THEORIES OF COSMIC TIME IN THE MAHABHARATA

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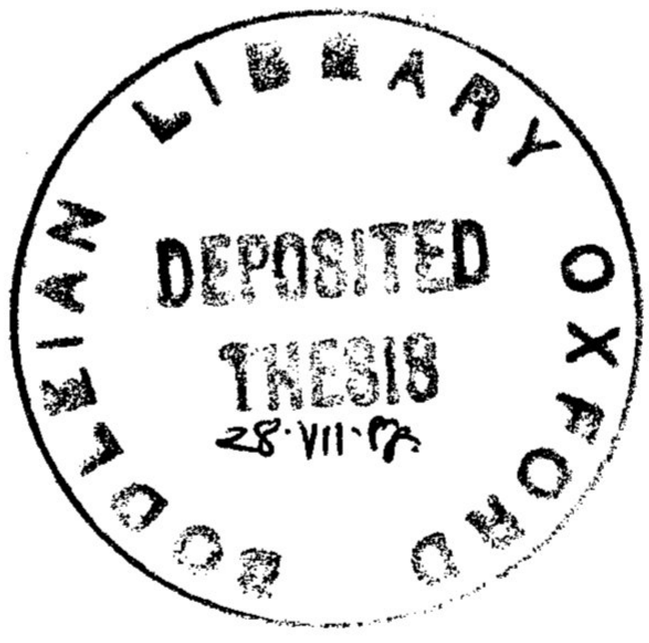

ABSTRACT

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This thesis presents an examination of the Indian theories of cosmic time as they are found in the Mahâbhârata. It looks at the theories in detail and analyses the essential characteristics and structures of its three main elements: the divisions of time; the cycle of creation and destruction; and the characteristics of the four **yugas**. Special attention is paid to aspects of the theory that have been little explored, such as
the relationship between the **yugas** and the **avatâras** of Viṣṇu; the characteristics of the junctures between the **yugas**, etc. In the few areas where the theories of cosmic time found in the Mahâbhârata differ from those of the Purâṇas, the differences are indicated.

Ideas of cosmic time in literature preceding the Mahâbhârata are examined, and it is argued that the fundamental structures and concerns of the later theories can be seen to have clear antecedents in the cosmogony of the Vedas and the cosmogonic implications of certain sacrifices found in the Brâhmaṇas: Vedic cosmogonies show that the primary creative act is the imposition of order on chaos, in the spatial, temporal and ethical spheres, and the sacrifices show the existence of a cycle of creation and destruction, where creation must be periodically re-established by the sacrifice and the sacrificer. These principles are seen to still inform the later theories, and often help to throw light on obscure areas within them.

THEORIES OF COSMIC TIME IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

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ABBREVIATIONS

Agni Purâṇa	Agni
Aitareya Āraṇyaka	AiA
Aitareya Brâhmaṇa	AiB
Atharvaveda	AV
Bhagavad Gîtâ	BhG
Bhâgavata Purâṇa	Bhâg.
Garuḍa Purâṇa	Garuḍa
Gopatha Brâhmaṇa	GB
Harivaṃśa	Hv
Kûrma Purâṇa	Kûrma
Maitrî Upaniṣad	MaitU
Manusmṛti	Manu
Mârkaṇḍeya Purâṇa	Mârk
Matsya Purâṇa	Matsya
Mahâbhârata	Mbh
Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad	MuU
Râmâyaṇa	Râm
Râmopâkhyâna	Râmo
Rgveda	RV
Śatapatha Brâhmaṇa	ŚB
Taittirîya Brâhmaṇa	TB
Taittirîya Saṃhitâ	TS
Vâjasaneyî Saṃhitâ	VS
Viṣṇu Purâṇa	Viṣṇu
Yuga Purâṇa	YP

Anandâśrama Sanskrit Series	ASS
Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute	ABORI
Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient	BEFEO
Études de Mythologie Hindoue	EMH
Harvard Oriental Series	HOS
Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society	JRAS
Sacred Books of the East	SBE

References to the Mbh and Râm are to the Critical Edition unless otherwise specified. References to other texts

are to the editions given in the bibliography. Translation throughout is my own, unless otherwise acknowledged. My policy has been to translate all Mbh references, and to use existing translations for other texts, except in the few cases indicated.

The system of transliteration employed in the longer passages quoted differs slightly from the standard diacritics in the following particulars:

â	=	ā
î	=	ī
û	=	ū
ñ	=	ṅ
ṣ	=	ś

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My first thanks must go to Dr Nick Allen who has supervised the majority of this thesis, and provided many useful comments, as well as much encouragement during the course of its production. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr Jim Benson, who supervised the translation with a patience and good-humour that was often required. I should also thank Professor Richard Gombrich for his supervision in the early stages.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The Mahâbhârata contains a substantial amount of material on the yuga theory and provides a rich source of information for a study of the ideas which constitute it. Moreover its importance is compounded by the fact that the epic is the first text in which the theory appears in any coherent form. Despite this, however, the epic yuga theory has been largely overshadowed by that of the Purâṇas: little attempt has been made to separate the two and identify details that are characteristically epic; and only a small amount of the Mbh material has been utilised in expositions of the theory.

This study, therefore, represents an attempt to redress the balance and to provide a detailed examination of the yuga theory as it appears in the Mbh: to present the different aspects of the theory and analyse their essential concerns and underlying structures; to see how these various aspects relate; and to attempt to throw some light on areas of the theory which have so far remained obscure. In so far as the essentials of the epic theory are largely in agreement with those of the Purâṇas, it is hoped that a presentation and analysis of the epic material will also stand as a detailed examination of the classical yuga theory as a whole. At the same time, by identifying the few areas where the Mbh material does differ from that of the Purâṇas, the study

should serve to establish details of the yuga theory which are characteristically epic, and thus provide additional information for an understanding of the theory's development. As well as analysing the yuga theory in the epic, it is also proposed to examine some of the ideas about time and the cosmos which can be found in texts earlier than the Mbh, in order to see whether they provide any foundation for the later ideas and, if so, to see how this endures and operates in the concerns and structures informing the different elements of the theories in the Mbh.

The aims of this thesis are therefore threefold: firstly, a detailed and comprehensive study of the classical yuga theory as it appears in the Mbh; secondly, an identification of the form of the yuga theory that is peculiar to the epic; and thirdly, an examination of the connections between the yuga theory of the classical texts and the ideas of time and the cosmos which precede it.

I believe that such a study is justified for a number of reasons. Firstly, although several scholars have written on the yuga theory, and the main elements of its ideas are well known, there has so far been no extensive and detailed examination of its constituents such as is proposed here. Previous scholarship on the subject has mainly consisted of fairly brief, introductory expositions of the theory, or else of

attempts to trace the theory's development, and only a few areas have been treated in any detail [1]. Apart from the work of Madeleine Biardeau, which I shall return to below, the only extensive study of the yuga theory already undertaken is that of Cornelia Dimmitt Church, and constitutes her PhD thesis, The Yuga Story: A myth of the four ages of the world as found in the Purâṇas [2]. In this again, however, apart from assessing different ways in which the myth can be interpreted from the viewpoint of comparative mythology, Church is mainly concerned with the development of the theory and establishing the relative chronology of its different elements. Despite previous work, therefore, there is clearly a place in the field for a far more detailed exposition and analysis of the yuga theory as a whole.

Secondly, because so few of the Mbh references to the theories of time seem to be known, beyond the two or three passages which correspond most closely to the Purâṇic versions [3], very little has been written on ways in which details of the epic material may differ from those of the Purâṇas [4]. Even Church, who is so concerned with the theory's development, fails to

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1 These include the manvantaras (Mitchiner [1978]); the avatâras (Huntington [1964]); and historical details in descriptions of the kaliyuga (Fleet [1911], Jayaswal [1928].

2 University of Syracuse, 1970.

3 Such as, for example, 12.224, mentioned by Church [1970] pp.120ff, and used by Gombrich [1975] pp.121ff.

4 Exceptions to this are Jacobi [1908] and Mitchiner [1978], who both suggest differences in the divisions of time. I shall return to these works, and others mentioned in this section, as the points arise in the following chapters.

establish any version of its elements that are characteristic of the epic, and this leads her to admitting a number of gaps in her charting of the theory's growth [5]. Although the present work is only concerned with the theory's development in so far as it can throw light on the details that appear in the classical texts, it does recognize that much past scholarship has been concerned with establishing the ideas' growth, and hopefully, by making the details peculiar to the epic more available, it will provide a useful tool for any such endeavour.

Although a number of articles have been devoted to the search for antecedents to the classical ideas in the Vedas and Brâhmaṇas, it is believed that the third aim of this thesis is also worthwhile, because of the nature of its approach. Past examinations of traces of the yuga theory in texts anterior to the Mbh have mainly consisted of a search for references to words that are important to the later ideas, such as the names of the yugas, or 'yuga' itself. The most comprehensive study of this kind is that of Kane, in his great History of Dharmaśâstra [6], but other scholars have also contributed to the subject and there has been much debate as to how the early references should be understood [7]. However, this search

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5 C.f. Church [1970] p.150. Another study also merely postulates as likely a stage in the theory's development that is illustrated by the epic material: c.f. Gombrich [1975] p.124.

6 Kane [1946] pp.885ff.

7 C.f., e.g., Tilak [1903] pp.157ff;171ff; Sharma [1974]; Church [1970] pp.133ff.

has usually centred on a very few, isolated references and although the more general ideas of time and the cosmos in the Vedas and Brâhmaṇas have been studied elsewhere in their own right [8], no one, to my knowledge, has examined these in the light of the classical yuga theory, in order to see what structural and conceptual antecedents they may contain.

These, then, are the central aims of this thesis and the reasons that I consider them worthwhile. In pursuing these aims, I propose to begin the study with an examination of the earlier concepts of time and cosmogony (Chapter 2), and then move on to the analysis of epic references which makes up the body of the thesis. Here I shall separate the yuga theory into its three main elements, viz., the divisions of time, the cycle of creation and destruction, and the characteristics of the four yugas, examining each in turn (Chapters 3-5). I shall then attempt to clarify some of the more obscure areas of the theory (Chapter 6) and, finally, summarise my findings and suggest topics for future research (Chapter 7).

As well as listing the areas I intend to investigate in this thesis, I should also, perhaps, briefly indicate some of the areas which will not be covered, pending a

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8 By, for example, Gonda [1984], Varenne [1982], Silburn [1955] and Heesterman [1957].

more detailed discussion of this in chapter 7. My primary aim has been to establish the details of the epic theories of time and to analyse the concerns and structures within them, and I have not extended this to include any speculation as to the theories' wider significance, or their relationship to other aspects of Hinduism. Similarly, although the examination of the particular passages on time was conceived against the wider background of the epic as a whole, I do not intend to offer any interpretation of the central narrative, or to establish the rôle played within this by the yuga theories. Both of these areas would be interesting and worthwhile topics for research, but must remain outside the scope of this thesis if its primary aims are to be realized [9].

Because I have limited the field of my inquiry in this way, I shall also impose a corresponding limitation on the secondary material treated. A great deal has been written on the Mbh in the last two centuries, and it is customary for studies of the epic to begin with a survey of this. However, as I am not directly concerned with the epic as a whole, little of this work is immediately relevant to my topic, beyond the general discussion of the composition and nature of the text. While the history of this debate is an interesting subject, especially in the light of approaches to the epic post-

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9 They have, moreover, been covered in some detail by several other scholars, including Biardeau, Hiltebeitel and Scheuer.

Dumézil, it is not essential for the purposes of my examination and, in the following chapters, I shall only return to aspects of it in passing.

A more serious omission is the lack of any detailed treatment of the work of Biardeau, Scheuer, and Hiltebeitel, all of whom have written extensively on the epic and whose concerns and methodology are close to my own [10]. My failure to treat these scholars in depth largely arises from constraints of space, as their work is complex and not easily summarised. This is particularly true of Biardeau's arguments about the structures of the time-cycles and their relationship to bhakti and yoga, which is the subject of her Etudes de Mythologie Hindoue [11], and I felt that any worthwhile discussion of this would have required a separate chapter, which I could not spare. Consequently, I have only referred to these scholars' work where it is directly relevant to the particulars of the yuga theory under discussion, and have not entered into their interpretations of its significance as a whole. This omission will be particularly noticeable in chapter 6, when I discuss the avatâra.

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10 These scholars major works on the subject are listed in the bibliography.

11 Biardeau [1968,69,71,76,78].

1.2 The yuga theory

Before beginning my examination of the separate elements of the theories of time, I feel it will be helpful to give a brief summary of the theories as a whole, and discuss the ways that they are presented in the texts which treat of them. Although the phrase 'the yuga theory' is a convenient short-hand for the classical theories of time, its use should not disguise the fact that the theories are made up of a number of different versions of a number of different elements. These elements can stand independently, and are often presented separately by the texts, which themselves group them under the divisions I have followed, namely: the computations of time, the characteristics of the four yugas, and the creation and destruction of the universe [12].

The computations of time usually begin with the smallest unit, the winking of an eye, and from there build up to the largest, which in the Purâṇic schema, is a life of Brahmâ. Between these extremes, come the four yugas themselves, which make up the cycle of the mahâ- or caturyuga; the kalpa, or day of Brahmâ, which is made up of 1000 of these in continuous revolution; and the manvantara, the period ruled over by a Manu, of which there are fourteen in a kalpa.

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12 For this division, c.f., e.g., Bhâg. 12.4.1f.

Again following the more systematised Purâṇic schema, at the beginning of Brahmâ's life the universe is created out of **prakṛti** - primordial matter, by the supreme god (usually Viṣṇu Nârâyaṇa), and Brahmâ is born from a lotus which emerges from the navel of this deity. This is the beginning of the larger, 'outer', cosmic cycle of creation and destruction, bounded by **sarga**, primary creation, and **prâkṛtikapralaya**, when the universe is reabsorbed into **prakṛti**. The smaller cycle that revolves within this, begins when Brahmâ awakes at the dawn of his day, rescues the earth which is submerged under water, and begins to create its animate and inanimate inhabitants. Brahmâ's day continues for a thousand revolutions of the four-**yuga** cycle, and ends with the destruction of the world and its inhabitants: first by fire, and then by the flood which submerges the earth again. This is the **pratisarga** and **naimittikapralaya** cycle.

Interior still, comes the cycle of the four **yugas**, beginning with the perfect age, the **kṛtayuga**, and descending through the **tretâ** and **dvâpara**, until the worst age, the **kaliyuga** arrives. Most narrations of the **yugas'** characteristics are set within the **kaliyuga**, and this is the age described in greatest detail. The **yugas** decrease in length in the series 4,3,2,1, and the state of **dharma** and the conditions in the world which depend upon it, decrease correspondingly throughout the cycle.

The Purâṇas, which should properly treat of **sarga** (the **prâkṛtika** cycle), **pratisarga** (the **naimittika** cycle) and the **manvantaras**, as part of the five subjects which characterise them - **pañcalakṣaṇa**, usually open with a description of the primary creation, move on to the divisions of time followed by the secondary creation, and then treat the remaining elements of the theories in different parts of the text. The Mbh also opens with a description of creation (1.1.27ff), which serves to set the events it narrates in a cosmic framework. Beyond that, however, it presents the theories of time mainly in the sections which contain most of its incidental myths and teachings: the Āraṇyaka, Śânti and Anuśâsanaparvas. The longest account of the theories comes in the session with Mârkaṇḍeya in the Āraṇyakaparva (3.186.1-189.15), and it will be useful to see how they are presented there.

Mârkaṇḍeya, addressing Yudhiṣṭhira, begins by setting the theories within the cycle of creation and destruction, and then goes on to narrate the divisions of time. He follows this with an extended description of the **kaliyuga**, which continues into a description of the **pralaya** at the end of the thousandth four yuga cycle. After this, Mârkaṇḍeya tells Yudhiṣṭhira how he alone survived the **pralaya**, and wandered around the world when only a solitary ocean remained. On this ocean, Mârkaṇḍeya came upon a divine child and, entering into his body, finds that the world is preserved there in a

state of perfection. Leaving the body, and returning to the **pralaya** ocean, Mârkaṇḍeya questions the child, and he identifies himself as Viṣṇu. After an interruption by Yudhiṣṭhira, Mârkaṇḍeya goes into another description of the **kaliyuga**, which this time ends with the arrival of Kalkin and the return of a new **kṛtayuga**.

Although this is the longest account, the Mbh also contains several other extended descriptions of one or more of the theories' elements, and it also mentions different aspects in the hundreds of smaller references that are scattered throughout the text. The briefest of these consist of either one or two **pâda** similes which liken epic characters and events to occurrences during the **pralaya**; or else of names given to Śiva or Viṣṇu which describe their functions within the cycle: creator, destroyer, etc.

Before leaving this background to the **yuga** theories, I should mention the ways in which I have approached and organised the epic material in the following chapters. Wherever possible, I have begun my presentation of each aspect of the theories with one or two of the extended epic passages, and then followed this with additional or divergent details found in the smaller references. The main exception to this, is in the treatment of aspects of the theory which are significantly different in the Purâṇas, and then I begin with an outline of the Purâṇic

details, in order to be able to establish more clearly how the epic material differs from them [13]. In both cases, this procedure is primarily followed for purposes of clarity, as it represents the most accessible way to organise and present the large amount of material at my disposal.

Except in a few areas, where I shall be concerned to establish the most typically epic details on a point [14], my approach to the references will be largely ahistorical, which means that I shall not make distinctions between 'late' and 'early' sections of the Mbh, or treat the material differently according to which it comes from. I have taken this approach for a number of reasons. The first is because the aims of this thesis are not primarily historical. Except in the few areas mentioned above, my concern is to understand the theories such as the epic presents them, rather than to delineate the stages of their development, or establish any relative chronology for their various elements. This means that I shall be treating the theories as a whole, and only bringing in historical considerations either where they are unavoidable, and provide the most obvious answer to a problem, or else in order to facilitate a clearer understanding of the theories as they stand. Thus, although I shall refer to the classical theories' connections with earlier ideas in many of the areas I

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13 This will be the case, for example, in Chapter 3 and 4.4.

14 For example, Chapter 3 and 4.3.

examine, it will be with a view to understanding how the basic structures have endured and been transformed, in order to highlight the essential concerns informing the Mbh material.

Secondly, I would argue that the theories of time are one of the many areas of Hindu mythology which are not particularly suited to a close historical study. As has been suggested before, their origins must surely lie in the corpus of oral literature available to the compilers of the epics and Purâṇas [15]. While some of this is reflected in the preserved Vedic texts, much remains unknown and can only be surmised from the later texts, where it is often apparent that the narrative is drawing on a broader store of mythology which its audience would have known. Because of this, it is not really meaningful, except, again, in the broadest outlines, to apply historical criteria to the details of the myth. Although a particular detail may only appear in a 'later' portion of the epic, or even a Purâṇa, it does not necessarily follow that it is a later idea, as it may simply not have been known to the narrator/compiler of other portions of the epic (for

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15 For this suggestion, c.f.,e.g., Church [1970] p.62. For general discussion of the existence of this corpus and its relationship to extant texts, c.f. Keith [1914] p.1022; Rocher [1986] p.17; Gonda [1975] pp.206-10; Bühler [1967] p.xc; Pargiter [1918] p.6; Winternitz [1927] pp.311ff; Church [1970] pp.6ff;52ff.

reasons other than historical ones), or been known, but omitted, again for a variety of possible reasons [16].

