; from wanting physical protection. 6

Royal bowmen who inadvertently kill brahmins in deer guise can expect to pay a steep price; Parāvasu, however, even after killing his own father, escapes a curse and the sin of brahmin-murder through cooperation with his brother Arvāvasu—a twist which will carry some significance in the discussion below. The brothers make a plan that Parāvasu will go back to finish the sacrifice that they have been jointly officiating, while Arvāvasu will perform the rites of absolution. Arvāvasu is then able to employ a ritual to secure divine intervention for their cause by retiring to a forest and performing powerful austerities. He appeases the guilt incurred by his brother and brings everyone involved back to life.

This iteration thus exhibits a number of alterations to the pattern followed by the other

[15] The word *mṛga* primarily refers to deer, but often extends to wild animals in general; in many contexts no precise determination can be made. In the quoted passage, verse 6 implies a more dangerous animal, suggesting that *mṛga* in verse 5 should not be rendered as "deer," even though the victim was dressed in an antelope skin. It is possible that the passage utilizes the ambiguity of *mṛga* to respect the story's basic template while avoiding even the slightest suggestion that Parāvasu was engaged in any form of sport-hunting. See below for further discussion of deer and antelope terminology in Sanskrit.

epic versions: it changes the killer to a member of the priestly, rather than the *kṣatriya* class; the victim is the killer's own father; the killer and his brother cooperate to mitigate the fallout of the act; and the killer is able to receive expiation for his crime though performing ritual acts. All of these will have relevance to the discussion below.

Kṛṣṇa

A final version in the *Mahābhārata* further rearranges the standard class assignments of killer and victim and gives strong confirmation that the scenes' deployment in the epics follows a pattern that marks important transitional moments. In Book 16, the Pāṇḍavas' bosom friend, the god Kṛṣṇa, begins to usher in the end of the *Dvāpara Yuga* (the Third, or Heroic Age), by permitting/abetting the mass slaughter of his people and kinsmen, the Yādavas.[16] After the carnage, Kṛṣṇa goes to the forest alone to engage in meditation, where a professional hunter mistakes him for a deer (*Mbh.* 16.5.19-20):

sa saṃniruddhendriyavāṅmanās tu śiśye mahāyogam upetya Kṛṣṇaḥ
jarātha taṃ deśam upājagāma lubdhas tadānīṃ mṛgalipsur ugraḥ 19
sa keśavaṃ yogayuktaṃ śayānaṃ mṛgāśaṅkī lubdhakaḥ sāyakena
jarāvidhyat pādatale tvarāvāṃs taṃ cābhitas taj jighṛkṣur jagāma
athāpaśyat puruṣaṃ yogayuktaṃ pītāmbaraṃ lubdhako 'nekabāhum 20

Restrained in senses, speech, and mind, Kṛṣṇa lay down, having entered into great meditation.
Then Jarā came to that spot; a hunter, at that moment longing for deer, fierce. 19
Keśava, engaged in meditation, the hunter took to be a deer, (so) with an arrow,
hastily, Jarā shot him in the sole of his foot; he, desirous of retrieving (his quarry), drew near him.
Then, the hunter saw a man engaged in meditation, clad in yellow, and many-armed. 20

The hunter's name is Jarā, "Old Age," "Decay," a superb identity for the figure who brings the cycle to a close. Rather than curse Jarā, Kṛṣṇa graciously forgives his killer and ascends to heaven.[17] The departure of Kṛṣṇa from the world signals the close of the heroic age and the onset of the *Kali Yuga*, the "Age of Strife," the last age of the eon. Whether viewed as the ending of

[16] Kṛṣṇa is a complex figure, and his various contradictory roles in the *Mahābhārata* can be hard to reconcile. An excellent overview can be found in Brockington 1998:256-67.

[17] This scene also shares elements with the embedded tale of Balāka the hunter, as told to Yudhiṣṭhira at *Mbh*. 8.49.34-40; Balāka is a hunter, but an otherwise virtuous man, who kills only to support his family and not from desire. From an ambush at a watering hole (much like Daśaratha's), he kills a mysterious snuffling beast and is rewarded with showers of flowers and a swift *vimāna* (aerial chariot) ride to heaven; it is then revealed that his victim was some unspecified being (*bhūta*) who had performed enough *tapas* (ascetic practices designed to heighten spiritual powers) to cause the destruction of the entire world. Brahma had delayed the catastrophe by blinding the creature, but by killing it, Balāka preserved all creation.

one age or the beginning of another, this final and distinctly variant iteration marks a momentous transition point.

The following table summarizes the most important shared components of these episodes:

	Pāṇḍu	**Kalmāṣapāda**	**Daśaratha**	**Rāma**	**Saudāsa**	**Parāvasu**	**Jarā**
1. Class (*varṇa*) of victim	Brahmin	Brahmin	Ascetic	(Demon)	(Demon)	Brahmin	*Kṣatriya*
2. Class (*varṇa*) of killer	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	Brahmin	*Śūdra*
3. Hunting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
4. Animal form or deerskin-clad victim	Yes (deer)	Victim eaten like prey	Yes (deerskin, with auditory illusion)	Yes (deer)	Yes (tiger)	Yes (deerskin)	Deer (illusion)
5. Offspring-related consequences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Indirectly			
6. Demarcates phases of the narrative	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2.

With so many shared features, the "Killing of a Deer Who Is Actually a Person" motif assuredly can be considered a type-scene. But unlike the more generic forms of recurring type-scenes so common in Homer or other traditional oral literatures, this one is not merely part of the connective tissue of oral performance. Material from earlier Sanskrit literature suggests that its productivity and prominent positioning in the epics stem instead from its deep symbolic foundations. Each of the features listed in Table 2 is part of an interlocking web of signifiers, as is the very fact itself of the motif's repeated recurrence. The first step towards understanding the strategic deployment of these scenes in the epics lies in examining their connection to the tale of the murder of Prajāpati, an ur-narrative which lays down the base pattern of motifs the epic variants revisit.[18]

The Killing of Prajāpati

The deity and demiurge Prajāpati, the "Lord of Offspring," occupies a vast and enigmatic position in the brāhmaṇic stratum of Hindu literature on account of his intrinsic connection to the

[18] Allen (2019:141) also notes the obvious relationship between Prajāpati and Pāṇḍu and expands the comparison to include Cronus.

act of creation and to the sacrifice.[19] Prajāpati is, himself, the primordial sacrifice, and he is not a blameless victim. Though he is an enormously powerful figure, nearly anyone can be brought down by a sex scandal, and the Prajāpati administration had a big one on its hands: *Ṛg Veda* 10.61.5-8 gives us a hazy description of incestuous copulation between a father and daughter that is generally regarded as the earliest textual version of the episode.[20] This enigmatic and disturbing vignette was taken up and expanded upon in the *brāhmaṇas*,[21] which supply further context for the sex act and explicate the connection between the tale and its enactment in ritual. The longest of these is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, where we find some of the details of Prajāpati's transgression and the other gods' reaction to it. Specifically, the sons of the demiurge witness the sex act and react by calling upon one of their number to assassinate their father with a bow and arrow (*ŚBr.* 1.7.4.1-4):[22]

> *prajā́patir ha vai svā́ṃ duhitáram abhídadhyau. dívaṃ voṣásaṃ vā. mithuny ènayā syā́m íti. tā́ṃ sámbabhūva.* 1
>
> *tad vaí devā́nām ā́ga āsa. yá itthaṃ svā́ṃ duhitáram asmā́kaṃ svásāraṃ karotī́ti.* 2
>
> *té ha devā́ ūcuḥ. yò 'yáṃ devaḥ paśūnām ī́ṣṭe 'tisaṃdhaṃ vā́ ayáṃ carati yá itthaṃ svā́ṃ duhitáram asmā́kaṃ svásāraṃ karóti vidhyemam íti táṃ rudrò 'bhyāyá tya vivyādha . . . .* 3

---

[19] Lévi 1966 and Gonda 1982 are both excellent starting points on this complex deity. According to Gonda, "The Vedic Prajāpati is only or mainly a lord of offspring or creatures" (1982:143). Joshi's observation that "it is significant that the cosmic significance of Prajāpati is set forth in noble terms, but in no passage of the RV is that god connected with the ethical. The developed cosmic significance of Prajāpati as against the waning ethical one of Varuna, in the later *Samhitās*, may be observed in the YV" (1972:103) is cogent and equally applicable to the deity's presence in later texts. Collins (2014, especially 71ff.) offers a fascinating theoretical framework for understanding Prajāpati's role as sacrificial victim and counterpart to Puruṣa. Ramanujan (1972) and Goldman (1978) both include the scene in their treatments of Oedipal conflict in Sanskrit literature. Abusch and West (2020) and West with Abusch (2020) examine textual connections between Prajāpati and Manu as creators of life. Others have proposed connections between Prajāpati and figures from Greek myth: M. West (1971:28-34) saw a possible connection between Prajāpati and the Prōtogonos (Πρωτογόνος) of the Greek Orphic tradition. Fowler (1943) argues that the story of Prajāpati and his daughter is cognate with that of Erichthonios in Athenian origin myths.

