

ASKO PARPOLA

BALA-RĀMA AND SĪTĀ:  
ON THE ORIGINS OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

**Introduction**

In my recent research on the Sāvitrī legend, I stumbled upon a striking parallelism between this legend and the account given by the Greek ambassador Megasthenes about the origins of the Pāṇḍya kingdom in South India (Parpola 1998: 263-270). This parallel, which concerns a curious detail and can hardly be purely accidental, appears to throw new light upon Sītā and her connection with Laṅkā. For this reason, I have taken it up as the subject of a separate communication. The historical background of the Rāmāyaṇa story and the identities of the dramatis personae is a complicated and much debated topic. I confine the present paper to matters most immediately related to the new textual parallel that prompted it, reserving its further development to another occasion.

**Furrow and Plough**

*Sītā and Bala-Rāma*

I would like to start this inquiry into the origins of the Rāmāyaṇa with the question asked by Albrecht Weber 150 years ago:

Has Rāma developed from Rāma Halabhṛt, i.e. has he originally

been just a personification of an agricultural divinity like Sītā (Cf. Weber 1850: 175; 1871: 7ff.)

In Weber's opinion, Rāma's spouse Sītā is at least partly mythical. In the admittedly late first book of the Rāmāyaṇa (1,66,14-15), Sītā comes out of the furrow when Janaka the king of Mithilā is ploughing a field, and is given the name Sītā and raised as his daughter by Janaka:

*atha me kṛṣataḥ kṣetraṃ lāṅgalād utthitā tataḥ /  
kṣetraṃ śodhayatā labdhā nāmnā sītetī viśrutā //  
bhūtalād utthitā sā tu vardhamānā mamātmaajā /  
vīryaśulketi me kanyā sthāpīteyam ayonijā //*

In the likewise late Uttarakāṇḍa (Rāmāyaṇa 7,88,9-14), Sītā finally returns to her mother Earth: the goddess comes to fetch her and the two disappear underground.

An agricultural goddess called Sītā, the personified furrow, is known already from the Ṛgveda (4,57,6-7), and the Gṛhyasūtras give instructions about her worship. The worship of Goddess Sītā as the 'furrow' is described in detail in chapter 2,17 of the Pāraskara-Gṛhyasūtra, and she was worshipped also at ploughing according to the Gobhila-Gṛhyasūtra (4,4,27-29). Weber (1871: 8) also pointed out that in the Uttararāmacarita, Janaka is called *sīradhvaja*, 'having the plough in his banner'.

Hermann Jacobi (1893: 130-139), too, took Sītā as the starting point of his interpretation of the Rāmāyaṇa story, as there in his opinion cannot be any doubt about her mythological character. Jacobi pointed out that in the Vedic Gṛhyasūtras Goddess Sītā is said to be the wife of either Indra or Parjanya. Jacobi therefore assumed that Rāma represents Indra or Parjanya, and that Rāma's battle with Rāvaṇa is a transposition of Indra's battle with Vṛtra.

It makes sense that the husband of 'furrow' is the god of ploughing. While it is quite true that Indra is often connected with ploughing and agricultural rituals (see Hillebrandt 1929: II 199-202), Indra was the chief deity of Aryan pastoralists whose economy was mainly based on animal husbandry, and a deity of thunder and war; that agriculture played a marginal role in Indra's mythology is clear from the fact that his feats are largely concerned with the capture of the

enemy's cattle. Indra therefore is likely to have taken over this function from the plough-god worshipped by the earlier settled population of the Indus Valley, the Harappan people, whose economy was mainly based on agriculture. This earlier plough-god may have survived to historical times in the shape of Bala-Rāma, a deity whose distinctive iconographic emblems, the plough (*lāṅgala*, *hala*, *phāla*) and pestle for pounding grain (*muṣala*) definitely mark him as primarily an agrarian deity. The agricultural connection is also plain from his alternative name Saṃkarṣaṇa, which is derived from his activity of ploughing (*kr̥ṣi*).

