

## **14th World Sanskrit Conference 2009 in Kyoto**

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**Suryavamsa - Somavamsa - Harivamsa.**

### **Abstract**

The two famous dynastic lines of the Surya- and Somavamsas have been used to back up claims to power by many Indian royal houses down to the present time. The beginnings of this mythological idea can be narrowed down fairly clearly to epic and Puranic literature.

In 1915 E. W. Hopkins stated that the genealogy of the Sun line, which traces the origins of the Ramayana heroes, had its roots as far back as the Veda, whereas the genealogists of the Mahabharata, wishing at a rather later time to ensure equal status for the Mahabharata heroes, developed "the parvenu Moon-race" as a counterpart. W. Ruben sceptically objected in 1941 that the origins of this second mythology had yet to be clarified. M. Witzel in 2005 seemed finally to have done so, in a detailed study on the formation and early history of the two dynastic genealogies, and his results as a whole corroborate the position taken by Hopkins.

My own studies on the subject, however, have provisionally led to quite different results. In the Ramayana the main heroes are traced back to Ikṣvaku, the eldest son of Manu Vaivasvata, but without any emphasis on the Sun as the founder of the line, while the Mahabharata heroes are traced back to Pururavas and his mother Ilā, who was Manu Vaivasvata's daughter. Since genealogists needed male lines, they even ventured to postulate a double sex or a sex change for Ilā, and this may have finally led to the intentionally alternative claim of a descent from Soma via his son Budha. Only then, and in conscious contrast to the newly conceived Somavamsa, did Surya begin to be played up as the true founder of Ikṣvaku's line.

The possibly oldest, and in any case very pointed, confrontation of the two lines is to be found in the Vamsanucarita portions of the Harivamsa (and in Puranic parallels). Here the intention to trace back the main royal dynasties to divine origins is in line with a more general tendency of that Mahabharata khila as a whole, namely to emphasize the divine foundation of the world and ongoing divine intervention in worldly affairs. This is already mirrored in the title of the work: Harivamsa can be interpreted as a sort of combined name for both the Soma- and Suryavamsas. This title seems to have originally applied only to the portions of the work concerned with genealogy and universal history. It was only later, when the Mahabharata khila was transformed into a Kṛṣṇa epic (and a counterpart of the Ramayana) that the name Hari in the title came to be understood as referring in particular to Kṛṣṇa as an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa.