

COW-DUST AND SUN-DUST:

REMARKS ON SKT. *GODHŪLI* AND SKT. *GORAJAS*

Though perhaps not evident at first sight, Skt. *godhūli* and *gorajas* are two of the more problematic tatpuruṣa compounds constructed with the polysemantic word *go*. While the expression corresponding to Skt. *godhūli* in Prakrit is *godhūliā*, a form developed from Skt. *godhūlikā*, some Neoindo-Aryan languages such as Hindī and Nepālī have adopted the tatsama *godhūli* and/or the tadbhava *godhūli*. As a rule, dictionaries render these words as « sunset » or « (evening) twilight », but do not agree when interpreting the first member of the compound. Monier-Williams¹ explains *godhūli* as « earthdust », i.e. « a time at which mist seems to rise from the earth », V. Apte², however, as « dust of the cows », « the time of sunset or evening twilight (so called because cows, which generally return home at about sunset, raise up clouds of dust by their treading on the earth) ». The latter interpretation is the usual one. R. L. Turner, too, analyses *godhūli* in his *Dictionary of the Nepali Language*³, where, besides the translation « sunset », he states « lit. the dust of cattle », and the *Śabdakalpadruma* (ŚKD)⁴ interprets it as *gavāṃ kṣurotthitā dhūlir yatrakāle, kālavaiśeṣaḥ*. Similar explanations are given by the Prākṛit-Hindī-Dictionary *Pāia-Sadda-Mahaṇṇavo* (PSM)⁵ and the Hindī Lexicon *Hindī-Śabdasāgar* (HSS)⁶. The PSM paraphrases Pkt. *godhūliā* as *gauoṇi ko carā kar lauṭne kā samay, sāyaṇikāl*, while the

1. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1899, 1964⁴, *sub verbo*.

2. *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 3 vols., Poona, 1957-59 (revised and enlarged edition), *sub verbo*.

3. *A Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language*, London, 1931, 1965 (reprint), *sub verbo*.

4. *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ... Śyāra-Rājā-Rādhākāntadeva-Bahādureṇa viracitaḥ*, vol. 2, Delhi-Varanasi-Patna, 1961 (reprint), *sub verbo*.

5. Pt. Hargovind Das T. SHETH, *Pāia-Sadda-Mahaṇṇavo*, Varanasi, 1963² (=Prākṛit Text Society Series no. 7), *sub verbo*.

6. Śyām(a)sumdar(a)dās, *Hindī-Śabdasāgar arthāt Hindī bhāṣā kā ek bṛhat koṣ*, vol. 2, Kāśī, 1938, *sub verbo*.

HSS gives the following, more detailed account: *vah samay jab ki jaṃgal se carkar lauṭī hūi gauṃ ke khurōṃ se dhūl urne ke kāraṇ dhumdhali chā jāy, samdhyā kā samay*. The word is thus interpreted as « that time of the day when the cows, having grazed, return from their pasture-lands and haziness spreads due to the dust raised by their hooves ».

To begin with, Skt. *godhūli* does not, as a matter of fact, signify « sunset » or « twilight » itself, but produces this meaning only in certain compounds where *godhūli* is either employed to determine any of the many expressions for « time » as, for example, in *godhūlikāla* (*Skandapur.* 2, 4, 9, 1), *godhūlisamaya* (*ibid.* 2, 4, 31, 20) and *godhūlivelā* (*Pārśvanāthac.* 7, 634), all meaning « sunset » or « twilight », or, similarly, in certain circumscribing constructions as, for example, *kāle... godhūlibhir dhūsare* (*Harivilāsa* 3, 69), « at the time (which is) hazy on account of *godhūli(s)* ». Our lexeme is not attested in Vedic literature, but appears in Sanskrit sources from about the 5th century A.D. onwards. Though *go* in *godhūli* can undoubtedly also be explained as meaning « earth », the use of the word in some of the oldest relevant texts does not in fact suggest the first interpretation mentioned above, that is to say, as « earth-dust » or « dust arising from the earth », but agrees with the second, traditional explanation, which interprets the first member of the compound as « cow » and, consequently, defines the whole word as meaning « cow-dust », i.e., « dust raised by (the hooves of) the cows ». We find a good example of this explanation in *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* 103, 13. The stanza describes evening time (*dinānta*), which, in India, is considered as extremely auspicious for the marriage ceremony:

*gopair yaṣṭyā hatānāṃ (gavāṃ) khurapuṭadalitā yā tu dhūlir dinānte /
sodvāhe sundarīṇāṃ vipuladhanasutārogyasaubhāgyakartrī //*

« The dust raised in the evening by the hooves (of the cows), (who are) beaten by the stick(s) of the cowherds, brings at the time of the wedding ample wealth, sons, health and conjugal felicity to (young and) beautiful (women) ». The same text also uses the expression *gopraveśasamaya*, « the time when the cattle come home », « evening time » (*Bṛhats.* 24, 35). In the commentary, ascribed to Sāyaṇa, on the *Parāśarasamhitā* (12, 10) we likewise read: *sāyamkāle goṣu mārgeṣv āgacchantīṣu vāyunā samut-thite gopādarajasi...*, « in the evening time, when cows come (back) on the (village) tracks (and) dust from the cow-feet is raised by the wind... ». It is interesting to note that this latter passage does not employ the term *godhūli*, but makes use of the longer, synonymous compound *gopādarajas*.

As the lexeme *godhūli* merely seems to serve as an abbreviated form based on the more explicit *gopādadhūli*, « dust from the feet of the cows », or *gokhuradhūli*, « dust from the hooves of the cows », also *gopādarajas*, when abbreviated, would yield the shorter expression *gorajas*. In fact, although the term employed most frequently is undoubtedly *godhūli*, both *gorajas* and occasionally also *goraja*, with a thematized

stem, are attested in much the same contexts as those we observed for the use of *godhūli*. We thus find the compound *gorajodhūtamastaka* in *Nīlamatapūr.* 1359 and the expression *gorajaḥsnāna* in *Dakṣasmṛti* 2, 15, *Parāśarasmṛti* 12, 10, *Skandapur.* 2, 4, 4, 80 and *Bhaviṣyapur.* 4, 122, 11, while the thematic *goraja* is to be met with in *Mbh.* 3, Appendix 25, 17, 9. *gorajas* poses, however, a number of intricate problems. Though the word appears, at first sight, to be entirely synonymous with *godhūli*, some occurrences suggest, most surprisingly, an interpretation which apparently deviates considerably from that of *godhūli*. We observe that, in these passages, the first member of the compound cannot be understood as having the meaning «cow», but signifies «sun», one of the numerous meanings of the highly polysemantic word *go*. The Sanskrit lexeme *gorajas* is sometimes used to denote a certain unit of matter and, as such, is mentioned in *Manusmṛti* as well as in a few tabular lists of small weights or measures contained in some Buddhist Sanskrit texts such as *Mahāvvyutpatti*, *Lalitavistara* and *Dīvyāvadāna*. We shall see that *gorajas*, when used for this particular purpose, does not, as in our previously given quotations concerning *godhūli* and *go(pāda)rajas*, refer to twilight or evening. It denotes, as is clearly indicated by Manu, a small particle of dust seen in the rays of the sun and is thus to be rendered, not as «cow-dust», but «sun-dust». In *Manusmṛti* 8, 131 f. we read the following:

*lokasaṃvyavahārthaṃ yāḥ saṃjñāḥ prathitā bhuvi /
tāmraṇṛpyasuvarṇāṇāṃ tāḥ pravakṣyāmy aśeṣataḥ //*

*jālāntaragate bhānau yat sūkṣmaṃ dṛśyate rajaḥ /
prathamam tat pramāṇāṇāṃ trasareṇuṃ pracakṣate //*

«Those technical names of (certain quantities of) copper, silver, and gold, which are generally used on earth for the purpose of business transactions among men, I will fully declare (131). The very small mote which is seen when the sun shines through a lattice, they declare (to be) the least of (all) quantities and (to be called) a *trasareṇu* (a floating particle of dust)» (132)⁷.

At a later period of time, however, this term for a very small unit of matter called *trasareṇu* or *gorajas*, which Manu explains to mean «sun-dust», was clearly misunderstood as «cow-dust», since the tabular lists of the Buddhist texts, I mentioned above also register a unit named *edakarajas* or *avirajas*, «sheep-dust», and another small measure called *śaśarajas*, «hare-dust». Evidently, the terms *edakarajas* and *śaśarajas* were coined after *gorajas* at a time when *go* in *gorajas* was wrongly believed to signify «cow». Though it is said in the texts, that seven *śaśarajāṃsi* form one *edakarajas* and seven *edakarajāṃsi* form one *gorajas*, the exact meaning of all the three terms became now rather

7. Translation after G. BÜHLER, *The Laws of Manu*, Oxford, 1886 (reprint Delhi-Varanasi-Patna, 1964), p. 276 f.

obscure. Monier-Williams translates *gorajas* with « a particle of dust on a cow-hair (named as a very small measure) » and Sarat Chandra Das⁸ interprets *glaṇ rdul*, the Tibetan equivalent of *gorajas*, as « a mote in the dung of an ox, a small particle of cowdung », while a Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara* and Hsiuen Tsang explain the three units of matter as a grain of dust on the hide of a hare, a sheep or a beeve⁹. The observations and the discussion we have conducted so far tend to suggest the presumption that Skt. *gorajas* possibly has two different meanings. While the first (1), an abbreviation of *gopādarajas*, would be synonymous with *godhūli*, the second (2), used, as we have seen, as a term for a very small unit of matter or weight, would according to Manu, mean « (particle of) dust (seen in the rays) of the sun »¹⁰. If this is correct, the word *go* in *godhūli* and *gorajas* (1) on the one hand and *go* in *gorajas* (2) on the other would have quite different meanings, namely « cow » in the first and « sun » in the second expression. The first interpretation would thus understand *go* in its primary and most realistic signification, the second, however, in a metaphorical sense, which, not unlike a number of other secondary meanings of *go*, was developed quite early. There exist some other Skt. words, too, in which *go*, when employed as first member of the compound, denotes either a « ray (of light) » or, still more interesting for our investigation, the « sun », for example, *gogaṇa*, « multitude of rays (of light) » (*Bhāgavatapur.* 4, 16, 14), *gopati*, « lord of rays », that is to say, « sun » (or « moon »), *goloka*, « cow-world », a part of heaven, especially Kṛṣṇa's heaven, and, more evident than other examples, *Goputra*, an epithet applied to Karna, a mythical king of Aṅga and elder brother on his mother's side of the Pāṇḍavas. Since King Karna was the son of the Sun-god by Prthā or Kuntī, before she was married to Pāṇḍu, the name *Goputra* was clearly constructed in the sense of *Sūryaputra*, i.e., « son (*putra*) of the Sun (*go*) ».

The examination of the two words we have studied appears to favour the final conclusion that, while *godhūli* ought to be rendered as « cow-dust », *gorajas*, when employed to denote a certain unit of measure, has evidently the signification of « sun-dust ». This result is undoubtedly striking, since, as is well known, *tatpuruṣas* built on one and the same semantic model are likely to have identical meanings. The combination of any word chosen for « river » with any word chosen for « master »,

8. *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, Kyoto, 1969 (reprint), sub *rdul*.

9. Cf. the entry *edaka-rajās* in F. EDGERTON, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit: Grammar and Dictionary*, vol. II: *Dictionary*, Delhi-Varanasi-Patna, 1970 (reprint), p. 155, which renders *gorajas* somewhat tentatively as « cow-speck ». EDGERTON ends his discussion of the three units of matter by saying: « Why should a speck on the skin, or in the dung, of an animal vary with the size of the animal? The Tib. itself gives no such indication. It seems safe to assume that *hare-speck*, *sheep-speck*, and *cow-speck* mean only three different sizes of small particles. Cf. also R. MITRA, *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, Calcutta, 1971 (reprint), p. 105.

10. An *śaśarajas* would then be seven times, an *edakarajas* seventy-seven times the size of a dust-particle seen in the rays of the sun.