Weber's hypothesis that Rāma as the husband of Sītā 'furrow' might stand for Bala-Rāma as the god of ploughing is supported by the fact that Rāma is actually used in the Mahābhārata 143 times as the name of the deity generally known as Bala-Rāma, which latter name does not occur a single time in the Mahābhārata (cf. Bigger 1998: 9).

### *Sītā and Janaka-Brahmā/Prajāpati*

The plough is instrumental in placing the seed in the womb of the earth, and ploughing thus symbolizes sexual intercourse. But the plough also creates the furrow, thus representing its generator. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Sītā's father, king Janaka, is represented as ploughing a field when Sītā is 'born', and his name denotes 'progenitor, father'. In fact, Janaka is one of the names used in the Purāṇas of the Hindu creator god Brahmā. Brahmā directly continues the Vedic creator god Prajāpati, whom the Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa (2,3,10) mentions as the father of Sītā Sāvitrī. On the other hand, as observed above, the plough and the field ploughed (or the furrow) form a couple, and while Prajāpati is the father of Sītā Sāvitrī, he is also her husband through incest (see below, and, for detailed references, Parpola 1998).

In the Sāvitrī legend, the human couple, Princess Sāvitrī and Prince Satyavat, correspond to the divine couple Goddess Sāvitrī and her husband God Brahmā. It is through the grace of Goddess Sāvitrī and her husband that the princess is born, and both the human and the divine Sāvitrī along with their husbands are to be worshipped in the ritual of *vaṭa-sāvitrī-vrata* that is associated with the legend and in the course of which the legend is to be recited. Even the fate of the human

couple has its counterpart on the divine level. In accordance with the prophesy of Sage Nārada, Prince Satyavat (alias Citrāśva, an ‘alter ego’ of Sāvitrī’s father Aśvapati) dies after one year has passed from his wedding, with his head on the lap of Princess Sāvitrī. Sāvitrī as a faithful wife, Satī, follows her husband to death when Yama comes to fetch him, and with his loyalty gains back the life of her dead husband.

The Skanda-Purāṇa (3,1,40) tells how the creator god Brahmā alias Prajāpati has sex with his own daughter Vāc and is therefore killed by Śiva, but Brahmā’s wives Sarasvatī and Gāyatrī pacify Śiva and make him join Brahmā’s severed head with the body. This myth is directly based on a Vedic myth, found already in the Ṛgveda but most explicitly told in the Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa (3,33): the creator god Prajāpati is guilty of incest with his daughter Vāc and is killed by Rudra in punishment. Goddess Vāc ‘speech, voice, sound’ is another name of Goddess, Sāvitrī, known best as the holiest stanza of the Veda composed in the Gāyatrī metre, which is to be recited at sunrise and sunset, and, later, also at noon, understood as a third *sandhyā* or twilight, these three being identified with Gāyatrī, Sāvitrī and Sarasvatī.

### **The incest of Prajāpati-Aśvapati and the Indian Heracles**

Sītā Sāvitrī is the daughter of Prajāpati, and according to the myth just related, Prajāpati had an incestuous relationship with his daughter and had to die in punishment of this sin. In the Sāvitrī legend, Princess Sāvitrī’s father, King Aśvapati of Madra, fails to marry off his daughter in time, and therefore sends her off on a journey to self choose her husband. The texts do not directly indicate that the king had an incestuous relationship with Princess Sāvitrī, but they do quote in this context a Smṛti stating that if a girl sees her first menses in her father’s house, the father incurs a great sin. According to the Mahābhārata (3,277,32), Aśvapati asks Sāvitrī to find a husband ‘equal to herself’ (*sadṛśam ātmanah*) as no wooer is forthcoming, but according to the Skanda-Purāṇa (7,166,16) Aśvapati says that however much he looks, he cannot find for her daughter a bridegroom who in worth is equal to himself (*vicārayan na paśyāmi varam tulyam ihātmanah*).