[20] The relevant portion of the hymn reads as follows (*Ṛg Veda* 10.61.5-7; translation from Jamison and Brereton 2014:III, 1476):

> *práthiṣṭa yásya vīrákarmam iṣṇád ánuṣṭhitaṃ nú náryo ápauhat / púnas tád ā́ vṛhati yát kanā́yā duhitúr ā́ ánubhṛtam anarvā́ / madhyā́ yát kártvam ábhavad abhī́ke kā́maṃ kṛṇvāné pitári yuvatyā́m / manānág réto jahatur viyántā sā́nau niṣiktaṃ sukṛtásya yónau / pitā́ yát svā́ṃ duhitáram adhiṣkán kṣmayā́ rétaḥ saṃjagmānó ní ṣiñcat svādhyò 'janayan bráhma devā́ vā́stoṣ pátiṃ vratapā́ṃ nír atakṣan / sá īṃ vṛ́ṣā ná phénam asyad ājaú smád ā́ páraid ápa dabhrácetāḥ / sárat padā́ ná dákṣiṇā parāvṛ́ṅ ná tā́ nú me pṛśanyò jagṛbhre.*
>
> He whose (penis,) which performs the virile work, stretched out, discharging (the semen)—(that one,) the manly one, then pulled away (his penis, which had been) "attending on" (her). / Again he tears out from the maiden, his daughter, what had been "brought to bear" on her—he the unassailable. / When what was to be done was at its middle, at the encounter when the father was making love to the young girl— / as they were going apart, the two left behind a little semen sprinkled down on the back and in the womb of the well-performed (sacrifice). / When the father "sprang on" his own daughter, he, uniting (with her), poured down his semen upon the earth. / The gods, very concerned, begat the sacred formulation, and they fashioned out (of it?) the Lord of the Dwelling Place, protector of commandments.

[21] The *brāhmaṇas* are a slightly later class of texts which elaborate and comment on the hymns of the Vedas, usually in the context of relating them to the procedures of the various rituals.

[22] Prajāpati's execution for his sexual misconduct may be indirectly mirrored in the way Raivya sends avenging demons to kill his daughter-in-law's rapist in *Mbh*. 3.138.

> *. . . yadā́ devā́nāṃ kródho vyaid átha prajā́patim abhiṣajyaṃs tásya táṃ śalpaṃ nírakṛntant. sa vaí yajñá evá prajā́patiḥ.* 4
>
> Truly, Prajāpati desired his own daughter, (who was) either Sky or Dawn. (He thought) "May I couple with her!" He joined with her sexually. 1
> This, truly, to the gods was a transgression. "He who acts in this manner towards his own daughter, our sister, (commits a transgression)." 2
> Indeed, those gods said:
> "This god, the one who rules over the beasts; a transgression, indeed, this one does, he who acts in this manner towards his own daughter, our sister.
> Pierce him!" Him, Rudra,[23] drawing back (his bow), pierced 3
> . . . When the anger of those gods went away, they cured Prajāpati and cut out that
> arrow-point. Assuredly, the sacrifice is indeed Prajāpati. 4

Beyond the killing, however, this scene is also significant for its aftermath. The resurrection and curing of their sire are apparently not enough to expunge the sons' lingering guilt. A portion of Prajāpati's flesh was torn out by Rudra's arrow, and in *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.5-8, the gods decide that this piece must be incorporated into the sacrificial offering so as to make the sacrifice "whole" again. Accordingly, they present the portion to several of their number for consumption. At each repetition of the offering, a price is paid. The first recipient is Bhaga ("Distributor," "Portion-Giver"), but it burns out his eyes, indicating to the other gods that "It has not yet become pacified here" (*nò nvèvā́trāśamat*; *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.7). They take it next to Pūṣan (a nurturing god associated with livestock and the sun), but he too is injured when the flesh knocks out his teeth, once more prompting the observation that "It has not yet become pacified here" (*nò nvèvā́trāśamat*; *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.8). Finally, the piece of flesh is taken to Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods, who enlists the help of Savitṛ for its "impulsion," *prasava*—Savitṛ's signal function—which accomplishes its placation: "then it was pacified" (*tato 'rvācīnaṃ śāntaṃ*; *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.8).

Prajāpati is the sacrifice, and his sacrifice is also a murder. However, a further dimension to the story is revealed when other *brāhmaṇas* introduce an additional element: the intercourse and the execution occur while Prajāpati and his daughter are in the form of deer.[24] Suddenly, the primal sacrifice begins to resemble the hunt. As the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā* tells us: "Prajāpati desired his own daughter Uṣas. She became a red deer, (he) having become an antelope, longed for her" (*prajā́patir vaí svā́ṃ duhitáram abhyakāmayat oṣásam, sā́ róhid abhavat tā́m ṛ́śyo bhūtvā́dhyait*; *MS* 4.2.12). An expanded version at *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33-38 puts Prajāpati in the form of a black antelope (*ṛśya*), while his daughter again becomes a female deer, though of a different species (a *rohita*) (*AitBr*. 3.33.1-5):

---

[23] Rudra is a Vedic deity later conflated with and absorbed into the developing persona of Śiva. A passage at *ŚBr*. 6.1.3 presents the story of Rudra's birth from the goddess Uṣas ("Dawn"). Uṣas is fertilized with Prajāpati's semen and a boy is born a year later. The passage describes Prajāpati's attempts to name him, assigning him first "Rudra," and then a number of Rudra's traditional epithets. Cf. *ŚBr*. 5.3.3.7 and 6.1.3.12; also see *AitBr*. 3.33.3 below.

[24] For elaboration on sexual aspects of the tale, see Doniger O'Flaherty 1969:8-10.

Prajāpatir vai svāṃ duhitaram abhyadhyāyad Divam ity anya āhur Uṣasam ity anye. tām ṛśyo bhūtvā rohitam bhūtām abhyait. taṃ devā apaśyann. akṛtaṃ vai Prajāpatiḥ karotīti. te tam aichan ya enam ārişyaty, etam anyonyasmin nāvindaṃs. teṣāṃ yā eva ghoratamās tanva āsaṃs, tā ekadhā samabharaṃs. tāḥ sambhṛtā eṣa devo 'bhavat, tad asyaitad bhūtavan nāma 1

. . .

taṃ devā abrūvann ayaṃ vai Prajāpatir akṛtam akar imaṃ vidhyeti. sa tathety abravīt sa vai vo varaṃ vṛṇā iti. vṛṇīṣveti. sa etam eva varam avṛṇīta paśūnām ādhipatyaṃ. tad asyaitat paśuman nāma 3

. . .

tam abhyāyatyāvidhyat, sa viddha ūrdhva udaprapata tam etam Mṛga ity ācakṣate. ya u eva mṛgavyādhaḥ sa u eva sa, yā rohit sā Rohiṇī, yo eveṣus trikāṇḍā so eveṣus trikāṇḍā 5

Indeed, Prajāpati desired his own daughter, whom some call “Sky,” others “Dawn.” Having become an antelope, he approached her, (who had) become a deer. The gods saw him (and said), “Truly Prajāpati commits an act not done!” They asked, “Who will destroy this?” They did not find him [a destroyer] amongst one another. Those of them whose selves were the most dreadful, those they brought together. Those, having been brought together, became this god, that one of whom “Bhūtavan” is the name. 1

. . .

To him the gods said, “Truly this Prajāpati did a thing not done. Pierce him!” He (Bhūtavan) said, “So be it.” Verily, he said, “I choose a boon from you.” “Choose!” (they said). He then chose precisely this boon: dominion over cattle. That is the reason that his name is “Endowed with Cattle.” 3

. . .

(Bhūtavan) having attacked (Prajāpati), he pierced him. He (Prajāpati), pierced, sprang aloft. He (Prajāpati) is seen in that (constellation) called “The Deer.” Whereas, he who was the deer hunter, that (constellation) is him (Bhūtavan). She who (was) the red deer, she is “Rohiṇī.” That three-part arrow, truly, that indeed is the “Three-Part Arrow.” 5

It is this tableau—the archer dispatching the deer-form father figure with an arrow—which the epics have reshaped into their anchor points. Why should we read the epic scenes of deer-form murder as replications of the brāhmaṇic tale? In part at least, because the *Mahābhārata* suggests that we should: within the abbreviated retelling of the *Ramāyaṇa* at *Mbh*. 3.258-76, the passage which describes Rāma’s killing of deer-disguised Mārīca employs a direct comparison to Rudra’s slaying of Prajāpati at *AitBr*. 3.33.5: “Rāma pursued the deer [Mārīca] as Rudra pursued the constellation known as ‘The Deer,’” (*anvadhāvan mṛgaṃ rāmo rudras tārāmṛgaṃ yathā*; *Mbh.* 3.262.19).[25]

Even without this explicit equivalency, however, the replication of an original pattern is unmistakable, most pronouncedly visible in King Pāṇḍu’s killing of the *ṛṣi* Kiṃdama, the epic

[25] The relevance of the simile is further reinforced by the way the text informs us at the commencement of the tale that Rāvaṇa, Rama’s true antagonist (for whom Mārīca is merely a surrogate), is the grandson of Prajāpati (*Mbh*. 3.258.11).

