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*Contributions to Indian Sociology* 1981 15: 75

DOI: 10.1177/006996678101500107

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## The salvation of the king in the *Mahābhārata*

MADELEINE BIARDEAU

The relation between brahman and kṣatra has been a moot point ever since Western indology started interpreting Indian data; in point of fact, the question has never been an easy one and has raised many problems in the Hindu minds as well, though not in the same way as among the Westerners. Instead of contributing to the general discussion on the subject, I just want to focus my attention on the *Mahābhārata* (MBh) and see what as a whole it has to teach us about this subject.

It might be useful to state here that Western terminology will be avoided as much as possible and an attempt will be made to formulate the 'orthodox' doctrine in terms that come closer to the brāhmaṇa texts or the dharmaśāstra. Therefore, we shall not make use of the opposition spiritual/temporal nor speak of secularisation (Dumont 1962), even if it entails dropping out any attempt at comparison.<sup>1</sup> The opposition of superstition/spiritualism will be just as carefully dispensed with and there will not be any hint at 'divine pretensions' of Hindu kings (Derrett 1976).

From the brāhmaṇas, we know that if Brahmins on the whole are priests officiating for generous patrons, the patrons are usually Kshatriya kings. These kings certainly are warriors and wielders of force, of daṇḍa, but as actors in the ritual context of the brāhmaṇas, they first appear as the typical yajamāna, the sacrificers without whom practically no solemn sacrifice would take place. This is a first aspect of the complementarity of the brahman and the kṣatra which shows that one could not exist without the other. A priest must have a patron, a patron must have priests, and if their common sacrificial activity were not performed regularly according to prescription, the order of the three worlds would be so upset that it could lead to destruction.<sup>2</sup> Though this rule is limited to the two upper varṇas,

<sup>1</sup>This obviously implies that the present essay is not meant to be a rejoinder to Louis Dumont's article, 'The conception of kingship in ancient India' (1962), but is rather a thankful acknowledgment of what my own work owes to his pioneering reflection on the subject.

<sup>2</sup>This is true even in the brāhmaṇa period, when the epic and purāṇic idea of a cyclical destruction of the world does not appear: see *Saṁpatha-brāhmaṇa* XIII.

it still is valid nowadays between the so-called jajmān and the Brahman priest, even when the jajmān belongs to some Shudra caste, provided he be a locally important landlord. The conclusion is obvious: a king cannot exist as a king without a Brahman and vice-versa. This ritual relationship, to be complete, includes the generous gifts of the kings to the Brahman as one aspect of the sacrifice.

In the dharmaśāstras, this ritual symbiosis finds its complement at the administrative level. Though, in actual fact, the kings had to issue decrees —śāsana—and rules of all kinds, they were not considered as legislators. Theoretically, law was dharma and the dharmaśāstra were the only source of it. But the dharmaśāstras were the Brahmins' affair and a good king was expected to have a Brahman mantrin by his side. The latter was to decide in all matters pertaining to dharma. It should be remembered that dharma is the objective order that holds together the three worlds—heavens, earth and the infernal regions: the social order is part of that whole. Learned Brahmins only are qualified to know what dharma is and how it should be maintained. That may be the reason why the *Arthaśāstra* has been attributed to a Brahman author. Even without bringing into consideration the moot question of hierarchy and power in the relation between kings and Brahmins, it is obvious that dealing with artha without any knowledge of dharma would be suicidal for the king, and to oppose rājadharmā and rājanīti (Derrett 1976) would be equally dangerous. Rājanīti, arthaśāstra and all such controversial terms are as many phrases to express the technicalities of the kings' job, just as the kalpasūtra (and later on the Mīmāṃsā) deal with the technicalities of the Brahmins' priestly functions. But the Brahman has a place in the kings' duties, just as the Kshatriya is actively present during the Brahmins' sacrificial performances.

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Is it inevitable that such an important charter of classical Hindu bhakti as the MBh should have been conceived of as an epic story, that is, the story of a battle, in which the fate of a royal dynasty, and through it of the whole world, is at stake?<sup>3</sup> If we refer to the *Śāntiparvan*, or to the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (and the same holds true of the *Bhagavadgītā*), we see in all these didactic parts of the epic many indications of its main import and there can be no doubt that the author's concern was primarily focused on the svadharma of Kshatriyas as opposed to that of the Brahmins.

7. 15, where, in the context of the sarvamedha, the Earth warns the king that he cannot give her away to his priest as dakṣiṇā lest she should sink into the water.

<sup>3</sup>The same remark holds good for the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but in this smaller epic, the meaning seems to be less important than the story itself, unlike in the MBh.

The subdivisions of Book XII provide good guidance to their doctrine, if we take notice of the fact that the opening section on rājadharmā is followed by one on āpaddharma, and the final one on mokṣadharmā. In each of them the duties of kings are differentiated from those of other varṇas and particularly of Brahmins—even when a desperate situation (āpad) allows a violation of all prescribed rules. The section about mokṣa, however, is rather disappointing in that it discourses on final liberation in terms so general that the very relevance of the question for kings is not at all discussed. Though one thing is sure: kings seem to have a right to know all about mokṣa, since the Kshatriya Bhīṣma is still the teacher (as for rājadharmā, for instance) and king Yudhiṣṭhira, the disciple. The obvious conclusion is that a king as such is not excluded from ultimate salvation, and this in itself is far from being unanimously admitted.

But the problem remains to decide whether mokṣa can be reached by kings and Brahmins alike by following the same course of action. Here again the notion of svadharmā comes in the way to forbid the Kshatriya to act like a Brahmin even for the sake of salvation. This brings us back to the well-known problem of sannyāsa and the four āśramas: do they apply to all the three upper varṇas or are they meant for Brahmins only? This might be the very point on which the MBh as a whole, through its narrative, and the *Bhagavadgītā* in particular through Kṛṣṇa's exhortation to Arjuna, have something original and fundamental to say.<sup>4</sup>

The dharmaśāstras when dealing with varṇāśrama-dharma are not very clear on the subject as if it did not concern them or, perhaps, because they prefer to leave it aside. Still it is obvious that the *Manusmṛti*, for instance, which devotes its first books to the four āśramas, then addresses itself to the Brahmins' duties and way of life. It speaks of the dvija in general; but the Brahmin is the dvija *par excellence*, and the Brahmin alone is meant by this term; this is actually also true of the MBh. The result should be then that only Brahmins are entitled to sannyāsa, and so also to mokṣa. Later authors, particularly in the darśana literature, hold differing views on the subject. During this intervening period, it seems that the MBh teaching has had an effect and allowed variations of opinions and new definitions of who qualifies for mokṣa. The purāṇas have followed suit and opened the mind to the idea of accessibility of mokṣa to all.