This statement reminded me of a parallel statement in the Greek ambassador Megasthenes' description of the Indian Heracles, written about 300 B.C. and preserved in Arrian's *Indica* (9,1-3):

“In this country where Heracles' daughter was queen, the girls are marriageable at seven years, and the men do not live longer than forty years. There is a story about this among the Indians, that Heracles, whose daughter was born to him late in life, realizing that his own end was near, and having no man of his own worth to whom he might give his daughter [*ouk ékhonta hótō andrì ekdōi tēn pāida heōutū epaksīōi*], copulated with her himself when she was seven, so that their progeny might be left behind as Indian kings. Thus Heracles made her marriageable, and thenceforward the whole of this line which began with Pandaea inherited this very same privilege from Heracles.” (Transl. Brunt 1983: 331.)

## Heracles and Bala-Rāma

Arrian (*Indica* 8,5-7), states that ‘this Heracles is chiefly honoured by the Surasenians, an Indian tribe, with two great cities, Methora and Clisobora [Kleisóborā]; the navigable river Iomanes flows through their territory. Megasthenes says that the garb this Heracles wore was like that of the Theban Heracles by the account of the Indians themselves; he also had a great many sons in this country, for this Heracles too wedded many wives, but he had only one daughter. Her name was Pandaea [*Pandaiē*], and the country in which she was born, the government of which Heracles entrusted to her, was called Pandaea after the girl...’ (transl. Brunt 1983: 327-9).

Practically all scholars have identified the Indian Heracles with Kṛṣṇa worshipped by Śūrasenas in Mathurā on the Yamunā river. A singular exception is James Tod, who in a paper published in 1835 identified Heracles with Bala-Deva, the god of strength (*bala*) – the strength being most characteristic of Greek Heracles. Tod was prompted to identify Heracles with Bala-Deva by an ancient intaglio coming from Jaipur, where the god is depicted ‘naked, his head encircled with a diadem or fillet, the ends flowing behind. His lion's hide (*bāgambra* [Tod's note: from *bāg*, a lion or tiger, and *ambra*, covering]) is thrown over his right arm, extended; on which is perched a

figure presenting him a wreath, or coronet. In his left he grasps a club...' (Tod 1835: 139-140).

### **The Pāṇḍya country and the pearl trade**

Tod (1835: 147) identified the Pandaea country with the region of Mathurā, pointing out that 'Pandú... married Koontí, sister of Basdéva, prince of Mathúrá, the father of Heri and Baldeva' and that Kuntí's sons 'are the "Five Paṇḍus" whose exploits fill the traditional history of India'. However, from the further information supplied by Arrian in *Indica* 8,8-13 it is clear that the Pandafē country where Heracles' daughter ruled is the Pāṇḍya country in south India, whose capital is Madurai. For, according to Arrian, 'Some other Indians tell of Heracles that, after he had traversed every land and sea, and purged them of all evil monsters, he found in the sea a new form of womanly ornament. And thus, even to our day, those who bring merchandise from India to our country are at pains to purchase these jewels and export them, and rich and prosperous Greeks in the past, and Romans today, are still more eager to buy the sea *margarita* [pearl] as it is called in the Indian tongue. Heracles was in fact so taken with the beauty of the ornament that he collected this pearl from every sea and brought it to India to adorn his daughter... among the Indians too the pearl is worth three times its weight in refined gold' (transl. Brunt 1983: 329-331).

The Arthaśāstra (2,1 1) mentions as sources of pearls several place names which can with more or less certainty be located along the coasts of southernmost India and northern Sri Lanka, among them Pāṇḍya-kavāṭa and Tāmraparṇī. Tāmraparṇī is both the name of a river in the Pāṇḍya kingdom of Tamil Nadu (Tāmparaparaṇi, Tampapaṇṇi) and the name of the first capital of the historical Sri Lanka, Tāmbapaṇṇi (Mahāvamsa 7,38-42), situated just opposite the said river across the straits. This early capital and port also gave its name to the whole island, Sri Lanka being referred to as Taprobane by Onesicritus, the admiral of Alexander the Great, who had heard about it c. 325 B.C. in the Indus Valley. This attests to the existence of full-fledged sea traffic between these regions by this time. (Maloney 1970: 604-606; Parpola 1984: 450.) This sea traffic must have started some-

what earlier, when the existence of pearls became known and a major attraction for seafaring adventurers.