« lord » or « king » etc., will invariably form a compound meaning « ocean », literally, « lord of the rivers », as can be easily seen in, for example, *nadīpati*, *nadīnātha*, *nadīśa*, *saridbhartṛ*, *sarītpati*, *sindhunātha*, *sindhurāja* and many more words composed in exactly this manner. We have, therefore, reason to wonder whether *godhūli* and *gorajas*, too, were originally wholly synonymous words. They are constructed analogically and both meant perhaps originally « dust (seen in the rays) of the sun », but differentiated in meaning, when in post-vedic times *go* in *godhūli*, as was the case also with *gorajas* (2), came to be interpreted as « cow ». Though a great deal speaks in favour of such a reinterpretation, it is difficult to find textual evidence that fully supports the presumed change of meaning. In any case, *go* had, as is well-known, an extraordinarily wide range of meanings in the earliest texts. Certain Vedic myths and beliefs have, as I have noted before, developed a number of metaphorical and figurative uses of *go* which, though based on the primary meaning of « cow », « cattle » or « bull », have moved far away from this concrete sense of the word. Thus *go*, according to the imagery peculiar to Vedic ideas, not only signifies « earth », here conceived of as a food-providing cow; it also denotes « rays of light », regarded as the herds of the sky, or the « rays of dawn » or the « rays of the sun », since rays are imagined to draw the chariot of the sun like draught-bulls. When the significance of these metaphorical usages had faded and phraseology changed, *go* came simply to mean, among other things, « a ray of light », « the sun », « the moon », « the sky » or « a region in the sky ». That these senses were not always clearly understood in post-vedic times, is shown by *gorajas* (2) and possibly also by *godhūli*, where the ambiguous *go* could easily be interpreted in its most common meaning, that is to say, « cow ».

It is interesting to note that in Sanskrit texts evening twilight is, as far as I know, never described in relation to cows returning from pasture or mist arising from the earth, nor, to my knowledge, does any classical poet make use of the imagery referring to these conceptions. Whenever the fall of night is depicted in *kāvya*, Sanskrit poets invariably observe the sequence sunset, dusk and night and, when describing twilight, often use terms such as *sandhyārajas*, *sandhyāṃśu* or *sandhyā-kiraṇa* (also *sāndhyakiraṇa*, *sāndhyarajas*, etc.) which, in actual fact, are not synonymous with, but come extremely close to the expression *godhūli*. We find the compound *sāndhyakiraṇa* in a stanza contained in a description of sunset, twilight and nightfall in *Śiśupālavadha* IX and the expression *sandhyārajas* in a stanza in the last canto of the *Naiṣadhacarita* which, like the *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa, ends with the evocation of the bliss of the married couple, followed by a detailed picture of sunset and night. The first stanza is *Śiśupālav.* 9, 15:

*atha sāndrasāndhyakiraṇārūṇitaṃ harihetihūti mithunaṃ patatoḥ /
prthag utpapāta virahārtidaladdhṛdayasrutāsrganuliṭtam iva //*

« Then the pair of birds named after Hari's weapon (i.e., the pair of

cakravāka-birds) flew up separately; they were reddened by the dense dust of the evening twilight and, therefore, looked as if they were smeared with the blood gushing forth from their hearts which were breaking because of the grief of their separation ».

The second stanza, which is *Naiṣadhacarita* 22, 4, reads as follows:

uccaistarād ambaraśailamauleś cyuto ravir gairikagaṇḍaśailaḥ //
tasyaiva pātena vicūrṇitasya sandhyārajaorājir ihojjihīte //

« Fallen from the lofty summit of the sky, the sun (is like) a red rock of chalk, pulverized. A line of evening dust (*sandhyārajaorāji*¹¹) arises from the ruins of its fall ». The stanza from *Śiśupālavadha* pictures the evening glow or, more exactly, the dust of the evening twilight which is so dense and so red that it colours the two *cakravāka*-birds which in accordance with a cruel, but inevitable destiny, have to leave each other every evening and spend the night separately. Māgha fancies that the anguish of imminent separation makes their hearts bleed and that the birds' bodies are thus stained by streams of red blood¹². Śrīharṣa's stanza depicts sunset and the dust of twilight that follows. In fact, the scene presented by the poet is grandiose: The sun falls like a huge rock of red chalk, which, when crushed into powder, produces the characteristic red glow of evening. The idea that the sun's rays are broken into pieces is employed by Bilhaṇa, too. In stanza 7 of his sunset description given in the beginning of *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* XI Bilhaṇa says:

dirghapādapaśikhāsu girīṇām mastakeṣu śikhareṣu grhāṇām /
dagdhakālavaśataḥ śatakhandaṁ dhāma caṇḍakiraṇasya babhūva //

« The light of the fierce-rayed (sun), due to evening time (or: by force of the wicked Kāla), was broken into a hundred pieces on the tops of the tall trees, the peaks of the mountains, and the (roof) terraces of the houses »¹³.

