TWO LEGENDS FROM THE PURAŅAS: A STUDY IN UPABŖMHAŅA **

Introductory:

Purānas form an important branch of Sanskrit literature and are « rooted in Vedic literature » ¹. They are said to be the very quintessence not only of the Vedas and of the Vedāngas, but the very soul of the Vedas ². They are reckoned as the fifth Veda ³. All this points to the close relationship of the Vedas and the Purānas. Hence they are very important not only for the religious and cultural history of India, but also for the Vedic studies as ancillary literature.

Various principles of Vedic interpretation have been expounded 4. The Mbh states that the moonlight in the form of *smṛti* is manifested

^{*} Faculty of Arts, M.S. University of Baroda.

^{**} Paper read at the Seminar on the «Aspects of Vedic Interpretation» held under the auspices of Centre of Advanced Study in Sanskrit, University of Poona, Poona (India) from 28th January 1980, to 31th January 1980.

^{1.} M. WINTERNITZ, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, p. 518 (Translated by Mrs. S. Ketkar), University of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1927.

^{2.} ātmā purāṇaṃ vedānām/Skandapurāṇa, Revākhanda 1.22, Venkateshvar Steam Press, Bombay; sarvavedavedāngašāstrāṇāṃ, sārabhūtam/Nāradīyapurāṇa 1.1.21; Venkateshvar Steam Press, Bombay, Saṃvat 1962; sarvavedārthasārāṇi purāṇānīti/Nāradīyapurāṇa 1.1.61; vedāḥ pratisthitāḥ sarve nātra saṃśayaḥ/Nāradīyapurāṇa 2.24.17; cf. Skandapurāṇa, Revākhanda 1.2.2; cf. nigamakalpataror galitaṃ phalam/BhP 1.1.3.

^{3.} purāṇaṃ pañcamo veda iti Brahmānuśāsanam/Skandapurāṇa, Revākhaṇḍa 1.18.

^{4.} ARTHUR A. MACDONELL, The Principles to be followed in Translating the Rgveda, «Commemorative Essays Presented to Sir Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar », pp. 3-19, BORI, Poona, 1917; A.B. DHRUVA, The Veda and Its Interpretations, «Malaviya Commemoration Volume », pp. 447-58, Benares Hindu University, Benares, 1932; S.S. BHAWE, The Soma-Hymns of the Rgveda, Part I, pp. 2-3. Oriental Institute, M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1957 (M.S. University of Baroda Research Series, No. 3).

by the full moon in the form of *Purāṇas* ⁵. The Mbh 1.1.204 and the *Purāṇas*, *e.g. Vāyupurāṇa* 1.201, expound a tenet that the *upabṛṃhaṇa* of the *Veda* is to be done with the help of *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* ⁶. *Upabṛṃhaṇa* is *śrutipratipannārtha-viśadīkaraṇa* ⁷ and according to Jīvagosvāmin *Purāṇa* is so called because it nourishes and supplements the meaning of the *Veda* ⁸.

It is quite well-known that some Vedic mantras, myths and legends have migrated to the Itihāsa and Purāṇa-literature. En passant it may also be noted that there are some enigmatic hymns in the Rgveda. Therein there is also a class of hymns known as the dialogue-hymns or the ākhyāna-hymns or the ballads. It is in this context that Purāṇas throw some times some important light in their exegesis by playing a supplementary, confirmatory and/or explanatory rôle. It is quite true that the tenet of upabṛṃhaṇa is a time-honoured principle and hence it is to be utilized with care and caution. The utilization of the Epic and Purāṇic tradition which in a sense represents the continuation of Indian tradition and culture, would not run counter to the thesis of Karl F. Geldner and R. Pischel who advocated that «the Indian literature of later periods provides the best key » 10 to the understanding of the RV.

In this paper it is proposed to examine afresh the two renowned legends viz. (i) the Brahmā-Sarasvatī legend and (ii) the Soma-Tārā legend, especially from the point of view of upabrmhana.