### **Paṇḍu princes in Sri Lanka and south India**

The legend of the origin of the earliest Siṃhala kings of Sri Lanka is related in the ancient chronicles *Dīpavaṃsa* (ch. 9-11) and *Mahāvāṃsa* (ch. 6-10), written c. AD 400. At first 700 Siṃhalas came to Sri Lanka under the leadership of Prince Vijaya. 'Prince Vijaya was daring and uneducated; he committed most wicked and fearful things, plundering the people.' He was therefore expelled from his home by his father, King Siḥabāhu, who ruled in Siḥapura in the kingdom of Lāla, i.e. Lāṭa in southern Gujarat. Arriving at the island of Laṅkā at the time when the Buddha was born, Vijaya and his men conquered the Yakkhas who occupied the island before their arrival, and Vijaya founded the city of Tambapaṇṇi. In the conquest Vijaya was helped by a fierce Yakkhini called Kuveṇī or Kuvāṇṇā, but after the conquest Vijaya rejected her, because he got the chance to marry the daughter of King Paṇḍu ruling at Madhurā in southernmost India. While doing so Vijaya invited his brother Sumitta to come from Siḥapura and rule Sri Lanka after himself. 'The daughter of the Sakka prince Paṇḍu, the princess called Kaccānā came over hither from Jambudīpa in order to preserve the dynasty. She was crowned as the queen-consort of Paṇḍuvāsa.' (*Dīpavaṃsa* 10,1-2, transl. Oldenberg 1879: 163). In the *Mahāvāṃsa*, Paṇḍuvāsa of *Dīpavaṃsa* is called Paṇḍuvāsudeva, and he is the youngest son of Vijaya's brother Sumitta, who married Bhaddakaccānā. Paṇḍuvāsudeva's son Abhaya took the name Paṇḍukābhaya, when he ascended the throne, likewise after 20 years his nephew and successor Paṇḍukābhaya. (Lamotte 1958: 133f.; Maloney 1970: 606-608; Parpola 1984: 450f.; Weber 1871: 13 n. 1.)

From this it has been plausibly argued that Aryan nobles of the Paṇḍu clan came from Gujarat and established themselves as the kings of Sri Lanka and as kings of Tamils in south India, where they ruled the Pāṇḍya kingdom. But what was the origin of the Paṇḍus of Siṃhapura in Gujarat? According to the *Mahābhārata*, the Pāṇḍavas were much on the move, to the extent that they are said to have conquered the whole world (2,23-29). The *Mahābhārata* in its detailed

enumeration of the places vanquished by the Pāṇḍavas mentions Siṃhapura in the Indus Valley (2,24,19); according to the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang, Siṃhapura was situated 700 *li* south of Takṣaśilā. (Maloney 1970: 608.) In the neighbourhood of this city, mentioned in the very next verse (2,24,20), the Pāṇḍavas crushed a people called Cola, and people with the name Cola are otherwise known only from Tamil Nadu in south India. (Parpola 1984: 452.)