Even though the epic has the same thing to say about the duties of each varṇa, and the close relationship between kings and Brahmins, as the smṛti literature at large, it has its own peculiar way of expressing it, and

<sup>4</sup>Kane (1941.II.2:942-44), briefly deals with the problem. He has collected a number of quotations from the smṛti at large, including some from the MBh showing that the epic's teaching is self-contradictory. It would be easy to prove the contrary, but it seems more relevant to show what is the central teaching of the epic.

this is true mostly of the complementarity between the two upper varṇas. For clarity sake, we start from the well-known and clear-cut definition in the *Manusmṛiti* (I. 88-89). 'To Brahmanas he assigned teaching and studying (the veda), sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting (of alms). The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study (the veda), and to abstain from sensual pleasure.<sup>5</sup> Later in the book, kings are taught respectful behaviour towards Brahmanas (IX.320) and the close association of both varṇas is strongly advocated (IX.322): 'Kshatriyas prosper not without Brahmanas, Brahmanas prosper not without Kshatriyas; Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, being closely united prosper in this (world) and in the next' (IX.399). In this type of formulation, the complementarity between the two varṇas cannot be missed. Almost all the terms that define their duties are opposed by pairs. The Brahman officiates whereas the Kshatriya offers sacrifices; the former teaches, the latter studies only; one receives gifts and the other gives away his riches. But the protection given to people by kings is also opposed and complementary to the priestly functions of the Brahmanas. In the smṛiti as well as the epic, it turns out that, the king's protection is first and foremost granted to Brahmanas.

This is, of course, also fundamental in the MBh, as, for instance, in the following passage taken from the *Vanaparvan*, in which the part of the forest inhabited by the exiled Pāṇḍavas is clearly described in these terms. 'While the Pāṇḍavas were living in Dvaitavana, the large forest became the resort of Brahmanas. The holy lake Dvaitavana was like the Brahmaloka with the noise of the vedas being constantly and everywhere uttered. The sound of the yajus, the ṛks, the sāmans and the prose recitations was pleasant. There was the noise of the bow strings coming from the Pārthas and the noise of the vedas coming from the wise (Brahmanas), and the Kshatriya united with the Brahman had even more brilliance' (III.26.1-4). In the forest the Pāṇḍavas have to hunt for their and the Brahmanas' food. Hunting here is the typical Kshatriya activity suited to forest life, and the use of bows makes it clearly a substitute for war. This is the way the exiled princes protect the Brahmanas who are around. Conversely the Brahmanas are busy reciting the vedas and sacrificing, the holy sounds suggesting some ritual performance going on.

<sup>5</sup>See Bhüler (1886:24). This definition of *Manusmṛiti* (I.88-89) has its exact parallel in *Arthaśāstra* (I. 3. 5-6). And the MBh eventually repeats these very terms. See for instance Dhṛṣṭadyumna's definition of the Brahman's dharma (VII.197.24-25) in the Kinjavadekar edition, which even today seems to be the most familiar to all Indian pandits and has recently been reprinted. Henceforward we shall quote from this edition only). We leave aside the two last varṇas, since they seem to be rather out of focus in the epic; but the Shudras' importance and their special relationship to dharma and salvation should not be overlooked in this bhakti work.

However, the epic seems to especially emphasise the striking contrast between kings and Brahmins. Should Duryodhana's wickedness be held responsible for such a rash statement as this: 'The earth swallows these two: a king who does not wage wars and a Brahmin who does not leave his home (to go to the forest: Nilakantha's commentary suggests *sannyāsinam* as a synonym to *brāhmaṇam*') (II. 55.14)? Most probably not, since everywhere in the epic the benevolence and peacefulness of the Brahmin is opposed to the warlike nature of the Kshatriya. Each time Yudhiṣṭhira wants to give up war and his kingship, and take to forest life, he is suspected to be more like a Brahmin than a Kshatriya. This is an insult, in spite of the regard all these warriors evince for Brahmins. But there are also very clear statements of principles in this respect, such as this one uttered by a Brahmin to a Brahmin:

Absence of violence (*ahiṃsā*) towards all living beings is the highest dharma. This is why a Brahmin should never injure any living being. A Brahmin should be benevolent only: this is the highest revelation. He knows the vedas and their auxiliary sciences, he gives the abhaya (absence of danger) to all creatures. Definitely, absence of violence, truthfulness and forgiveness, and upholding of the vedas—such is the highest dharma of the Brahmin. As to the Kshatriya's dharma, you should not seek for it. Punishing, looking fierce, and protecting his subjects, these are the activities of the Kshatriya (I. 11.13b-17).

There is some sort of a paradox in this protector of men, who can be so only by killing and punishing, and the peaceful Brahmin who does not 'protect' anybody nor destroys any living being. Beyond this, it is a fact that the Brahmin is mainly defined as a renouncer, the one who practises the virtues of the yogin or the *sannyāsin*. Actually almost all the epic Brahmins are ṛṣis, living in the forest, rather than householders. Some of them are with wives, most of them without, but all are instances of the third āśrama, they are *vānaprastha*. In this context, it means that the values of the fourth āśrama, namely *sannyāsa*, have percolated through the whole life of the ideal Brahmin. Actually in any case a Brahmin has to be an ascetic, or like an ascetic, during his *brahmacharya* period and should come back to ascetic life at the end after being a householder. No wonder, then, if a Brahmin householder also becomes a strict vegetarian and staunch supporter of *ahiṃsā*. But this has been made possible only because the *svadharma* of Kshatriyas has been defined mainly in terms of *daṇḍa*, *hiṃsā*, *ugratva*, war and so on; since there can be no worldly life—that is, no life at all on earth—without punishment and violence to keep everyone and everything in order according to dharma.

The Brahmin ascetic is the first to be benefited by this division of

labour, as Śamikā explains to his wrathful son, who has cursed king Parikṣit for having insulted his father:

I do not like what you have done. This is not the dharma of ascetics. We live in the territory of this king and he dutifully protects us. That is why I do not approve of this harm done to him. One who is the ruling king should always be forgiven by the likes of us. Dharma, when injured, injures—that is sure. If the king did not protect (us), we would be in the worst situation. We would not be able to practise our own dharma as we would like. When protected by dharma-oriented kings we fully practise our own dharma and they have a share of it. So a ruling king should be forgiven in any case (I.41.20-24).

It is clear from the epic that a Brahman cannot be clearly distinguished from an ascetic, and the king rules over the forest ascetics as well as the village and city people.<sup>6</sup> Conversely the ascetic, vānaprastha or sannyāsin, cannot just be considered as being outside the social order. He has become part and parcel of it by the blessing his very presence bestows on the kingdom. The contrast between the two upper varṇas has been stretched to its utmost, their complementarity not being impaired by this but rather strengthened. Does this mean that the king is definitely without the pale when ultimate values and salvation are concerned? Actually the MBh, far from warranting such a conclusion, goes against it.

Let us for a moment listen to what Vidura (the younger brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, born of a Shudra mother by the Brahman ascetic Vyāsa as an incarnation of Dharma)<sup>7</sup> has to say about dharma to his elder brother, the blind Kshatriya Dhṛtarāṣṭra: he should be an expert in this field. He says:

Sacrifice, gifts, vedic recitation, asceticism (*tapas*)—these four are followed by good people. Self-control, truth, honesty, benevolence—these four are observed by good people. Sacrifice, vedic recitation, gift, asceticism, truth, forgiveness, compassion, absence of greediness—this is the eightfold path of dharma. The first group of four can also serve the purpose of self-pride. The second one is not found in those who are not truly spiritual (*mahātman*) (V.35.55-57).

<sup>6</sup>There would be a number of epic texts to support this. See for instance the praise of daṇḍa uttered by Arjuna (XII.15.2-13).

<sup>7</sup>Vidura is one of the characters who, at the same time, shows that the bhakti ideal does not exclude Shudras from salvation, and that the epic situation is pretty bad in the generation preceding that of the fighting cousins: Vidura-Dharma is the last of the three brothers and his status is also inferior because of his Shudra mother, thus giving dharma the lowest place in the values that govern Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu.



This teaching obviously suits a Kshatriya rather than a Brahman, since the definition of perfect dharma does not include the priestly and teaching functions of the Brahman. But the 'protection' of the subjects and the necessity of fighting and killing are not mentioned. Instead there is a list of yogic virtues that one would expect in Brahmans rather than kings. Actually, many statements in the MBh would seem to contradict this, but we cannot slight it because of what Vidura stands for; there should be a way in which a king could be said to possess yogic virtues like a true yogin, like a renouncer. But is this not the core of the *Gītā* doctrine? For once, let us stop talking of contradictions and satisfying ourselves with the idea that a large text that the MBh is cannot possibly have a *single* doctrine of its own. On the contrary, let us try to look for the deep unity that lies at the base of the so-called contradictions. With this in mind, we shall now turn to the epic plot and main characters, which alone can give us a clue to this unity if at all it exists.

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The importance of svadharma for kings as well as Brahmans has for its correlative in the epic the fear of varṇasaṅkara, of mixed birth. Actually the mixture of varṇas, and the confusion or overlapping of svadharma, are only two different aspects of one and the same fundamental disorder—adharma—in society and their absence is one of the main features of the Kṛtayuga. Whether a man be born from a Brahman father and a princess or, he, being a Brahman, act as a warrior and a king, or vice-versa, the result is an impending catastrophe for the world. This formula seems to provide a good point of vantage to look at some of the main characters of the epic,<sup>8</sup> and more particularly those who are supposed to be virtuous, 'good people', though they fight on the asuric side—I mean Bhīṣma and Droṇa.

Bhīṣma is a Kshatriya of the lunar dynasty, and at first sight a kind of model for all Kshatriyas, since he is the tutor of the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava brothers and the teacher in the Śāntiparvan and Anuśāsanaparvan of the MBh. However, his father, Śāntanu is the ruling king because his elder brother has chosen the life of an ascetic in the forest, and his name Śāntanu preserves something of this fact. As to Bhīṣma's mother, Gangā, she is the well-known river of salvation, whatever else the word may mean. Things become worse when, in order to please his father, who, out of passion, wants to marry the lovely Satyawatī, Bhīṣma renounces the normal Kshatriya life that should have been his. He will not get married, will not procreate and will not be his father's successor on the throne, in order to allow

<sup>8</sup>We shall have to limit our study to only a few of them for want of space.



Satyavatī's son to become the heir apparent. All this looks very generous, disinterested, and full of filial devotion.

No doubt, Bhīṣma is a very virtuous man; but what about his svadharma as a Kshatriya? By giving up marriage, progeny and kingship, he actually violates his svadharma. The evidence for this is poor Ambā's fate. Ambā should have been the chief queen (mahīṣī) but will instead remain a virgin through Bhīṣma's action. A symbol of the earth, she is abandoned without a protector and a master,<sup>9</sup> because Śāntanu's true heir has refused to play his own part. No wonder that she had been secretly engaged to an asuric king! As a reward, Śāntanu gives his son a boon that he will die only when he is ready and willing. If this is connected with other facts of the MBh it can be read as a Brahmanic feature in Bhīṣma, for a Brahman cannot be killed in fight, he can only die of his own accord, especially if he has yogic power (like Droṇa, for instance). Moreover, this man, who has no progeny of his own, is called Pitāmaha by everybody. Sure enough, this may seem natural that his grandnephews call him so since he is their paternal great-uncle. But Pitāmaha is at the same time, the well-known title of Brahmā, and applied to Bhīṣma, it might point to his Brahmanic behaviour as well. He acts as a Brahman in that he renounces the life of a householder, though, as a Kshatriya, he has no right to do so. Mention should be made also of the fact that he becomes Yudhiṣṭhira's teacher during Books XII and XIII of the MBh, though only a Brahman should be qualified for such a role. One cannot compare him to Kṛṣṇa doing the same thing in the *Gītā*, because Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu himself, an avatāra and a form of the great ṛṣi Nārāyaṇa.

Viewed in this light, Bhīṣma at the same time is a very pious and virtuous man and a cause of the forthcoming disaster through no fault of his. It is not mere chance that his stepmother, the princess Satyavatī, had an illegitimate son from a Brahman before her marriage,<sup>10</sup> and this son, Vyāsa, a Brahman and an amśa of Nārāyaṇa (like Kṛṣṇa on the Kshatriya side), will live as an ascetic but will have to sire sons on behalf of his dead uterine brother. Here we see the varṇasaṅkara and dharmasaṅkara correspond to each other for the same dreadful result. The scene is set in such a way that nobody really is wicked or commits the first sin, though the violation of the objective dharma is constant.

The same holds true of Droṇa, the warrior Brahman. Should we say that

<sup>9</sup>All this could be substantiated through an analysis of Bhīṣma's role in the svayamvara of the Kashi king's daughters and the fight between Bhīṣma, the Kshatriya bachelor, and Rāma Jāmadagnya, the warlike Brahman, about Ambā (V.173-96).

<sup>10</sup>The same motif recurs with Kuntī, whose first son Karna was born of the god Sūrya before her marriage. As to Vyāsa being the son of a Brahman father and a Kshatriya mother, this is to be compared with Rāma Jāmadagnya's situation.

he has chosen to become a warrior, and that in so doing at least he becomes a great sinner? This is far from obvious. But here we can afford to analyse the story of his young days till his arrival at Hastināpura, since it is short enough. Moreover, it has been narrated thrice, and the variations may offer useful suggestions. However, the third version (I.166.1-28) will be left aside: it is shorter and completely omits Droṇa's marriage and the birth of his son, the main focus is the falling out between him and king Drupada that leads to Dhṛṣṭadyumna's and Draupadī's birth. The first two versions are more interesting because they are Droṇa's story (I.130.33-67; 131.1-34; I.131.40-79).

Droṇa's birth narrative is practically identical in both texts: he is ayo-nija. His father, the Brahman ascetic Bharadvāja, has spilled his semen and collected it into a vessel (Droṇa) 'on seeing the lovely Ghṛtācī, an apsaras whose name, derived from ghr̥ta, clarified butter, is an indication of what is in Bharadvāja's mind. In spite of his tapas and his vānaprastha life, Bharadvāja performs his ritual duties with an element of desire—kāma—a legitimate desire, no doubt, since he wants to lead the life of a pure Brahman. This is personified in Ghṛtācī from whom Droṇa will be born. The implications of this will be understood later on.

In both versions, Droṇa's childhood is described in about the same terms. In the first, his father is the guru under whom he and his friend prince Drupada study the veda. The two boys study and play together (this is also mentioned in the third version: I.166.7). In the second one, both study the veda and the dhanurveda under Agniveśa, and Drupada is then called Yajñasena: here comes in a non-Brahmanic feature that is surprising in Droṇa's education; but the young prince is learning how to become a royal yajamāna, being trained in dhanurveda and at the same time prone to sacrificing as his name indicates. From the symbolic value attached to 'play' in the epic at large, and its particular relevance to the king's ruling over the world that is God's līlā, the mention of the playing and studying together of Droṇa and Drupada may mean either that they co-operate in making the world prosper according to dharma, or that they vie with each other in performing the same activities. This will remain ambiguous till the ascetic Droṇa meets king Drupada in his palace.