^{5.} purāṇapūrṇacandreṇa sṛmtijyotsnāprakāśinā/Mbh. Ādiparvan, Appendix I, p. 885 (cr. ed. BORI, Poona). Vide also P. V. Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. V, Part II, p. 914, fn. 1449, BORI, Poona, 1962.

^{6.} itihāsapūrāṇābhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabṛṃhayet/Mbh. 1.1.204; vide also Rāmānuja, Srībhāṣya on Brahmsūtra 1.1.1 (p. 69, edited by Vasudeva Shastri Abhyankar, Poona, 1935).

^{7.} RAM SHANKAR BHATTACHARYA, *Itihāsa-Purāṇa-kā Anuśīlana* (Hindi), p. 25, fn. 1; Indological Book House, Varanasi, 1963.

^{8.} Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 238; cf. pūraņāt purāņam/Jīvagosvāmin as referred to by Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, ibid., p. 46.

^{9.} Vide T. G. Mainkar, The Upabrmhana and the Rgveda Interpretation, pp. 8, 10, 16 (L.D. Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad, 1975). Baladeva Upadhyaya, Purānavimarša (Hindi), pp. 243 ff. (Chowkhamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi, 1965). He gives also the classification of the working of the principle of upabrmhana (ibid.).

^{10.} M. Winternitz, op. cit., p. 72. T. G. Mainkar has « made an effort to indicate the utility as well as the necessity of the upabrmhana» (ibid., Preface, p. 5) and he observes that « it is to be remembered that the traditional cry for "upabrmhana" also has its rightful place by the side of these modern principles» (ibid., p. 17). For various principles of interpreting the Purāṇas vide Anand Swarup Gupta, The Problem of Interpretation of Purāṇas, Purāṇa, Vol. VI, No. 1, January 1964, All-India Kashiraj Trust, Varanasi (Benares), pp. 62 ff.

Synopsis of the legends:

(i) Brahmā-Sarasvatī Legend:

The Brahmā-Sarasvatī legend is broadcast in Sanskrit literature and this Vedic legend is re-told with additions and alterations in several *Purāṇas* ¹¹.

In the MP ¹² which is one of the earliest *Purāṇas* the legend is narrated in the context of the primal creation (*ādisarga*). On the epochmaking event of the creation Brahmā meditated on Sāvitrī and whilst he was engrossed in *japa*, his body was cut in twain and the one-half became the female and the other half, the male. This female half was reckoned as his daughter as she was born of his body (*aṅgajā*) and she came to be variously known as Satarūpā, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī and Brahmāṇī. Being mad at Satarūpā's peerless beauty he gazed at her libidinously in all directions ¹³ and finally he married her, the blameless one, who gave birth to Manu Svāyambhuva *alis* Virāj and other sons.

The MP has a second half of this legend and it begins with a significant query regarding the sagotra-marriage of Brahmā and Sarasvatī and the Purāṇakāra offers an allegorical explanation of it ¹⁴. It is pointed out that this primal creation is the result of divine knowledge. It is divine and supersensuous in character. Moreover, in this context Brahmā is the presiding deity (adhiṣthātā) and the vedarāśi, whereas Gāyatrī is said to preside over the Vedas (tad-adhiṣthitā). This couple is corporeal as well as incorporeal and their inseparable concomittant relationship is compared by the Purāṇakāra, for example, with the inseparableness of the sunshine and the shadow, suggesting thereby that their co-habitation is natural and in the fitness of things. At the end the MP notes that Brahmā was abashed of his condemnable act and he cursed Cupid for urging him to commit such an ignominous and abominable act; thus the episode tends to breathe an ethical atmosphere.

It is significant to note that the MP adds a remark that the mortals do not know the ways of the immortals, *i.e.* to say they have their own laws and the human valuation is not to be applied to these laws and an entertaining of such an idea is deemed inauspicious. It is interesting to note here that the BhP ¹⁵ in the context of Kṛṣṇa's relationship with gopīs observes that the fault of the violation of dharma does not

^{11.} Vide Siddheshvar Chitravshastri, *Prācīnacaritrakośa* (Hindi), p. 527, Bharatiya Charitrakosha Mandal, Poona, 1964.