### **Paṇḍu/Pāṇḍya and the spread of Vaiṣṇavism to the south**

The first Siṃhala king Vijaya was a Paṇḍu prince who came from Gujarat, and his nephew's name was Paṇḍu-Vāsudeva. This suggests that the conquest of Sri Lanka coincides with the early spread of the Vaiṣṇava religion to the south. According to Champakalakshmi (1981: 20ff.), the earliest form of Vaiṣṇava religion in south India is the Pañcavīra cult, i.e. the worship of the five Vṛṣṇi or Yādava heroes of the Mathurā region including Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and Bala-Rāma/Saṅkarṣaṇa; for example the Āy rulers of Vēṇāṭu (southern Travancore) c. 800 A.D. traced their descent from the Yādavas (cf. Champakalakshmi 1981: 34). This migration of the Yādavas from the Mathurā region to the south is reflected in the mythology as well. Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva is said to have moved from Mathurā to Gujarat, where he founded the coastal city of Dvārakā. Dvārakā's name is derived from the word *dvāra(ka)* 'door'. This Sanskrit word corresponds to Tamil *kavāṭam* / *kapāṭam* 'fold of a door', found in the name of Pāṇḍya-kavāṭa that is mentioned in the Arthaśāstra (2,11,2) as one of the places in the south from where pearls were obtained; it is most likely the same city as Kapāṭapuram, where the 8th century Tamil legend mentions places one of the ancient literary academies (*caṅkam*) of the Tamils. (Maloney 1970: 612f.; Parpola 1984: 27.)

### **Pāṇḍu, Pandaīē and Sītā-Sāvitrī**

On their way to Virāṭanagara near Jaipur, where they spent one year incognito, the Pāṇḍavas passed through the Śūrasena country



(Mahābhārata 4,1 and 5); they also had Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva as their ally. On the basis of their names the first Paṇḍu kings of Sri Lanka and south India had brought with them the cults of Vāsudeva and Bala-Rāma. Bala-Rāma's complexion is white, and the word *paṇḍu* / *pāṇḍu* means 'pale, whitish'. Oskar von Hinüber (in Wirth and Hinüber 1985: 1110) has suggested that Greek Pandaíē may correspond to Sanskrit Pāṇḍeyā, 'daughter of Pāṇḍu'. Sītā was the daughter of Janaka, which is another name of Prajāpati-Brahmā, the father of Sītā Sāvitrī and the god of creation who was killed in punishment for his incest. Pandaíē's incestuous father also died soon after the copulation. It was prophesized to Pāṇḍu, the father of the Pāṇḍavas, that he would die if he would ever copulate again, and so it came to pass when he had intercourse with his wife Mādri. Mādri was a princess of the Madra country, and ascended the funeral pyre of Pāṇḍu, resolute as the goddess Dhṛti. In both respects she was like another princess of the Madra country, namely the resolute princess Sāvitrī, who as the prototype of a Satī was willing to follow her husband to death. Mādri's brother Śalya, King of Madra, had Goddess Sītā in his flag.

### **Pāṇḍya, Mathurā and Bala-Rāma**

The Pāṇḍya capital Madurai was named after the north Indian Mathurā (cf. Dessigane et al. 1960, I: xiv; Hardy 1983: 156). Mathurā is called Madhurā 'sweet' by Patañjali c. 150 B.C. (cf. Weber 1873: 380f.), and appears to be the same as Madhu-pura, 'city of the demon Madhu': this demon, subdued by Kṛṣṇa, lived in the Madhu-vana or 'forest of the demon Madhu' on the Yamunā river. I would like to suggest that this 'demoniac' god originally worshipped at Madhurā was Bala-Rāma, who was addicted to drinking palm wine (*madhu*). His cult was absorbed into that of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva through a myth that made these two deities brothers. As summarized especially by Suvira Jaiswal (1981: 52ff.; also Joshi 1979; Brockington 1998: 261f., 266f.), textual as well as iconographic evidence from the last centuries B.C. and the early centuries of the Christian era attests to the importance of Bala-Rāma especially in the Mathurā area.