Then in both stories, Drupada becomes king whereas Droṇa, after his father's death, lives as a vānaprastha. Prompted by his father (or his ancestors, pitṛ), and out of desire (lobha) for a son, he marries Kṛpī, Śaradvat's daughter, who, in both versions, is called Gautamī. She gives birth to Aśvatthāman, Droṇa's son. At first sight, Droṇa's desire for a son is quite legitimate, connected as it is with his duty toward his dead father. But the word lobha is rather surprising: stronger than kāma, it definitely has a disparaging connotation. It betrays something wrong in the apparently dharmic behaviour of Droṇa. The choice of his wife might be one more in-

dication of what is in Droṇa's mind, stressing as it does both the purity of his status and the obvious anomaly that mars its purity.

According to the MBh (I.130.2ff.), Kṛpī, Śaradvatī or Gautamī is Kṛpa's sister; she is a Brahman and her patronymic Gautamī certainly is meaningful: Gotama could be translated as 'utterly a cow', and through this a pure Brahmanic status is emphasised. A cow is that without which a Brahman cannot be a Brahman. That is why dakṣiṇās are so often estimated in cows. Moreover, the link between the Brahman and the cow through the sacrificial offerings stresses the fact that the Brahman is the real source of all riches in this world.<sup>11</sup> Just as a king's wife is the symbol of his kingdom, a Brahman's wife is symbolically linked to his cow as the main source of his Brahmanic power. However Kṛpa and Kṛpī—who again are ayonija—were born from their father's seed fallen into a clump of reeds: Śaradvat was a Brahman warrior, and his semen was spilled when he saw the apsaras Jānapadī. Then he dropped his bow and arrows, the goat skin he wore as a vānaprastha, near that clump of reeds and left his hermitage. The two children were brought up by king Śāntanu. The meaning of the name of the apsaras is clear: janapada is a compound word used to name as a whole the territory and the people over which a king rules. Śaradvat obviously is the opposite of Bharadvāja as his weapons would also indicate. He is a Brahman who, in order to keep his Brahmanhood and his link with the cow, holds some of the attributes of the kṣatra. Two inferences may be drawn from that. Either he has to resort to the use of weapons because the present Kshatriyas do not correctly perform their svadharma and do not protect Brahmans. This could be the case, if we think of Bhīṣma's renunciation of kingship. Or, the Brahman, out of extreme purity, may refuse to sacrifice for kings or serve them as minister, and is thus led to severing his connection with Kshatriyas, the result being the same paradoxically: the refusal of the relationship between kings and Brahmans leads the Brahmans to wish for Kshatriya power. The clump of reeds (śarastamba) in which Kṛpa and Kṛpī were born is a symbol of weapons (śara meaning also an arrow) that prepares them for a life of warlike Brahmans. Therefore, when Droṇa marries Kṛpī Gautamī, his life takes a new turn (not so new according to the second version, which makes him study the dhanurveda). His wife as well as his brother-in-law prepare him for what we have called a dharmasaṅkara.

Now the two versions somewhat differ in the account of Aśvatthmāman's birth. In the first (I.130.47ff.), soon after he was born, the baby neighed

<sup>11</sup>That is why the Brahman's cow is Kāmadhenu. See also Vasiṣṭha's name, which makes him the richest of men, though he only possesses his cow. This is the source of his difficulties with Viśvāmitra. The same idea exists in Jāmadagni's and Kārtavīrya's story.

like a horse. Hence his name, as the text has it: he possesses the strength of a horse—*aśvasya sthāma*. Then, as if it was the result of this birth, Droṇa becomes an addict to the *ghanurveda*. Hearing of Rāma Jāmadagnya, who is giving away everything to Brahmins, he decides to go to his hermitage and get a share of these gifts. After introducing himself to Rāma as an *Aṅgīrasa*,<sup>12</sup> he asks him for riches. But it is too late: Jāmadagnya has given away everything he has conquered from the *Kṣatriyas*. However, as he cannot reject a Brahmin's request, he offers Droṇa to choose between his own body, that is himself, and his weapons. Droṇa chooses the weapons: if they are not gold or kine, they can be used to acquire them, and they are the necessary attributes of kings.<sup>13</sup> Then he goes and visits king Drupada and reminds him of their former friendship in order to revive it.

The second version (I.131.50ff.) is better brought in before interpreting the first. *Aśvatthāman*, as soon as he was born, was *bhīmavikramakarman*—of fierceful bravery and feats. He craves for milk though, like a true Brahmin. Droṇa is so poor that he has no cow and he starts looking for someone who would give him a cow without defiling him or impairing his status. He does not get any. The children around his son give him some flour diluted with water and make him believe it is milk. The child is happy and actually believes he has tasted milk, whereas the other children laugh at him. Droṇa cannot stand this situation, but does not accept to 'serve' anybody in order to deal with the situation, since this would be highly censurable for a Brahmin (131:59). With this in mind he remembers Drupada and goes to him, knowing his friend of old days has meanwhile become a king.

When compared to each other, the two versions mutually clarify and strengthen their meaning, which on the whole is identical. *Aśvatthāman* neighs as a horse. The horse is a royal animal just as the cow is a Brahminic one, and *Aśvatthāman* is strong like a horse. The idea expressed in '*bhīmavikramakarman*' is the same. These are royal features. A Brahmin is not supposed to possess strength and be able to protect himself. The son is one's other self: no wonder if Droṇa now starts devoting himself to the

<sup>12</sup>On the relationship of Gotama and *Aṅgīrasa* in the veda, see Macdonell and Keith (1967: Vol. I: 234-35) under *Gotama*. Moreover there is a well-known complementarity between the *Aṅgīrasa* and the *Bṛghu* (Rāma being a *Bhārgava*). *Bṛhaspati* is an *Aṅgīrasa*, *Śukra* a *Bṛghu*. One is the *purohita* of the *devas*, the other of the *asuras*. Both *Bṛghu* and *Aṅgīrasa* were born from the Fire (*Bṛhaddevatā* V. 97-101).

<sup>13</sup>This offer reminds us of the scene in which Duryodhana and Arjuna come to Kṛṣṇa and ask for his help in the forthcoming conflict (V. 7). Kṛṣṇa offers himself without any weapon or his troops. Arjuna chooses Kṛṣṇa, Duryodhana is very happy to get his armies. Duryodhana and Droṇa make the same type of choice and they are going to fight on the same side.

dhanurveda and being desirous of riches after the birth of such a son.

The other version makes the link between Aśvatthāman's birth and Droṇa's search for riches even clearer. Right from the beginning, Droṇa is looking for a cow or goods which would not be given as a 'salary'. He refuses to 'serve', and this obviously excludes the service of kings, though a dharmic society needs the mutual help of kings and Brahmins. It is true that the dharmaśāstras give the poor independent Brahmin as an ideal of Brahminhood and forbid him all kinds of *sevā*. At the same time, they make it necessary for Kshatriyas and Brahmins to co-operate, with the result that, in actual fact, a Brahmin who 'serves' a king is slightly inferior to others.<sup>14</sup> That is why in the first version Droṇa has gone to Rāma Jāmadagnya, a Brahmin, from whom he could receive gifts without serving anyone. Left with a choice between Jāmadagnya himself and his weapons, he follows the same logic and is obliged to choose weapons, which will make him independent or equal to a king, like Jāmadagnya himself. At the same time, this choice will make him violate his *svadharma*, possibly to show that independence is not the aim to be pursued.