"index case" which hews closely to Rudra's execution of Prajāpati. The two stories share undeniable foundational similarities:

> — The male partner of a copulating couple is killed with a bow and arrow, interrupting the copulation.
> — The victim had assumed the deer form for the purposes of copulation.
> — The victim is a sort of patriarch: Prajāpati is the "Lord of Offspring," and the text informs us that Kiṃdama is the leader of his herd.
> — The tale is part of a beginning, or an inception. Just as the murder of Prajāpati occurs at the beginning of a *kalpa* (an eon, or cycle of time), the killing of Kiṃdama is the start of the Pāṇḍavas' problems.
> — The aftereffects of the killing are just as important as the act itself; the murder initiates a new or larger cycle of events.

The potent mix of sex and patricide in Prajāpati's tale, combined with its deep ritual associations, apparently catapulted the scene of the deer-disguised father being murdered during sexual intercourse into a second life as a staple of epic storytelling, where the scene was replicated again and again with just enough modification to give the story a fresh complexion in each iteration.[26] In general, Sanskrit epic shies away from reliance on type-scenes, and one would be hard pressed to identify another set of parallel incidents which share so many components. What is it about this brāhmaṇic motif complex that resonates so powerfully? Understanding this narrative's utility to the epic compilers lies in understanding the significance of the tale's components, which are discussed below in the order in which they appear above in Table 2 (which has been reproduced again here for convenience).

[26] The recurrence seems to be an excellent illustration of Lord's observation (1960:121): "The fact that the same song occurs attached to different heroes would seem to indicate that the story is more important than the historical hero to which it is attached. There is a close relationship between hero and tale, but with some tales at least the type of hero is more significant than the specific hero."

	Pāṇḍu	**Kalmāṣapāda**	**Daśaratha**	**Rāma**	**Saudāsa**	**Parāvasu**	**Jarā**
1. Class (*varṇa*) of victim	Brahmin	Brahmin	Ascetic	(Demon)	(Demon)	Brahmin	*Kṣatriya*
2. Class (*varṇa*) of killer	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	*Kṣatriya*	Brahmin	*Śūdra*
3. Hunting	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
4. Animal form or deerskin-clad victim	Yes (deer)	Victim eaten like prey	Yes (deerskin, with auditory illusion)	Yes (deer)	Yes (tiger)	Yes (deerskin)	Deer (illusion)
5. Offspring-related consequences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Indirectly			
6. Demarcates phases of the narrative	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2 (repeated).

1. The Victim Is Usually a Brahmin

In the epic versions, Prajāpati's role as victim is customarily occupied by an assortment of forest-dwelling brahmins, or some mild variation (such as that Daśaratha's victim is merely a religious ascetic, or that while Rāma kills a *rākṣasa* disguised as a deer, his true antagonist is a *rākṣasa* disguised as a brahmin). That the default seems to be for the victim to be a brahmin certainly stems at least in part from the demiurge's strong connections to the sacrifice, which confer obvious ties to the priestly class. But equally central to Prajāpati's identity is the fact that he is the progenitor of most of the divine entities of Vedic religion, and attempting to produce offspring is his most characteristic activity. He is profoundly fixed in his position as ur-father, and it is in this aspect that the brahmins serve as his stand-ins in these tales.

In the epic variants, Prajāpati's treatment at the hands of his sons has been refracted through a lens of class conflict in the recurring epic subtext of brahmin-*kṣatriya* struggle. While the brahmin victims in the epics are not the *kṣatriya* killers' *actual* fathers, the *Mahābhārata* repeatedly gives prominence to a mythological event which establishes this prescriptive relationship between the *varṇas*. This brahmin-as-father / *kṣatriya*-as-son hierarchy is mythologically initiated in a tale recounted an astonishing thirteen times in the epic,[27] the story

[27] See Collins 2020:149-52 for a careful treatment of each of these scenes and their presence in the epic.

of the brahmin warrior nonpareil Rāma Jāmadagnya.[28] Told and retold in the service of establishing brahmin superiority, "It provided a fantasy of brahmin power with which the mythmakers could identify and a model of the Brahmin-Kṣatriya relationship that they hoped Kṣatriyas would emulate" (Collins 2020:5). Rāma Jāmadagnya is not only presented as an exemplar of the supreme combatant, but his mythology is used to advance an assertion that all living *kṣatriyas* are the descendants of brahmins, a proposition which would obligate warrior-class men to venerate the priestly class as they would their progenitors.

In this backstory to the heroic age, the brahmin Rāma Jāmadagnya slays the *kṣatriya* Kārtavīrya in a fit of rage, but fails to anticipate the revenge of Kārtavīrya's sons, who rush to Rāma Jāmadagnya's father's hermitage and avenge their father by killing Rāma's.[29] Jāmadagnya's subsequent retaliation is two-fold: in a series of twenty-one massive purges between the second and third ages of the world, he kills every *kṣatriya* on earth, famously creating five lakes from their blood. But almost crueler, in a Hindu context, is what happens next: the widows of Rāma's victims cry out for the children that the loss of their husbands has denied them, and in response, *brahmin* men conceive upon them the next generation of the warrior class (*Mbh*. 1.58.5-7):

tadā niḥkṣatriye loke bhārgaveṇa kṛte sati
brāhmaṇān kṣatriyā rājan garbhārthinyo 'bhicakramuḥ 5
tābhiḥ saha samāpetur brāhmaṇāḥ saṃśitavratāḥ
ṛtāv ṛtau naravyāghra na kāmān nānṛtau tathā 6
tebhyas tu lebhire garbhān kṣatriyās tāḥ sahasraśaḥ
tataḥ suṣuvire rājan kṣatriyān vīryasaṃmatān
kumārāṃś ca kumārīś ca punaḥ kṣatrābhivṛddhaye 7

Then when the world was made *kṣatriya*-free by the descendant of Bhṛgu,
the female *kṣatriyās* (sexually) approached the brahmin men, O King, seeking pregnancy. 5
With them the brahmins came together, faithful to their vows,
at the proper time, O Tiger-among-men, not from desire, or at the wrong time. 6
From (the brahmins) indeed, those female *kṣatriyās* obtained pregnancies by the thousands,
then they delivered, O King, *kṣatriyas* (who were) respected for heroism,
boys and girls, to once again build up the *kṣatriya* population. 7

The tale is repeated later in the same book of the epic (*Mbh*. 1.98.3-4):

evam uccāvacair astrair bhārgaveṇa mahātmanā

---

[28] Rāma Jāmadagnya (also known as Paraśurāma) is a colorful and wide-ranging character, and all or parts of his story are retold or mentioned many times in a variety of texts (see Collins 2020:152). He is perhaps best known for the decapitation of his own mother (*Mbh.* 3.116), for which his father grants him a long life, the undoing of the killing, and the eradication of it from the memories of all concerned. Treatments of the character and his role can be found in Goldman 1978, Choudhary 2010, and (most exhaustively) Collins 2020.

[29] This story also presents an interesting funhouse-mirror image of the Prajāpati story; instead of killing their own fathers, sons kill one another's fathers.

triḥsaptakṛtvaḥ pṛthivī kṛtā niḥkṣatriyā purā
evaṃ niḥkṣatriye loke kṛte tena maharṣiṇā 3
tataḥ saṃbhūya sarvābhiḥ kṣatriyābhiḥ samantataḥ
utpāditāny apatyāni brāhmaṇair niyatātmabhiḥ 4

In such a manner, with various weapons, by the great-souled descendant of Bhṛgu
thrice seven times the entire world was made empty of *kṣatriyas.*
When in this way the world was made empty of *kṣatriyas* by the great-souled one, 3
then, having come together with all the female *kṣatriyas*, from all sides,
children were begotten by the self-controlled brahmins. 4

Not only does the massacre cost the *kṣatriyas* their lives; it steals their legacy and adds a further degree to their permanent subordination to the brahmins.[30] But this etiology has especial ramifications for many of the *kṣatriya* heroes in the tales of deer-form killing which take place in the third age of the world; they are not just murderers, or committers of *brahmahatyā* (the specific sin of brahmin murder); they are patricides.

2. The Killer Is a *Kṣatriya*

In five of the seven epic versions, Rudra's role as the killer is assigned to a member of the warrior class. By one sort of logic, it might be assumed that any god in a brahmāṇic story would be represented by a member of the priestly class in an epic repurposing of the motif, but the differential is an effective way to convey the oppositional aspect of the relationship between Prajāpati and his sons within the new genre. Rudra's mythology is also particularly conducive to assigning his role to a character from the warrior class. In the *Vedas*, Rudra is identified (along with his brother Pūṣan and Indra) as a "Ruler of Men" (*kṣayadvīra*, *RV* 1.114.2, 3), frequently referred to as the "Lord of the Beasts" (*paśupati*),[31] and connected with archery (*RV* 2.33.10, 14; 5.42.11; 10.126.6); his mortal analogue would quite reasonably be a royal hunter.

The incorporation of *kṣatriya*-brahmin tension also precipitates some remodeling of the narrative in respect to the nature and directionality of crime versus punishment: where the sons of Prajāpati carry out an intentional murder yet escape reprisal, the standard epic versions change the act to an accidental killing which is harshly punished.[32] This is a substantive alteration to the tale's fabric, and at first glance might simply suggest that there are very different rules for gods and mortals. However, one episode makes it clear that the harsher treatment only applies when

---

[30] There is a powerful relevance here to Pāṇḍu's punishment: sons kill a father, and by doing so lose the chance to father their own children. As Goldman points out in respect to Kalmāṣapāda's similar situation, "The curse serves to both symbolically castrate the offending king and further punish him by forcing him to yield his own wife to an avenging father figure" (1978:357). That father figure in Kalmāṣapāda's story is the brahmin seer Vasiṣṭha, who appears in the tale of Saudāsa and eventually frees Kalmāṣapāda from his curse at *Mbh*. 1.168.

[31] Cf. *ŚBr.* 5.3.3.7 and 6.1.3.12; also see *AitBr.* 3.33.3 (quoted above).

[32] The story of the Haihaya prince is the notable exception here, of course.

the mortals in question are *kṣatriyas*. In the story of Parāvasu at *Mbh*. 3.139, the sole epic version in which the killer is a brahmin, the consequences of patricide are again avoided, and by the same stratagem as the sons of Prajāpati use to evade retribution. Just as the gods suffer no repercussions after slaughtering their sire,[33] Parāvasu, the brahmin who shoots his own father, is able to repair the situation with the assistance of his brother, and through their cooperation the killing is completely undone. Comparing the events in *Mbh*. 3.139 with those from *AitBr*. 3.33 or *ŚBr*. 1.7.4 reveals a thoroughgoing similarity in elements absent from the *kṣatriya*-centered versions:

> — Like Prajāpati, Raivya is the only one of the epic victims given no chance to cry out or deliver a curse as he dies.
> — Just as Rudra, the brother who actually wielded the bow, is not part of the group carrying out the revivification, so too the murder-committing brother (Parāvasu) is not the one who manages its fallout (that task falls to Arvāvasu).
> — Just as Prajāpati's sons cooperate to pacify the dropped flesh, Parāvasu and Arvāvasu repair the situation by working together.
> — Just as Prajāpati's sons undo the effects of their actions via ritual, Parāvasu and Arvāvasu employ ritual solutions to expiate Parāvasu's crime.
> — Prajāpati and Raivya are both restored to life.
> — In contrast to nearly all the scenes with *kṣatriya* hunters, the Prajāpati and Parāvasu episodes end peaceably for all concerned, with no lingering ramifications.

Also of note in the Parāvasu episode is the fact that it is the only version in which the killer is not engaged in hunting; the significance of this for our analysis rests on mores regarding the practice of the hunt.

3. Hunting

The "King Who Kills a Deer that Is Actually a Person" motif in the epics is inseparable from cultural connections between the hunt and Hindu kingship. All of the *kṣatriya* versions of these tales occur in the context of hunting, and this cannot be purely out of the logical convenience of having a bow and arrows at the ready for the killing. In ancient India, professional hunting was one of the most sinful occupations imaginable, and professional hunters are often vilified.[34] However, when done according to protocols, hunting can be an acceptable act

---

[33] The actual killer, Rudra, receives only a reward (dominion over cattle) for his deed, and while Bhaga and Puṣan are maimed, this stems more from insufficiently cautious behavior in the ritual than from any responsibility for their father's death.

[34] Except when they aren't. The great epic contains several embedded narratives which feature laudable hunters, for example, *Mbh*. 3.196-206, a carefully constructed remonstrance to smug-minded orthodoxy in which a short-tempered brahmin is forced to seek instruction in *dharma* from an introspective and insightful hunter, or *Mbh*. 8.49.34-40, the tale of Balāka, discussed below. Brodbeck (2009:71-86) gives an excellent and nuanced overview of paradoxes inherent in the characterization of hunting in Hindu thought and literature.

even for holy men, as the epic heroes often bring up in their own defense. Rāma, for example, tells his monkey opponent Vālin, "For that matter, even royal sages learned in *dharma* go hunting" (*yānti rājarṣayaś cātra mṛgayāṃ dharmakovidāḥ*; *R*. 4.18.34). The *Mahābhārata*, too, cites the hunting practices of one of the great seers (*Mbh.* 1.109.14):

> *agastyaḥ satram āsīnaś cacāra mṛgayām ṛṣiḥ*
> *āraṇyān sarvadaivatyān mṛgān prokṣya mahāvane*.
>
> The *ṛṣi* Agastya, sitting at a (sacrificial) session, went hunting,
> after having consecrated in the great forest the wild deer, dedicated to all the gods.

Royal hunting is portrayed as both an established prerogative and an act that is heavily weighted with moral hazard. On the one hand it is clear that hunting was in some way expected of a ruler: it is, for example, a source of game which may be used to feed hungry subjects (as noted in Brockington 1998:191-92, 225). While being told of the Pāṇḍava brothers' life in exile in the forest, King Janamejaya specifically inquires as to whether the heroes fed themselves and their retinue with game or with agricultural products; Vaiśaṃpāyana informs him that Yudhiṣṭhira himself killed "deer, with purified arrows" (*mṛgāṃś caiva śuddhair bāṇair nipātitān*; *Mbh*. 3.47.4), and that the menu (always offered first to the brahmins) included "rurū deer, black antelope, and other ritually pure forest animals" (*rurūn kṛṣṇamṛgāṃś caiva medhyāṃś cānyān vanecarān*; *Mbh*. 3.47.7). In such a context, Yudhiṣṭhira's hunting is apparently both admirable and kingly. Beyond the acquisition of food, across many ancient cultures the hunt was viewed as valuable practice for making war.[35] As Pāṇḍu tells Kiṃdama, "Whatever practice (is used) in the slaying of enemies, that (practice) is allowed in the slaying of deer. . . . This truly (is) the proper conduct of kings" (*śatrūṇāṃ yā vadhe vṛttiḥ sā mṛgāṇāṃ vadhe smṛtā. . . . sa eva dharmo rājñāṃ*; *Mbh.* 1.109.12-13).

Far more abundant, however, are restrictions or prohibitions on the practice of kingly hunting. The *Mānavadharmaśāstra* (VII.50) describes hunting as a vice on the order of alcohol consumption, gambling, or promiscuity, and this is echoed in a variety of sources.[36] The *Nītisāra*, for example, devotes considerable space to weighing the risks of the hunt to king and kingdom and balancing them against its benefits. It ultimately specifies that if a king wishes to hunt, he should be provided with a well stocked but risk-minimized game park in which he can be supervised while doing so (*Nītisāra* 15.30). For a Hindu king hunting was an act of delicate brinkmanship leading into dangerous territory, both literally and metaphorically.[37] For the warrior-class men of the epic, the introduction of hunting into any plotline injects a hint of jeopardy into the tale. Narratives which involve kings and the hunt are often structured to induce a king to stray toward recklessness or poor judgment, and the motif of the hunt-exhilarated king

---

[35] Cf. Allsen 2006 for a detailed survey of the practice of royal hunting all over the Eurasian world, and Abusch 2008 on hunting's role in the formal education of princes in the ancient Near East.

[36] For more on hunting as a vice, see Doniger 2009:320-21.

[37] See, for example, Chaplin 1943; Falk 1973; Sinha 2016; Thapar 2001.

crops up in tales as different as those of Pṛthu[38] and Viśvāmitra.[39] Even when heroes retain their composure and the hunt is undertaken for legitimate purposes, it is still associated with risk: just as Rāma's pursuit of the deer-form Mārīca gives Rāvaṇa the opportunity to abduct Sītā, the Pāṇḍava brothers are away hunting at *Mbh*. 3.248 when Jayadratha abducts Draupadī. Though the text assures us that their hunt was required to feed brahmins, the brothers' enjoyment in the sport is stressed, as the quest for animals beguiles them into splitting up and leaving their wife alone and unprotected (*Mbh*. 3.248.1-4):

tasmin bahumṛge 'raṇye ramamāṇā mahārathāḥ
kāmyake bharataśreṣṭhā vijahrus te yathāmarāḥ 1
prekṣamāṇā bahuvidhān vanoddeśān samantataḥ
yathartukālaramyāś ca vanarājīḥ supuṣpitāḥ 2
pāṇḍavā mṛgayāśīlāś carantas tan mahāvanam
vijahrur indra pratimāḥ kaṃcit kālam ariṃdamāḥ 3
tatas te yaugapadyena yayuḥ sarve caturdiśam
mṛgayāṃ puruṣavyāghrā brāhmaṇārthe paraṃtapāḥ 4

In that game-rich forest, the great warriors (were) enjoying themselves;
in Kāmyaka the best of the Bharatas went about like immortals. 1
Looking around at many types and regions of the forest on all sides,
and rows of groves beautifully in bloom, delightful in accord with season and time. 2
The Pāṇḍavas, hunting deer in the great forest,
went about like Indras at that time, those tamers-of-the-foe. 3
Then they, at the same time, went in all the four directions
after deer for the sake of the brahmins, those tigers-among-men, those burners-of-the-foe. 4

It is clear that hunting is one of the signifying activities of a king, however problematic its outcomes might be at times. However, the fact that its most laudable function is killing deer to feed to brahmins becomes somewhat surprising given the degree to which an equally profound affiliation between brahmins and deer also permeates the texts.