## Pandaīē and Goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai

Queen Pandaīē of Megasthenes has been compared with the Goddess of the Pāṇḍya capital Madurai, best known with her Sanskritized name Mīnākṣī. According to the local tradition, recorded in the Tiruṣṭaiyāṭar-Purāṇam (its shorter version dates from the 12th, longer from the 16th century), she is the daughter of a Pāṇḍya king of Madurai and his queen who was the daughter of a Coḷa king called Śūrasena. As they were childless, they performed a sacrifice to obtain a son, but received from the sacrificial fire a girl. (The birth of Princess Sāvitrī to King Aśvapati in the Indus Valley was similar.) The girl had three breasts, and a voice from heaven told the king that she should be educated in military arts like a prince, and that she would conquer the whole world. The third breast would disappear, when she met her future husband. All this happened, and finally when fighting at Mount Kailāsa she met God Śiva and the third breast disappeared. After their marriage, Śiva ruled Madurai as King Sundara-Pāṇḍyan.

That the Pāṇḍya kings of Tamil Nadu came from north India via Sri Lanka is strongly suggested also by the fact that a similar legend is recorded from the island. Vijaya's Sri Lankan yakkhinī wife Kuveṇī or Kuvanṇā likewise had three breasts, and she had also been told that one of them would vanish when she would see her future husband, which happened when she saw Vijaya. (Cf. Shulman 1980: 200-211.) As Shulman has pointed out, the three breasts correspond to three eyes, and the word *kaṇ* included in the original Tamil name of Mīnākṣī, Aṅ-kayaṅ-kaṇṇ-ammaiyār 'the lady of the beautiful carp-eyes', means both 'eye' and 'breast-nipple' in Tamil. This corresponds to the Tantric image of Sītā given in the Śrīvidyārṇava-Tantra, where Sītā is three-eyed and wears the crescent of the moon on her head. She has four arms holding a noose, a goad, a bow and an arrow. (Ramachandra Rao 1992: VI, 269.) I have elsewhere argued in detail for Sītā Sāvitrī's close association with the warrior goddess Durgā, which is sometimes made explicit in texts (Parpola 1992; 1998). In the case of Mīnākṣī, this relationship with Durgā is clear from her local legend.

## **Origins of the Rāmāyaṇa story**

Christian Lassen (1847: I, 535) was the first to make the suggestion that the Rāmāyaṇa might tell the story of the first attempts of the Aryans to extend their power southwards by means of warring expeditions. Albrecht Weber (1871: 3-5) was inclined to accept this view, though it was clear to him (1871: 29f.) that the poem was composed in north India and that its author did not have any exact knowledge of the southern parts of the subcontinent. Indeed, the most recent survey of the geographical horizon of the Rāmāyaṇa by a leading authority in this field speaks of ‘the inherent improbability of the traditional identification of Laṅkā with Ceylon’ (Brockington 1998: 423). Yet the evidence presented above supports the identification of Laṅkā with Sri Lanka (Ceylon).

The Sri Lankan chronicles tell that King Vijaya sent for his brother to succeed him on the throne. The people who fetched Sumitta from Siṃhapura undoubtedly brought to north India tidings that could have provided the basic elements of the Rāmāyaṇa story: Prince Vijaya, an Aryan noble coming from the north and conquering the island from demons, had there found and married a local woman who was like the Goddess Sītā worshipped in north India. The similarity of this lady found in Laṅkā to a northern goddess – who undoubtedly had a special relationship to the king as his protectress and divine consort – suggested that she must have been earlier abducted from north India by the demoniac ruler of the island. From some such short news received perhaps around 500 B.C. from Sri Lanka at Siṃhapura, the Rāmāyaṇa epic can have started developing and spreading in the north.

## **Sītā and Rāvaṇa**

This scenario implies that even the Yakṣas or Rākṣasas who ruled Laṅkā when Vijaya arrived there, had come – earlier – from north India and that Sītā was a goddess worshipped by them. Weber (1871: 3-5) already suggested that Rāvaṇa is likely to hail from north India as he is described worshipping Brahmanical divinities and to descend from Pulastya, a Vedic Sage who was the ancestor of a Brahmanical clan. Moreover, Hanuman sees in Rāvaṇa’s palace in Laṅkā noble

horses from countries in the northern Indus Valley, Āraṭṭa, Kamboja and Vālhika (cf. Weber 1871: 29f.). In the present paper I cannot much enlarge upon this hypothesis, which I think is correct, but I would like to make a few points.