Now the scene is set for the meeting between Drupada and Droṇa, and Drupada's flat refusal to help his former friend can be seen in its proper light. He has perfectly understood that Droṇa does not come to him as a Brahmin comes to a king, to seek help and protection and give blessings in return, if not proper service. Though he is in great need, Droṇa has come as a friend, that is, as an equal. Drupada's reply then in its own way is quite correct: 'A poor man is no friend for one who is rich, nor an ignorant man for a learned one; a eunuch is no friend for a warrior. What do you expect from a former friendship' (I.131.9)? Or, in 131.66b-67a: 'One who is no śrotriya is no friend for a śrotriya, nor one who is not a car-warrior for a car-warrior. Friendship requires equality, or 'sameness' (*sāmya*) and is made impossible by inequality (*vaiśamyā*)'; I.166.15a is identical with 131.66b and 15b adds: 'one who is not a king is no friend for a king'. The Brahmin's claim for friendship is sufficient reason to dismiss him and refuse the slightest help. Drupada's statement is well balanced. If the wealthy man or the car-warrior is the Kshatriya, the ignorant and the a-śrotriya also is the Kshatriya, whereas the Brahmin is rightly acknowledged as learned and śrotriya. The impossibility of friendship holds for both sides and its expression is but another way of stating the complementary oppositions between Brahmins and kings.

On the face of it though, king Drupada is wrong and violates his *svadharma* by ignoring a Brahmin's request. But the whole scene centers

<sup>14</sup>Actually the king's personal chaplain is called *purohita*, the one who is placed before or first, and in the *jajmāni* system the Brahmin priest is never considered a 'servant'.

around the idea of friendship and its implications. Droṇa, whether equipped with Jāmadagnya's weapons or only stubborn in his refusal to do any *sevā*, does not come to king Drupada as a true Brahman, and that is what his claim for friendship means. On the one hand, Droṇa wants to break the dharmic complementarity between Brahmans and kings; while remaining superior as a Brahman, he wants to get arms and riches for himself in order not to depend on a king for his livelihood. On the other hand, Drupada does not evince the respect with which he, as a king, should treat a Brahman. Though in a different way from Bhīṣma, he thus shows that the *kṣātra* is not performing its part. Many stories have been told of Kṣatriyas who were tested by haughty Brahmans and proved to be exceedingly patient before being rewarded for so much forbearance. Again where is the first sin? However, the result is clear. Just as Ambā, the Earth, was left unprotected, the Brahman child Aśvatthāman is doomed to extreme poverty and made unable to grow as a true Brahman.<sup>15</sup>

It is no wonder then that Droṇa, with a vindictive mind, goes to Hastināpura and meets Bhīṣma. The renouncing prince and the warlike Brahman will work hand in hand at the court of the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and will serve the asuric Kauravas; from the very beginning they have been the symptoms of *adharma* and have helped to bring the world to a desperate situation, which will be solved through a war and complete destruction. According to Hindu tradition, the prevailing *adharma* is like the result of a victory of *asuras* over *devas* and the upsetting of the normal hierarchy between the three worlds. The *asuras* have become the inhabitants of heaven whereas the *devas* have been chased away from their home. In the epic, Bhīṣma is an incarnation of the *Vasu Dyaus*, a *deva* who has been doomed to be reborn on earth because of some offence (against a *brahma-ṛṣi*!): *Dyaus* (sky) is here the transparent symbol of heaven. Droṇa is the incarnation of *Brhaspati*, the gods' *purohita*. When both of them are living at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's court, whose sons are an *asura* (Duryodhana) and *rākṣasas* (the 99 others), the epic scene seems to correspond to that situation in which heaven is occupied by *asuras*.<sup>16</sup> But this type of world crisis

<sup>15</sup>Actually Aśvatthāman's name seems to hint at the *araṇis*, the kindling sticks of the sacrificial fire that are made of *aśvattha* wood. See Biardeau (1978-1979:154). Thus there is one more symbolic link between the son being deprived of milk and the Brahman father who cannot maintain his fires, between milk and Brahmanhood.

<sup>16</sup>There are many more instances in the epic of the confusion in the *svadharma*s of the two upper *varṇas* and its symbolic equivalent, the *varṇasankara*. An obvious one is the importance of the *Sūta* caste (a mixture of Brahman and Kṣatriya), of which Karna is the most famous example. The role of *rākṣasas* is also quite typical. These carnivorous monsters are considered as Brahmans (*brahmarakṣas*), and a careful study of their feats in the MBh (or in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well, from Tātāka to Rāvaṇa) helps understand that they are a form of the Brahman that comes to the



again has a name in Hindu tradition. It is the end of a yuga, that has to come anyway at regular times, and dharma should then be restored through Viṣṇu's avatāras. As a matter of fact, Duryodhana is the asura Kali and his maternal uncle Śakuni the asura Dvāpara, the two last yugas being personified.

The main difficulty in understanding the whole plot in the MBh is that it uses the typical frame of an avatāra myth without being such a myth. No doubt Kṛṣṇa is everywhere and decides everything; he is considered as the supreme god and nothing takes place without his consent or his active co-operation.<sup>17</sup> But he has, so to say, split into two characters: Arjuna is his bosom friend, cross-cousin and brother-in-law (by Subhadra); and the two of them are the ṛṣis Nara and Nārāyaṇa reborn. From this privileged relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, one may guess that Arjuna's role is particularly meaningful. He receives special instructions from Kṛṣṇa (the *Gītā*) and the grace of his vision as Viśvarūpa; he has Kṛṣṇa as his charioteer during the battle and, as such, is guided by him in all his actions. He obeys Kṛṣṇa in everything and holds him responsible for the final victory in the war without giving himself any share of the merit, though he has been his agent in all circumstances. He is Kṛṣṇa's true bhakta. It seems—and this is the main contention of this paper—that the epic makes him the figure of the ideal king, in spite of Yudhiṣṭhira's being the apparent king of the story. If such is the case, the doctrine of the *Gītā* and Arjuna's behaviour in conformity with it should have something to tell about the ideal king.<sup>18</sup>

What is Arjuna's place among his brothers, once we keep in mind his special relationship to Kṛṣṇa? This can be made clear by referring to the values each one of his brothers stands for. Dumézil's analysis is quite relevant here and remains largely valid.<sup>19</sup> It will allow us to deal more briefly

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fore when the ksatra does not perform its normal function. In both epics, there are rākṣasas on both sides, the asuric and the divine.

<sup>17</sup>Scholars do not any longer try to reconstruct the epic and read into it a progressive growth of Kṛṣṇa's deification. Moreover, it is possible, starting from the MBh itself, to show that there is no opposition between the Kshatriya Kṛṣṇa and his gopāla form.

<sup>18</sup>It is somewhat paradoxical that the very success of the *Gītā* in India, and even elsewhere, has kept its main purpose more or less hidden. It is uttered for a king and tells of the king's duties. However, we shall see that the king may also stand for a man in general, that is, the Hindu conception of man. For a lengthy discussion of this problem of kingship in relation to Yudhiṣṭhira and Arjuna see Biardeau (1978: 87-204). In the present paper the same problem is raised in terms of the svadharma of a king as taught by the epic.

