

Proposal for a paper at the Fourteenth World Sanskrit Conference, 2009 ('Epics and Purāṇas' panel):

With and Without Manu: Solar and Lunar Lines in the Sanskrit Epics

Abstract

This paper compares and contrasts the main royal patriline of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Its central purpose is to show that, despite the common supposition that the *Mahābhārata* is a story of a lunar dynasty based in Hāstinapura and the *Rāmāyaṇa* a story of a solar dynasty based in Ayodhyā, both texts are in fact presented as stories of solar dynasties.

The paper shows that in the *Mahābhārata*, in the genealogies allegedly presented by Vaiśampāyana to Janamejaya at the snake sacrifice, Śaṃtanu's (and Janamejaya's) royal line is presented as a solar line by the reckoning of the ancestry of distant ancestor Purūravas through his mother Ilā, daughter of Manu, descendant of the sun (*Mahābhārata* 1.70:9–16; 1.90:7). Also important in this regard is *Mahābhārata* 1.1:40–45, where Ugraśravas (without mentioning Manu) tells the ṛṣis that 'the lineage of the Kurus, those of the Yadus and of Bharata, the lines of Yayāti and Ikṣvāku and of the royal seers in general' (tr. van Buitenen) are all descended from the sun.

The paper discusses lunar lines as they appear in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. At *Mahābhārata* 7.119 Saṃjaya tells a lunar line of the Yādavas (descendants of Yayāti's disinherited eldest son), reckoning Purūravas's ancestry through his father Budha, son of the moon. This lunar Yādava genealogy (which does not include Manu) coincides with the Bhārata genealogies told by Vaiśampāyana only in the section Purūravas–Āyus–Nahuṣa–Yayāti. Critical also are the *Mahābhārata*'s various references to the Kaurava line as a lunar line; the paper collects and surveys these references, which are set before the Kurukṣetra war and seem thus to represent an understanding that is earlier than Vaiśampāyana's solar-line presentation. Earlier, that is, in terms of the narrative's fictional chronology, which the paper will carefully differentiate from an extra-textual historical chronology.

Whereas the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s main royal family (Rāma Dāśaratha and his ancestors) is presented by Vasiṣṭha as straightforwardly solar in origins (through the sun, his son Manu, and his son Ikṣvāku; *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.69; 2.102), the *Mahābhārata* seems narratively to depict a change in ancestral conventions; the solarising eclipse of a lunar line. Here the paper draws on Romila Thapar's 'Genealogical patterns as perceptions of the past' (1991; reprinted in *Cultural Pasts*, 2000), and refers briefly to the *Harivaṃśa*. To close, the paper attempts an interpretive comparison of the Kurukṣetra massacre, the *Mausalaparvan* massacre, and Janamejaya's snake-massacre.

Simon Brodbeck

School of Religious and Theological Studies, Cardiff University

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