This is part of the larger question of approaches to the text, which anyone working on the epics or Purâṇas must address. As mentioned above, I cannot, at this point, offer any detailed examination of the ways in which the Mbh has been approached in the past, or the arguments ranged about its structure and contents. The question of a 'text-historical' or 'structuralist' approach to the epic involves a number of complex and contentious issues which require careful argument and supporting evidence, and I am unwilling to enter into an abstract discussion of methodology, without the space to treat it in sufficient depth. It will become apparent throughout the thesis, however, that I am, for the most part, following the approach pursued by scholars such as Biardeau, Hiltebeitel and Scheuer, who are more concerned with the web of connections within the text, than with its contradictions and anomalies. In this, they are following Dumézil when he says, at the beginning of Mythe et Épopée:

> On sait aujourd'hui que, devant un corpus mythologique, il faut être plus humbles, le servir at non le fait servir, l'interroger et non l'annexer à des dossiers avides de matière, en respecter surtout la richesse, la variété, voire les contradictions. [17]

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16 This is, of course, a complex issue and sometimes it will be obvious that historical considerations should be taken into account. I shall return to this in 3.2.

17 Dumézil [1968] p.11.

CHAPTER 2 - TIME AND COSMOGONY IN THE VEDAS AND BRĀHMAṆAS

Previous work on the Vedic antecedents for the classical theories of cosmic time has largely taken place within the context of the historical development of the theories traced by scholars most familiar with the Purâṇic material [1]. The general conclusion is that while traces of the later ideas can be found in a relatively few references scattered throughout the Vedic texts, there is no developed theory in evidence there that could constitute a firm foundation for the classical theory. Thus, for example, Church concludes that the 'yuga story' appears in the Purâṇas as a complete story whose origins have largely been lost, and that it probably formed part of the unrecorded Vedic oral tradition [2]. Sharma, also, looking more widely at the idea of cyclical time in Hinduism, argues that the Vedic literature has no evidence of it [3] and Jacobi, while saying that the idea of a cycle of creation and destruction is a very ancient one, offers only one Vedic

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1 C.f. Chemburkra [1974]; Church [1970], [1971], [1974]; Jacobi [1908]; Kane [1946, 1958]; Sharma [1974]; Tilak [1903].

2 C.f. Church [1970] p.7; [1974] p.7.

3 C.f. Sharma [1974] p.29. While Sharma concedes that the saṃhitâs give the image of time as a wheel (which I will discuss below as a possible model for the classical concept of time), he dismisses it as evidence for a cyclical view of time as it could be a poetic rather than a philosophical image - a differentiation that is not really meaningful in the sphere of myth - and because 'the view that the Hindu notion of time is cyclical is based primarily on the theory of the yugas' [i.e. four distinct ages] (p.28). I believe that this is a misapprehension, for reasons which should become apparent in the following chapters.

reference to support it [4]. Other scholars concur with this and we are left with the problem of how a theory so well known to the Mahâbhârata that it provides one of its most common images can have left virtually no trace of its development in the literature preceding it.

Another light is thrown on this problem, however, when we turn to the work of Vedic scholars investigating concerns more central to the texts themselves namely, cosmogonic accounts and the theories of sacrifice. Here, well outside the context of the yuga theory and its development, we find statements such as the following:-

> To the Vedic thinker the whole world was constantly moving between the two poles - of birth and death, integration and disintegration, ascension and descent - which by their interaction occasion the cyclical rhythm of the universe. 5

> . . .the king, as represented in the râjasûya, is the incorporation of the universe's moving forces: 'boom to bust, and boom again'. 6

Or again, in a different study:-

> À charge pour le Créateur de favoriser le passage (d'ailleurs nécessaire) du Non-Etre à l'Etre. . . Pourtant si l'évolution du Non-Etre à l'Etre est inéluctable. . . il va sans dire que l'inverse est vrai aussi: l'Etre, nécessairement, devra régresser vers le Non-Etre. L'Univers, en se résorbant, laissera pourtant un reste qui ne sera pas autre chose que tout l'Etre transformé en Non-Etre. . . Au plus secret de cette masse ténébreuse résideront pourtant, en germe . . . la vie, la lumière, la beauté [7]

If these statements are representative, it would appear that at the heart of the texts that provided such scant references to the yuga theories themselves, more

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4 C.f. Jacobi [1908] p.201.
5 Heesterman [1957] p.6.
6 Ibid. p.224.
7 Varenne [1982] p.163.

general conceptions of time and cosmogony can indeed be found that bear a striking resemblance to some of the most characteristic elements of the classical theories. If this more general investigation of the Vedic ideas of time and creation were brought to bear on the search for the Vedic background to the yuga theory, therefore, there could emerge a much firmer foundation in the early texts than has previously been supposed.

In this chapter, therefore, I propose to first offer a brief examination of the specific references studied by other scholars, in order to establish what little information they do yield us (2.1), and then to look more generally at the ideas of time and cosmogony to be found in the early Vedic texts (2.2), followed by those to be found in the Brâhmana theories of sacrifice (2.3). These are all complex areas of research, and while I cannot hope to treat them in any comprehensive way, it will be necessary to enter into a certain amount of detail in the areas which I do look at. However, the ideas that are covered here are so important to the analysis of the Mbh references in the subsequent chapters that a through treatment at this stage is rendered necessary.

2.1 Specific references

The majority of scholars who have attempted to trace antecedents for the classical theories of time, have concentrated their search on references to words and

specific ideas that are important there. Most work has been done on references to yuga itself, and this is the word that occurs most frequently, with over thirty appearances in the Rgveda alone. Precisely what it means there, however, remains unclear, as it is obviously being used in a number of different ways, some of them not even temporal [8]. Although the majority of references are connected with time, and have been variously interpreted in the light of the later ideas, none of them can, in fact, be unambiguously seen as referring to these ideas, and many obviously do not.

The most common occurrence of yuga is in the phrase mânuṣâ yugâ or its derivatives, which is usually understood as 'human generations' or 'ages'. However, while for the most part this clearly refers to the general passage of time among humans, it does not seem to be used in a specific way to designate any fixed period of time, as these typical examples of its usage show:

> (To Soma) The tree whose praises never fail yields heavenly milk among our hymns, urging men's generations on [mânuṣâ yugâ]. [9]
>
> (To Agni) By night as in the day the grey one was born young, passing untouched by eld through many an age of man [mânuṣâ yugâ]. [10]

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8 Thus, for example, 5.73.3 - nâhuṣâ yugâ - has been variously taken as 'tribe' or 'generation', as has 10.27.19 yugâ janânâm. Other Vedic uses of the word yuga refer to its primary non-temporal meaning of 'yoke': c.f. e.g., RV.2.39.4;3.53.17;10.60.8;10.101.3,4. All RV references are to the Vaidika Samshodhana Mandala ed. [1933-51].

9 9.12.7. This and other RV references translated by Griffith [1920] unless otherwise specified.

10 I.144.4. For mânuṣyâ yugâ (or similar) c.f. also: I.92.11;124.2;5.52.4;6.16.23;7.9.4;8.46.12;10.140.6

Other references not qualified by **mânuṣa** are still unclear both in their precise meaning and in their relationship to the later usage and, again, they seem to be generally referring to time and the passage of time in the past or future. The phrase **yuge yuge** - in each **yuga** - for example, which is commonly used in connection with the developed **yuga** theory in the Mahâbhârata, is obviously being used much more generally in the Veda, as becomes clear in passages that refer to things remaining the same **yuge yuge**, a usage unlikely in the context of the later ideas, e.g.:

> (To Agni) In every age bestow upon the singers wealth. . .
>
> (To the pressing stones) Your fathers verily stand firm from age to age.[11]

Similarly, when **yuga** is qualified by uttara, para, or pûrva, also common in the later texts, there is still nothing to suggest that anything more precise than past or future time in general is being meant. Thus, for example:

> (To the Aśvins) Enriching us with treasures in abundance ye have looked back to former generations [**pûrvâni yugâni**].[12]

Only in a very few references in the Rgveda is there any idea of **yuga** as referring to a fixed period of time and even here there is no clear indication as to length.

In I.158.6:

> Dirghatamas the son of Mamatâ hath come to length of days in the tenth age of human kind [**daśame yuge**]

---

11 6.8.5;10.94.12. For **yuge yuge** c.f. also:- I.139.8; 3.26.3;6.15.8;36.5

12 7.70.4. C.f. also:- I.166.13;3.33.8;7.87.4; 10.10.10;72.1,9.

where **dasame yuge**, clearly not referring to the later system of four **yugas**, has been taken variously as 'generation' (in the precise biological sense) or period of four to five years by Kane [13], and month by Tilak who uses it to support his argument about the origins of the **aryans** [14]. In X.97.1:

> (To the healing herbs) The tawny plants were born in the ancient times [**pûrvâ**], three ages before the gods [**devebhyas triyugaṃ purâ**] [15].

it obviously means a longer, fixed period, as Kane argues [16], but again is not really applicable to the later theory of four ages.

The most interesting references in the Rgveda, and the ones that come potentially closest to the later ideas are in X.72, commented on by both Kane and Tilak [17]. Here **yuga** occurs four times, in vs. 1,2,3 and 9 and it is the usage in vs 2 and 3 that is the most interesting:

> . . . In the earliest age of the gods, existence was born from non-existence [**devânâṃ pûrvye yuge**] (2)
>
> In the first age of the gods, existence was born from non-existence. . . [**devânâṃ yuge prathame**] (3) [18]

Here, as in X.97.1, the reference is again obviously to a long period and while in the context of the other Vedic references it most probably has the more general meaning of passage of time among the gods (as **mânuṣâ yugâ** among humans), it is also possible that **devânâṃ yuge** could be taken in conjunction with the later usage of **devayuga** as

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13 Kane [1946] p.886.
14 Tilak [1903] p.171.
15 Translated by O'Flaherty [1983].
16 Kane [1946] p.886.
17 Ibid. p.886.; Tilak [1903] p.171.
18 Translated by O'Flaherty.

an alternative to kṛtayuga, to suggest a reference to the earliest of the four ages.

In the Atharvaveda there are fewer references to yuga but the strongest intimation of the later ideas in the saṃhitâs occurs there, in 8.2.21, a hymn for conferring long life, which is discussed by both Tilak and Kane:

> A hundred, a myriad years, two periods [yuga], three, four, we make for thee; let Indra and Agni, let all the gods, approve thee, not showing enmity.[19]

Although this is the clearest indication of yuga being used as a fixed and long period of time and the existence of four yugas is mentioned, it is still not clearly a reference to the later caturyuga idea, as there is nothing to show that four is the end of the potential series, especially given the other Vedic indications of greater numbers.

The post-saṃhitâ literature does not offer anything much clearer and yuga is mentioned relatively rarely. However, the names later associated with the yugas do occur, usually in the context of the dice game. Already in the Ṛgveda, kṛta was mentioned in connection with the winning throw of the dice [20], but although kali occurs four times in the Ṛgveda, it is as the name of a seer and

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19 C.f. Kane [1946] p.886; Tilak [1903] p.172. This and other AV references translated by Whitney [1905]. All references are to the Vishva Bandhu ed. [1960-64].

20 RV 10.34.6;43.5; c.f.also AV 7.52 (Whitney's 50).2,5,6.

only in the Atharvaveda is it associated with dice [21]. In the Taittirîya Samhitâ of the Yajurveda, kṛta, tretâ and dvâpara are mentioned as throws of dice along with two others, as they are in the Vâjasaneyi Śamhitâ, with āskanda as the fourth [22].

This association continues in the Brâhmaṇas, with the Śatapatha Brâhmaṇa listing kṛta, tretâ, dvâpara and āskanda with, interestingly, the fourth being followed by a reference to antaka, who is the prime-mover of the pralaya in later literature [23]. In ŚB 5.4.4.6 kali is mentioned as the dominant one of five dice in the râjasûya gambling match and all four are given in TB 3.4.16.

In references where the names are not associated with dice, they are still not clearly referring to yugas.

In the legend of Sunaḥśepa recited in the Aitareya Brâhmaṇa (again in the râjasûya section) is the verse:

> Kali he becometh who lieth
> Dvâpara when he riseth
> Tretâ when he standeth erect
> And Kṛta when he moveth [24]

---

21 AV 7.109.1 (dice); for kali as a seer, c.f. RV.I.112.15;8.55;66.15;10.39.8. C.f. also, AV 10.10.13 where kalis are mentioned as a kind of supernatural being akin to gandharvas. For further discussion of this use of kali, c.f., below (6.5).

22 TS 4.3.3; VS 30.18, cited Kane [1946] p.887.

23 ŚB 13.6.2.20.9-10 (list of victims for the puruśamedha):- (9) 'To the king of dice a gambler. To the Kṛta one who takes advantage of mistakes in the game. To the Tretâ one who plays on a (regular) plan. To the Dvâpara one who plans to over-reach his fellow players.' (10) 'To the āskanda a post of the gaming room. To antaka a cow slayer'. Trans. by Eggeling. This and other ŚB references are to Eggeling [1882-1900].

24 AiB 33.3(7.15) translated by A.B. Keith.

As the context of this is Indra urging Rohita to 'wander' and praising 'wandering', the four names are obviously given in ascending order of worth, but beyond that the meaning is unclear. Another reference, in the Mundaka Upaniṣad, is more promising:

> . . .the sacrificial works which they (the poets) saw in the hymns (of the Veda) have been performed in many ways in the Tretâ age.[25]

translating:

mantreṣu
karmâṇi kavayo yâny apaśyaṃs tâni tretâyâṃ
bahudhâ santatâni

Here, although Max Müller's 'age' is a gloss and he himself says it could as well mean trayi vidyâ, the three-fold priestly duties, tretâyâm could refer to the tretâyuga [26] and be connected with the later associations between that age and sacrifice [27].

As well as these reference to yuga and the names of the yugas, a few passages are cited as evidence for the Veda knowing specific ideas characteristic of the later theory. Again, however, the references are fairly ambiguous and could be understood without recourse to the later ideas. A verse at RV.10.10.10:

> Sure there will come succeeding times [uttarâ yugâni] when brothers and sisters will do acts unmeet for kinsfolk.

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25 MuU 1.2.1 translated by Max Müller [1884].
26 It is taken this way by Monier-Williams p.462. [Here and elsewhere, references to Monier-Williams without a date, are to his Sanskrit - English dictionary.
27 For these, c.f. below (5.4).

is cited as pointing to the decline in **dharma** through the ages characteristic of the **yuga** theory [28]. Although it could be taken in this way, it is again not the most obvious interpretation if **uttarâ yugâni** is being used with the usual Vedic meaning of 'future time', and could just as well point to a general idea of future decline. This is a fairly universal idea which need not be connected to any particular theory of time, as can be seen by the fact that it occurs in linear schemata (e.g. Judaeo-Christian) as well as cyclical, and, indeed, is a common platitude.

As evidence for the periodic destruction characteristic of the later cycle, Jacobi cites two verses from the Atharvaveda:

> As between heaven and earth Agni went, burning on, all consuming, where stood beyond they of one husband - where perchance was Mâtariśvan then?
>
> Mâtariśvan was entered into the waters; the gods were entered into the seas; great stood the traverser of space; the purifying one entered into the green ones. [29]

These occur in a long hymn which also contains some other verses that could possibly be read in conjunction with this idea, but in all of them, including the two that Jacobi cites, the connection is extremely tenuous [30].

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28 C.f. Kane [1946] p.886; Church [1970] p.134

29 AV 10.8.39,40.

30 I shall return to this hymn in 2.2 below.

Kane, also seeking evidence for the later cycle of creation and destruction, cites RV 10.190.3 as the germ from which kalpa grew:

> **sûryâcandramasau dhâtâ yathâpûrvam akalpayat divaṃ ca pṛthivîṃ câ 'ntarikṣam atho svaḥ**
>
> The Arranger set in order the sun and the moon, the sky, the earth, the atmosphere and then the light, yathâpûrvam.[31]

His argument hinges on his translation of **yathâpûrvam**, for which he gives 'as before', thus linking it to a periodic creation [32]. However, although this is certainly a possible reading, it is not the only meaning for **yathâpûrvam** in this context, and once again, the reference must remain ambiguous [33].

So far, therefore, the search for references to the classical theories in the Vedic texts bears out the paucity of results yielded to other scholars: out of the passages examined, themselves an extremely small portion of the Vedic corpus, only a few could be seen to have any bearing on the later theories at all and even these afford no very clear references. Turning from this unfruitful search, therefore, I shall begin my second line of approach, and examine some of the more general

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31 My translation.

32 C.f. Kane [1958] p.686.

33 For *yathâpûrva* Monier-Williams gives:- in succession; one after another (for RV); as before; as previously (for later texts). But, taking them separately, for **yathâ** he has 'in which manner; as; like' and for **pûrva**, 'former, prior, preceding' - both references applicable to the RV usage. Other translators of the verse have taken the phrase non-temporally: O'Flaherty [1981] has 'in their proper place'; and Griffith has 'in due order'.

ideas of time and cosmogony in the texts to see what correspondence to the later ideas can be found there.

2.2 Concepts of time and cosmogony in the early Vedic texts

The dominant image of time in the saṃhitas, and one that it holds in common with the later ideas, is that of a wheel, revolving in an unbroken and unending cycle. This is most commonly expressed in terms of the year, with the seasons, months and days identified with its various parts, e.g.:

> The twelve-spoked wheel of Order (cakraṃ ṛtasya) rolls around and around the sky and never ages. Seven hundred and twenty sons in pairs rest on it. (11)
>
> Twelve fellies, one wheel, three naves - who has understood this? Three hundred and sixty are set on it like poles that do not loosen. (48) [34]

As well as pointing to the cyclical nature of time measured in the revolution of the year, these verses also show the connection between time and order in the minds of the poets. This connection is taken up in other hymns, where the cycle of diurnal and seasonal repetitions visible in the world, is used as an image of

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34 RV I.164.11;48. C.f. also vs. 2,13; AV 4.35.4; 10.8.4;19.53.2. Among later Vedic references Gonda cites SB 3.4.4.15;4.3.1.7; - c.f. Gonda [1984] p.6. The idea of time as a continual revolution is also found in terms of the lunar and solar cycles e.g. RV 10.85.18,19 and can also be found in hymns to Dawn and the Sun, as the punctuators of time, e.g. RV I.92.10;10.177.3.

the more profound order that underlies and rules the workings of the universe, social and natural:

> As days follow days in regular succession, as seasons come after seasons in proper order, in the same way order their life-spans, O Arranger, so that the young do not abandon the old. [35]

> From the billowy ocean was born the year, that arranges days and nights, ruling over all that blinks its eyes [36]

The association of time with the order of the universe is developed into the idea that the year, as the unit which encompasses the complete temporal cycle, is the foundation upon which everything rests:

> All the worlds rest on this five-spoked wheel that rolls around and around [37]

In the two hymns to kâla in the Atharvaveda (19.53;54) these ideas are developed and time, now deified, is seen as the father of Prajâpati and the creator of everything:

> Seven wheels doth this time drive; seven [are] his naves, immortality forsooth [his] axle; he, time, including (?) all these beings, goes on as first god.