---

[38] King Pṛthu pursues the Earth in the form of a cow and compels her to provide nourishment for humans in a scene deliberately structured to resemble a hunt, and the terrified earth-cow is explicitly likened to a deer: "Becoming a cow, she fled, terrified / like a hunter-harried deer" (*gauḥ saty apādravad bhītā / mṛgīva mṛgayudrutā*; *BhāgP.* 4.17.14). Though Pṛthu is doing his royal duty by protecting his starving subjects, during the pursuit he becomes transcendent with rage and veers dangerously close to committing the grievous sin of killing the earth-cow —which would of course have brought about the destruction of his subjects as well.

[39] In yet another tale of royal privilege gone out of control, King Viśvāmitra is hunting when he arrogantly attempts to seize the Kāmadhenu from Vasiṣṭha (*Mbh*. 1.164). For general summaries of episodes treating hunting in the epics, see Brockington 1998, especially 191-92, 225, 417; Brodbeck 2016:71-86; Sinha 2016.

4. The Animal-Form or Deerskin-Clad Victim

In ancient Indian religion and society, cattle were the obvious primary animal of cultural focus, but the significance of deer and other ungulates (particularly the black antelope or blackbuck) in ritual and narrative is supported by copious evidence.[40] Eggeling, for example, asserts (1882:I, 23 n. 2):

> The skin of the black antelope may be regarded as one of the symbols of Brāhmanical worship and civilisation. Thus it is said in Manu II, 22-23: "That which lies between these two mountain ranges (the Himālaya and the Vindhya), from the eastern to the western ocean, the wise know as Āryāvarta (the land of the Āryas). Where the black antelope naturally roams about, that should be known as the land suitable for sacrifice; what lies beyond that is the country of the Mle*kkha*s[41] [*sic*] (barbarians)."

Unlike the cow, whose symbolism permeates every level of Hindu culture, deer and antelope have a deep but narrow association with the priestly class, as well as with ritual and the sacrifice. The connection between ascetic sages and antelope/deer encompasses a variety of elements, from the similarities between the words that designate them (*ṛṣi* ("ascetic sage or seer") and *ṛśya/ṛṣya* ("the male of the white-footed or painted antelope") or *riśya* ("a deer or antelope")), to their solitary existences in the forest, to the antelope skins (*kṛtti*) which are the standard accoutrements of the career ascetic. Blackbuck hides were the preferred garments and seats of holy men, as well as performing other more arcane functions such as serving as the "placenta" during the ceremonial process in which a consecrated individual becomes an "embryo" and is then reborn (cf. *AitBr*. 1.3). Brahmin ascetics even display a propensity to metaphorically or actually be or become ungulates, from Ṛṣyaśṛṅga—named for the antelope horn on his head—whose parents were a human ascetic and a female deer (*Mbh*. 3.110-13), and Mādhavī, daughter of King Yayāti, who becomes a *mṛgacāriṇī*, an ascetic who lives in the

---

[40] Given their importance in myth and ritual, the Sanskrit nomenclature surrounding deer is surprisingly inconsistent (see, for example, Eggeling's note (1900:V, 338 n. 1) on his attempt to make sense of the word *gomṛga* at *ShatBr*. 13.3.4.3). Deer (family Cervidae) and antelope (family Bovidae) are both members of the order Artiodactyla (even-toed ungulates) and are outwardly very similar creatures with similar habits. Their primary distinction is that deer have antlers which are shed each year where antelope have horns. The Sanskrit terms have been included above in every instance in which they occur in the texts, and translated as seems most likely, but there is significant overlap in the various meanings. The largest difficulty lies in accurately translating *mṛga*, which is both the most common term for deer, but also used more generally in its earlier meaning of "wild animal"; Monier-Williams (1899:828) lists its meaning as "a forest animal or wild beast, game of any kind, (esp.) a deer, fawn, gazelle, antelope, stag, musk-deer." The word also forms the base of six compounds which apply exclusively to antelope: *citramṛga*, *kṛṣṇamṛga*, *vātamṛga*, *pummṛga*, *puruṣamṛga*, *tārāmṛga*. Monier-Williams gives ten other terms which can apply equally to both species (*hariṇa*, *maru*, *maruka*, *riśya*, *mayu*, *nyaṅku*, *kravyaghātana*, *nityaśaṅkin*, *bhāryāru*, *eṇa*), while a host of others are listed as applying only to antelope (*aiṇeya*, *bhāraśṛṅga*, *bhāryāru*, *binducitra*, *binducitraka*, *calana*, *cārulocana*, *cārunetra*, *chikkāra*, *citrāṅga*, *eṇa*, *eta*, *jāṅghika*, *kadalin*, *kālaprṣṭha*, *kālasāra*, *kṛṣṇa*, *kṛṣṇapucchaka*, *ṛṣṇasāra*, *kṛṣṇasāraṅga*, *kṛtamāla*, *madhyama*, *mahājava*, *manthara*, *śikharin*, *śikhiśṛṅga*, *śikhiyūpa*) and sixteen which apply only to deer (*bhīruhṛdaya*, *cañcu*, *divaukas*, *hariṇaka*, *harṣula*, *kauṭilika*, *ligu*, *mṛḍīka*, *pallavāda*, *plavaṃga*, *sāraṅgaja*, *sulocana*, *sunayana*, *alpahariṇa*, *gandhamṛga*, *vanastha*).

[41] *Mlecchas*.

manner of a deer, in order to avoid marriage (*MBh.* 5.118.7 and 5.119.20, 24),[42] to the doomed *ṛṣi* Kiṃdama, who describes how he spends time in deer form on account of modesty and to alleviate his social anxiety (*Mbh.*1.109.28).[43] This brahmin ascetic-deer affiliation is not observable only in the *Mahābhārata*; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 5.8 tells the story of the ascetic Bharata who becomes the custodian of a fawn who has lost its mother; Bharata becomes so immersed in his complete devotion to the orphan that his own body wastes away entirely and he is reborn as a deer. When the brahmin warrior Rāma Jāmadagnya (discussed above under #1) discovers that his father has been slain, he explicitly likens this killing of a brahmin by *kṣatriyas* to a deer hunt (*Mbh*. 3.117.1):

> *mamāparādhāt taiḥ kṣudrair hatas tvaṃ tāta bāliśaiḥ*
> *kārtavīryasya dāyādair vane mṛga iveṣubhiḥ*
>
> As a result of my transgression, by these vile ignoramuses you were killed, Dear Father,
> by the sons of Kārtavīrya, in the forest as (one might shoot) a deer, with arrows.

Altogether, a clear picture emerges showing a kinship or equivalence between brahmins and deer; it should perhaps not be surprising, then, that an equally clear association can be traced between deer and that other major signifier of a brahmin: the sacrifice.

The sacrifice (*yajña*) is the incontrovertible center of Hindu thought and religious practice, and its performance not only solicits the benevolence of the gods, but reenacts and reasserts one Hindu conception of the fundamental nature of reality: that everything is a recurring cycle of consumption. As a famous formulation in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* has it, "everything is just food and eater of food; (in the sacrifice) *soma* is the food and Agni is the eater" (*idaṁ sarvam annaṁ caivānnādaś ca, soma evānnam, agnir annādaḥ*; *BṛĀrUp.* 1.4.6.82). Sacrifice aligns the microcosm of its performers with this macrocosmic relationship between "food and eater of food" (*anna* and *annāda*); it is "the visible form of an all-pervading divinity" (Daniélou 1991:63). Having his flesh offered for consumption to other gods makes Prajāpati the consummate exemplar for this conceptualization, and there are analogues to the sons' act of ingesting his flesh in the human rituals modeled after Prajāpati's death and revivification.[44]

While Prajāpati's story may be the first narrative expression of a *vinculum* between deer and the sacrifice, it is by no means the extent of it. Numerous passages draw a line between deer-

---

[42] Mādhavī's lifestyle and dedication eventually result in her father Yayāti recouping the prestige he lost when he began to despise all people and be overcome with pride in heaven.

[43] One of the few references to the ungulate-human equivalency that does not directly reference a special relationship to the priestly class is a "flipped" version: the Pāṇḍavas are told to go see Lake Mānuśa, ". . . where black antelopes, O King, tormented by a hunter, / having plunged in that lake, became human" (. . . *yatra kṛṣṇamṛgā rājan vyādhena paripīḍitāḥ* / *avagāhya tasmin sarasi mānuṣatvam upāgatāḥ*; *Mbh.* 3.81.53).

[44] The ritual describing the human-consumption analogue to the divine consumption of Prajāpati's flesh is described in *ŚBr*. 1.7. Also relevant is *ŚBr*. 2.2.4, which describes how Agni was born from Prajāpati's mouth, "therefore, Agni is an eater" (*tásmād annādò 'gniḥ*; *ŚBr*. 2.2.4.1). Agni then goes on to make several attempts to eat Prajāpati before the demiurge learns to pacify the hungry fire god with dairy products.

and antelope-killing and the sacrifice—or at the very least, with *complicated* or problematic sacrifice—and in many instances the sacrifice is embodied as an ungulate. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, for example, Yajña, the personified sacrifice himself, is hunted in the form of a blackbuck before mysteriously disappearing and leaving only his skin behind (*ŚBr.*1.1.4.1):[45]

> *átha kṛṣṇājinam ā́datte yájñasya ivá sarvatvā́ya. yajñó ha devebhyó 'pacakrāma sa* ***kṛṣṇo*** *bhūtvā́ cacāra. tásya devā́ anuvídya tvácam evā̀vacāyā́ jahruḥ.*
>
> Then he takes the black antelope skin, in respect to the wholeness (as it were) of the sacrifice. Indeed, Yajña went away from the gods, and having become a **black antelope**, he wandered. The gods having found only his skin, gathering (it) up, they bore it off.