<sup>19</sup>See Dumézil (1968), and particularly pp. 42-102 where he acknowledges his debt to S. Wikander. The following is the gist of his analysis: Starting from the birth story of each brother and bringing together relevant features and events with



with this question, even though we shall have to differ from its conclusions. More specifically, Dumézil's method helps illuminate our problem. In the epic characters he sees types rather than individuals, and these types are meant to embody values and social functions rather than illustrate any psychological truths. That is how, following him, we consider the five Pāṇḍavas here.

First of all, the central position of Arjuna among his four brothers, after Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma but before the twins, is to be noticed. Nakula and Sahadeva in every respect are inferior to their brothers and their only aim is to serve their brothers' purposes. Because of their asuric maternal uncle (Śalya), we may see them as the representatives of the inferior strata of the world, that is, both of the low castes of the Indian society and of the inhabitants of the infernal regions. All they have to do is to obey their superiors, and that is what they actually do.<sup>20</sup> In the present context, they may be kept aside. As to Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma, being older than Arjuna, they are his superiors in a way and he should obey them. When Yudhiṣṭhira talks of retiring to the forest and renouncing kingship, he proposes Bhīma as his successor (VIII.70.46). But this superiority should be understood in the proper way: in a setting where the divine avatāra acts as a charioteer, the most obvious meaning cannot be the final one.<sup>21</sup> Though Kṛṣṇa is supposed to take orders from Arjuna, he actually is his master, his guru. Arjuna gives him instructions regarding his horses, but he obeys him in everything else. Conversely, though Bhīma can be considered as Arjuna's superior, the latter has been placed by Yudhiṣṭhira above the former during the battle. We are thus invited to look for another level of meaning, less obvious no doubt, but more in keeping with the overall significance of the epic.

The striking Brahmanic features in Yudhiṣṭhira have been rightly delineated by Dumézil (1968: 59-63). But these should be qualified in more than one way. He is likened to a Brahman when he wants to avoid the war or to stop it, when he proposes to renounce the world and go to the woods, or when he advocates mokṣa as the supreme goal of man (XII.167). His Brahmanhood is more that of a sannyāsin than of a householder. He

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which they are associated, Dumézil sees Yudhiṣṭhira, son of Dharma, as the sovereign, who is for him a representative of the Brahmanic varṇa; Bhīma and Arjuna, born from Vāyu and Indra respectively, as two representatives of the warrior class; and the twins, sons of the Aśvins, as standing for the third 'function', that is, the productive classes of society. This pattern allows him to conceive of the epic heroes as replicas of the vedic pantheon and its structure.

<sup>20</sup>This should not be understood in a minimal way. Sahadeva especially is considered as an expert in nīti, he is the most beloved son of Kuntī, though he actually was born of Mādrī. The bhakti ideals work such wonders!

<sup>21</sup>Similarly Viṣṇu was born as Upendra and as such subservient to Indra's aims.

believes in *ahiṃsā*, truth, compassion, the virtues that have become the Brahman's through the *sannyāsic* ideal. This is in agreement with the epic conception of the Brahmins, but does not account for Yudhiṣṭhira's kingship.<sup>22</sup> It rather makes it unintelligible.

After his coronation comes the famous dice playing between him and Śakuni, who acts for his nephew Duryodhana. As a Kshatriya he may play dice, but he is exceedingly fond of gambling and not very good at it. That is how he stakes and loses all his possessions to Śakuni. In Book IV, when the Pāṇḍavas have to disguise themselves before appearing at Virāṭa's court and live there for one year unrecognised, Yudhiṣṭhira takes the garb of a Brahman, but of a Brahman who is an expert at dice playing. He will spend that year gambling with Virāṭa and his court and winning all the time. He had been taught all the subtleties of the game by a *gandharva* king during his exile in the forest. To be a Brahman and a dice expert makes a strange combination. Given the constant comparison between the dice game of Book II and the war (see Gehrts 1975:229ff.), it is possible to look at such a Brahman as a mock duplicate of the Brahman warrior, that is, as the kind of mixture the epic considers as dangerous and exemplifies in Droṇa.

The name Yudhiṣṭhira adopts during that year points to the same conclusion and adds a new piece of information: the pseudo-Brahman is called Kaṅka Vaiyāghrapadya. The patronym, which is mentioned only once, is rather difficult to interpret, but the name Kaṅka is easier to decipher.<sup>23</sup> Kaṅka is first of all the name of a carnivorous bird, a kind of heron, which in the epic is traditionally coupled with the *baka*, a crane, and found in all inauspicious descriptions of the battlefield in the company of jackals, vultures and other meat and carrion eaters. Moreover, the *kaṅka* lives in the Matsya kingdom, among the fish, which are its normal food. A Brahman gambling and winning, a heron which fishes around for food: these are ominous associations for the dharmic Yudhiṣṭhira. As a matter of fact, he is Dharmarāja and son of Dharma. Nowhere in the epic is Dharma equated with Yama, but Dharmarāja is a well-known epithet of Yama (just as *Pitāmaha* is of *Brahmā*). This at the same time clarifies Dharma's appearance as a fish-eater *baka* at the end of Book III, and takes care of the awful power of Yudhiṣṭhira that is not connected with the actual practice of fighting: the bleeding of his nose which could destroy the whole world. He is clearly associated with Death. The epic plot being

<sup>22</sup>This is one of the points where we cannot agree with Dumézil: the topmost *varṇa*, that is, the Brahmins, should not partake of sovereignty according to Hindu ideals. They are superior, not only because they act as priests, but because they are the repositories of the knowledge of *dharma*, which provides the theoretical frame for their functions as priests and kings' advisers.

<sup>23</sup>For a more detailed discussion, see Biardeau (1978: 94-111)

the enactment of a world crisis at the level of human 'history', Yudhiṣṭhira with his sannyāsic bent is the fit sovereign to rule over this period and lead all the warriors to salvation. Ultimately they all will be found in heaven at the end of the MBh. That is why Yudhiṣṭhira's kingship is not meant to give the portrait of the ideal king. He rules as Dharma-Yama rules, by destroying and making room for a new world in order to save dharma and the three worlds. At the same time, he embodies the ultimate value of mokṣa which commands the universal order. But it is also quite clear that he could not do anything without the avatāra Kṛṣṇa's help, that is, without Arjuna as well.

Bhīma in many respects is just the opposite of Yudhiṣṭhira. He advocates kāma as the supreme goal of man (XII.167), and sees kāma at the very root of sannyāsa: no life, nor renunciation of life, in the world can be understood without an element of desire. But the urge in the Brahman to sacrifice for himself or perform sacrifices for others also is rightly called kāma. Kāma cannot be separated from all forms of life. That is one of the meanings of Bhīma's birth from Vāyu. Vāyu should be understood as the god of vital breath, prāṇa, that is, the first and last manifestation of life and movement.<sup>24</sup> But Vāyu is also known as Prabhañjana, the breaker, one of the symbols of physical strength in its most violent form. Desire for life requires violence (hiṃsā) because every living being is threatened in its very existence by a stronger one. This is the idea underlying the so-called mat-syanyāya, according to which might is right.