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35 10.18.5 Translated by O'Flaherty.
36 10.190.2 Translated by O'Flaherty.
37 I.164.13 C.f. also, v. 2. In much of this hymn, the wheel of time is closely associated with the wheel of the sacrifice, as it is elsewhere, and these verses are ambiguous as to which they are referring to - an ambiguity that could well be deliberate as the hymn is offered as a riddle. This association of time as the foundation for everything, is probably what lays behind the year's identification with everything that exists in the later Vedic texts: on this c.f. Gonda [1984] pp.62,91.

> Time generated yonder sky, time also these earths; what is and what is to be stands out sent forth by time.
>
> . . . time is the lord of all, who was father of Prajâpati. [38]

In another hymn, AV 10.8, the wheel of time, described in familiar terms in vs 4-6, is again credited with being the creator of everything:

> One-wheeled it rolls, one-rimmed, thousand-syllabled, forth in front, down behind; with a half it has generated all existence; what its [other] half is - what has become of that? (vs 7)

and again, implicitly, linked with Prajâpati:

> Prajâpati goes about within the womb; not being seen, he is manifoldly born; with a half he has generated all existence; what his [other] half is - which sign is that? (vs 13)

This is a very interesting hymn, and the one that provided Jacobi with the verses that he saw as evidence for an idea of periodic destruction (vs.39,40, mentioned above 2.1). While vs.7 and 13 are no less ambiguous than those Jacobi cites, it is never the less tempting to read the questions that the verses end with in terms of the destructive associations of time in the classical texts, where it is presented as rolling the world unceasingly towards its periodic dissolution.

While this element of cosmic destruction can only be very tentatively suggested however, the idea of time as the destroyer of **mortals** is much more firmly evident:

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38 AV 19.53.2,5,8. Here and elsewhere, additions in parentheses are the translator's unless otherwise indicated.

> They that are the five divine directions, that are the twelve divine seasons, that are the fangs of the year, let them be ever propitious to us.[39]

This idea is developed in the later Vedic texts where the year as time, measuring out the life of mortals, is identified with death, antaka, and seen as the cause of creatures' birth and destruction:

> The year causes some things to perish and calls others into existence
>
> Out of the year these creatures are born, in the year they grow, in the year they perish.[40]

Just as the view of time found in the early Vedic texts can be seen to bear some fundamental similarities to the later concepts, so too can the Vedic ideas of cosmogony. This is most immediately clear in the case of the cosmogonic <u>themes</u> common to both Vedic and classical texts, where the classical reworking of earlier ideas is most obvious and uncontroversial. Less obvious, but more significant, however, are the similarities that can be found in the underlying <u>structures</u> and <u>concerns</u> of the Vedic cosmogonies, and I shall turn to these first.

The principles of Vedic cosmogony have been analysed by a number of scholars. Varenne, in <u>Cosmogonies Védiques</u>, argues that Vedic creation is never ex nihilo,

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39 AV 11.6.22.

40 AiA 3,2,3; MaiU 6,15. C.f. also ŚB 10.4.3.1. These and others cited by Gonda [1984] p.13.

but rather is out of a primary matter - the waters or **hiraṇyagarbha** - where everything to be created was pre-existent in potential as yet unrealized in a state of chaos. According to Varenne, creation is therefore primarily:

> . . . un passage du chaos au cosmos, de l'informe au formé. . . [41]

and the cosmogonic act:

> la réalisation de quelque chose qui n'était que virtuel avant le geste cosmogonique. [42]

After the initial release of potential, this realization takes place by dividing and ordering the universe and its contents:

> les éléments constitutifs de l'univers préexistent au moins à l'état de germe;. . . il faut. . . les mettre à leur place, leur assigner leurs fonctions, puis veiller au bon fonctionnement de celles-ci. [43]

In this, the creator is like:

> un sculpteur qui d'une masse d'argile informe, insignifiante 'morte', fait un objet significatif 'vivant'. . . [44]

Varenne sees this same basic principle of creation being expressed in the cosmogonic variations in the Veda: in the **vṛtrahatyâ** myth, which he sees as the prototypical Vedic cosmogony, where Indra conquers Vṛtra, who represents 'l'informe', and releases the waters; and in the myths of Prajâpati, Puruṣa and Viśvakarman [45].

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41 Varenne [1982] p.56.
42 Ibid. p.60.
43 Ibid. p.69.
44 Ibid. p.162.
45 C.f. Ibid. pp.75f;161f.

Varenne goes on to argue that if creation is thus largely a matter of realizing and ordering the potential that already existed in a primary state of chaos, the possibility for a reversal of this process must exist as well: the passage from chaos to order carries with it the possibility of a return:

> Pourtant si l'évolution du Non-Etre à l'Etre est inéluctable. . . il va sans dire que l'inverse est vrai aussi: l'Etre, nécessairement, devra régresser vers le Non-Etre. [46]

In seeing the **vṛtrahatyâ** as the primary cosmogonic myth of the Rgveda, Varenne follows Norman Brown, who argues that this myth typifies the conflict between the forces of creation and the forces of inertia perpetually enacted in the **devâsura/âdityadânava** conflict [47]. Like Varenne, Norman Brown also views the imposition of order as an important element of the cosmogonic act, and in the later Ṛgvedic cosmogonies such as 10.72;81;90, he sees this ordering principle as being represented by a knowledge of the sacrificial rituals [48].

An examination of the Vedic hymns themselves certainly supports these ideas. That creation exists in potential before it is realized, can be seen in hymns which say that the waters which hold the **hiraṇyagarbha**, from which the world springs, were 'pregnant' with creation:

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46 Ibid. p.163, cited above, 2.1.
47 C.f. W. Norman Brown [1978] pp.25ff.
48 C.f. Ibid. pp.43/4.

> When the high waters came, pregnant with the embryo that is everything, bringing forth fire, he arose from that as the one life's breath of the gods. Who is the god whom we should worship with the oblation?[49]

In many of the cosmogonic myths the imposition of order is also stressed, with the universe being 'ordered' in the creative act, e.g., 10.82.2:

> The All-Maker is vast in mind and vast in strength. He is the one who forms, who sets in order. . .[50]

or, from the Puruṣasûkta:

> From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they set the worlds in order.[51]

This is also expressed in hymns where the cosmogonic act is seen as measuring out the realms of space, e.g.:

> He who made fast the tottering earth, who made still the quaking mountains, who measured out and extended the expanse of the air, who propped up the sky - he, my people, is Indra.[52]

Or again, in the separating out of the originally united heaven and earth,

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49 RV 10.121.7, translated by O'Flaherty. C.f. also 10.82.6 for a similar idea.
50 C.f. also vs. 3;3.38.3;10.129.2,3;190.2,3.
51 10.90.14 (translated by O'Flaherty).
52 2.12.2 (translated by O'Flaherty). C.f. also: RV 8.14.5,7;10.121.2;AV 13.1.7.

night and day, representing the ordered universe of space and time:

> . . .sky and earth have been propped apart, by Varuna's law. [53]

Just how fundamental the notion of order is to the cosmogonic accounts can be seen by the words that they use to express themselves: dhâtṛ, a common name for the creator, comes from the verb √dhâ - to put, place, set, and can also be translated 'the orderer' or 'the arranger' [54]; and the verb √klp, used, for example, in the Purusasûkta, displays a similar ambiguity [55]

Before leaving the subject of Vedic cosmogony, I should like to look briefly at some of the cosmogonic themes common to both Vedic and classical texts. Like the Vedas, the epic and Purâṇas know a number of different cosmogonic themes, some of which are obviously retained from Vedic sources: creation from the egg/hiraṇyagarbha; creation from the sacrifice; creation from the body of the primeval man/god [56]. Despite these obvious retentions, the most typically classical account, the creation from the lotus, at first sight appears to

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53 6.70.1 (translated by O'Flaherty). C.f. also: I.160.4;185.1,2;3.31.12;10.82.1,4. This 'measuring out' of the universe also goes back to time as an ordering principle, with the divisions of the year supplying the temporal distinctions that correspond to the ordering of space.

54 C.f. Monier-Williams p.514.

55 C.f. Ibid. p.308.

56 I shall examine all of these and give their Vedic analogues below in 4.2.

have no clear analogues in the Vedas. However, even here, a deeper search does reveal a number of significant connections with the Vedic cosmogonic accounts, and it will be interesting to briefly survey these, as they show how the themes have been preserved and re-worked in a different mythical setting [57].

In the most basic form of the classical myth, the world is covered by an unbroken expanse of water on which Nârâyaṇa lies sleeping with Śeṣa as his couch. Out of his navel (**nâbhî**) a lotus springs up and Brahmâ is born on this (or is asleep and wakes up, depending whether the cosmogony is **prâkṛtika** or **naimittika** and starts the process of creating the triple universe and its inhabitants.

The most obvious element of this myth common to both Vedic and classical accounts is the presence of the primeval waters. These are found in nearly all the Vedic creation myths, as for example, RV 10.129.3:

> Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning;
> with no distinguishing sign, all this was water. [58]

The idea of the waters being pregnant with the potential for creation, which, as we have seen, in the Vedic cosmogonies is expressed in terms of the waters holding the **hiraṇyagarbha** which contains the universe in embryo,

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57 Again, I shall examine this myth in more detail in chapter 4.2.

58 Translated by O'Flaherty. C.f. also RV 10.82;121;125;129;AV 12.1.8

is in the classical account represented by the presence of Nârâyaṇa and Śeṣa who, between them, contain the animate and inanimate world [59].

In some of the classical accounts, the initial urge to creation comes from Brahmâ's **ahaṃkâra**, his desire to exist, and this, too, finds a parallel in the Vedas, where, in some hymns, the creative process is started off by initial desire or **tapas**:

> Desire came upon that one in the beginning; that was the first seed of mind. [60]

If these elements of the later cosmogonies can all be seen quite clearly in the Vedic accounts, others can perhaps be traced more faintly. Thus in RV 10.82.5-6, we find:

> That which is beyond the sky and beyond this earth, beyond the gods and the Asuras - what was that first embryo that the waters received, where all the gods together saw it?
>
> He was the one whom the waters received as the first embryo, when all the gods came together. On the navel of the Unborn was set the One on whom all creatures rest - **ajasya nâbhau aḍhi ekam arpitam yasmin viśvâni bhuvanâni taṣṭhuḥ** [61]

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59 C.f.,10.121.7, cited above, and also RV 10.82.6, and ŚB 6.1.1.10 as an example of a Brâhmaṇa account. The cosmogonic potential of water is by no means unique to Indian mythology, of course, and is found in many other cultures also.

60 RV 10.129.4 (translated by O'Flaherty). C.f. also 10.190.1.

61 Translated by O'Flaherty.

These verses are addressed to Viśvakarman, the Vedic All-Maker who fashions the universe. In this, he has a clear functional connection with Brahmâ, the classical creator of **trailokya**, and thus, Viśvakarman set on the waters prior to creation in the Vedic myth, could by juxtaposed with Brahmâ set on the lotus prior to creation in the classical myth. This connection is strengthened by the words that are used in the Vedic account (v.6): **aja**, here relating to the waters, is a name of Viṣṇu Nârâyaṇa in later mythology (and the etymology of **nârâyaṇa** is often given as relating to 'waters' - **naras**); and the use of the word **nâbhî** echoes a similarity of conception in the symbolism involved.

Finally, the world being contained in Nârâyaṇa during the period of dissolution to await the coming creation, has clear conceptual connection with Vedic cosmogonies from a primeval body. In the Vedic myths this is expressed more directly in physical terms (although always with a metaphysical extension): the world is either created from the body of Puruṣa or Viśvakarman [62]; or is born from the womb of Aditi [63]; whereas in the classical account, the emphasis is more metaphysical, a change that is also apparent in the development of the word **puruṣa** as it is applied to Nârâyaṇa [64].

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62 E.g. RV 10.90;10.81.5-6.
63 E.g. RV 10.72.
64 Again, I shall return to these themes in 4.2 below.

This brief examination of time and cosmogony in the early Vedic texts has thus revealed a number of fundamental similarities to the classical ideas which it willbe helpful to recapitulate before going on to look at their development in the Brâhmaṇas. The most important similarity found in the Vedic concept of time was its presentation as a wheel, perpetually revolving in the universe. Here, at the most fundamental level, time is clearly perceived as cyclical, and while this cycle is only based on the smaller unit of the year, it is but an easy step, as we shall see in the next chapter, to extend this into the larger cycle of the **yuga**. Again, through its regular repetition, time is identified with cosmic order, and through this, seen as the foundation of the ordered universe. Time, therefore, clearly has a cosmic and cosmogonic reference. In the human sphere, this creative aspect is joined by a destructive one and time is presented as the creator and destroyer of mortals, a rôle which again, could easily be expanded onto a cosmic scale [65]. At the moment, however, it is important to stress that these ideas have only been found in embryo, and it is only in the next section that a clear cycle of creation and destruction will begin to emerge.

Similarly, in Vedic cosmogonic accounts, a number of ideas were found that will prove fundamental to the classical theories. Most important was the fact that the

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65 As will be demonstrated further in 4.3.

act of creation can be seen as the imposition of order onto a primeval chaos. The created universe is thus presented as an ordered universe, an idea that will be seen to recur in classical cosmogonies and, more significantly, in the nature of the decline through the four yugas. The cosmogonic implications of the vṛtrahatyâ and the devâsura struggle were also presented and, again, this will prove important in subsequent chapters [66]. Although at this stage there is no reason to view the cosmogonies as part of a cycle, and there is no mention of a corresponding cosmic destruction, some potential for this was seen to exist, in that creation as the ordering of chaos, suggests an inherently unstable situation. When this is connected with the cosmogonic significance of the vṛtrahatyâ and the devâsura struggle, the tenuous victory of order is made clearer and could suggest a need to periodically reinforce it. Again, however, this is going further than the early Vedic texts allow, and we shall only begin to see it clearly in the next stage of development.

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66 Especially 6.2-5.

2.3 Cosmogonic implications in the sacrifice: the râjasûya and agnicayana

An important cosmogonic theme in the early Vedic texts not yet examined, is that of the sacrifice which, as we have already seen, Norman Brown considers to be the main ordering principle of the later Rgvedic cosmogonies. The theme of a primeval sacrifice that brought the world into existence is found in its best-known form in the Purusasûkta (RV 10.90) [67]. Here, the gods sacrifice the primeval man who is 'all this, whatever has been and whatever is to be' (vs 2) and who is 'yet more than this' (vs 3). When the gods sacrifice him, they are sacrificing everything and 'from that sacrifice in which everything was offered' (vs 8,9), everything became created in the forms manifested in the universe, with different things corresponding to different parts of the dismembered body:

> His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born.
>
> The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and from his vital breath the Wind was born.
>
> From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they set the worlds in order. [68]

This last verse, especially, points once again to the idea of the creative principle being primarily an act of

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67 For other instances of sacrifice as a cosmogonic theme c.f. also, RV 10.81;130.
68 10.90.12-14 (translated by O'Flaherty).

imposing order, and suggests that it is the order of the ritual that transforms the puruṣa.

Another cosmogonic sacrifice is found in AV 13.1.46-55. Here it is performed by Rohita, the sun, and this time the constituents of the universe come out of the elements of the sacrifice themselves, rather than the sacrificial victim [69]. Thus, e.g. the earth was the sacrificial hearth, heat and cold were the two fires, mountains the sacrificial posts, rain the ghee, etc. and the necessity for these objects in the sacrifice seems to have impelled the creation of the parts of the universe which serve for them:

> Rain as sacrificial butter, heat as fire, earth as sacrificial hearth took shape; there, with songs, the fire shaped these mountains aloft. [70]

If the sacrifice is an important cosmogonic agent in the saṃhitâs, so too inversely is cosmogony an important factor in the philosophy of the sacrifice found in the Brâhmaṇas. According to Varenne, many sacrifices:

> ...jouent le rôle d'une re-création du monde, ou, si l'on préfère, 'miment' ce que fut l'apparition de l'univers et son agencement progressif [71]

and an examination of two Brâhmaṇa rituals, the **râjasûya** and the **agnicayana**, certainly supports this.

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69 Although a similar idea is also found in the Puruṣasûkta (v.6), where the seasons serve as parts of the sacrifice.
70 AV 13.1.53.
71 Varenne [1982] p.27.

In the examination of time and cosmogony in the early Vedic texts, although we found a basis for a cyclical concept of time measured by the year, with this cycle being given some cosmogonic significance, there was no real evidence that this was seen as a cycle of creation and destruction. In the mythology of the Brâhmaṇas, however, a cycle of creation, destruction and re-creation is made explicit and while it is enacted in the sphere of the sacrifice, its links with both the cosmos and time, in terms of the year, are made clear. This cycle can be seen when we look at the **râjasûya** and **agnicayana** rituals. In the first, as studied by Heesterman [72], it becomes obvious that the sacrifice is essentially concerned with the rebirth of the yajamâna, the king, and through him the rebirth and renewal of the kingdom and the cosmos, probably in a yearly cycle. The second sacrifice, as well as strengthening many of Heesterman's conclusions, makes the cosmogonic implications and the destruction preceding this renewal even clearer. When the different levels at play are put together, it would seem that the Brâhmaṇas contain the pattern of a yearly cycle of cosmic decline and renewal through the sacrifice that could provide a model for the essence of the classical theories, a model thus firmly rooted within the heart of **śrauta** literature. I will begin by looking at Heesterman's analysis of the **râjasûya** sacrifice.

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72 Heesterman [1957].

