

Janamejaya and Puṣyamitra

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In *Mahabhārata* I, 2, 69, 233 are given the titles of two Supplements (*Khilas*) to the great epic. One of them called *Bhaviṣyat* corresponds to chapters 115-118 of the *Harivaṃśa* (edited by P.L. Vaidya). These chapters relate the deeds of Janamejaya Pārikṣita after the completion of his snake sacrifice. The story, related by Ugraśravas in the Naimiṣa forest, can be summarized as follows: Soon after the conclusion of his *sarpasatra* Janamejaya undertakes to perform the horse sacrifice. Vyāsa predicts that the rite shall end in failure and that thereafter the *kṣatriyas* shall never be able to perform the same rite again. This prophesy comes true. During the sacrifice Vapuṣṭamā the wife of Janamejaya is violated by Indra who has entered into the carcass of the immolated horse. The king lays a curse on the god, saying that henceforward the *kṣatriyas* will not worship him with the horse sacrifice. The wrath of the king is directed also at the officiating priests, who are banished from the country. Although Janamejaya is finally reconciled with both his queen and the priests, the gloomy prophesy of Vyāsa cannot remain unfulfilled.

In *HV* 115, 39-40 Vyāsa tells Janamejaya that in the *kali*-age some commander of army, born of Kaśyapa gotra of Brahmins, will restore the celebration of the horse sacrifice. There is no doubt that these verses allude to the performance of the *aśvamedha* by Puṣyamitra the founder of the Śuṅga dynasty. It is exclusively the *kṣatriya* kings who are entitled to offer the horse sacrifice. The arrogation of the rite by the non-*kṣatriya* king must have evoked immense sensation among the contemporary Aryans. It is apparently the grave sense of crisis aroused by the recent historical event of Puṣyamitra's ritual undertaking which underlies the whole text of the *Bhaviṣyat*. What the author of this *Khila*-text tried to carry out was to offer some reasonable interpretation of the crisis from his own historical perspective. Having chosen Janamejaya as the hero of his narrative the author made the king responsible for the alienation of the *kṣatriya*-class from the *aśvamedha*.

Some verses from the *HV* and other Purāṇic texts hint that the Vājasaneyakas took part in Puṣyamitra's celebration of the horse sacrifice. The Kāṇvāya kings seem to have been descended from a family of these Vajasaneyakas.