The ruined sacrifice of King Dakṣa shows us another mythological coalescence of deer, hunting, and the sacrificial ritual when Yajña attempts to flee from the wrath of Śiva (the later, much expanded persona of Rudra) by taking the form of a deer (*mṛga*) (*VamP*. 5.26-27, 43):

> *agnau praṇaṣṭe yajño 'pi bhūtvā divyavapur mṛgaḥ*
> *dudrāva viklavagatir dakṣiṇāsahito 'mbare* 26
> *tam evānusasāreśaś cāpamānamya vegavān*
> *śaraṃ pāśupataṃ kṛtvā kālarūpī maheśvaraḥ* 27
> *. . . evaṃ kṛtvā kālarūpaṃ trinetro yajñaṃ krodhān mārgaṇair ājaghāna*
> *viddhaścāsau vedanābuddhimuktaḥ khe saṃtasthau tārakābhiścitāṅgaḥ* 43
>
> When the fire disappeared, Yajña (did) too, having become a deer of divine form;
> he fled, gone into overwhelming fear, together with the offering. 26
> The Lord, indeed, pursued him, having bent (his) bow swiftly,
> (and) having fixed a *pāśupata* arrow to that bow, the great god, in the form of Yama (did this). 27
> . . . Having taken his Yama-form, the Three-Eyed One angrily struck Yajña with arrows.
> And that one, pierced (but) free from the perception of pain, remained in the sky with limbs placed by means of stars. 43

As did Prajāpati in *AitBr*. 3.33 (as cited above), Yajña, too, becomes a constellation. It must be concluded that at some level, or in some early phase of cultural development, the sacrifice was entangled with (or perhaps seen in a kind of perpetual apposition to) the hunt. Though correspondences between hunting and sacrificial killing have been noted in a variety of

---

[45] There are multiple references to this story in the *brāhmaṇas*; cf., for example, the following, which records the same tale, but omits the sacrifice's antelope form and replaces the hunting with a request from the gods that it return: "Yajña ran away from the gods. Those gods marked his departure with a blessing, (saying) to him, 'Listen to us! Come back to us!' He said, 'Let it be so!' (and) verily he returned to the gods. With him returned, the gods worshiped. Having sacrificed with him, the gods became that which is this (now)" (*yajñó ha devebhyó 'pacakrāma. táṃ devā ánvamantrayan tā́ naḥ śṛṇúpa na ā́vartasvéti. só 'stu tathéty evá devā́n upā́vavarta. ténopā́vṛttena devā́ ayajanta téneṣṭva ìtád abhavanyád idaṃ devā́ḥ*; *ŚBr.* 1.5.2.6).

ancient cultures,[46] there is little overt intersection between the two in ancient Indian literature or ritual. However, the scenes described above suggest that some form of covalence linked the two practices at some early point. When these scenes are laid alongside the description of Prajāpati's deer form in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, a complex system of equivalencies in the texts springs into focus: Prajāpati is a deer; Prajāpati's killer is a hunter. Brahmins are deer; *kṣatriyas* are hunters. Prajāpati is the sacrifice; his murderer is therefore performing an analogue to the sacrifice, and in fact, Rudra, the killer of Prajāpati's deer form, is saluted as *yajñasādhaṁ*, "Accomplisher/ Perfecter of the Sacrifice," at *RV* 1.114.4. Rendered in chart form, the binaries underlying the epic scenes of deer-form murder look like this:

Father	Brahmin	Deer	The sacrifice
Son(s)	*Kṣatriya(s)*	Hunter(s)	The hunt

Table 3.

Within this tale at the very least, the hunt is constructed as a kind of *kṣatriya* mirror-image of the sacrifice. Certainly, the sacrifice and the hunt share many characteristics: hunting also embodies the cycle of *anna* and *annāda*, it requires the death of an animal, and it can bring disastrous results if performed incorrectly. Warrior-class killing happens on the battlefield and in the forest, and priestly-class killing is performed within the sacrifice; both are a part of the proper and necessary functioning of the world. A further similarity lies in the fact that in these tales, the dangerous outcomes are linked to the production of children.

5. Offspring-Related Consequences

Prajāpati's executioners are his children and (as discussed above) there are clear textual reasons to see the brahmins killed in deer form as being murdered by their supposed mythological descendants. However, in the epic variants, offspring expand into another significant dimension of the narrative as they also become the locus of the penalty that each killer faces, often manifested in a form tailored to the circumstance of each killing. The denial or loss of offspring for the *kṣatriya* killers is a multiform and thoroughgoing part of the epic modifications: Pāṇḍu and Kalmāṣapāda are deprived of the chance to father their own sons for killing a brahmin during intercourse, Daśaratha is destined to lose a son for killing a brahmin youth, and Rāma (whose story's adherence to the template is the loosest) loses access to his wife, a consequence functionally similar to Pāṇḍu and Kalmāṣapāda's situations, albeit in his case temporary.

Given the fact that Prajāpati's killers face no such punishment, why should there be such

[46] Burkert examined the similarities between hunting and the sacrifice across a variety of ancient societies and concluded that "One could . . . separate hunting and sacrifice on principle. In the hunt, one might argue, killing is not ceremonial but practical and subject to chance; its meaning and goal, both quite profane, lie in obtaining meat for food; a wild beast must be seen in opposition to a tame domestic animal. And yet the very similarity of hunting and sacrificial customs belies such a distinction" (1983:15).

a regular narrative connection between hunting-associated accidental murders and the loss of one’s posterity? The likely answer lies in Prajāpati’s role as the “Lord of Offspring” and the complicated equivalence between the sacrifice and the hunt: in particular, there is one form of the sacrifice which is restricted entirely to brahmins, performed to secure offspring, and whose etiology once again positions Prajāpati as a hunted victim.

The *agnihotra*, the twice-daily dairy oblation which may only be performed by members of the priestly class, has a unique status among the sacrifices, and in *ŚBr.* 2.2.4.1-3, we learn that the mythological origins of this ritual lie in Prajāpati’s omnipresent yearning for offspring. As in most stories that include the demiurge, the tale is situated at the beginning of time, and describes the god’s generation of Agni, the quintessential eater, and the first of Prajāpati’s children to attack him (*ŚBr*. 2:2:4.1):

> *prajā́patir ha vā́ idamágra éka evā̀sa*
> *sá aikṣata kathaṃ nu prájāyeyéti so 'śrāmyatsa tápo 'tapyata sò 'gnímeva múkhāj janayā́ṃ cakre*
> *tád yád enam múkhād ájanayata tásmād annādò 'gniḥ.*
>
> Prajāpati alone, indeed, existed here in the beginning. He considered, “How may I be reproduced?”
> He toiled and performed acts of penance. He generated Agni from his mouth; and because he generated him from his mouth, therefore Agni is a food-eater.

Eternally hungry, Agni pursues his creator with a gaping mouth (in effect, hunting him) and Prajāpati, fearful of being eaten, invents the *agnihotra* to satisfy the fire god instead, thus mythologically positioning it as an alternative or substitute for the hunt. It is clear that there are procreative undertones to the rite even aside from these mythological origins; the *agnihotra*’s connection to procreation is abundantly noted in the scholarship.[47] Presumably because of the

[47] While surely not the full sum of the *agnihotra*’s sprawling layers of significance, its connection to fertility is obvious even to those who view it as a secondary aim of the text. Thus “L’agnihotra est un sacrifice qui a pour objet de procurer au sacrifiant la prospérité, la santé, la longévité, la richesse en bétail et, surtout une nombreuse descendance mâle, c’est-à-dire la continuité de la race. . . . L’agnihotra est un charme de fécondité” (Dumont 1939:vii). Bodewitz was convinced that solar ideology was at the root of the *agnihotra*, and maintains that fertility was a secondary role, only mentioned so frequently in the brāhmaṇical literature because “The disappearance of the sun and its reappearance from the dark night, which forms the central theme in the speculations on the *agnihotra* was described with the image of conception and delivery. This image thrusted itself upon the authors of the *brāhmaṇas*, who did not hesitate to use it for one of their well-known obsessions: fertility” (1976:147). Skeptical as he is about the true relevance of a procreative aspect to the ritual, he goes on to supply five pages of textual citations from the *brāhmaṇas* on the *agnihotra*’s fertility-related powers.

association between dairy products and the male generative fluid,[48] the text describes Prajāpati's performance of the *agnihotra* as an act of reproduction, another manifestation of the way in which sacrifice, hunt, and procreation are intertwined with Prajāpati's character (*ŚBr.* 2.2.4.7):

> *sá hutvā́ prajā́patiḥ / pra cā́jāyatātsyatáś cāgnér mr̥tyór ātmā́nam atrāyata sa yó haivā́m vidvā́n agnihotrā́m juhóty etā́m haiva prájātim prájāyate yā́m prajā́patiḥ pra̍jāyataivám u haivà̀tsyatò 'gnér mr̥tyór ātmā́naṃ trāyate*
>
> Prajāpati, having made a sacrificial offering, reproduced himself and protected himself from Agni-death. Thus the wise man who offers the *agnihotra* reproduces himself as that very Prajāpati who reproduced himself once upon a time in exactly that way and protected himself from Agni-death who was about to eat him.