The rājasūya

Heesterman presents the **rājasūya** as a process whereby the **yajamāna** is identified with the cosmos and then, in the rhythm of the sacrifice, enacts the cosmic cycle, thereby rejuvenating the cosmos for another year:

> The place of sacrifice is by virtue of the code of connections identical with the cosmos; the three fires are the three divisions of space, the course of the sacrifice represents the year. . . In the centre of this sacrificial world stands the sacrificer for whose benefit the cosmic processes are set in motion by the ritualists, who know the connections. Thus the whole world is centered upon the sacrificer, who 'becomes all this' and represents in his person the cosmic drama. . . the sacrificer, realizing through the ritual symbols his identity with the universe, performs through the sacrifice the cyclical rhythm of the universe in a series of deaths and births; again and again he enters as an embryo upon the **dīkṣā** to be reborn out of the sacrifice.[73]

Heesterman goes through the different stages of the sacrifice, which lasts about two years in toto, showing how this interpretation works in the details of the ritual. The complete sacrifice can be broken down into three stages: 1) the preparatory year; 2) the unction festival itself; 3) the concluding year. In the first, Heesterman sees the different stages and variations for the year as all establishing the identity of the **yajamāna** as a cosmic embryo, ready to be reborn in the **rājasūya** proper. Thus the year can either be passed as a year-long **dīkṣā**, which he follows Sylvain Lévi in seeing as a process whereby the **yajamāna** is reduced to an embryonic

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73 Ibid. p.6,7.

state [74]; or in a series of **câturmâsya** sacrifices which take up the year and which he analyzes as the ritual evocation of the annual process of maturing and birth in the vegetable, animal and human spheres. Participation in these identifies the **yajamâna** with the cosmos and this yearly cosmic process [75]. Whichever of these is followed, the introductory year begins with a series of **iṣṭis** which he also presents as full of the symbolism of rebirth [76] and ends with another series of rituals again stressing the cosmic importance of the sacrifice. An example of this would be the **pañcedhmîya** rite which he sees as a ritual enacting of the cosmological drama:

> The **adhvaryu**, pushing out the fires to the points of the compass and moving clockwise round them, makes the cosmos unfold and enacts the rotation of the cosmic powers of which the sacrificer forms the pivot. [77]

That the second stage of the sacrifice, the central unction festival, occurs after this year-long 'embryonic' preparation and identification with the cosmos, emphasizes that the **yajamâna** and the cosmos he represents will be born anew out of the sacrifice. Again, this is born out by the detail of the different stages, with, for example, the unction fluid that will anoint the king being taken from each of the directions, 'stressing the idea of the king incorporating the universe' [78]. Again, the preparations that the **yajamâna** undergoes at this

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74 Op. Cit.
75 Ibid. p.29.
76 Ibid. p.15.
77 Ibid. p.39.
78 Ibid. p.89.

stage emphasize the process of the preceding year and 'turn the royal sacrificer into a cosmic embryo about to be born' [79]. Heesterman sees the crucial moment of the unction itself as an enactment of the pattern central to the theme of time:

> . . . through his unction he [the king] resumes both poles of the cosmic rhythm; he is born and at the same time disintegrates, dies, enters the womb again, to be reborn at the end of yet another time cycle. Like the cosmic man Prajâpati he enacts the cosmic process of birth-disintegration-rebirth. [80]

After this turning point, the rituals that follow are concerned with recreating the cosmos held in balance: the ritual chariot drive, for example, strengthens the identity of the king and the cosmos and ensures the renewal of the creative process [81] and the game of dice which follows it, plays out the creation of order in the universe [82]. The year following the unction, which can be taken up by various offerings displaying similar themes is also like another **dîkṣâ** [83]. It concludes with the haircutting ceremony, where again the year's growth of hair:

> stands for plant growth and the ripening of the crops, the cutting of his hair at the end of the year-long ripening process makes the universe fit again for a new productive time cycle. [84]

The rôle of the year in this sacrifice can be seen quite clearly, both in the yearly rhythm of its unfolding

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79 Ibid. p.102.
80 Ibid. p.122.
81 Ibid. pp.134ff.
82 Ibid. pp.150ff.
83 Ibid. p.218.
84 Ibid. p.217.

and also in the symbolism of twelve that recurs in many rituals providing **pratimâs**, symbolic likenesses, of the year [85]. This importance of the year in the structure of the sacrifice, leads Heesterman to conclude that the **râjasûya** was originally a yearly festival of renewal:

> . . .the **râjasûya** seems to be an abridgement of what originally must have been an unremitting series of yearly ceremonies with the object of regenerating the universe. . . The universe had yearly to be recreated and so had the king who, like the common **śrauta** sacrificer, incorporated the cosmos... In the cyclical conception of the world, the cosmogony-consecration must be repeated over and over again. [86]

Heesterman concludes his study by summarising the process in terms that show its deep significance for the later theories of time:

> Ascension and descent, disintegration and reintegration, chaotic dispersion and re-articulated structure, such are the terms of the cosmic rhythm as represented in the different phases of the **râjasûya**. They are epitomized in the king's unction, which has been seen to be at once birth, concentration of the cosmic forces, and death, disintegration. . .. on the joint between two subsequent time cycles, having encompassed and articulated the universe during the course of the

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85 For **pratimâs** of the year c.f. also Gonda [1984] p.28 who cites them in relation to the **aśvamedha** and they are doubtless found in other sacrifices also. I shall return to them in chapter 3.

86 Heesterman [1957] pp.10/11; c.f. also pp.44f and p.159. The idea of the sacrifice as renewal occurs elsewhere also. Thus, e.g., Hillebrandt [1980] says that various factors indicate the existence of a new fire that is to be produced year after year (Vol 1 p.61), and Gonda [1984] says that at the end of its course, the year is worn out and needs renewal, with the end of the year an inauspicious time for consecrations, etc. (p.9). This is also born out by a reference in the RV (6.103.8,9) which suggests a yearly rhythm of sacrifice: 'Brahmins with soma raise their voices offering the prayer for the beginning of the year...'(8) 'They have kept the order of the twelve-month as ordained by the gods; these men do not neglect the season'(9). Translated by O'Flaherty.

> preceding time cycle, he emerges from his **dîkṣâ**, that is his embryonic state, to be born; but at the same time he dies and disintegrates, to ripen during another year-long **dîkṣâ**. . . towards a new birth at the end of the next time cycle when the same process starts all over again.[87]

If Heesterman's interpretation is correct, therefore, in the **râjasûya** the concept of a yearly cycle of decay and recreation in the cosmos can clearly be seen. Expanded, this could serve as a model for the cycle of creation and destruction which is one of the most essential structures of the **yuga** theory. Such an interpretation of the cosmic dimensions of the **râjasûya** is supported when we look at the relationship between the **agnicayana** ceremony and the myths of Prajâpati.

The agnicayana

Prajâpati is hardly mentioned in the Ṛgveda, but by the time of the Brâhmaṇas the myth of his disintegration and reconstruction is not only the most typical cosmogony, but is also the texts' central pre-occupation. As Silburn says:

> . . . la description de la reconstitution du Dieu forme le contenu des Brâhmaṇa, le but qu'ils poursuivent sans se lasser.[88]

This centrality of Prajâpati is certainly true of the Śatapatha Brâhmaṇa creation myths, where it is closely linked with the **agnicayana** ritual. Consequently, this is

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87 Heesterman [1957] p.224.
88 Silburn [1955] p.51.

the Brâhmaṇa I shall concentrate on, firstly giving an account of the myth and then going on to look at the light it throws on aspects of the later theories of time.

The most succinct account of the myth appears in ŚB 7.1.2.1-4:

> Prajâpati produced creatures. Having produced creatures, and run the whole race, he became relaxed. From him, when relaxed, the vital air went out from within: then his vigour went out of him. That having gone out, he fell down. From him, thus fallen, food flowed forth: it was from that eye on which he lay that his food flowed. And, verily, there was then no firm foundation whatever here. (1)
>
> The gods spake, 'Verily, there is no other foundation than this: let us restore even him, our father Prajâpati; he shall be our foundation'. (2)
>
> They said unto Agni, 'Verily, there is no foundation other than this: in thee we will restore this our father Prajâpati; he shall be our foundation.' - 'What will then be my reward?' said he. (3)
>
> They spake, 'This Prajâpati is food: with thee for our mouth we will eat that food, and he (Prajâpati) shall be the food of us, having thee for our mouth'. (4) [89]

This outline is embellished elsewhere in the SB and a long and detailed version occurs in 6.1.1-2, opening the section on the **agnicayana**. This version says that in the beginning there was only **asat** (6.1.1.1): this became seven **puruṣas** who joined to form one **puruṣa**, Prajâpati, who is straightaway identified with the fire-altar about to be built:

> That same person became Prajâpati. . . And that Person which became Prajâpati is this very Agni (fire-altar), who is now (to be) built. (5)

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89 For this pattern of creation-disintegration-healing through the sacrifice, c.f. also, I.6.3.35-6; 3.9.1.1-4;10.1.1.1-2.

Prajâpati desires to create and through **tapas** produces the waters. He enters the waters and an egg arises (10) from which is produced the earth. By his union with the earth air is produced (14), and then, in a series of successive creative acts, the whole universe and its inhabitants (6.1.1.14-2.11). When he has finished creating, Prajâpati falls apart and calls to Agni to restore him (2.12-13), an act which is linked to the present **yajamâna's** building up of the fire altar (2.16ff). This building up works on three levels: individual, building up Prajâpati's bodily parts (17) [90]; temporal, building up the year (18); and spatial, building up the regions (19). By building up the bricks in the **agnicayana** rituals, the **yajamâna** 'heals Father Prajâpati' (24), just as the gods did (21). Conversely, as well as enacting, in the present, the reconstruction of Prajâpati in the past, the temporal congruity works the other way and the advantages that accrued to Prajâpati and the gods in the past from their reconstruction, are enjoyed by the yajamâna in the present (36):

> . . .by assuming that form [of the fire-altar in the shape of a bird] the gods became immortal: and what thereby the vital airs, and Prajâpati, and the gods became, that indeed he (the sacrificer) thereby becomes. [91]

These two accounts of Prajâpati's creation and disintegration, and its relationship to the **agnicayana**,

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90 C.f. also 10.1.3.4 - these are the mortal parts of Prajâpati i.e. the **yajamâna** who will become immortal through the sacrifice.

91 For immortality as the result of the ritual, c.f. also the account at 10.1.3.1-6 discussed below, and 10.4.3.9.

bear out a lot of the ideas that Heesterman sees to be at play in the **râjasûya**, and bring out their connection with the classical cycle more clearly. I shall look at the similarities with the **râjasûya** that support Heesterman's analysis first, and then go on to their relevance for the classical cycle.

That some of the meaning of the sacrifice comes from its re-enactment of the cosmogony is made very clear in these two ŚB accounts and the fact that the second (6.1.1-2) opens the whole section on the **agnicayana** in the Brâhmana, firmly roots the understanding of the ritual in the cosmogonic myth. Moreover, throughout the description, the sacrifice currently being performed by the yajamâna is explicitly related back to the cosmogonic sacrificial acts of Prajâpati and the gods. This is seen in the above account at 1.5;2.16ff;2.24, etc., and elsewhere in passages such as the following from the building of the nirṛti altar:

> . . .when he now does this, it is because he thinks, 'I must do what the gods did.' [92]

As we saw from the second account given above, because of the interconnectedness of the present sacrifice and the past cosmogony, the yajamâna currently heals Prajâpati (6.1.2.24) and gains immortality himself (6.1.2.30) and this congruence of time is emphasized elsewhere, in 10.1.1.3:

> And that Prajâpati who became relaxed is that very Fire-Altar which here is built; and those joints of

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92 7.2.1.4 C.f. also, 5.2.2.18;6.2.2.23-24;10.1.3.5,7

> his, the days and nights, which became relaxed are no other than the bricks: thus when he lays down these. . ., he thereby restores to him those joints of his.

In a passage at 5.2.2.18 this is taken even further and suggests that the ability to influence the present enjoyed individually at 6.1.2.36 is imparted more universally in terms of rejuvenating the cosmos:

> . . . Prajâpati, truly, is that sacrifice which is here performed, and from which these creatures have been produced, - and, indeed, they are even now produced after this one. . .

This gets us very close to Heesterman's interpretation of the **râjasûya** as a ritual of cosmic renewal and this indeed is the conclusion that Gonda arrives at separately in relation to the **agnicayana**:

> . . . the sacrificer and his officiants re-enact a timeless part, when the god who was to create life in the world was periodically engaged in creating . . . Prajâpati's periodical creative activity, his relaxation and 'reconstruction' bring about and guarantee the continuation of all creative processes.[93]

The importance of the **yajamâna** at the centre of this process, is also quite apparent in the **agnicayana**, through his identification with Prajâpati. Thus in 10.4.2.29,30, just as Prajâpati became the body of all things, so too does the yajamâna. Again, in 3.2.1.11, the **yajamâna** puts on a hempen girdle because when Prajâpati, having been an embryo, sprang out of the sacrifice, the amnion became hemp. By putting it on, the **yajamâna**:

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93 Gonda [1984] p.86.

> . . .in like manner as Prajâpati, having become an embryo, sprung forth from that sacrifice, so does he become an embryo and spring forth from that sacrifice.

This identification of the **yajamâna** with Prajâpati as the cosmic embryo preparing for birth in the course of a year is also taken up in 7.2.1.5,6 and strongly reinforces Heesterman's interpretation of the **yajamâna** as cosmic embryo in the **râjasûya**.

The connections between the sacrifice and time, in the form of the year found in the **râjasûya** can be seen in the **agnicayana** as well. This is made especially clear in a number of references that state Prajâpati to be the year and the sacrifice to be Prajâpati [94]. In some accounts of Prajâpati's disintegration, his identity with the year is also stressed and it is said, e.g., at I.6.3.35-36 that the joints that fell apart were the joints of time: day and night, the seasons, etc., and that the gods reconstructed him by performing sacrifices at those times [95]. Again, as in the **râjasûya**, the links with the year are stressed by the rôle of the year in the ritual, both by **pratimâs** [96] and by the duration of the rites:

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94 3.2.2.4;5.2.1.2;11.1.1.1. On this also c.f. Gonda [1984] p.78.

95 C.f. also 10.1.1.1-2 and Silburn [1955] p.3, who argues that the aim of the ritual is to build the continuous flow of time into an organised structure of the year.

96 6.2.2.8;12;36,37

> One ought to build him (Agni, the fire-altar) up in ... a year, and recite for a year. [97]

They are also found clearly in the cosmogonic myth itself, for in the continuation of the account at the beginning of the **agnicayana** section, another cosmogony is given and there, after creating the earth, Prajâpati and his partner Uṣas, the dawn, consecrated themselves for a year (vs.7-9), i.e. underwent **dîkṣâ** (like the **râjasûya yajamâna** and the embryonic Prajâpati and **yajamâna** in 7.2.1.5-6). Prajâpati, who is identified with the year, and the seasons then impregnate Usas who gives birth after another year (v.8) [98].

These then are the ways in which the **agnicayana** and the myth of Prajâpati bear out Heesterman's interpretation of the **rajâsûya** and give his important findings there a broader base in a different sacrifice. Turning now to its implications for the classical theories of time, the most obvious of these is to be found in the recital itself: Prajâpati's disintegration after creating the world and his subsequent reconstruction through the sacrifice. This is important for two reasons. Firstly because it provides a clear pattern of cosmogony as a process of creation-disintegration-renewal, and both Gonda and Silburn have seen the myth and sacrifice in this way [99]. This pattern comes very close to the classical cycle of creation-

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97 6.1.3.20

98 For another example of the importance of the year, c.f. also account at 11.1.6.1-15 discussed below.

99 Gonda [1984] pp.90,91; Silburn [1955] p.3.

destruction-recreation and provides an even firmer foundation for it than that of the **râjasûya's** yearly regeneration.

This interpretation of the myth of Prajâpati's disintegration and renewal is strengthened by looking at variants to the basic account which can also be found in the ŚB. These are not so closely connected with the stages of the sacrifice but demonstrate the same idea of creation/disintegration/reconstruction, expressed in different ways, and show that creation is tinged with destruction and must come to an end or be renewed.

The first is at 10.1.3.1-6. Here, Prajâpati created the gods and mortal beings but also created death to consume them. As he was himself half mortal and half immortal, he was afraid of death, so to hide he became clay and water and entered the earth. The gods found him, gathered him up and made a brick which, when fired, was immortal [100]. By encompassing his mortal part, earth, with the immortal brick in the **agnicayana**, the gods give him immortality. Here therefore, we have the sequence creation/disintegration/reconstruction expressed in slightly different terms as creation/fear of death:dispersal to escape death (i.e. disintegration)/the attainment of immortality via the ritual. This variant is

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100 This making of the brick links back to the clear disintegration/reconstruction account at 6.1.2.29.

therefore very close to the basic account and bears out its fundamental structure.

In 10.4.2.2-18 we find a variant that takes the myth nearer to the classical cycle. Here, after creating, Prajâpati does not fall apart, but instead feels <u>empty</u> and wants to get the created things <u>back into his body</u>. This, therefore, takes us closer to the classical image of emission/resorption instead of disintegration/ reconstruction.

11.1.6.1-15 provides an account that is furthest from the basic myth and the one that corresponds most closely with the classical ideas. Prajâpati is born after a year's gestation in the **hiraṇyagarbha**, but this time, instead of disintegration following creation, a specific limit is put on his life span at the very beginning:

> He was born with a life of a thousand years: even as one might see in the distance the opposite shore, so did he behold the opposite shore (the end) of his own life. (vs 6)

The gods, also, whom he creates are 'born with a life of a thousand years' (vs 15). Thus, in this account, the span of creation is clearly limited, and the length allotted to it, 1,000 years, is one that will be seen to be highly significant for the later ideas. It suggests, moreover, that the basic unit of the cycle of time (i.e. the cycle in which the cosmos must be regenerated) has been expanded from a single year to a thousand years and

such a process of expansion is also an important step towards the larger time-scales of the classical computations.

As well as setting a temporal limit to creation, this passage can be seen to express the idea of its limitation in another way that will also prove important for the later ideas. After creating the gods, who correspond to the daylight, Prajâpati goes on to create the **asuras**:

> And by the downward breathing he created the Asuras: they were created on entering this earth. Having created them there was, as it were, darkness for him. (8)
>
> He knew, 'Verily, I have created evil for myself since, after creating, there has come to be, as it were, darkness for me.' Even then he smote them with evil, and owing to this it was that they were overcome. (9a)
>
> . . .
>
> Now what daylight, as it were, there was for him, on creating the gods, of that he made the day; and what darkness, as it were, there was for him, on creating the Asuras, of that he made the night: they are these two, day and night. (11)

Prajâpati's creation of the **asuras** and darkness, immediately following the gods and the light, can be read as another expression of the idea that the act of creation brings with it the potential for destruction, here embodied by the **asuras**. The idea that the **asuras**/darkness/destruction are an unavoidable part of creation is strengthened by the fact that they are created by the other half of Prajâpati's breath: the gods were created from his inward breath (implied by v.7), and

the **asuras** from his outward breath (v.8). The inherent tension between creation and destruction already expressed in other ways is therefore here connected with the cycle of victories and defeats in the **devâsura** struggle to be played out in the ensuing period. That the **devâsura** struggle should be seen to express this idea is not surprising, given the importance of the **vṛtrahatyâ** as a cosmogonic myth in the early Vedic texts, and it is an expression that will be seen to endure in the classical texts also, both in some cosmogonic accounts and in the rôle of the **avatâra** at the **yuga** juncture.

Conclusions

Although the search for specific ideas and words relating to the **yuga** theory unearthed very few Vedic antecedents for the later ideas, this broader investigation has proved more fruitful. The early Vedic texts showed a clear understanding of time as a cycle, with the year as its basic unit of revolution. Their cosmogonic accounts showed the primary creative principle to be the imposition of order onto pre-existent chaos, as well as the cosmogonic significance of the **vṛtrahatyâ**.

These ideas were all developed in the Brâhmaṇas. In the **râjasûya**, the cycle was seen to be a yearly pattern of decline and renewal in which the symbolic death and rebirth of the king/**yajamâna** encompassed the cyclical regeneration of the cosmos. In the **agnicayana**, this pattern was confirmed, as was the cosmogonic significance of the sacrifice, and the accompanying myths of Prajâpati were seen to take the pattern closer to the classical model of creation/destruction/re-creation. This was expressed in a number of variants: as Prajâpati creating/falling apart/being reconstructed; as Prajâpati creating beings and death/dispersing himself because he is afraid of death/being gathered together and made immortal; as Prajâpati creating/feeling empty/desiring to take things back into himself.