^{12.} MP 3.30 ff., 4.1 ff., 24, 25.

^{13.} As a consequence of his gazing at her in all directions Brahmā came to have five faces and his fifth head was covered in his matted hair and it was lopped off by Siva (MP 3.40; 183.86).

^{14.} Vide S. G. Kantawala, The Brahmā-Sarasvatī Episode in the Matsyapurāṇa, JOIB, Vol. VIII, No. 1, September, 1958, pp. 38 ff. Wilson designates it as an allegory (H. H. Wilson, Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, Vol. I, p. 108, London, 1864). Anand Swarup Gupta designates the relationship as symbolical (ibid., p. 63).

^{15.} BhP 10.33.30-31.

accrue to the *tejīyas*, just as no blemish accrues to the fire, the devourer of everything; hence an ordinary mortal should not commit such an act.

According to the BhP ¹⁶ Svayambhū, the lord of speech, gave birth to a beautiful daughter named Vāc alias Sarasvatī and loved her passionately, even though she did not love him. His sons Marīci and others came to know about his adharmamati and beseached him not to behave so, as such an act was not committed in the past and they pointed out that even for the tajīyas such an act did not conduce to fame. Moreover, people obtain kṣema by following his act and hence he must follow the dharma ¹⁷. Thus the BhP also adds an ethical note here. On finding his sons present he gave up his body. Later in the same chapter ¹⁸ it is stated that when Brahmā found that his prajā did not procreate further, he had his kāya divided into two halves giving rise to a mithuna consisting of one male and another female. The male part came to be known as Manu Svāyambhuva, the king, and the female part came to be known as Satarūpā, his queen who carried on the task of creation successfully.

Note that according to this BhP-version Satarūpā is Svāyambhuva Manu's wife, whereas according to the MP-version he is her son *i.e.* she is his mother. Thus the BhP depicts the incestuous relationship between a brother and a sister, whereas the MP delineates it between a father and a daughter.

The $V\bar{a}yupur\bar{a}na$ mentions Satarūpā as the female portion of Brahmā ¹⁹.

According to the *Vāmana-Purāna*, Brahmā, the grand sire of the world, had created all the movable and non-movable objects. Again he thought of creation and he created a beautiful maiden whom he invited for copulation. On account of his sinister act his head was torn asunder ²⁰.

According to the *Manusmṛti-version* ²¹ Brahmā divided himself in twain and the one half became the male and the other half the female in whom he produced Virāj by the *maithunadharma* ²².

All these versions inherit the theme of incest from the Vedas.

^{16.} BhP 3.12.28 ff.

^{17.} BhP 3.12.31-32.

^{18.} BhP 3.12.15 ff.

^{19.} D. R. Patil, Cultural History from the Vāyu-Purāna, p. 42. Deccan College, Poona, 1946.

^{20.} Vāmana-Purāna, Critical Edition, All-India Kashiraj Trust, Varanasi, Sarohamāhātmya, ch. 28, stanzas 3-5.

^{21.} Manusmṛti 1.32 (Gujarati Printing Press, Bombay, 1913).

^{22.} Kullūka on Manusmrti 1.32.

(ii) Soma-Tārā Legend:

The Soma-Tārā episode is broadcast in Sanskrit literature 23 and amongst its Purānic occurrence the MP-version is summarized here, as it is one of the earliest Purānas 24. Being intoxicated with the acquisition of power, prosperity and lordship over the seven worlds after the performance of the Rājasūya sacrifice, Soma, once, chanced to see Brhaspati's wife Tārā, the paragon of beauty. Both were passionately attracted and enamoured of each other and he abducted her to his abode and enjoyed her maddening company for a number of days. At this event Brhaspati was much perturbed and was very miserable. He (i.e. Brhaspati) entreated him (i.e. Soma) to return his better-half in vain. At last, out of affection for Brhaspati, Siva with his legion and allies gave a fierce battle to Soma and when it foreboded the destruction of the entire universe, Brahmā interceded and requested Soma successfully to return Tārā to Brhaspati, the lord of speech (vākpati, MP 23.46). Brhaspati regained his enceinte wife and repaired to his abode merrily. Then Budha was born of her. Thus the legend depicts a case of seduction, rape and adultery.