### **Rudra-Śiva as the God of Ploughing**

While the Vijaya story seems to be connected with the early spread of the Vaiṣṇava religion and in particular with the cult of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and Bala-Rāma to the south, I suspect that Rāvaṇa as the would-be husband of Sītā rather represents Bala-Rāma's earlier Śaiva counterpart (see below). In Bengal Śiva is worshipped as Lāṅgaleśvara (cf. Smith 1999).

The name *Rāvaṇa* appears to be a variant of *Puru-rāvan-* and *Purū-rāvas-* occurring in the Vedic tradition as names of a demon and of an ancient king, respectively (cf. Wright 1967). *Purūrāvas* as the human lover of apsaras *Urvaśī* and his heavenly wife, a personification of the dawn, seem to be yet another example of the 'sacred marriage followed by the (sacrificial) death of the male partner' theme (cf. Wright 1967). This Śiva-śava theme is also represented by the *Prajāpati-Vāc* and *Mahiṣāsura-Durgā* myths the *Sāvitrī* legend, and the Vedic horse sacrifice (see Parpola 1992; 1998). The horse sacrifice may be implied in the *Sāvitrī* legend where *Sāvitrī*'s father and husband are called *Aśvapati* and *Citrāśva* (cf. Parpola 1998: 243, 297). That *Rāvaṇa* and *Sītā* as well are part of this (originally Near Eastern) agricultural death-and-resurrection cult is suggested by *Rāvaṇa*'s banner-emblem, the severed human head. Moreover, just like *Pāṇḍu*, *Rāvaṇa* too was cursed to die if he sexually united with any woman, in particular with *Sītā*.

### **Bala-Rāma's identity with Rudra-Śiva and the 'King of Snakes'**

'Although *Saṅkarṣaṇa* appears as a Vaiṣṇavite divinity in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas*, there are traces of his close connection with the cult of Rudra-Śiva also. The *Pañcarātra Saṃhitās* often iden-

tify Saṅkaraṣaṇa with Rudra-Śiva. The Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa states that Rudra was known as Halāyudha. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa speaks of Saṅkaraṣaṇa-Rudra who comes out of the mouth of the serpent Śeṣa at the end of every aeon... Śiva also is intimately associated with the nāgas' (Jaiswal 1981: 54). Bala-Rāma was considered an incarnation of an ancient snake deity connected with fertility and the subterranean regions, called Śeṣa or Ananta. He was also connected with the wine-palm (palmyra, called in Sanskrit *tāla*, which is a loanword from Dravidian languages) and with wine-drinking: the palmyra palm, the wine cup, and the three-bend (*tri-bhaṅga*) pose associated with snake deities belong to Bala-Rāma's iconographic attributes (cf. Ramachandra Rao 1991: IV, 121-5).

It is significant that there is a legend of a three-breasted princess not only at Madurai and Sri Lanka, but also at Nāgapattinam in Tamil Nadu: here this 'Lady of the long dark eyes' (Karun-taṭaṅ-kaṇṇi) is the daughter of Ādi-Śeṣa, King of the snakes, an ardent worshipper of Śiva. Of her, too, it was prophesized that her third breast would disappear as soon as she sees the king who is to wed her, in some variants a Nāgarāja (cf. Shulman 1980: 205.) Shulman (1980: 200-211) has already discussed her relationship with the goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai and with Kaṇṇaki, the heroine of Cilappatikāram who destroys the city of Madurai with one of her breasts, both of them multiforms of the three-eyed warrior goddess Durgā-Kālī. Shulman also notes that at Madurai, too, the bridegroom appears to have been the local Śiva-related snake god, Āla-vāy (= Hālāsya) (cf. Shulman 1980: 123ff., 206).

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