The falling apart of Prajâpati and its variants were also seen to express the same idea in a different way, viz., that creation is inherently connected with the seeds of its own destruction. Prajâpati falls apart/feels empty <u>through</u> the process of creation; Prajâpati creates death and is afraid of it, being himself half mortal; Prajâpati creates the **asuras** and darkness from the same expiration that must follow the inhalation that created the gods and light.

Although this destructive aspect of the creative process is not really brought out in the early Vedic texts, the potential for such an idea does exist. The

pre-existence of chaos suggests an inherent instability in creation's hold; and the **vṛtrahatyâ** cosmogony, connected as it is with the **devâsura** struggle, suggests that the initial creative act is just part of an on-going battle.

Although the importance of some of these themes for the later ideas will not yet be apparent, it is clear that they do display, in embryo at least, many of the essential structures of the classical theories, even though the details are still a long way from their classical expression.

However, although this provides a much firmer Vedic basis for the classical ideas than has previously been supposed, there are still some important elements of the later theories missing from these findings, viz., the measurement of four **yugas** with their characteristic features, which is nowhere conclusively found, and the details of the **pralaya** that pervade the epic. Neither of these absences presents a fundamental problem, however . From the work of other scholars, it seems very likely that a foundation for the structure of the **pralaya** can be found elsewhere in the Brâhmaṇas: in the **dakṣayajña** and the relationship of Rudra and Viṣṇu to the sacrifice [101]. That is not to say that the **pralaya** itself was

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101 For a foundation in the **dakṣayajña**, c.f. Hiltebeitel [1976] pp.312ff and Scheuer [1982] pp.333ff on Hiltebeitel's arguments. Biardeau, Hiltebeitel and Scheuer all concur in seeing Viṣṇu and Śivas' rôles in the **pralaya** to have Vedic parallels, and Biardeau, especially, relates it to the funerary sacrifice, c.f.

known, however, and it seems very unlikely that a developed myth of cosmic destruction on the scale of the classical model could have existed without leaving some trace, especially in descriptions of the deities associated with the **pralaya**: Antaka, Yama, Agni and Rudra [102]. As for the lack of any clear theory of four **yugas**, this would seem to fit in with the argument I shall advance below (5.5), that the **yugas** as such are not essential to the overall concept of time and merely serve to punctuate the decline of **dharma** and disintegration of order.

The absence of a cycle of four **yugas** at this stage is, therefore, not surprising and various explanations for it could be offered. Church, as we have seen, suggests that the **yuga** 'story' formed part of the Vedic tradition that went unrecorded [103]. While this must surely have existed, and indeed, by nature of its genre be more likely to provide the true, lost, basis for the epics and Purânas than the Vedic texts we have, it is still strange that these aspects of the theory of time should have been left out if they were extant, when so many other characteristics have left traces in the preserved corpus. Another possibility is that these ideas came from outside India and were adapted to the

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Biardeau [1971]. I find the arguments of these scholars very convincing, but have been unable to follow them up for the purposes of this thesis: see suggestions for future research in Chapter 7.

102 The ŚB does, of course, know the myth of the universal flood, but not linked to a periodic destruction. C.f. ŚB 1.8.1.1-6.

103 Church [1974] p.7, cited above.

already existing structures [104]. This certainly seems a tenable explanation, especially as the Greek ideas of the different ages of the world display remarkable similarities to the Indian **yugas** and are found in texts of a significantly earlier date than the Mahâbhârata [105]. However, a more detailed study of comparative mythology than is within the scope or brief of this thesis would be necessary before any satisfactory conclusions could be arrived at on this point. Although these serious gaps in the theory do exist, I hope this investigation has shown that the essential structures of the classical ideas can be found from the **saṃhitâs** onwards and that it will become apparent that as well as providing a useful historical framework, an understanding

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104 C.f. Gombrich [1975] p.117 (citing Kirfel's idea of Babylonian influence) and p.118.

105 C.f Hesiod Works and Days [Wender 1973] ll.105-202. Although Hesiod gives five ages, it seems likely that the age of the heroes is an insertion into a basic myth of four ages, c.f. Kirby Flower Smith [1908]. Hesiod's descriptions of the first and last ages show greatest similarities with the Indian yugas. Thus: 'The gods, who live on Mount Olympus, first /Fashioned a golden race of mortal men; /These lived in the reign of Kronos, king of heaven, /And like the gods they lived with happy hearts /Untouched by work or sorrow. Vile old age /Never appeared, but always lively-limbed, /Far from all ills, they feasted happily. /Death came to them as sleep, and all good things /Were theirs; ungrudgingly, the fertile land /Gave up her fruits unasked.' (108-17) 'This is the race of iron. Now, by day, /Men work and grieve unceasingly; by night, /They waste away and die. The gods will give /Harsh burdens, but will mingle in some good; /Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men, /When babies shall be born with greying hair. /Father will have no common bond with son, /Neither will guest with host, nor friend with friend; /The brother-love of past days will be gone. /Men will dishonour parents who grow old /Too quickly. . .' (180-91). With the exception of the age of the heroes, the other ages show a progressive decline but otherwise are not like the yugas in their characteristics.

of their Vedic expression helps to throw light on the constituents of the epic theories.

CHAPTER 3 - THE DIVISIONS OF TIME

This is the area of the theories of time in which the Mbh details display the greatest differences from those in the Purâṇas. These are differences, moreover, which reflect most closely on the interests of other scholars in the field. Consequently, in this chapter, I shall be concerned to establish the details of the divisions of time as they appear in the epic references, and to see how these differ from the general picture afforded by the Purâṇas. After this, I shall briefly refer back to the Vedic ideas, and suggest how the epic divisions relate to these. As the differences in the scheme of divisions in the epic and Purâṇas are quite complex, I propose to approach the Mbh accounts by first giving an outline of the Purânic schema as a background against which to understand them. I am taking the following as my sources for the classical divisions:- Kûrma I.5.7-16;Mârk 46.3-44 [1];Viṣṇu I.3;Matsya 142.11-37;Bhâg. 3.11.18-24.

Purâṇic divisions of time

In both epic and Purâṇas, the computations of time usually begin with the smallest unit, a winking of the eye (**nimeṣa**), and from there build up to the vast time-scales of the **yugas** and **kalpas**. The most common list of the sub-annual divisions is as follows:

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1 This reference is to Pargiter: in Dimmitt and van Buitenen it is 43.3-44.

15 nimeṣa	=	one kâṣṭhâ
30 kâṣṭhâ	=	one muhûrta
30 muhûrta	=	one day and night
30 days and nights	=	one month of two fortnights, one light and one dark
12 months	=	one year (varṣa) of two six month ayaṇas, one when the sun is in the north (uttarâyaṇa) and one when it is in the south (dakṣinâyaṇa)

A year of humans (mânava) = a day and night of the gods (uttarâyaṇa is the day and dakṣinâyaṇa the night), and from here the lists go into years of the gods (divya) to make the larger computations, with one divya year thus being equal to 360 mânava years. Each cycle of four yugas, called a mahâyuga or caturyuga lasts 12,000 divya years (i.e. 4,320,000 human years):

> divyair varṣasahasrais tu
> kṛtatretâdisamjñitam
> cáturyugam dvádaśabhih. . .
>
> The four yugas called kṛta, tretâ, etc. (are calculated with) twelve hundred years of the gods.[2]

Each of the four yugas has a dawn (saṃdhyâ) and a dusk (saṃdhyâṃśa) as well as the main period, and the 12,000 years are distributed between them as follows [3]:

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2 Kûrma I.5.7

3 These are divya years: in human years the measurements would be

	1,728,000
	1,296,000
	864,000
	432,000
	4,320,000

I will return to the significance of the total being 12,000 divya years and the necessity of the dawns and dusks for achieving this at the end of this chapter.

		saṃdhyâ	saṃdhyâṁśa
kṛta	4,000	400	400
tṛetâ	3,000	300	300
dvâpara	2,000	200	200
kali	1,000	100	100

A thousand of these four-yuga periods make a **kalpa** which is a day of Brahmâ and this is brought to an end by the **naimittika pralaya**, and followed by a **brâhma** night of equal length:

> **brâhmam ekam ahaḥ kalpas tâvatî râtrir iṣyate**
> **caturyugasahasraṃ tu kalpam ahur manîṣiṇaḥ**
>
> One day of Brahmâ is called a **kalpa** and a night likewise. The wise say a **kalpa** is a thousand of the four yugas.[4]

Three hundred and sixty such **kalpas** make a year of Brahmâ (**mahâkalpa**) and 100 years make the extent of Brahmâ's life, called a **para**, which is divided into two 50 **brâhma** year **parârdhas**. The period of Brahmâ's life is concluded by the **prâkṛtika pralaya**, as the period of his day had been by the **naimittika**, and again, this is followed by a corresponding period of non-creation before the next Brahmâ is born at the beginning of a new **para**. We are currently in the eighth **mahâkalpa** of the second **parârdha** of Brahmâ's life, called the **varâhakalpa** [5]. To summarise this therefore, the larger divisions are as follows:

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4 Kûrma I.5.15

5 According to Wilson, the **varâhakalpa** and its immediate predecessor, the **padmakalpa** are the only two which are regularly named. C.f. (1840) p.25, fnt.9. Texts as heterogeneous as the Purâṇas present many variants to these basic divisions, of course, but I am here only concerned to give an outline of those that are most typical.

360 human years	= 1 year of the gods		
1 year of the gods	= 1 **mahâyuga**	**kṛta**	4800
		tṛetâ	3600
		dvâpara	2400
		kali	1200
1000 **mahâyugas**	= 1 day of Brahmâ (kalpa) - followed by a brâhma night of equal length		**naimittika pralaya** cycle
360 **brâhma** days (and nights)	= 1 year of Brahmâ (**mahâkalpa**)		
100 **brâhma** years	= 1 lifetime of Brahmâ (para = 2 x parârdha) - followed by period of dissolution of equal length		**prâkṛtika pralaya** cycle

This division into **yugas**, **mahâyugas** and **kalpas** is the simplest schema, but a **kalpa** can also be divided up according to **manvantaras**, periods presided over by a Manu. There are 14 **manvantaras** in a **kalpa** and each **manvantara** thus lasts for 1/14th of a **kalpa**, which is approximately 71 **mahâyugas** [6]. There are some variations in the lists of **manvantaras**, but the following from the Kûrma Purâṇa is fairly representative:

1 Svâyaṃbhuva
2 Svârociṣa
3 Uttama
4 Tâmasa
5 Raivata
6 Câkṣuṣa
7 Vaivasvata
8 Sâvarṇa
9 Dakṣasâvarṇa
10 Brahmasâvarṇa
11 Dharmasâvarṇa

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6 The approximation comes from the fact that 1000 divided by 14 leaves a remainder of six **mahâyugas**, so each **manvantara** also contains 1/14th of this remainder as well.

12 Rudrasâvarṇa
13 Rocamâna
14 Bhautya [7]

Again, the current period is situated in the centre of this schema, at the tail end of the seventh, **vaivasvata manvantara.**

Two important devices are at play throughout these divisions. The first is the separation of the units by cycles of creation and destruction. The most obvious of these are the **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika pralaya** cycles, which respectively punctuate a day and a life of Brahmâ. However, as I shall argue in more detail below, these find echoes on a correspondingly smaller scale in the lesser units also, with the **manvantara, mahâyuga** and **yuga** all involving some form of dissolution and recreation, either literal or symbolic [8]. The other device which is used to facilitate the introduction of increasingly greater units of time, is the re-definition of days and nights in terms of larger time scales associated with different classes of beings. Thus, as we have seen, a year of humans = a day and night of the gods and (twice) 12,000 years of the gods = a day and night of Brahmâ. This is also used in subdivisions - a month of humans = a day and night of the pitrs; and to extend the whole system beyond the cycle of Brahmâ, with 100 years of

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7 Kûrma I.49.4,5;51.30,31. For variations in the list c.f. for example, Matsya 9.32-34; Bhâg 8.13.30,33

8 As, of course, had the year in the Vedic texts, a point I shall return to below.

Brahmâ (i.e a **para**) equalling a day of 'the Supreme Lord' [9] or, alternatively, according to the Matsya:

> '20 years of Brahmâ are equal to one day of Śiva and 100 years of Śiva to one wink of the eye of Viṣnu' [10]

Thus, as Gombrich says of Indian cosmology in general, we are in 'a universe of chinese boxes' [11].

Epic divisions of time

Using this classical statement of the divisions of time as a coherent background, I will now turn to an examination of the divisions of time found in the Mbh yuga references, looking first at the more extended references found at 3.186.18-23 and 12.224.12-31, and then going on to correlate the information found in the smaller references scattered throughout the epic [12]. In particular, I will be trying to evaluate how much of the classical schema is consistently known and shall be looking both for nominal differences, i.e. what each of

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9 Mârk 46[43].7

10 Matsya 290.22. Translated Akhtar [1972] pp.368/9.

11 Gombrich [1975] p.112. This mechanism, especially in its extension beyond the **brahmâ** cycle, also brings up the interesting question of whether the universe is infinite or finite: do a sufficient number of Viṣnu nimeṣa ultimately add up to a complete Viṣnu life? Certainly, other passages indicate that a limit to Viṣnu's life is not intended, and the Viṣnu P adds a qualification to an equation of a **para** with a day of Viṣnu: 'But,in fact, to that eternal supreme spirit there is neither day nor night, and these distinctions are only figuratively applied to the almighty' (Wilson [1840] p.637.

12 There are two other longer references containing time divisions also, at 12.271.30f and 299.1-14, but they do not conform to the measurements of the classical system at all and I will treat them with other deviant references below.

the divisions is called, whether yuga, mahâyuga or kalpa etc., and also for substantive differences in the basic unit of the cycle. Especially, I shall be trying to establish (1) whether the pratisarga/naimittikapralaya creation and destruction distinctively punctuates the simple four-yuga in the epic, or whether it relates to the complete cycle of 1000 four-yugas, as it does in the Purânas; and (2) whether there is evidence for the two hierarchised cycles found in the Purâṇas, corresponding to the day and the life of Brahmâ.

Of the two extended references, the closest to the Purâṇic schema is that found at 12.224.12-31 which begins with a very similar list of the smaller units of time and then goes on to the different measures of days and nights for humans, pitrs and gods (vs.15,16). This list concludes with the measurement of a day and night of Brahmâ which here, as in the Purâṇas is specifically given in years of the gods:

> ye te râtryahanî purve kîrtite daivalaukike
> tayoḥ saṃkhyâya varṣâgraṃ brâhme
> vakṣyâmy ahaḥkṣape (17)
>
> Calculating in that day and night in the world of the gods which was previously mentioned, I will describe a day and night of Brahmâ and also his years. (17)

This is followed by the classical divisions of the four individual yugas (4,800 etc.), by implication (following v.17), but not explicitly, in divya years (vs.19-20). After a brief description of the four yugas'

characteristics it goes on to say:

> etâṃ dvâdaśasâhasrîṃ yugâkhyâṃ kavayo viduḥ
> sahasraṃ parivṛttaṃ tad brâhmaṃ divasam ucyate (28)
> . . .
>
> sahasrayugaparyantam ahar yad brahmano viduh
> râtriṃ yugasahasrântâṃ te >horâtravido janâḥ (30)

> The wise know the period of a yuga to be this one of 12,000 (years); repeated 1,000 times that is called a day of Brahmâ. (28)
> . .
>
> Those people who know what a day and night is, know a day of Brahmâ to stretch to 1,000 yugas and a night to last for 1,000 yugas. (30)

Thus while the units under discussion are here substantively the same as in the Purâṇas (a cycle of 12,000 years repeated 1,000 times), a terminological difference is being displayed, as the Mbh passage is calling the 12,000 years simply a yuga rather than the Purâṇic caturyuga or mahâyuga.

The reference at 3.186.18-23 conforms to this fairly closely: it also calls the 12,000 year cycle simply a yuga:

> eṣâ dvâdaśasâhasrî yugâkhyâ parikîrtitâ (22)

and again, a thousand of these cycles, with the kali of one followed by the kṛta of the next, is a day of Brahmâ:

etat sahasraparyantam aho brâhmam udâhṛtam
viśvam hi brahmabhavane sarvaśaḥ
parivartate
lokânâm manujavyâghra pralayam tam vidur
budhâḥ (23)

This going on for a thousand (times) is called a day of Brahmâ. (Then) everything goes back completely to its abode in Brahmâ. The wise know that to be the dissolution of the worlds, O Tiger among men. (23)

However, this passage differs from the one in the Śântiparva in that the computations are nowhere classified as divya. Thus, for example, in its computation of the kṛta yuga it simply has:

catvâry āhuḥ sahasrâṇi varṣâṇâm tat
kṛtam yugam
tasya tâvac chatî saṃdhyâ saṃdhyâṃśaś ca
tataḥ param (18)

They say the krta yuga is 4,000 years long and its dawn and dusk are so many hundreds (of years) besides that. (18)

As well as simply using the word **yuga** for the **caturyuga** unit, neither of these extended passages use the word **kalpa** to describe the 1,000 **yuga** day of Brahmâ and neither take the computation beyond this point into a life of Brahmâ. Again, neither of them make any mention of manvantaras. These differences from the classical system are largely born out by the many smaller references in the Mbh which I will now examine in relationship to them, beginning with the relatively simple issues of divine versus human years and manvantaras, and then going on to the more complex yuga/kalpa/para distinctions.

3.1 The occurrence of divya years and the manvantara in the Mbh

Apart from 12.224.17, just examined, only one other passage uses the qualification **divya** with respect to a unit of time (other than **ahorâtra**) and that is 12.201.9[13]. This states that Soma performed penances for 1,000 celestial **yugas** - **sahasram . . . divyânâṃ yugânâm**. The precise meaning of **divyânâṃ yugânâm**, however, is unclear, and need not refer to **yugas** computed in **divya** years, as in the Manusmṛti at least, the term **divyayuga** seems to often refer to a **mahâyuga** rather than a yuga reckoned in **divya** years [14]. The consistent omission of divine as a qualification of year in all but 12.224.17, thus suggests that the Mbh computations are understood to be in the simpler scheme of human years. This is a stage in the theory's development posited by Church, but her failure to treat the Mbh details led her to assert that there was no textual evidence for it [15].

An examination of the smaller references also bears out the epic's comparative ignorance of the **manvantara** system. While there are passages which know the **manvantara** as a unit, these are scarce and all appear in the Śântiparva. Here, two references do clearly refer to

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13 The use of 'divine years' or 'years of the gods' in other passages in the Roy translation is a gloss.
14 Bühler [1967] pp.71f,79-80,115,123.
15 C.f. Church [1970] p.150. Gupta [1969] p.306, however, does acknowledge that the Mbh might not make its computations in **divya** years.

the classical conception of **manvantaras** as composed of a number of **caturyuga** cycles. In 12.321.9 it is said that Nârâyana took birth in the **kṛtayuga** of the **svâyaṃbhu** period - **kṛte yuge... purâ svâyaṃbhuva >ntare...** - and the **vaivasvata** period is mentioned at 12.323.51 [16]. A variant on 12.59.119 uses the word **manvantara**, saying that the earth becomes uneven in each one - **manvantareṣu sarveṣu viṣame jâyate mahî** [17]. 12.337.40 also uses the word **manvantara**, saying that Apantaratamas (Vyâsa) will appear in each **manvantara** - **manvantareṣu** - (v.41) and knows the **manvantara** of Śani [18]:

> **śanaiścaraḥ. . . bhaviṣyati manur mahân**
> **tasmin manvantare. . .**
>
> Śanaiścara will be the great Manu in that manvantara.

It would, therefore, seem to be the case that the system of **manvantaras** is not very well known in the Mbh. This is certainly the conclusion arrived at by Mitchiner, in his more detailed study of the **manvantaras**, where he argues that the system was not fully developed in the epic, and could only be found in embryonic form in its later portions [19]. Other scholars also have suggested

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16 Manu Vaivasvata is also mentioned at 3.185.24-55, in an account of the flood, but is not connected with a unit of time.

17 C.f. C.E. 12.59.119 fnt.132

18 Not one that occurs in the Purâṇic lists I have consulted.

19 Mitchiner [1978] pp.11,31. He also points out on p.21 that it is unknown in the Yuga Purâṇa, which is variously dated between 1CBC and 3CAD (c.f. Rocher [1986] p.254).

that the **manvantaras** were a later addition, and seen difficulties in reconciling them with the **yuga** system 20.

3.2 The distinction between the yuga and the kalpa

Turning now to the larger units of time: **yuga, mahâyuga, kalpa** and **para**, it is necessary to take up the distinction between nominal and substantive differences mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. As we saw above, the epic, while clearly knowing the four-yuga cycle called a **mahâyuga** or **caturyuga** in the Purâṇas, typically simply calls this a **yuga**. Thus, when it mentions events occuring **yugânte** - at the end of the **yuga** - it substantively means **caturyugânte** - at the end of the cycle of four **yugas**, as will become very obvious below. The difference between the epic and Purâṇic schemata on this point, viz. **yuga/caturyuga**, is therefore simply a question of designation.

The same needs to be asked about the epic's knowledge of the **kalpa**: does it (1) know the word; and (2), more importantly, know the unit of 1000 x 4 **yugas**,

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20 C.f. Gupta [1967] p.311 on the epic's ignorance of the **manvantara**; Dimmitt and van Buitenen [1978] p.23 on the problems of reconciling the two systems; and Jacobi [1908], who argues that the **manvantaras** were probably brought in to explain the different patronymics of Manu.

bounded by creation and destruction? I shall concentrate on this question first, before going on to the slightly different question of days and lives of Brahmâ.

Although the word **kalpa** is known in the Mbh, it is explicitly used in the classical sense of 1,000 (catur)**yugas** in only a few references. 6.30.17 (BhG 8.17) uses the same verse that we saw in 12.224.30 to identify 1,000 yugas as a day of Brahmâ:

> **sahasrayugaparyantam ahar yad brahmano viduh**
> **râtrîṃ yugasahasrântâṃ te >horâtravido janâḥ**
>
> Those people who know what a day and night is, know a day of Brahmâ to stretch to 1,000 yugas, and a night to last for 1,000 yugas.

and follows this by stating that all beings become manifest at the beginning of the day and merge at the end of it (vs.18,19). This can be juxtaposed with a verse closely following it at 31.7 (BhG 9.7) which identifies this basic unit of creation and destruction as a kalpa:

> **sarvabhûtâni kaunteya prakrtim yânti mâmikâm**
> **kalpakṣaye punas tâni kalpâdaú visṛjâmy aham**
>
> At the end of the kalpa, O Kaunteya, all beings go to my prakṛti; at the beginning of the kalpa I emit them again.

In a reference at 12.326.58 it is said that Brahmâ is given the boon of becoming Viṣṇu's son at the beginning of every kalpa - (Viṣṇu speaking) matputratvaṃ ca kalpâdau - and, a little further on, that he enters Viṣṇu at the end of the kalpa along with the other gods - yatrâ viśanti kalpânte sarve brahmâdayaḥ surâḥ (12.331.6). The first passage is followed at v.66 by:

tato yugasahasrânte saṃhariṣye jagat punaḥ

Then at the end of 1,000 yugas I will destroy the world again.

Thus the basic unit of the cycle is both 1,000 yugas and designated as a **kalpa** (I shall return to its identification as a life of Brahmâ below). Elsewhere in the Śântiparva also, Vyâsa tells his disciples how he witnessed creation:

yathâvṛttaṃ hi kalpâdau dṛṣṭaṃ me
jñânacakṣuṣâ

With my eye of knowledge, I saw (creation) as it happened at the beginning of the kalpa.[21]

and in the Anuśâsanaparva, the cycle is again identified as a kalpa [22].

Less orthodox, however, is the use of **kalpa** at 12.291.14. Here, while the different units involved clearly correspond to the classical divisions of time in substantive terms (12,000 x 1,000) **kalpa** seems to designate the smaller unit of 12,000 rather than the complete cycle, which is simply called a day of Brahmâ:

yugaṃ dvâdaśasâhasraṃ kalpaṃ viddhi
caturguṇam
daśakalpaśatâvṛttaṃ tad ahar brâhmam
ucyate

Know the four-fold yuga of 12,000 (years) to be a **kalpa**; ten **kalpas** repeated a hundred times is called a day of Brahmâ[23]

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21 12.327.23
22 13.14.185
23 My translation. Roy takes it differently: 'Twelve thousand years [which he glosses as **divya**] make a yuga,

Another passage, 13.14.183-5 knows both **yuga** and **kalpa** but seems to be using them interchangeably rather than serially. Thus in v.183, Śiva creates Rudra to destroy the world at the end of the yuga - **yugânte**, while in v.185 Śiva remains having absorbed everything into himself at the end of the kalpa - **kalpânte**.

In most passages where **kalpa** occurs, the period of time it refers to is not defined. This is the case in references that do not fit in with the classical system, where it could mean any long period of time [24], and also when it is used in **purâkalpe** and corresponding formulae to set charter myths, etc. in a 'once upon a time' period of great antiquity [25].

The word **mahâkalpa** is also known as a unit of time in two references, although nowhere specified as a year of Brahmâ. Rather it seems to designate a complete cycle of creation and destruction and thus could be interchangeable with **yuga** or **kalpa**, as in 12.326.104:

> **mahâkalpasahasrâni mahâkalpaśatâni ca**
> **samatîtâni râjendra sargâś ca pralayâś ca ha.**
>
> Thousands of great kalpas, hundreds of great kalpas and creations and destructions have passed, O king.[26]

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four such **yugas** taken a thousand times, make a **kalpa** which measures one day of Brahman' (Vol.10 p.419).

24 C.f. 13.110.102,110, discussed below.

25 E.g., 9.46.5;13.62.31;116.53.

26 The other reference to **mahâkalpa** is at 12.323.1: Vyâsa was born when the great **kalpa** had passed - **>tite mahâkalpe** - i.e., as is made clear in an earlier verse (322.51), at the beginning of the next one. **yuga**, rather

Thus, in Biardeau's words, 'l'impression se confirme donc d'un certain flottement dans la terminologie. . .' [27], and she continues that it is important to see if this terminological haziness corresponds to a real confusion in the myths.

In a number of references, it seems that it does not: while they may not use the word **kalpa**, they are clearly presenting a cycle of 1000 x 4 yugas. Thus 12.47.37, a eulogy of Kṛṣṇa has:

> yo >sau yugasahasrânte pradîptārcir vibhâvasuḥ
> saṃbhakṣayati bhûtâni tasmai ghorâtmane
> namaḥ
>
> The fire with blazing flames that destroys beings at the end of 1,000 yugas - homage to that terrible nature (of yours)

and 12.329.2 says:

> saṃprakṣâlanakâle >tikrânte caturthe
> yugasahaṡrânte
> avyakte sarvabhûtapralaye sthâvarajaṅgame
>
> At the time of the destruction (of the world) by flood when the fourth (yuga) has passed, at the end of a thousand yugas, when it is the time of all immobile and mobile beings' dissolution in the unmanifest. . .

with yuga in both these references having its epic signification of caturyuga. These, therefore, correspond to the extended reference at 3.186.18-23, examined above, where the final verse simply calls the 1000 (catur)yuga

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than **kalpa** or **mahâkalpa** is also found as the highest unit in lists of portions of time e.g. at 12. App.I.28.270; 13.15.19;16.46;145.38.

27 Biardeau [1976] p.125. Biardeau addresses this problem at some length, and I shall discuss her conclusions below.

unit, which it clearly knows, a day of Brahmâ. The Purâṇic schema of 1000 revolving caturyugas is also obviously known a little further on in the Āraṇyakaparva, when the kaliyuga being described, is ended by Kalkin and goes into the next kṛta [28].

Apart from these few passages, however, the vast majority of epic references present a different picture, with the basic cycle of creation and destruction being based around a single (catur)yuga unit, rather than 1000 repeating (catur)yugas. A very clear example of this comes between the two Āraṇyakaparva passages just cited, but despite this proximity to the longer cycle, here it is quite plain that the cycle does not repeat:

> karmakâle punar deham anucintya sṛjâmy aham
> praviśya mânusam deham
> mâryâdâbandhakâraṇât (30)
>
> śvetaḥ kṛtayuge varṇaḥ pitas tretâyuge
> mama
> rakto dvâparam âsâdya kṛṣṇaḥ kaliyuge tathâ
> (31)
>
> trayo bhâgâ hy adharmasya tasmin kâle bhavanty uta
> antakâle ca samprâpte kâlo bhûtvâ 'tidâruṇaḥ
> trailokyam nâśayâmy ekaḥ kṛtsnam
> sthâvarajaṅgamam (32)

When it is again the time for action, I think of a body and I create myself, having entered a human body in order to produce the bonds of moral law. (30)

My colour is white in the kṛtayuga, yellow in the tretâyuga, red having reached the dvâpara, then black in the kaliyuga. (31)

At that time when adharma is three portions (of the four) and when the end of time has arrived, I become very terrible Time and, alone, destroy the

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28 3.188.85ff.

> entire triple universe[29] with its immovable and moving creatures. (32)

Other references support this. In 6.62.40, it is said that Vâsudeva creates humans and their regions of habitation, (as well as those of the gods), yuga after yuga - yuge yuge mânuṣam cai 'va vâsam punaḥ punaḥ sṛjate vâsudevah - and in 3.81.109, everything previously created by Śiva re-enters him at the end of the yuga - tvâm eva bhagavan sarve praviśanti yugakṣaye. Again, in I.1.28 an egg is said to have been the cause of creation at the beginning of the yuga - yugasyâ 'lau - and this is followed in v.36 by:

> punah samkṣipyate sarvam jagat prâpte
> yugakṣaye
>
> The whole world will be destroyed again when the end of the yuga arrives[30]

The most frequent use of yuga to designate the whole cycle in this way occurs in the many references in the epic which liken people and events to the pralaya. In many references the stage of the cycle when the pralaya occurs is not explicitly stated, and the reference is simply to kalâgni, etc., with yugânte prâpte understood but not specified [31]. Where a temporal setting is stated, however, the pralaya events are invariably

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29 3.187.30-32. However, a few verses on, we return again to the Purânic schema, when Viṣnu says of the period of dissolution: 'For 1000 revolutions of the yugas. . . I sleep' (v.40).

30 For other e.g.s of this c.f. also 12. App I.28.361;327.89;13.135.11;203.14.

31 As will become clear in 4.3 below.

situated simply at the end of the yuga - yugânte, yugakṣaye, etc. We shall see how frequently these references occur in the next chapter, but one representative example from the many available would be 1.218.38, which relates to the battle at the burning of the Khândava forest:

> tatrâ 'dbhutâny adṛśyanta nimittâni mahâhave
> yugântasamarûpâṇi bhûtotsâdâya bhârata
>
> In that great battle marvellous omens were seen similar to those at the end of the yuga (heralding) the destruction of beings, O Bhârata

These pralaya similes, like the other references which seem to indicate a single cycle of 4 yugas are also largely situated in the main body of the epic (i.e. not the Śânti and Anuśâsanaparvas) and their frequency, as well as the closeness with which they are interwoven into the narrative makes them the most representative example of epic terminology. While the compounds yugânte/yugâdau are grammatically ambiguous, allowing possible interpretations of either yugasya ante/âdau or yugânâm ante/âdau, (which could be further glossed as sahasrânâm yugânâm, and thus related to the Purâṇic schema), the singular sense, yugasya, is the more likely choice. This is further born out by the non-compound reference at I.1.28 where yugasyâ 'dau is made explicit. Not only has such a four yuga cycle been frequently posited as an earlier stage in the classical theory's development [32],

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32 Scholars who have suggested an earlier cycle of four yugas include Jacobi [1908]; Gombrich [1975] p.124; Mitchiner [1978] p.23/4; and Church [1970] p.152. Church

but it is also the system more popularly understood in India even today 33. This would suggest that it is the more mythically fundamental pattern, with the more complex systematisation into **yugas** and **kalpas** being a product of Purâṇic speculation that has not really filtered down to the folk awareness.

The only scholar whose work would substantially disagree with this interpretation is Madeleine Biardeau, who contends that the difference between the epic and Purâṇic cycles is purely one of terminology [34]. Biardeau argues that while many Mbh references situate the pralaya at the end of the **yuga**, there is no need to conclude from this that the epic is ignorant of the **kalpa**:

> Il n'est évidemment pas question de supposer que l'épopée parle de **yuga** parce qu'elle ignore les **kalpa**. Ou alors, il faudrait s'amuser au petit jeu qui consisterait à classer comme tardifs tous les passages où il est fait mention et usage du terme **kalpa**. [35]

Biardeau suggest, rather, that the logic behind the epic usage of **yugakṣaye**, etc., stems from the fact that the

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does not acknowledge the epic material, however, and argues that such a phase in the **yuga** theory's development is only conjectural without any textual evidence for it existing.

33 An example of a **caturyuga** cycle still being the dominant popular image, occurred in a Guardian article some time ago. The reporter (Indian) questions his boatman about a strange structure next to the Ganges: 'A bit intrigued I asked Ram, "What on earth is that?" "We don't really know, but they say that it's a monster!. . . a Kaliyuga monster." In the Hindu philosophy, Kaliyuga denotes that period of time when the whole universe would come to a violent end.'

34 Biardeau [1976] pp.121-35.

35 Ibid. p.124.

end of the **kalpa** always coincides with the end of a **yuga**, viz., the thousandth yuga of the cycle [36].

While this is a plausible explanation, it seems to me to be unnecessarily complicated and to fit the evidence less naturally than the suggestion that the epic cycle was originally that of the **(catur)yuga**. While I would generally agree with Biardeau in her rejection of a too-historical approach to the text, I feel that in a case such as this, recourse to the historical dimension of an idea's development <u>is</u> justified, without necessarily descending into 'le petit jeu' she deplores. However holistic one's approach to the text, it is still necessary to retain some sense of what is central to the epic's concerns, a sense which, on any given point, can only emerge from a comprehensive analysis of all the available references. While such a comprehensive study of one idea in one text is not within the scope or concerns of Biardeau's <u>Études de Mythologie Hindoue</u>, I feel that on this particular point, its absence does undermine her interpretation of the epic references.

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36 Ibid. p.133f.

3.3 The distinction between a day of Brahmâ and a life of Brahmâ

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, the Purâṇic schema identifies the 1000 x 4 **yuga kalpa** with a day of Brahmâ, and this multiplied by 36,000 (360 days x 100 years) makes up a life of Brahmâ (para). The **brâhma** day and **brâhma** life make up two distinct cycles: one bounded by the **naimittikapralaya** and **pratisarga**; and the other by the **prâkṛtikapralaya** and **sarga**. Once again, the epic gives a slightly different picture: the word **para** is not used and although both the day of Brahmâ and life of Brahmâ are known, they do not seem to be brought together and put into temporal hierarchy. Rather, they are used separately as alternative designations for the unit which makes up the cycle of creation and destruction. Thus, some passages, as we have seen, correspond to the Purâṇic designation and identify the cycle of 1000 x 4 yugas as a day of Brahmâ, but without mentioning a life beyond it:

> sahasrayugaparyantam ahar yad brahmano viduḥ
> râtriṃ yugasahasrântâṃ te >horâtravido janâḥ
>
> Those people who know what a day and night is, know a day of Brahmâ to stretch to 1000 yugas and a night to last for 1000 yugas.[37]

Others, however, identify the basic unit of creation and destruction as a life of Brahmâ, but again, with no indication that this follows the smaller cycle of a day. Thus, in another passage already cited, this unit is Purâṇically called a **kalpa**, but it is bounded by the

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37 12.224.30, cited above.

birth and death of Brahmâ, rather than his waking and sleeping:

> matputratvam ca kalpâdau. . .
>
> (You will be) my son at the beginning of the kalpa[38]

Further on in the same passage, the basic unit is still Brahmâ's life, but here simply called a creation:

> sargasyā 'dau smṛto brahmâ. . .
>
> Brahmâ is remembered [i.e. created from the mind of Nârâyaṇa] at the beginning of each creation.[39]

The use of kalpa in the first verse cited, suggests that these verses are not just referring to the larger prâkṛtikapralaya/sarga cycle with the existence of the smaller cycle known but simply not mentioned. Rather, it points to a genuine discrepancy in the identification of the unit as Brahmâ's day or life, and this is borne out by a passage which uses both ideas to designate what is clearly one and the same cycle:

> brâhme râtrikṣaye prâpte tasya hy amitatejasaḥ
> prasâdât prâdur abhavat padmam
> padmanibhekṣaṇa
> tatra brahmâ ṡamabhavat sa tasyai 'va prasâdajaḥ
> (15)
>
> ahnaḥ kṣaye lalâṭâc ca suto devasya vai tathâ
> krodhâviṣṭasya ṡamjajñe rudraḥ
> saṃhârakâ̇rakaḥ (16)

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38 12.326.58
39 12.326.105.

> When the end of Brahmâ's night arrives, a lotus appeared through the grace of that immeasurably splendid one, O you who have eyes like lotus petals. There Brahmâ was produced, born from his grace. (15)
>
> And likewise, at the end of Brahmâ's day, a son is born from the forehead of that god who is (then) filled with wrath: Rudra who brings about the world's destruction. (16) *

Here, while the unit is a **brâhma** <u>day</u> and <u>night</u>, its commencement is the occasion of Brahmâ's <u>birth</u>.

A longer reference also point to Brahmâ's life as the basic unit, and this time it is given as part of a systematic series of births and deaths. The passage, at 12.336.10f, is about the passing down of **bhakti** through the ages. Nârâyaṇa created **bhakti** in the first yuga - **adiyuge** (v.10), and then it was passed on by the **phenapa** - foam-drinking - **ṛṣis** in the cycle where Brahmâ is born from Nârâyaṇa's mouth - **yadâ 'sîn mânasaṃ janma nârâyaṇamukhodgatam** (v.13). In the next birth of Brahmâ from Nârâyaṇa's eyes - **yadâ 'sîc câkṣuṣaṃ janma dvitîyaṃ brahmaṇo** (v.15), it was passed on by Rudra, and, in the **kṛtayuga** of that cycle - **purā kṛtayuge** - it was passed on to the **vâlakhilyas** (v.16). The text goes on to the third birth of Brahmâ - **tṛtîyaṃ brahmaṇo janma** - from

* 12.328.15-16

Nârâyaṇa's speech (v.17) and then to his birth through Nârâyaṇa's ear (v.23). In that cycle bhakti disappears after the kṛtayuga and only reappears in the kṛta of the next birth of Brahmâ, this time from Nârâyaṇa's nose - nâsikyajanmani purâ brahmaṇah - (v.36). Then comes the birth of Brahmâ from an egg - aṇḍaje janmani - (v.40) and this is followed by the seventh, and present, birth of Brahmâ from the lotus - yad idam saptamam janma padmajam brahmaṇo (v.44) [40]. Although presenting a series of brâhma lives, this passage is still not commensurate with the Purâṇic schema. As in the other epic references, there is no indication that a life of Brahmâ constitutes 100 brâhma years of 360 kalpas each. Indeed it would appear that here Brahmâ's life is not even identified with the unit of 1,000 mahâyugas, but rather with a simple revolution of the four yugas. This is especially clear in vs.23-36 where bhakti disappears at the end of the kṛtayuga of one birth and does not reappear till the kṛta of the next, with no mention of the intervening 999 kṛtayugas where it should have re-appeared according to the Purâṇic system. Moreover, the use of yugâdau in v.45 also points to the yuga - used here in the epic sense to refer to caturyuga - as the unit of the cycle. Thus, this passage would seem to be identifying Brahmâ's <u>life</u> with the more typically epic cycle of creation and destruction, based on a single (catur)yuga. There is, therefore, a terminological haziness in this aspect of

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40 The seventh creation, from the lotus, is also known at 12.337.17: prâpte prajâvisarge vai saptame padmasaṃbhave.

the larger computations as well as in the others and, again, this would seem to correspond to a substantive difference from the Purâṇic theory. The epic seems to know only one cycle of creation and destruction, rather than the two set in hierarchy by the Purâṇas, and it alternatively identifies this as a day or a life of Brahmâ, basing it on either the 1000 x 4 **yuga** unit, or, more typically, the simple cycle of 4 **yugas**. The significance of this will become more apparent when I examine the **pralaya** in 4.3.

Deviant references

All the references so far covered have been recognisably part of the classical schema even if they show some deviation from its Purâṇic details. In a number of references, however, **yuga** is used in a way which is clearly inimical to this system [41]. In some of these, the usage of **yuga** would appear to go back to its meaning in those passages in the early Vedic texts where it referred to a lengthy but unspecified period of time, irreconcilable with a cycle of repeating ages with different characteristics. Thus, for example, in Mbh 14.93.61 a brahmin is told that his actions have rescued his ancestors for countless **yugas** - **subahûni yugâni** [42].

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41 As mentioned above, it is very likely that traces of similar, non-classical uses of the word would be found in the Purâṇas also. Different systems of computation using the word **yuga**, largely found in astronomical texts have also been discussed by Church [1970] pp.100ff.

42 C.f. also 13.27.39, which mentions spending 1000 **yugas** standing on one foot as a penance, and 12.221.48 where Śrî is said to have dwelt with the **dânavas** for many

As well as these, there are two extended references in the Śântiparva which offer alternative measurements to the classical system. Both are set within philosophical sections of the **parva** and their ideas are clearly linked to the philosophies expounded. In 12.299.1-14 the device of expanding days and nights, which we saw to be a feature of the classical system, is here applied to the various constituents of a version of the **sâṃkhya** emanation theory. Thus, 10,000 **kalpas** make a day of **avyakta**, the highest principle: 7,500 **kalpas** make a day of Brahmâ, who is the next stage down; 5,000 a day of the **ahaṃkâra**; and 3,000 a day of the great elements (**mahâbhûtâni**). This passage is close enough to the classical system in its logic that it seems unlikely to represent an alternative system of computation, but rather to be using the **ahorâtra** device for its own ends. The ingenuousness of its application, however, to establish the hierarchical values of the **sâṃkhya** principles, serves to highlight its use in the classical system to establish the world into a hierarchy of beings.

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yugas (while they were still dharmic: discussed below in 5.3). Similar usages seem to be found in 13.27.39; 63.22;110.67,8,106. The epic also uses **yuga** in the sense of yoke, as the Veda did, but now it seems likely that its dual meaning is consciously played on, as, for example at 8.24.72, describing Siva's chariot when he drove against Tripura: **dyâṃ yugaṃ yugacarmâṇi saṃvartakabalâhaKân** - the sky was its yoke and the (**pralaya** fire) **saṃvartaka** and the (**pralaya** cloud) **balâhaka** were the shields of the yoke. This dual meaning is further borne out by a passage not included in the C.E. - **yugaḥ kṛtayugo** - the **kṛtayuga** was its yoke (8.24 fnt.258).

The other passage, at 12.271.30f, seems less likely to derive from the classical system. It comes in a passage treating of the jīva's purification through thousands of births until it attains to **mokṣa** through Viṣṇu. Here the passage mentions 'creations' and 'destructions' - **prajâvisarga** (v.30), **saṃhâravikṣepa** (v.30), **saṃhâravisarga** (v.40) and these are only identified with **kalpas** in Nīlakaṇṭhas commentary [43]. The extent of this period is said to be the time it would take to dry up thousands of enormous lakes by daily taking away as much water as can be carried on the tip of a hair (vs.31,32). The passage then goes on to say how many of these periods the **jīva** spends in various conditions on its way to enlightenment.

Conclusions

To summarize the details of the divisions of time in the Mbh, therefore, it can be seen that the majority of epic references largely conform to schema found in the Purâṇas, but with a few consistent differences that seem to show the theory at a more simple stage of its development. These differences are both nominal, to do with the terms applied to the divisions and substantive, to do with the structure of the divisions. The nominal differences are:

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43 C.f. C.E. 12.271.30. The Roy translation follows him in this.

1. The Mbh does not use the terms **mahâyuga** or **caturyuga** to designate the cycle of four **yugas** and typically calls this cycle simply **yuga**.

2. Although 1,000 **(catur)yugas** are known to be a day of Brahmâ and used as the basic unit of creation and destruction in some references, it is not yet clearly identified with the world **kalpa**, and the use of this word is fairly fluidly applied to different units of time. **Mahâkalpa** likewise is not fixed in its meaning and para and **parârdha** are unknown.

The more significant substantive differences are as follows:

1. For the most part, the computations of time are not qualified as **divya** and therefore could be assumed to follow a simpler scheme of calculations in human years.

2. The system of **manvantaras** is not known outside the Śânti and Anuśâsanaparvas, and rarely mentioned there.

3. Despite the knowledge of the extended cycle of 1,000 **(catur)yugas**, it appears that the epic more typically presents a simpler cycle of four **yugas** as the basic unit of creation and destruction.

4. Although the epic knows both a day of Brahmâ and a life of Brahmâ, these terms seem to be used interchangeably, and are not yet set in series to form two distinct cycles of creation and destruction.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to consider how the divisions of time in the epic might be related to

the Vedic ideas examined in the last chapter. As was seen there, few specific antecedents for the details of the classical divisions into **yugas** or **kalpas** were found. Instead, it was suggested that the cycle of creation and destruction had its basis in the yearly decline and renewal of the cosmos, embodied in the **râjasûya** and **agnicayana** rituals. In the **saṃhitâs** also, the basic revolution of the wheel of time was the year. It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the classical yuga cycle, especially in its simpler epic form of one revolution, bears some relationship to the Vedic year.

It is impossible to offer any detailed examination of this idea here, but I would like to briefly explore one aspect of the classical divisions that would seem to support it, and that is the subject of the **yugas'** dawns and dusks. As we saw above, the complete **caturyuga** cycle is made up of individual **yugas** of decreasing length, in the series 4,3,2,1. Thus the **kṛtayuga** proper lasts for 4000 years; the **tretâ** 3000; the **dvâpara** 2000;and the **kali** 1000. This simple system is complicated, however, by the additions of 'dawns' and 'dusks' - **saṃdhyâ** and **saṃdhyâṃśa**, of corresponding lengths to the **yugas** they accompany: 400, 300, 200 and 100. At first sight, this seems to add nothing of any significance to the pattern [44]. If anything, it would point to the individual yuga as analogous to the day, but although this is an

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44 And will be found to add little to the concept of the yuga junctures also, the only other area of the theories where they might have been significant.

important unit in the divisions of time, such an identification has little meaning within a cycle that is made up of all four individual yugas [45]. However, when the dawns and dusks are seen in the context of the caturyuga as a whole, their value becomes apparent. Without them, the computation of the four yugas gives a total of 10,000 years: with them, this is increased to 12,000 (4800 + 3600 + 2400 + 1200). As was briefly discussed in relation to the Brâhmaṇa sacrifices, twelve is frequently used as a pratimâ - symbolic likeness - of the year, and this is the significance, for example, of twelve day dīkṣas, or offerings of twelve potsherds, as well as other more tortuous identifications [46]. It therefore seems feasible to suggest that the primary purpose of the dawns and dusks is to turn the caturyuga cycle into a symbolic likeness of the year, thereby making its line of descent from the Vedic cycle even clearer [47].

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45 The individual yugas are never presented as a cycle on their own. The analogy would, moreover, require a corresponding analogue to the night, as it is the complete ahorâtra that is the significant unit, as was seen in the days and nights of the gods, pitṛs, etc. above.

46 Gonda [1984] p.28, for example, cites TB 3.9.1.1f, which states that the eighteen victims of the aśvamedha are a pratimâ of the year, constituting the twelve months, five seasons, and the year itself.

47 This is strengthened by the fact that in the developed system, it is the human year which stands at the centre of all the computations: a year of humans = a day and night of the gods, and then the larger units are built on that.

CHAPTER 4 - THE CYCLE OF CREATION AND DESTRUCTION

4.1 Time as a cycle

Although there may be disagreement as to the basic unit of revolution, the Mbh is consistent in presenting time as a cycle, and the creation and destruction of the universe is always understood as part of an ongoing process. This is most clearly expressed at 6.30.18,19 (BhG 8.18,19):

> avyaktâd vyaktayaḥ sarvâḥ prabhavanty aharâgame
> râtryâgame pralîyante tatrai 'vâ 'vyaktasaṃjñake
> (18)
>
> bhûtagrâmaḥ sa evâ 'yaṃ bhûtvâ bhûtvâ
> pralîyate
> râtryâgame >vaśaḥ pârtha prabhavaty aharâgame
> (19)
>
> When the day comes, all differentiated things come out of the unmanifest; when the night comes, they are absorbed in that which is called the unmanifest. (18)
>
> This whole collection of beings, coming into existence again and again, is dissolved, helpless, when the night come, O Pârtha, and arises (again) when the day comes. (19)

The endless flow of this process is expressed in a variety of images. The most common is the image of a perpetually revolving wheel, used in the Vedic texts to refer to the turning of the year, but extended in the Mbh to encompass the larger cycle of the yugas:

> kâlacakraṃ jagaccakraṃ yugacakraṃ ca
> keśavaḥ
> âtmayoġena bhagavân parivartayate >niśam

> The blessed lord Keśava makes the wheel of time, the wheel of the world and the wheel of the yugas revolve continually by his own yoga[1]

The force of this image is seen most clearly in another passage:

> evam etad anâdyantam bhûtasamhârakârakam
> anâdinidhanam loke cakram samparivartate
>
> Thus is this wheel (of cosmic creation and destruction), without a beginning or an end, revolving in the world, endlessly causing the created world and destruction.[2]

Another image employed is that of a tortoise extending and contracting its limbs:

> prasârya ca yathâ 'ñgâni kûrmaḥ saṃharate
> punaḥ
> tadvad bhûtâni bhûtâtmâ sṛṣṭvâ saṃharate
> punaḥ
>
> As a tortoise stretches out his limbs and then pulls them in again, in the same way does the soul of all beings create beings and then draw them back in again.[3]

Or again, the process is likened to waves rising and falling in an ocean [4].

As well as being described in these visual images, the rhythm of creation and destruction is also expressed in terms of the philosophies current in the Mbh, and this

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1 5.66.12.
2 1.1.38. For other uses of the wheel image, c.f. 12.203.11;13.135.46. The wheel as an image of the year is also found in the Mbh, c.f. 13.143.22, and it is commonly used as an image for the general flow of time.
3 12.187.6. The tortoise image is also found at 12.239.4 in relation to mahâbhûtas.
4 12.187.5.

sliding between mythological and philosophical modes for expressing the same underlying idea, will be seen to run through the more extended descriptions of the process also. Although the details of the philosophical images vary, they all express a repeating alternation which results in the periods of creation and non-creation. Thus it is described in terms of **prakṛti** having two essential states of being which she moves between:

> **ekatvaṃ pralaye câ 'sya bahûtvaṃ ca pravartanât**
>
> Unity in the dissolution of this (creation) and multiplicity after the flow.[5]

Or again, it is seen as **puruṣa** displayed in various forms which enter him again:

> **puruṣaś cai 'ko nirguṇo viśvarûpas**
> **taṃ nirguṇaṃ puruṣaṃ câ 'viśanti**
>
> **puruṣa** is one and attributeless (yet) has manifold forms and these (again) enter that attributeless **puruṣa**[6]

or as the diminishing and growth of **mânasa**, the name given here to the supreme creator:

> **yadâ tu divyaṃ tad rûpaṃ hrasate vardhate punaḥ**
> . . .
> When that divine form [of **mânasa**] grows smaller then grows large again . . .[7]

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5 12.294.34. C.f. also 12.306.42 for a similar idea.
6 12.339.10.
7 12.175.33.

In the majority of references the cycle of creation and destruction is orchestrated by a deity who stands outside it. These references are fairly numerous and occur most often in eulogies to Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa or to Śiva. A typical example of this is 2.37.14:

> **caturvidhânâṃ bhûtânâṃ triṣu lokeṣu mâdhavaḥ**
> **prabhavaś cai 'va sarveṣâṃ nidhanaṃ ca yudhiṣṭhira**
>
> Mâdhava [Kṛṣṇa] is the origin and the annihilation of all the four-fold[8] creation in the triple universe, Yudhiṣṭhira.

or, for Śiva, given as two of his thousand names:

> **sarvabhâvakaro haraḥ**
>
> (You who) produce[9] all existence; (you who are) the destroyer.

In far fewer references, the mover of the cycle is identified as Brahmâ[10], although he is, of course, commonly assigned a rôle in the cycle as creator, subservient to the supreme mover. Elsewhere, Indra[11] and Agni[12] are lauded as the creator and destroyer but

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8 For other references to Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa in this rôle c.f. also:- 2.35.22-4;3.186.14;187.1,29,32,34; 5.66.10-13;67.3;68.11;6.9.17;62.40;7.124.13,14;9.62.26; 12.43.5,16;46.8,27;47.12,22,37-8,42,57;51.2,13;200.1,29-33;203.11;271.7-8,19-20;290.110;322.12,20;325.4,76-77, 105-7,153-4;327.80;331.43;332.6;335.11,17;336.82; 13.126.26;135.11,46,57,76,115;143.7;14.51.13;53.14.

9 13.17.41. For other references to Śiva as the mover of the cycle, c.f. also 3.81.109; 7.57.42,3;172.69;12.App.I.28.175,180,191,201,209,247,254, 259,301,319,334,342,361;14.5,51,161,163,183-6;16.36;17.31,36,41;145.5.

10 C.f., 12.250.24;12.300.2, one variant of which has brahma (n), which would seem more likely.

11 1.21.11.

12 1.223.14;5.16.5.

as these occur only in extended eulogies to these gods, it seems likely that no great significance need be attached to them [13].

As well as these gods, various abstract principles are also lauded as the mover of the cycle, the most usual being Time [14], but also mentioned are the **mahâbhûtas**, the five great elements that everything is constituted from [15]; **avyakta**, the unmanifest [16]; and the **sâṃkhya** philosophy itself [17], as well as the already mentioned **prakṛti**, **mânasa** and **puruṣa**.

The idea of a triamvirate of gods separately responsible for creation, destruction and preservation, such as is found in the classical system also appears, but only in a few references. At 12.47.20, Kṛṣṇa is said to be Brahmâ at the beginning of the yugas and Saṃkarṣaṇa at the destruction - **brahmâprokto yugâdiṣu kṣaye saṃkarṣaṇaḥ proktaḥ**. Or again, in a passage on Nârâyaṇa, at 12.328.12f, we find:

> **yasya prasâdajo brahmâ rudraś ca**
> **krodhasaṃbhavaḥ (12)**
> . . .

---

13 In the eulogy to Indra, for example, he is also identified with Viṣṇu and Soma (1.21.12) and it seems likely that 'creator and destroyer' is used as a stock form of praise.

14 C.f., 6.9.20;12.224.72;230.20.

15 C.f. 12.187.4-7;335.10.

16 C.f. 14.44.16.

17 C.f. 12.290.8.

tasmât sarvâḥ pravartante sargapralayavikriyâḥ
tato yajñaś ca yaṣṭâ ca purâṇaḥ puruṣo
virâṭ
aniruddha iti prokto lokânâṃ prabhavâpyayaḥ
(14)

brâhme râtrikṣaye prâpte tasya hy amitatejasaḥ
prasâdât prâdur abhavat padmaṃ
padmanibhekṣaṇa
tatra brahmâ samabhavat sa tasyai 'va prasâdajaḥ
(15)

ahnaḥ kṣaye lalâṭâc ca suto devasya vai tathâ
krodhâviṣṭasya saṃjajñe rudraḥ
saṃhârakârakaḥ (16)

etau dvau vibudhaśreṣṭhau prasâdakrodhajau
smṛtau
tadâ 'deśitapanthânau sṛṣṭisaṃhârakârakau
(17)

[Nârâyaṇa is he] from whose grace Brahmâ is born and from whom anger Rudra springs (12)
. . .