An episode in Book 3 of the *Mahābhārata* draws another illuminating direct connection between the hunt and the *agnihotra*. While none of the Pāṇḍava brothers ever enacts the "Killing of a Brāhmin in Deer Form" themselves, at several instances just such an event seems to loom in the offing. At *Mbh*. 3.295, the Pāṇḍava brothers are living an exemplary and virtuous life at a hermitage when they are approached by a panicking brahmin who has lost his *araṇis* (ritual drilling woods) right before performing his evening *agnihotra* (*Mbh*. 3.295.7-11):

> *ajātaśatrum āsīnaṃ bhrātṛbhiḥ sahitaṃ vane*
> *āgamya brāhmaṇas tūrṇaṃ saṃtapta idam abravīt* 7
> *araṇīsahitaṃ mahyaṃ samāsaktaṃ vanaspatau*
> *mṛgasya gharṣamāṇasya viṣāṇe samasajjata* 8
> *tad ādāya gato rājaṃs tvaramāṇo mahāmṛgaḥ*
> *āśramāt tvaritaḥ śīghraṃ plavamāno mahājavaḥ* 9
> *tasya gatvā padaṃ śīghram āsādya ca mahāmṛgam*
> *agnihotraṃ na lupyeta tadānayata pāṇḍavāḥ* 10

---

[48] While the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* remains frustratingly silent on whether a cigar is sometimes just a cigar, it is emphatic and consistent in its assertions that dairy products offered to the fire are *always* semen: the homogeneity of semen, milk, and butter is asserted repeatedly in descriptions of sacrificial acts throughout the text, for example, "Melted ghee [is] indeed semen; truly, he pours out that very semen" (*réto vā ā́jyaṃ réta eva ìtát siñcati*; *ŚBr*. 1.9.2.7), or "Then she looks at the melted ghee. Assuredly the wife [is] the mistress, and melted ghee [is] semen" (*athā́jyam ávekṣate. yoṣā vai pátnī réta ā́jyam*; *ŚBr*. 1.3.1.18). An etiology of the milk-semen equivalency is found alongside Agni's birth story, and it shares significant verbiage (marked in bold) with *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.1 and its description of Prajāpati's sexual activity with his daughter: "Now, Agni **desired** [the cow]: '**May I couple with her,' he thought. He joined with her sexually**, and in her (his) semen became that milk . . . that's why it is hot (when it is) first milked; it is Agni's semen, indeed" (*tā́m u hāgnír* ***abhídadhyau / mithunyánayā syāmíti tā́ṃ sámbabhūva*** *tásyāṃ rétaḥ pra̍siñcat tát páyo 'bhavat . . . tásmāt prathamadugdhám uṣṇám bhavaty agner hi rétaḥ*; *ŚBr*. 2.2.4.15).

Nor is the semen-dairy equivalence confined to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*; see, for example, *TB* 2.8.2.3, *RV* 1.100.3, or *RV* 1.160.3, which also equate dairy products with semen. The equivalency of all dairy products to one another is also made clear elsewhere, for example, "There he acquired either a ghee offering or a milk offering; but really both are actually that milk" (*tátra viveda ghr̥tāhutí vaivá payāahutíṃ vobháyaṃ ha tvèva tatpáya eva*; *ŚBr.* 2.2.4.4 and 2.2.4.5). This equivalence may also be seen in the epics, such as the divinely presented milk-porridge (*pāyasa*) which impregnates the wives of Daśaratha at *R*. 1.15.17.

brāhmaṇasya vacaḥ śrutvā saṃtapto 'tha yudhiṣṭhiraḥ
dhanur ādāya kaunteyaḥ prādravad bhrātṛbhiḥ saha 11

Ajātaśatru was sitting with his brothers in the forest.
Having approached (them) swiftly, a brahmin, greatly distressed, said this: 7
“My *araṇīs* (were) hanging suspended on a tree, a king of the woods,
when a deer was rubbing against it; on his horn 8
taking them [the *araṇīs*], he left, O King; the huge deer ran away,
from the *āśram* he ran swiftly, leaping, very fleet! 9
Quickly having gone on its track, and having gone after the huge deer—
let my *agnihotra* not be spoiled! Bring (the *araṇīs*) back, O Pāṇḍava.” 10
Having heard the brahmin’s words, Yudhiṣṭhira was greatly distressed.
Having taken his bow, the son of Kūntī ran after (the deer) with his brothers. 11

The forest setting, the nearby hermitage, the pursuit of a large and powerful deer: all are acutely reminiscent of the encounter which led to their father’s death. As the brothers press deeper into the forest, they are overcome by thirst. One by one they approach a pool in the forest and are stricken into a deathlike state by an invisible voice. This tale ends happily, however, when an unexpected father-son connection suddenly manifests as the dangerous power presiding over the pool is revealed to be the god Dharma (father of Yudhiṣṭhira) wishing to test (and then reward) his son.

Not only is this the closest the heroes of the great epic ever come to enacting the motif, but it brings us to another quality shared by the hunt and the sacrifice: as actions, both are the near-exclusive provenance of one *varṇa*, but are frequently performed as a service for the other. The typical *yajña* is performed by brahmins on behalf of *kṣatriyas*, while the optimal form of the *kṣatriya* hunt is (as attested above) one done to feed brahmins. But both *kṣatriyas* and brahmins also conduct their salient activities for their own personal benefit. For warriors, this is the recreational hunt, where for brahmins, it is the *agnihotra*, the personal twice-daily act of worship forbidden to the warrior class. Table 4 depicts this correspondence:

	Kṣatriya	**Brahmin**
Cross-*varṇa* service	Hunting performed to feed brahmins	Sacrifices carried out on behalf of *kṣatriyas*
Personal benefit	Hunting performed for sport	The *agnihotra*

Table 4.

It is in the “personal” versions in the lower register of Table 4 that the rules for the two classes reverse, as if reflections of one another in a mirror. Where the *agnihotra* (unless skipped or

somehow severely misconducted) brings assurance of progeny, the hunt—its dark counterpart or antithesis—is the jeopardizer of lineage, a potential cause of the eradication of the family line.[49]

6. Demarcation of Phases of the Narrative

The final issue to be addressed is this motif's regular recurrence, especially in view of the fact that the Sanskrit epics generally avoid the conspicuous reuse of thematic material. Yet again, an element from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*'s account of the assassination of Prajāpati suggests an underlying rationale for its repeated use. Though the description of the murder at *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.1-4 is shocking, more attention is actually paid in that narrative to its aftereffects than to the killing itself. As described above in the section on the brāhmaṇic versions, the description of the sex and murder occupy only a scant three verses, while the rest of the narrative portion of the chapter is dedicated to the gods' repeated attempts at damage control (*ŚBr*. 1.7.4.5-9). The sons decide as a group to kill Prajāpati, but they pay the price for their transgression one at a time. One by one, the killers try to "pacify" the fragment of their father's flesh; one by one they suffer terrible consequences, each time marked by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*'s refrain of "it has not yet become calmed/pacified" (*nò nvèvā́trāśamat*; *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.7, 8). It is not until Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the gods, gives it to Savitṛ for "impulsion" that "thenceforward it was pacified" (*tato 'rvācīnaṃ śāntaṃ*; *ŚBr.* 1.7.4.8).

These proportions are to some degree reflected within the individual epic versions as well: in each one, the killing is more important as a catalyst than as an event unto itself. But the template can also be seen on the larger scale as encompassing the epic versions as a group. Just as the sons of Prajāpati repeat their attempts to pacify the flesh, in the epic variants, the divine transgressions from the beginning of time are reenacted over and over again by *kṣatriyas*, until Kṛṣṇa's acceptance of his own killing and his forgiveness of the hunter who shot him brings the final pacification.