Discussion:

(i) Brahmā-Sarasvatī Legend:

The germs of the incestuous relation between a father and a daughter depicted in the first half of this legend are traceable to the RV 1.71.5; 10.61.5-9 (the Nābhānediṣṭha hymn). The *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṃhitā* 4.2.12 mentions Prajāpati as being enamoured of his daughter Uṣas. This legend occurs several times in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature; *e.g. Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1ff, *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33, where it specifically occurs

^{23.} Vide Siddheshvar Chitravshastri, op. cit., pp. 202-203, 243, 250; Giorgio Bonazzoli, Seduction Stories in the Brahmavaivartapurāṇa, Purāṇa, Vol. XIX, No. 2, July 1977, p. 328, fn. 24. It is significant to note that according to Bonazzoli also this story can be considered to be a good example of the saying « itihāsapurāṇā-bhyāṃ vedaṃ samupabṛṃhayet » (ibid., p. 331).

^{24.} Cf. Giorgio Bonazzoli observes that out of the several Purāṇas in which this legend occurs, « Devī Bhg and Matsya deserve a special attention because they give importance to the description of Tārā's beauty and to the pleasures of Candra and Tārā's union, elements that will have great significance in the BVP » (ibid., p. 329). These two Purāṇas dwell also on the seduction theme. (Vide ibid., p. 333). He continues to observe that « a study of such stories (i.e., seduction-stories; bracket ours) helps to understand the Purāṇic attitude towards tradition and the moral feelings of the composers on one hand, while on the other hand it provides a clue to the structure of a purāṇa, its handling of mythical themes, revelation and its topics that constitute the matter » (ibid., p. 322). In this paper Bonazzoli studies the structure of two stories, viz., Indra-Ahalyā and Candra-Tārā. Vide also D. R. Patil, op. cit., p. 44.

as a case of Prajāpati's incest with his daughter 25. The AV 9.10.12 mentions the placing of the seed in the daughter. Thus the MP and the BhP inherit the Vedic legacy of incest. This half is interpreted from several points of view, e.g. (i) natural phenomenon of the arrival of the sun and the dawn 26, (ii) philosophical interpretation: father as manas, the thinking principle and daughter as vānī and the union of the two representing the śabda, (iii) ādhidaivika interpretation: primal creation 27, and (iv) sociological interpretation: « the most primitive stage of the society had kinless organisation and hence the "father" was not supposed to be the "kin" of the children » 28 and the memory of such society is preserved in this episode. The first stage shows the « maternal or even prematernal stage of society and the second, the paternal stage, when "father" came to be the rightful kin of the children » 29. Thus the episode is a relic of the free sexual commerce between a father and a daughter at some stage of development of the society. At this juncture one is reminded of Manu's injunction that a father and a daughter should not sit in privacy because a powerful host of senseorgans drags even the wise and the learned astray 30 indicating thereby the slippery and weak moments of human mind.

It may, however, be mentioned that this first half symbolises the cosmological process, wherein the celebrated characters « are to be taken as representatives of the two principles of creation, the male and the female 31 , as the legend occurs in the context of $\bar{a}disarga$.

^{25.} A. A. Macdonell, *The Vedic Mythology*, p. 119 (Indological Book House, Delhi, 1971). J. Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, Vol. I, pp. 107 ff., Vol. IV, pp. 45 ff. Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill., London, 1890. Siddheshvar Chitravshastri, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

^{26.} According to T. G. Mainkar the Purāṇic addition « confirms the Sūrya-Uṣas interpretation of the original Rgvedic account » (*ibid.*, p. 11) and he continues to observe that « the Vedic poets... are seen indulging in a free use of metaphorical and symbolical language, as a result of which we get many unintelligible passages » (*ibid.*, p. 11).

^{27.} Vide BALADEVA UPADHYAYA, op. cit., pp. 257 ff.