In this way the symbolism of Bhīma cuts across Yudhiṣṭhira's at the Matsya court. The year spent in the Matsya kingdom marks the lowest ebb in the world crisis and calls for the emergence of a king. Bhīma was born just at the same time as Duryodhana, as an answer to this embodied threat to the existence of earth. Therefore, he at the same time is the one who upholds the interests of life in this world, and is the strong and bloody warrior who treats his victims on the battlefield (Duḥśāsana, Dṛuryodhana, etc.) as well as outside (Jarāsandha, Kīcaka, many rākṣasas) without any consideration for the warrior's code of honour. The meaning of so much violence is made obvious when he, at the same time, is Draupadī's most helpful and understanding husband when she is in pressing need or has an apparently frivolous and unreasonable whim to fulfil. Bhīma always is ready to answer her demands for help, contrary to Yudhiṣṭhira who preaches patience to her and blames her ignorance and her irresponsible behaviour.

<sup>24</sup>In this capacity Vāyu is the first and transitory form of Brahmā at the end of a cosmic night, when Nārāyaṇa wakes up. Brahmā, becoming Vāyu, moves over the ocean and looks for means to dive and raise the earth from the bottom of the ocean. This is the first appearance of life and movement, where the wind and the vital breath cannot be dissociated.

The contrast between Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma thus could not be deeper and their being born one after the other calls for some explanation. Mokṣa and kāma stand side by side, but kāma coming after mokṣa should be subordinate, mokṣa being the dominant and encompassing value. This order recalls the purāṇic cosmogonies,<sup>25</sup> which start from the supreme yogic form of the Puruṣa to end with the formation of Brahmāṇḍa at the first stage, then start again in the pratisarga with Brahmā-Vāyu and Yajña-Varāha, thus subordinating the kāma world symbolised by Brahmā and sacrifice—svargakāmo yajeta is the standard formula that the Mīmāṃsā analyses—to the yogic values that are connected with mokṣa.<sup>26</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma thus stand for the two extreme values that command the cyclical 'history' of the universe. Creation occurs in order to allow individuals to crave for mokṣa, and in order to ensure the continuity of that process, the world of kāma should be kept constantly recurring through alternating cosmic days and nights (the cosmic nights being equated to the yogic sleep of the Puruṣottama at the highest level, or of Nārāyaṇa between two kalpas). But the uncommitted attitude of Yudhiṣṭhira and the unchecked behaviour of Bhīma would lead to a disastrous situation, to the reign of matsyanyāya. The apparently irreconcilable opposition between them calls for a mediation. In a way Kṛṣṇa is the mediation, since Yudhiṣṭhira often takes his advice, but he is not the main actor.

In fact this is the point at which Arjuna has to come in. He was born third, but he was sired by Indra, the king of the gods; Paṇḍu and Kuntī have prepared his coming in a very special way. Prophecies accompanied his birth and they are repeated at several junctures in the narrative. Arjuna is to be the performer of three great sacrifices, of which the most obvious is not a sacrifice in the ordinary sense of the word; all commentators agree in identifying the three sacrifices as Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūya and āśvamedha and the 'sacrifice of battle' in between. In the first two, Yudhiṣṭhira, as the apparent sovereign, is also the apparent yajamāna, whereas Arjuna acts only as the main warrior in the digvijaya and as the guardian of the sacrificial horse during its year of wandering. During the war, however, Arjuna's leading role is obvious at all levels of interpretation. But if he is to be understood as the ideal king, his personal action should be analysed as mediating between mokṣa and kāma, between yogic values and sacrifice. He should be able at the same time to epitomise these opposite and complementary values in himself and ensure their harmonious working for the welfare of the three worlds.

<sup>25</sup>Even though the purāṇas could be proved more recent than the epic, it is obvious that the epic rests on the same set of values and already knows the basic frame of the purāṇic cosmogonies.

<sup>26</sup>See Biardeau (1968, 1969 and 1971) on the purāṇic cosmogonies and pralaya.

This is exactly what the *Gītā* has to say: at first sight, Kṛṣṇa does not teach Arjuna how to be a perfect king or a good warrior. The problem Arjuna has raised right from the beginning is one of values. As a Kshatriya that is, at the same time a prince and a warrior, he has to fight against his own relatives and his superiors and he curses his svadharma.<sup>27</sup> He does not wish for victory, kingship or pleasure, not even for life, if he has to destroy all his superiors and family for that; he will reap sin only from such a victory and will bring about the destruction of dharma and of his lineage. Kshatriya women will be led astray and there will be a 'mixture of varṇas' as a consequence of the death of Kshatriya men on the battlefield (*Bhagavadgītā* I.28-46). Arjuna is obsessed by the very same idea which pervades the whole epic plot.

But Kṛṣṇa answers by emphasising the svadharma of the Kshatriya in such a way as to brush aside all these objections. To put it briefly, Kṛṣṇa denies the possibility for a man to avoid acting in some way or other if he is to live at all. No doubt traditional sannyāsa and the ideal of naiṣkarmya are completely discarded, but the main purpose is to show their inapplicability to Kshatriya ideals. A Kshatriya is a born warrior, his first duty is to be a protector of people, to fight for the welfare of the worlds, and the present battle is a battle for the sake of dharma and legitimate kingship (two phrases to express one and the same idea). Actually kingship, which Arjuna refuses with all the pleasures and privileges attached to it, is not the subject matter of Kṛṣṇa's speech. He talks of a king's duties, not of his rights or profits. A Kshatriya is a yajamāna of a special type. Not only should he not give up the performance of regular and ritually defined sacrifices, but he should consider all his actions, including fighting as a warrior, as many sacrifices. In this way he is a yajamāna who never stops sacrificing and the battle as a sacrifice is his own variety of it, for which he is the sacrificer, the priest and the victim. The first consequence is to make the violence of war as justifiable as any killing performed within a sacrificial rite: it cannot be called himsā if this violence is not for the sake of killing but intended as sacrifice.

But Kṛṣṇa's teaching goes one step further. Even though the war should result in kingship being restored to the Pāṇḍavas, kingship is not the aim, but dharma and the welfare of the world. Moreover, the warrior who starts fighting makes himself a victim; he has to renounce his own life, which is more to him than his social status and possessions, as long as he is not sure of his victory. Therefore, the true warrior is one who fights not for his own benefit, not to conquer overlordship, power and riches, but for

<sup>27</sup>This fight between 'brothers' recalls the fight between asuras and devas, in which the asuras, as the elders and superiors, are the winners; only the avatāra's interference turns the victory in favour of the gods, that is, of dharma.

the whole world's good. He offers his own self as a victim for that purpose, and in doing so he imitates the Supreme God who gets incarnate on earth in order to save the dharma. That is why his acts cannot remain attached to him and produce future good or bad births, since he does not try to reap the fruits of what he has done. This sacrificer thus also becomes the true renouncer, the true sannyāsin. Keeping his sacrificial fires burning, lighting the fire of war, he never has his self-interest in view but devotes himself to God and acts as his duplicate or his representative on earth. As such a Kshatriya can be a true yogin when performing the sacrifice of war. This idea, of course, gives the svadharma of kings a new content and links it with salvation. The specific Kshatriya way to salvation is also their specific sannyāsa and sacrifice. Kings have not to renounce ultimate values in order to remain kings, they only have to renounce their own self— and this the Brahman has also to do if he is to become a sannyāsin.