The reuse/recurrence of the primal scene of murder aligns the epic narrative with Hindu cosmology, reflecting the innate periodicity of the Hindu conception of time as an endless cycle of *kalpas* ("eons") each followed by *pralaya* ("dissolution"). This pattern is tightly bound to Prajāpati, who is often the first being to appear at the beginning of time (as at *ŚBr*. 2:2:4 or 6.1.1) and has an enduring connection to the act and time of creation. Through his position as the creator of beings and as the primordial sacrifice, his tale became synonymous with "beginning" in the epics. By having principal figures re-perform this allegory from the beginning of time at the outset of their stories, the epics ground themselves within this conception of cyclical time. The scene establishes the epic narratives as a part of a template imposed at the onset of the eon,

---

[49] Examining other episodes, Brodbeck (2016:71-86) does find a corresponding association between a king's progeny and well conducted hunting, concluding that "Success at hunting seems to give a king success in getting a good heir, and wildness is glossed with a tendency not to give daughters away" (86). Even so, the fundamental point holds that while the *agnihotra* is a low-risk, high-reward activity, in the epics, hunting is a high-risk, and at best moderate-reward activity. Another connection between hunting, beginnings, and denial of offspring occurs at the beginning of the *Ramāyaṇa*, with Vālmīki's curse upon the Niṣāda hunter for killing the male *krauñca* bird during mating at *R.* 2.13-14: the incident relates a sin committed while hunting that becomes the mythological account of the origin of the *śloka* and results in the hunter being cursed with death.

unavoidable, inevitable. Prajāpati's sons committed their crime and laid down a pattern for its resolution: attempt, attempt, attempt, finally followed by appeasement. On the human scale, the mortal heroes must recapitulate the crime over and over again until a divinity, Kṛṣṇa, steps in to impel a resolution, just as Savitṛ does for his brothers in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. In a perfect reverse analogue to Prajāpati's creation, Prajāpati has just finished the act of creating his divine family, where Kṛṣṇa has just finished ensuring the total destruction of his. In this final, "backwards" presentation of the motif, the core of the tale remains intact (a person shoots a deer who is actually a person), but illicit copulation is replaced with recumbent meditation; Kṛṣṇa is the blameless victim, where it is his killer who is unclean; and warrior-priest conflict collapses upon itself within the persona of Kṛṣṇa, both warrior and god. Finally, in contrast to the emphasis on retribution throughout the epic versions, punishment is replaced by forgiveness, as Kṛṣṇa, having just orchestrated the slaughter of his kinsmen, forgives his own killer. The death of Kṛṣṇa brings about the end of the heroic age; the primal sacrifice from the beginning of time is reenacted at the fin-de-siècle.

Conclusions

In the murdered body of Prajāpati the sacrifice and the hunt merge (or revert to some even more ancient shared significance), and the conflict between Prajāpati and his sons as expressed through the imagery of the deer and its hunters lays down an enduring pattern for narrative interactions between brahmins and *kṣatriyas*. Combining Hindu conceptions of the sacrifice and cyclical time with warrior- and priestly-class tension and capitalizing on the strong associations between brahmins, deer, and fatherhood, the murder of a person in deer form is used to mark the pivot point between phases of a narrative or of time itself, and serves as a reminder that the world of the epics is itself envisioned as a massive ritual of sacrifice. As a succession of epic characters reenact the elements of the initial divine parricide, the story is revealed to play a part in a larger program: just as Prajāpati's murder carries serious consequences for his divine family, its human-sphere reenactments precipitate similarly seismic events. Each episode marks a turning point in the narrative, an upheaval that takes much of the rest of the text to smooth out. Much like the refrain at *ŚBr*. 1.7.4.7-8, "it has not yet become pacified" (*nò nvèvā́trāśamat*), as the gods repeatedly find themselves unable to neutralize the piece of Prajāpati's dropped flesh, the "pacification" required of—or exacted upon—the warrior-class heroes following each deer-form murder leads to the formation of a corresponding cyclical/repetitive structure in the epic narrative.

Stories and motifs are frequently duplicated and reused in epic literature, but rarely in such an intentional and programmatic fashion; most significantly, the tale can produce this resonance with only a palimpsest of the original pattern. The motif's reduplication and deployment in the text functions as a marker of every age's ultimately relentless march towards tragic degeneration, culminating in the version which marks the onset of the *Kali Yuga*. In every phase, the *kṣatriya* debt is reincurred, until it is finally appeased by the willing martyrdom of Kṛṣṇa. While every iteration of the tale adds differentiating features, the shared foundation is clearly visible in all, aligning narrative with cosmology and imbuing the plotline with deep

cosmological meaning. The "King Who Kills a Deer that Is Actually a Person" is an object lesson in the way the tools of oral narrative can be used to reflect cosmological principles, and the reuse of a theme can serve as a powerful tool in social and religious messaging.

St. Catherine University

References

Abusch 2008 — Tzvi Abusch. "Hunting in the Epic of Gilgamesh: Speculations on the Education of a Prince." In *Treasures on Camels' Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph'al*. Ed. by Mordechai Cogan and Dan'el Kahn. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press. pp. 11-20.

Abusch and West 2020 — Tzvi Abusch and Emily Blanchard West. "Sowing the Seeds of Uncertainty: The Transmutation of the Mesopotamian Flood Myth in India, Iran, and the Classical World." *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 48.3/4:325-51.

Allen 2019 — N. J. Allen. *Arjuna-Odysseus: Shared Heritage in Indian and Greek Epic*. New York: Routledge.

Allsen 2006 — Thomas T. Allsen. *The Royal Hunt in Eurasian History*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bodewitz 1976 — H. W. Bodewitz. *The Daily Evening and Morning Offering (Agnihotra) According to the Brāhmaṇas*. Orientalia Rheno-traiectina, 21. Leiden: Brill.

Brockington 1998 — J. L. Brockington. *The Sanskrit Epics*. Handbuch der Orientalistik. Zweite Abteilung, Indien, 12. Leiden: Brill.

Brodbeck 2016 — Simon Pearse Brodbeck. *The Mahabharata Patriline: Gender, Culture, and the Royal Hereditary*. London: Routledge.

Burkert 1983 — Walter Burkert. *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*. Trans. by Peter Bing. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chaplin 1943 — Dorothea Chaplin. "The Symbolic Deer." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 24.3/4:215-23.

Choudhary 2010 — Pradeep Kant Choudhary. *Rāma with an Axe: Myth and Cult of Paraśurāma Avatāra*. Delhi: Aakar Books.

Collins 2014 — Brian Collins. *The Head beneath the Altar: Hindu Mythology and the Critique of Sacrifice*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Collins 2020 — _____. *The Other Rāma: Matricide and Genocide in the Mythology of Paraśurāma*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Daniélou 1991 — Alain Daniélou. *The Myths and Gods of India: The Classic Work on Hindu Polytheism from the Princeton Bollingen Series*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International.

Dhand 2004 — Arti Dhand. "The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahābhārata: A Tale about Women, Smelly Ascetics, and God." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72.1:33-58.

Doniger 2009 — Wendy Doniger. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York: Penguin.

Doniger O'Flaherty 1969 — Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty. "Asceticism and Sexuality in the Mythology of Śiva. Part I." *History of Religions*, 8.4:300-37.

Doniger O'Flaherty 1981 — _____. *Siva, the Erotic Ascetic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dumont 1939 — Paul-Émile Dumont. *L'agnihotra: Description de l'agnihotra dans le rituel védique d'après les Śrautasūtras de Kātyāyana (Yajurveda blanc); Āpastamba, Hiraṇyakeśin, Baudhāyana, Manu (Yajurveda noir); Āśvalāyana, Śāṅkhāyana (Ṛgveda); et la Vaitāna-Sūtra (Atharvaveda)*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Eggeling 1882-1900 — Julius Eggeling, trans. *The Satapatha-Brâhmana, According to the Text of the Mâdhyandina School*. Parts I and V. The Sacred Books of the East, 12 and 44. Oxford: Clarendon.

Falk 1973 — Nancy E. Falk. "Wilderness and Kingship in Ancient South Asia." *History of Religions*, 13.1:1-15.

Fowler 1943 — Murray Fowler. "The Myth of 'EPIXΘ ONIOΣ." *Classical Philology*, 38.1:28-32.

Goldman 1978 — R. P. Goldman. "Fathers, Sons, and Gurus: Oedipal Conflict in the Sanskrit Epics." *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 6.4:325-92.

Gonda 1982 — Jan Gonda. "The Popular Prajāpati." *History of Religions*, 22.2:129-49.

Joshi 1972 — J. R. Joshi. "Prajāpati in Vedic Mythology and Ritual." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 53.1/4:101-25.

Jamison and Brereton 2014 — Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, trans. *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*. 3 vols. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lévi 1966 — Sylvain Lévi. *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*. 2nd ed. Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études. Section des sciences religieuses, 73. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Lord 1960 — Albert Bates Lord. *The Singer of Tales*. Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, 24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Monier-Williams 1899 — Monier Monier-Williams. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Ramanujan 1972 — A. K. Ramanujan. "The Indian 'Oedipus.'" *Transactions of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies*, 16:127-37.

Sinha 2016 — Kanad Sinha. "The Hunter, the Hunted and the Hunt: Reading the Royal Hunting Episodes in the Mahābhārata." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 77:41-44.

Thapar 2001 — Romila Thapar. "Perceiving the Forest: Early India." *Studies in History*, 17.1:1-16.

E. West 2010 — Emily B. West. "Marriage, Cosmic Tranquility, and the Homeric Retiring Scene." *Classical World*, 104.1:17-28.

E. West 2016 — _____. "Nausicaa and Iphthime: The Dark Side of the Girl at the Spring." *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 44.3/4:494-519.

E. West 2017 — _____. "The Transformation of Cyavana: A Case Study in Narrative Evolution." *Oral Tradition*, 31.1:77-122. https://journal.oraltradition.org/wp-content/uploads/files/articles/31i/04_31.1.pdf

West with Abusch 2020 — Emily Blanchard West with Tzvi Abusch. "*Bījāni*, *Retas* and *Zēr Napšāti*: The 'Seeds of Creatures' in the Indic Flood Myth." *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 48.3/4:504-33.

M. West 1971 — M. L. West. *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. Oxford: Clarendon.