^{28.} S. A. Dange, *Prajāpati and His Daughter*, Purāṇa, Vol. V, No. 1, January 1963, p. 45; for details *vide* pp. 39-46; *vide* also his *Sexual Symbolism from the Vedic Ritual*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1979, Ch. 8 « The Lusty Father », pp. 141 ff.

^{29.} S. A. Dange, op. cit., p. 46. K. V. Nilameghacharya examines this episode with the help of «certain Mīmāṃsic tenets of interpretation of the Vedic texts and on the basis of these texts he asserts that such Vedic accounts are supernatural and divine...». This relationship «has nothing to do with any worldly relation of the father and his daughter of the primitive society» (Prajāpati-tat-kanyā-vṛttānta-mīmāṃsā, Purāṇa, Vol. VI, No. 1, January 1964, pp. 79-80; vide ibid., pp. 79-96). T. G. Mainkar remarks that «the other portions of the Rgveda to me, indicate the Rgvedic ethical and moral ideals would in all probability accept such an incest » (ibid., p. 11). Vide S. G. Kantawala, Cultural History from the Matsyapurāṇa, M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda, 1964 (1965), p. 66, fn. 25 (M.S. University of Baroda Research Series, No. 8).

^{30.} Manusmṛti 2.215.

^{31.} T. G. Mainkar, op. cit., p. 11; vide also S. G. Kantawala, op. cit., p. 66.

The second half of the episode given in the MP is important from the interpretational point of view. It tries to palliate the graveness of the sexual act of Brahmā with Sarasvatī by taking it as an allegory 32. The germs of this half are traceable to the Vedic literature. In the RV Savitr, who is one of the solar deities, is called also Prajāpati³³. « In the sūtras Prajāpati is identified with Brahmā (AGS 3.4 etc.) » 34. In the Brāhmanas 35 Sarasvatī is identified with Vāc and Vāc is identified with Prajāpati 36. The Kausitakī Upanisad 5.1 states that Vāc is Sarasvatī and the BhP refers to the union of Vac and Prajapati who is girām pati 37. This identification explains also why she is said to have her abode in Brahmā's mouth 38. In the Mārkandeya-Purāna Sarasvatī is called brahmayoni³⁹. In the MP 4.24 Gāyatrī is said to be brahmavādinī, « singer of the Vedas »; thus this confirms her connection with the Vedas. And this is testified by the Tāndya-Brāhmana 2.3.10.1 which refers to the present of the three Vedas by Soma to Sītā, the daughter of Prajāpati. According to the MP Sarasvatī is Sāvitrī who is the daughter of the Sun. Sūryasya duhitā is one of the important concepts of the RV. Sūryasya duhitā is the genius of poetry or muse of poetry 40, or in other words « she is poetry personified, while Sūrya originally stood for prayer or poetry. Sarasvatī is the guardian deity of poetry » 41. Sāvitrī who is also designated as Sarasvatī is also Satarūpā in the MP and Satarūpā in this context appears to symbolise the multi-aspect of literary creation of the poets. Thus the Vedic concept of Sūryasya duhitā finds its upabṛṃhaṇa in the Purānas.

(ii) Soma-Tārā Legend:

The germs of the Soma-Tārā legend are traceable to the famous Rgvedic Brahmajāyā hymn 42. According to the Rgvedic account Soma, the king, restored the Brahmajāyā to Brhaspati 43. It is significant to

^{32.} On the causes of the introduction of this allegory vide J. Muir, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 112-13. J. Muir designates it as « mystical explanation ».

^{33.} divó dhartā bhúvanasya prajāpatih/RV 4.53.2a.

^{34.} A. A. MACDONELL, op. cit., p. 119.

^{35.} e.g. SB 3.9.1.7; AB 3.1.10; A. A. MACDONELL, op. cit., p. 87; A. B. Keith, The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads, HOS, Vol. 31, pp. 173-74 (1925).

36. A. B. Keith, op. cit., HOS, Vol. 32, p. 344 (1925).

^{37.} BhP 3.12.20.

^{38.} Vide MP 13.52.

^{39.} Mārkaņģeya-Purāņa 23.30 as quoted by A. S. Gupta, Sarasvatīstotra, Purāņa, Vol. VI, No. 1, January 1964, p. 1.