This teaching of the *Gītā* could not be understood outside the bhakti ideals. It implies a new arrangement of the different goals of man. If the practice of svadharma, which has for its aim the maintenance of universal dharma, is now linked with the attainment of mokṣa, the word dharma acquires a new meaning by which it encompasses all goals including even mokṣa. This is not possible without giving the dharma a broader definition, in which the sannyāsic virtues will find the pride of place, and this new definition will not be the Brahman's exclusive concern but will be applicable to all varṇas. In the already quoted chapter 167 of Book XII of MBh, Vidura, the kṣattar, a mixture of Kshatriya and Shudra (actually one of the three sons who were sired by the ascetic Brahman Vyāsa acting as a surrogate for his dead uterine brother), is the advocate of dharma as the supreme goal of man. Being an incarnation of Dharma, what else could he say? But his idea of dharma, in agreement with the *Gītā*, includes all sannyāsic virtues as well as the ideal of dharma of the upper varṇas. Says Vidura:

Vedic learning, asceticism (*tapas*), generosity, faith, performing sacrifices, forgiveness, pure feelings, compassion, truth, self-restraint and perfection of ātman. . . all these have dharma and artha as their roots, and to me this comes under a single word: by dharma alone have ṛṣis crossed (this life), and the worlds are founded on dharma. By dharma gods have prospered and artha is entrusted to dharma. Dharma is first, artha comes in the middle and kāma is last, as the wise say (XII.167.5, 6b-8).

Obviously Vidura's idea of dharma is not different from Kṛṣṇa's, though he retains the 'orthodox' order of puruṣārthas and seems to exclude mokṣa. But the difference is only one of the starting point: in a statement meant to give the true order of values in this world, dharma has to come first



anyway, since the world is maintained through dharma. Mokṣa comes in only when the individual as such is taken into consideration and wants to know where he is going to land after a dharmic life. This actually is the purport of Yudhiṣṭhira's praise of mokṣa at the end of the same chapter (43-48); he does not forbid the practice of the three goals of man but warns that one should not have any attachment to worldly things since success and happiness do not depend on men's efforts or virtues (47-48). From this, one comes to the conclusion that true happiness should be reached amidst the activities of life through detachment (45-46). Detachment is mukti or mokṣa, and Dharmarāja does not even refer to saṁsāra and rebirth as opposed to final liberation. Though Yudhiṣṭhira has the last word, and is praised by everybody, his own arrangement of the puruṣārthas does not contradict Vidura's.<sup>28</sup>

After Vidura, Arjuna pleads in favour of artha as the most important goal of man (XII.167.11-20). Knowing him as the faithful disciple of Kṛṣṇa, and the recipient of the *Gītā's* teaching, we should interpret his words with that context in mind. Artha<sup>29</sup> is considered as the king's main concern, and this here certainly is one of the reasons why Arjuna should be considered as the ideal king. But, at the same time, we know him as disinterested and fully engrossed in his duty. He is not of the type who would confuse his own artha and the world's artha, the more so as he only fights in order to surrender the earth to his elder brother.<sup>30</sup> No doubt his praise of artha is linked with the character he typifies.<sup>31</sup> Dharma and kāma are mentioned as depending upon artha and not opposed to it or exclusive of it. How could a king perform costly sacrifices and lavishly reward Brahman priests without artha? He should possess artha and constantly acquire some new one if he wants to be the main yajamāna of his kingdom. Arjuna does not use the term mokṣa but mentions those who wear the jaṭa and saffron robes, who have their senses under full control and are free from attachment, as actually in need of artha—arthārthin.

<sup>28</sup>Moreover this chapter 167 occurs in the Āpaddharma section of the Śāntiparvan; therefore, we should be prepared for various formulations that correspond to different situations. It might be said that ultimately there is no āpad at all for the detached man who does not strive after any particular goal in this life.

<sup>29</sup>The word will be kept untranslated, like dharma, because it retains in itself so many shades of meaning as cannot be expressed by a single English term: wealth, material interest, aim or purpose in general, anything good. All these terms mostly remain at the level of the individual's artha. As the king's specific goal, Dumont (1962) sees in it the indiscriminated sphere of both politics and economics. We shall presently show how this statement should be qualified.

<sup>30</sup>Just as Karna wants to give her to Duryodhana.

<sup>31</sup>The same may be said of Bhīma's discourse in favour of kāma as described above.



Only the man, arthavān, is able to maintain the members of his household and punish his enemies.

Is not the arthavān a king, then, when we know that, according to the same Arjuna (XII.15), the king should make use of his *daṇḍa* to rule even over the ascetics in the forest and see that everybody acts in conformity with his own dharma? The very first words of the present speech are particularly meaningful, coming after Kṛṣṇa's teachings: 'This is the land of actions, *karmabhūmi*'.<sup>32</sup> Artha, then, is at the centre of this *karmabhūmi*, as that which keeps everything going, and going in order if properly managed. Artha is a *puruṣārtha* (here again the translation of artha is impossible) because it is the means to all other *puruṣārthas*, and not because everything is moved by interest, as a superficial reading might lead one to suspect.

We then have the clue to Arjuna's rank among his brothers. Obedient to Yudhiṣṭhira, he remains silent when Bhīma blames him and speaks in anger to him. He also keeps quiet when he disapproves of Kṛṣṇa's plan to have Droṇa killed and does not prevent Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira to act accordingly, but he stands aloof to mark his disagreement and his permanent dislike of the battle and its dire necessities. He appeases Bhīma's outbursts of anger as much as he can, but does not hesitate to counteract the disastrous results of his thoughtless actions (as in the final meeting between Bhīma and Aśvatthāman, when the latter makes use of the *brahmāstra*). He opposes Dharmarāja when he wants to retire to the forest; it is in this context that the above quoted speech about *daṇḍa* is delivered. When in battle, he is the best warrior and cannot be vanquished as long as Kṛṣṇa is by his side. War for him is the core of his *svadharma* and is the means by which he can serve both the values that lead this world and are impersonated by his elder brothers: yogic virtues (traditionally linked with *mokṣa*) and sacrifice (usually prompted by *kāma*). War also is, of course, as usual the means to conquer territories and riches and establish one's sovereignty. But by now it has been invested with a new function, which reaches far beyond the sphere of artha proper. There is not the slightest chance left for artha to become autonomous, at least at the ideological level.

This seems to be the only development that can be traced in the conception of Hindu kingship, and it was brought through the *bhakti* ideals. But this development, meant for Kshatriyas in the epic has been conceived all along Indian history as valid for all non-Brahman Hindus as well. It gave every *svadharma* a religious content and an access to ultimate salvation.

<sup>32</sup>Would it be possible to read this well-known phrase *karmabhūmi* under the equally well-known name of Kurukṣetra, which the opening words of the *Gītā* call also *dharmakṣetra*?

The Brahmanic model was not lost sight of, but was generalised so as to fit all other categories of Hindu society including Shudras, women and all impure castes. Once the Kshatriya gained access to salvation through his specific and impure activities, the generalisation became easy. Every sort of impurity could be sacralised and turned into svadharma. Nothing was left outside the realm of ultimate values, though at the same time the status of Brahmans remained unimpaired.

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