As a matter of fact, the lexemes *rajas*, *kirāṇa*, *reṇu*¹⁴, *aṁśu* and *dhūli* not only mean « dust », frequently also « pollen », but have also

11. In the Hindī paraphrase of Haragovinda Śāstrī's edition in the *Haridāsa-Saṃskṛta-Granthamālā*, vol. 205, rendered as *usikā* (= *sūryakā*) *sandhyārūpi dhūli-samūh*.

12. The *cakravāka*-motif is taken up in a similar way by BHĀRAVI in *Kirātārj.* 9, 4, the second half of which reads: *āsasāda virahayya dharitrīṇi cakravākahṛdayāny abhitāpaḥ*, « affliction abandoned the earth and entered the hearts of the *cakravākas* ». *abhitāpa*, which means « heat » and « (great) pain », is here used in both senses, but also denotes the evening glow, as can be seen from *Kumāras.* 8, 46: *bhānunā saṃvibhaktam sādhyam ātapam*, « the twilight glow shed by the sun ». *ātapa* and *abhitāpa* are synonymous words.

13. Compare this stanza with *Kumāras.* 8, 46, quoted in the preceding footnote, where the setting sun again sheds his evening light on the tops of mountains and trees:

siṃhakesarasatāsu bhūbhṛtām pallavaprasaviṣu drumeṣu ca /
paśya dhātusikhareṣu bhānunā saṃvibhaktam iva sādhyam ātapam //

14. Note the expression *trasareṇu* in *Manusmṛti* 8, 132.

the meaning of « any small particle » or « subtle component (of matter) ». The Tibetan equivalent for these Sanskrit words is *rdul* which, as the dictionaries of H.A. Jäschke¹⁵ and Sarat Chandra Das correctly state, denotes « dust, not so much as a deposited mass, but rather as particles floating in the air » (Jäschke) or « particles of dust in the air visible in the rays of the sun » (Das). We may assume that *dhūli* and its synonyms, when compounded with *sandhi*, *sandhyā* or *go*, are to be understood in exactly this sense. They do not seem to signify dust raised by cattle or mist from the earth¹⁶, but denote minute particles which, specially at sunset or when seen through a window, become visible in the rays of the sun. To this must be added that our compounds do not indicate anything regarding the substance or origin of these motes. While nobody, except an austere Yogin, would be willing to look into the scorching disk of the sun in the day-time, the situation is different in the brief period between day and nightfall. In their descriptions of sunset and twilight the classical poets are, indeed, fond of stressing the fact that the setting sun now characterised as « not hot » (*atāpa*) or « not heating » (*atāpakara*) or, according to another sense of these words, « not paining », is pleasant to look at. *netragamyam avalokya bhāskaram* says Kālidāsa in *Kumāras*. 8, 29, « looking at the sun which is (now) accessible to the eyes ». Bhāravi in *Kirātārjunīya* 9, 4 similarly states *gamyatām upagate nayanānām lohītāyati sahasramarīcau*, « after the reddening thousand-eyed (sun) had become (easy) of access to the eyes »; and in *Śiśupālav*. 9, 10 we read *anurāgavantam api locanayor dadhataṁ vapuḥ sukham atāpakaram... ravim*, « the sun, though it was red and possessed of a body that was pleasant, but not (too) hot ».

We may thus make the assumption that *go* in *godhūli* and *go* in *gorajas* are probably not incompatible in meaning as far as the earliest uses of both these words are concerned. Both show a parallel structure and like *gorajas*, the first member of which was in later times understood, not as « sun », but as « cow », *godhūli* may originally have had the meaning of « sun-dust ». However gradually, though at least one or two centuries before Varāhamihira's time, it was thought to signify « cow-dust »¹⁷.

15. *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, London, 1965 (reprint), *sub verbo*.

16. It seems to me worth noting that in *Vikramāṅkadevac*. 11, 12, which compares the evening glow (*ātapa*) to a cloth (*paṭa*) worn by the sun, BILHAṆA says clearly: *dinabhartā... nījātapaṭaṭam vicarkarṣa*, « the sun drew the cloth in shape of his own glow... ».

17. Unlike *kāvya*, later Indian miniature painting is in perfect agreement with this later interpretation of the expression *godhūli* in Sanskrit and the vernaculars. Several Pahārī-paintings depict twilight and evening by representing a herd of cattle that, at sunset-time, returns home to the village. — It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness in preparing this article to Dr. M.A. MEHENDALE, Poona, who commented on many points in a first draft of this paper and also sent me some valuable information from several texts, difficult of access.