^{40.} Vide K. F. Geldner, Kommentar (Stuttgart), p. 141 (on RV 9.72.2); S. S. Bhawe, The conception of Muse of Poetry in the Rgveda, JUB, Vol. XIX, Part II, September 1950, pp. 19 ff.

^{41.} R. N. DANDEKAR, Vedic Bibliography, Vol. II, p. 165 (University of Poona, Poona, 1961) on S. S. Bhawe, ibid.

^{42.} RV 10.109; vide also AV 5.17. On the interpretation of RV 10.109, vide S. S. Bhawe, An Interpretation of RV 10.109 (Brahmakilbişa), «Studia Indologica, Festschrift für Wilibald Kirfel », 1955, pp. 17 ff.; T.G. MAINKAR, op. cit., pp. 8. ff. 43. RV 10.109.2,5.

note that the AV 5.17.4 refers to Tārikā who is a forerunner of Tārā and also the occurrence of the vocable Tārakāmaya qualifying the compound word surāsuravināśah in the BhP 9.14.7. The Vāyupurāņa also describes the battle as Tārakāmaya 44. The RV 10.109.2 and the AV 5.17.2 describe Soma as a rājā and the Purānas also describe him as a king. According to H. Oldenberg and K. F. Geldner ādhi in RV 10.109.3 stands for Brahmajāyā's illicit son Budha 45 and this suggests the sin. En passant it may be mentioned that the Tāṇdyamahābrāhmaṇa mentions one Saumāyana Budha. In this connection it is well to note that in the Purānas, at the time of the Jātakarmotsava-ceremony at Brhaspati's abode gods asked Tārā as to the biological fathership of Budha. She was overcome with bashfulness and when asked repeatedly she replied that Soma was his biological father 46. The query about the fathership and consequent bashfulness of Tārā indicate the sin-character of her dalliance with Soma. According to the Vedic evidence 47 Brahmajāyā is Vāc. In his bhāṣya on RV 10.109.7 Sāyana explains Brahmajāyā as Brahmanah Brhaspater jāyā and on RV 10.109.6 as juhū. On RV 10.109.1 while quoting an itihāsa Sāyaṇa remarks that juhū is vāc. Naturally, she becomes the wife of Brhaspati alias Brahmanaspati, the Lord of speech 48. Soma's taking away Brahmajāyā in the Vedic context stands metaphorically for prayers or hymns being increasingly sung in his honour 49, and this interpretation may be extended to the Puranic version also. The warrior-like and romantic character of Soma is also traceable to the Vedas 50. Thus this episode symbolises also the close connection of $V\bar{a}c$ and its presiding deity.

Both the legends in the *Purāṇas* try thus to supply the missing links, explain, elaborate and interpret the Vedic themes by the tecnique of *upabṛṃhaṇa*. Moreover, these legends reflect also the development of social and moral ideas of the ancient Indian society.

M. S. University of Baroda.

ABBREVIATIONS

BhP = Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, Saṃvat 2022.

MP = Matsya-Purāṇa, Anandashram Sanskrit Series, Vol. 54. Anandashram Press, Poona, 1907.

RV = Rgveda with Sāyaṇācārya's commentary, Vaidika Samshodhana Mandal, Poona, Vol. I, 1933; Vol. II, 1936; Vol. III, 1941; Vol. IV, 1946.

45. S. S. BHAWE, op. cit., p. 25.

^{44.} D. R. PATIL, op. cit., p. 44.

^{46.} Vide MP 24.4 ff.; vide also D. R. Patil, op. cit., pp. 44, 157. 47. S. S. Bhawe, op. cit., p. 25.

^{48.} Cf. RV 2.23.2; Brhadāranyaka-Upanişad 1.3.20-21 (Ten Principal Upanişads with Sārikarabhāṣya, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1964).
49. S. S. Bhawe, op. cit., p. 26.

^{50.} A. A. Macdonell, op. cit., p. 110. Cf. RV 9.86.32 where he is spoken of as pátir jánīnām. Vide also A. A. Macdonell, op. cit., p. 107.