All the alterations of creation and destruction are produced from that. Thence is the sacrifice and the sacrificer: he is the ancient, splendid Puruṣa. He is called 'Aniruddha', the origin and disappearance of the world. (14)

When the end of Brahmâ's night arrives, a lotus appeared through the grace of that immeasurably splendid one, O you who have eyes like lotus petals. There Brahmâ was produced, born from his grace. (15)

And likewise, at the end of Brahmâ's day, a son is born from the forehead of that god who is (then) filled with wrath: Rudra who brings about the world's destruction. (16)

Those two superior gods who are known to be born from the grace and anger (of Aniruddha) are ordained to follow the paths of creating and destroying. (17)

In the most complete statement of the triumvirate in the epic, it is Śiva who is said to create the three gods:

yo >sṛjad dakṣiṇâd aṅgâd brahmâṇam
lokasaṁbhavam
vâmapârśvât tathâ viṣṇuṃ lokarakṣârtham
îśvaraḥ
yugânte cai 'va saṃprâpte rudram aṅgât sṛjat
prabhuḥ (183)

sa rudraḥ saṃharan kṛtsnaṃ jagat
sthâvarajaṅgamam
kâlo bhûtvâ mahâtejâḥ saṃvartaka ivâ 'nalaḥ
(184)

eṣa devo mahâdevo jagat sṛṣtvâ carâcaram
kalpânte cai 'va sarveṣâṃ smṛtim âkṣipya
tiṣṭhati (185)

He is the Lord who created Brahmâ, the creator of the world, from his right side, then Viṣṇu for the protection of the world from his left side, and, when the end of the yuga arrives, the mighty one created Rudra from his body. (183)

That Rudra, having become Time, destroying the entire world of moving and stationary creatures is of great splendour like the saṃvartaka fire. (184)

Mahâdeva is this god who creates the moving and stationary world and remains at the end of the kalpa, having withdrawn (even) the memory of all things. (185)[18]

Creation

Creation is as complex and detailed a subject in the classical texts as it was in the Vedas and this complexity excludes the possibility of a comprehensive treatment of Mbh creation myths and theories here. A comprehensive study of creation would properly cover the primary creation of the cosmos and its constituents; the

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18 13.14.183-5.

secondary creation of its inhabitants; and related myths such as the recovery of the earth from under the **pralaya** water and the recovery of the Vedas, all of which are found in the Mbh. However, apart from the myth I shall use as an introduction to epic cosmogony, I must restrict my examination at this point to the primary, cosmic creation, as this is the aspect which is most important to the **yuga** theory. As well as containing many mythical accounts of cosmogony, the Mbh also treats the subject in its philosophical sections, and here the speculation is expressed largely in terms of **sâṃkhya** emanation theory. Again the details of the philosophy are outside the scope of this thesis, and I shall only be concerned with the philosophical accounts in so far as they relate to the mythology.

Despite these restrictions, however, cosmogony is an important part of the complete **yuga** theory and worth treating in some detail for a number of reasons. Firstly, because it is both the temporal and conceptual beginning of the entire cycle: temporal because it is the point where the manifest world emerges; and conceptual because the cosmogonic accounts introduce many themes that will recur in other aspects of the **yuga** theory. Creation, destruction and the decline through the **yugas** connecting the two, are all closely interwoven and it is necessary to recognize the concerns that inform the creation of the cosmos in order to fully understand the events that are played out in its unfolding.

Secondly, the epic's creation myths are important because, as mentioned in chapter 2, cosmogony is an aspect of the classical theories which exhibits a number of connections with the Vedic ideas. This is most obviously true in the fact that many of the earlier cosmogonic themes can be found to have been retained and developed in the Mbh: creation from the body of a primeval being; creation from a primeval egg; creation from the sacrifice, etc., and also because, more importantly, it was in the Vedic cosmogonic myths and the ideas of sacrifice associated with them, that a potential basis for the fundamental structure of the whole cycle was found. Again, the Mbh accounts appear to show a connection with these structures and this will be brought out most clearly in the analysis of the most typically classical cosmogony, that from the lotus coming out of Viṣṇu's navel.

In this section, therefore, I shall examine the four main cosmogonic themes known to the Mbh: 1) creation from the lotus; 2) creation from the body; 3) creation from a primeval egg; 4) creation from a sacrifice. In the case of the first, creation from the lotus, I shall analyse the three main epic versions of the myth in order to bring out the underlying significance of its various parts, and to show how it can be seen to reflect a number of Vedic cosmogonic concerns. In the case of the other three creation themes, where the Vedic connections are

more immediately obvious, I will examine the different ways in which each theme is manifested and used in the epic.

In each of these, my primary intention is to present and analyse the different cosmic creation myths that the epic contains. However, by showing their connections with the Vedic ideas, I hope to reinforce my arguments that the classical theories of time are, in their essence, firmly rooted in the earlier texts. As well as this, I shall also begin to show how the philosophical and mythological expressions of the themes are related, with philosophical elements being brought into the mythical narrative in the case of the lotus creation, and the transformation of a complete image from one mode to the other in the case of creation from the body. However, I shall leave a more detailed study of the relationship between philosophy and mythology until I come to examine the **pralaya** myths where it is displayed more clearly.

Most of the accounts I examine are concerned with the creation of the cosmos, and do not go into Brahmâ's (secondary) creation of its inhabitants in any detail. Cosequently, I shall begin by presenting a straightforward cosmogony which shows how the two relate, and this should serve as a useful framework for the more complicated accounts to follow. The account is at 12.160.11-21.

salilaikârṇavam tâta purâ sarvam abhûd idam
niṣprakampam aṅâkâśam anirdeśyamahîtalam (11)

tamahsamvṛtam asparśam
atigambhîradarśanam
nihśabdam câ 'prameyaṃ ca tatra jajñe
pitâmahaḥ (12)

so >sṛjad vâyum agniṃ ca bhâskaraṃ câ 'pi
vîryavân
âkâśam asṛjac co 'rdhvam adho bhûmiṃ ca
nairṛtim (13)

nabhaḥ sacandratâraṃ ca nakṣatrâṇi
grahâṁs tathâ
samvatsarân ahorâtrân ṛtûn atha lavân
kṣaṇân (14)

tataḥ śarîraṃ lokastham sthâpayitvâ
pitâmahah
janayâmâsa bhagavân putrân uttamatejasaḥ (15)

marîcim ṛṣim atriṃ ca pulastyaṃ pulahaṃ
kratum
vasiṣṭhâṅgirasau co 'bhau rudraṃ ca prabhum
îśvaram (16)

prâcetasas tathâ dakṣaḥ kanyâḥ ṣaṣṭim
ajîjanat
tâ vai brahmarṣayaḥ sarvâḥ prajârtham
pratipedire (17)

tâbhyo viśvâni bhûtâni devâḥ pitṛgaṇâs
tathâ
gandharvâpsarasaś cai 'va rakṣâṃsi vividhâni
ca (18)

patatrimṛgamînâś ca plavaṃgâś ca
mahoragâḥ
nânâkṛtibalâś câ 'nye jalakṣitivicâriṇaḥ
(19)

audbhidâḥ svedajâś cai 'va aṇḍajâś ca
jarâyujâḥ
jajñe tâta tathâ sarvaṃ jagat sthâvarajaṅgamam
(20)

bhûtasargam imam kṛtvâ sarvalokapitâmahaḥ
śâśvatam vedapathitam dharmam ca yuyuje
[var. prayuyuje] punaḥ (21)

Formerly, my dear, all this was a single ocean of water, unmoving, without sky and the surface of the earth was undefined. (11)

Covered in darkness, intangible, appearing exceedingly deep, silent and immeasurable - there the Grandfather was born. (12)

He created the wind, fire and also the powerful sun and he created the sky above, the earth[19] below and the regions of Nirṛti: (13)

Likewise, the heavens with the moon and stars, the asterisms and planets; the years, the day and night, the seasons and seconds and moments. (14)

Then, placing his body in the world, the blessed Grandfather gave birth to mighty sons: (15)

The ṛsi Marîci, Atri, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, both Vasiṣṭha and Aṅgiras and the mighty lord Rudra. (16)

Then Dakṣa, the son of Pracetas, begot sixty daughters and the brahmarṣis received them all for the sake of (producing) offspring. (17)

Then all beings came from them: gods, the hosts of pitṛs, gandharvas and apsarases and various demons; (18)

Birds, forest animals and fish, monkeys and great serpents and hordes of other variously formed (animals) that wander about in water and on land; (19)

Things born from plants, those born from sweat, from eggs and from wombs - thus was all the moving and immobile world produced, my dear. (20)

Having performed this creation of beings, the Grandfather of all the world again set in motion [taking var.] the eternal dharma which is propounded in the Veda. (21)

Apart from this passage, which displays no particular cosmogonic image, the majority of extended mythical cosmogonies in the Mbh are expressed in images which can be classified into four main themes, and I shall now turn to the first of these.

1) Creation from the Lotus

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19 Or: the earth, belonging to Nirṛti.

The birth of Brahmâ from the lotus growing out of the navel of the sleeping Nârâyaṇa is the best known and most typically classical creation myth. In the Mbh the myth is told at some length in three different versions, and referred to elsewhere [20]. While this cosmogonic theme is not amongst those explicitly found in the earlier texts, it was seen to have some conceptual antecedents there, and its underlying connections with fundamental Vedic ideas of creation will be strengthened when the three epic tellings of the myth are compared.

Version 1 - 3.194.8f

The myth first appears in the Āraṇyakaparva, where it opens with the image of Viṣṇu sleeping on the pralaya waters:

śṛṇu râjann idaṃ sarvaḥ yathâ vṛttaṃ
naràdhipa
ekârṇave tadâ ghore naṣṭe sthâvarajaṅgame
pranaṣṭeṣu ca bhûteṣu sarveṣu
bharataṛṣabha (8)

prabhavaḥ sarvabhûtânâṃ śâśvataḥ puruṣo
>vyayaḥ
suṣvâpa bhagavân viṣṇur apśayyâṁeka eva ha
nâgasya bhoge mahati śeṣasyâ 'mitatejasaḥ (9)

lokakartâ mahâbhâga bhagavân acyuto hariḥ
nâgabhogena mahatâ parirabhya mahîm imâm (10)

svapatas tasya devasya padmam sûryasamaprabham
nâbhyâm vinihsṛtam tatra yatro 'tpannaḥ
pitâmahaḥ
sâksâl lokagurur brahmâ padme sûryendusaprabhe
(11)

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20 The three main versions of the myth are at: 3.194.8f;12.200.9f;12.335.17f. Brahmâ's birth from the lotus is also mentioned at:- 12.175.15;328.14-15;13.143.8, and **padmajan** is a common epithet of Brahmâ throughout.

caturvedaṡ caturmûrtis tathai 'va ca
caturmukhah
svaprabhâvâd durâdharṣo mahâbalaparâkramah
(12)

Listen, O king, to all this just as it happened, O lord of men. When there was a single terrible ocean and moving and immobile things had vanished and all beings had perished, O bull of the Bharatas, (8)

The origin of all beings, the eternal and imperishable Puruṣa (who is) the blessed Lord Viṣnu, slept, alone on the bed of waters in a great coil of the snake Śeṣa whose splendour is unlimited. (9)

The blessed Lord Acyuta Hari, the creator of the world, O great-armed one, having clasped this earth with a huge coil of the snake, (slept).(10)

A lotus with a radiance like the sun's came out from the navel of that sleeping god and on it in bodily form the Grandfather appeared, Brahmâ, the guru of the world, on the lotus lustrous as the sun and moon, (11)

(Brahmâ) of the four Vedas, four forms and four faces, hard to attack because of his own power, of very mighty strength. (8-12)

This is followed by the sudden and unexplained appearance of two demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who proceed to intimidate Brahmâ:

kasya cit tv atha kâlasya dânavau vîryavattarau
madhuṡ ca kaiṭabhaṡ cai 'va dṛṣṭavantau
hariṃ prabhum (13)

ṡayânaṃ ṡayane divye nâgabhoge mahâdyutim
bahuyojanavistîrṇe bahuyojanamâyate (14)

kirîṭakaustubhadharaṃ pîtakauṡeyavâsasam
dîpyamânaṃ ṡriyâ râjaṃs tejasâ vapuṣâ tathâ
sahasrasûryapratimam adbhutopamadarṡanam (15)

vismayaḥ sumahân âsîn madhukaiṭabhayos tadâ
dṛṣṭvâ pitâmahaṃ cai 'va padme
padmanibhekṣaṇam (16)

vitrâsayetâm atha tau brahmâṇam amitaujasam

vitrâsyamâno bahuśo brahmâ tâbhyâṃ
mahâyaśâḥ
akampayat padmanâlaṃ tato >budhata keśavaḥ
(17)

Then, at a certain time, two very powerful dânavas, Madhu and Kaiṭabha saw the Lord Hari, (13)

Sleeping radiant on the divine bed of the snake's coil, extending many yojanas, and measuring many yojanas, (14)

Wearing his diadem and kaustubha (jewel), with robes of yellow silk, blazing with splendour, brilliance and wondrous beauty, O King, like a thousand suns, his appearance was very wonderful. (15)

Seeing the Grandfather of the lotus-like eyes, on the lotus, Madhu and Kaiṭabha were very greatly astonished. (16)

Then they began to terrify immeasurably strong Brahmâ and, repeatedly terrified by those two, illustrious Brahmâ shook the stalk of the lotus and then Keśava woke up. (17)

Viṣṇu offers the Dânavas a boon (18), but they laugh at him and try to assert their superiority by offering one to him in return (19,20). Viṣṇu accepts (21) and asks that he may kill them 'for the good of the world' - lokahitâya - (22). The demons agree, but ask him to perform the slaughter 'where space is uncovered' - anâvṛte >sminn akâśe vadham. Viṣṇu agrees to this and kills the demons, from which act he gains his epithet Madhusûdana, and this connection is stressed in this account:

vicintya tv atha govindo nâ 'paśyad yad
anâvṛtam
avakâśam pṛthivyâṃ vâ divi vâ
madhusûdanaḥ (29)

svakâv anâvṛtâv ûrû dṛṣtvâ devavaras tadâ
madhukaiṭabhayo râjañ śirasî madhusûdanaḥ

cakreṇa ṡitadhâreṇa nyakṛntata
mahâyaṡâḥ (30)

However, having considered this, Govinda Madhusûdana did not see any space which was uncovered, either on the earth or in the sky. (29)

Seeing that his own thighs were uncovered, that most excellent god, illustrious Madhusûdana, then, O king, cut off the heads of Madhu and Kaiṭabha with his sharp-edged discus. (30)

At first sight it appears that the myth of Madhu and Kaiṭabha has been rather anomalously added to the creation myth and the purpose of its addition seems unclear. However, the story of Madhu and Kaiṭabha follows the other major narrations of this creation myth too consistently for its addition to be dismissed as accidental.

Version 2 - 12.200.9f

As well as beginning to introduce elements of philosophy into the mythical account, the next telling of the myth provides a number of clues as to the purpose of the addition of the Madhu and Kaiṭabha story to the cosmogony. This version again begins with the image of Viṣnu stretched out on the waters:

sa dṛṡtvâ [variant: sṛṡtvâ]
pṛthivîm cai 'va sarvabhûteṡvaraḥ prabhuḥ
apsv evà ṡayanam cakre mahâtmâ puruṣottamaḥ
(9)

sarvatejomayas tasmiñ ṡayânaḥ ṡayane ṡubhe
so >grajam sarvabhûtânâm saṃkarṣanam
acintayat (10)
. . .

tatas tasmin mahâbâho prâdur bhûte mahâtmani
bhâskarapratimam divyam nâbhyâm padmam
ajâyata (12)

sa tatra bhagavân devaḥ puṣkare bhâsayan
diśaḥ
brahmâ samabhavat tâta sarvabhûtapitâmaḥ (13)

And then, having created [taking var.] the earth, that mighty lord of all beings, the great-souled supreme person made his bed on the waters. (9)

(Then) the all glorious one, lying on that splendid bed thought of the eldest born of all beings, Samkarṣaṇa.[21] (10)
. . .

After that great-souled being had become manifest, O Great-armed One, a divine lotus resembling the sun grew out of the navel (of Puruṣa). (12)

There, my dear, in the lotus, the blessed God Brahmâ was born, the Grandfather of all beings, illuminating the directions. (13)

Once again, Brahmâ's birth is followed by the introduction of Madhu, but this time, instead of appearing from nowhere, the demon's presence is presented as an integral part of creation. He comes into being at the same time as Brahmâ and, being produced from tamas, provides a dark parallel to the creator god who was born from a lotus that was **bhâskarapratimam** - like the sun (lit. light-maker) - and who is himself - **bhâsayan diśaḥ** - illuminating the directions [22]:

tasminn api mahâbâho prâdur bhûte mahâtmani
tamasaḥ pûrvajo jajñe madhur nâma mahâsuraḥ
(14)

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21 Which Nîlakaṇṭha's commentary glosses as **ahaṃkâra** - consciousness.

22 This equation with light could be seen in the previous version also: the lotus was **sûryasamaprabha** - with splendour equal to that of the sun - and **sûryendusaprabha** - with the splendour of the sun and moon (3.194.11).

But also, Great-armed One, when that great-souled being arose, a great asura called Madhu was born, the eldest creation of tamas/darkness. (14)

In this version, Viṣṇu kills Madhu before he has time to threaten Brahmâ and once again the epithet Madhusûdana is stressed as relating to this:

tam ugram ugrakarmâṇam ugrâṃ buddhiṃ
samâsthitam
brahmaṇopacitiṃ kurvaṅ jaghâna puruṣottamaḥ
(15)

tasya tâta vadhât sarve devadânavamânavâḥ
madhusûdanam ity âhur vṛṣabhaṃ sarvasâtvatâm
(16)

The supreme person, acting for the gain of Brahmâ struck down that mighty (asura) of terrible deeds who had entered upon the terrible intention (of killing Brahmâ). (15)

Because of the destruction of that (asura), my dear, all gods, dânavas and humans call the lord of all the Sâtvatas [Kṛṣṇa] Madhusûdana [the slayer of Madhu]. (16)

Another hint as to the significance of the slaying of Madhu for the creation myth begins to emerge in the following verses. After Madhu is killed, Brahmâ commences his creative function and produces beings to populate the earth:

brahmâ tu sasṛje putrân mânasân daksasaptamân
marîcim atryaṅgirasau pulastyaṃ puláham
kratum

Then Brahmâ created his mind-born sons with Dakṣa as the seventh: (the others were), Marîci, Atri, Aṅgirasa, Pulastya, Pulaha and Kratu. (17)

From these are produced the gods (23), **gandharvas**, horses, birds, cows, **kiṃpuruṣas**, fishes, plants, trees (25), **âdityas** (26), **dânavas** and **asuras** (28). However, Brahmâ's creative rôle is fairly limited here, and the creation of the cosmos and its ordering principles is still left in the hands of Viṣṇu, who is thus presented as the supreme creator with Brahmâ subordinate to him 23:

> **ahorâtraṃ ca kâlaṃ ca yathartu madhusûdanaḥ**
> **pûrvâhnaṃ câ parâhṇaṃ ca sarvam evâ**
> **'nvakalpayat (29)**
>
> **buddhyâ 'paḥ so >sṛjan meghâṃs tathâ**
> **sthâvarajaṅgamân**
> **prthivîm so srjad viśvâṃ sahitâṃ**
> **bhûritejasâ (30)**
>
> Day and night, time, morning and afternoon: Madhusûdana made everything follow in their proper sequence. (29)
>
> And with his intellect he created the waters, clouds and also (all other) standing and moving things; he created the whole earth, possessing great spendour. (30)

So far, therefore, the second version of the myth has illuminated the first in two ways: (1) in presenting Madhu's birth at the same time as that of Brahmâ, it has shown the demon to be an integral part of the creation myth and hinted at his rôle as a dark parallel to Brahmâ; and (2) it has shown the creative process to begin only after Madhu is eliminated. These two points gain further clarification in the third version of the myth.

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23 Brahmâ's subordinate rôle is, of course, apparent in the first version also.

Version 3 - 12.335.17f

Following a passage on philosophy, this creation account again begins with Hari making his bed on the waters and lying absorbed in yogic sleep - nidrâyogam upâgatah - (17). He creates Brahmâ who is identified with the **ahamkâra** and **hiranyagarbha**, and seated on the thousand-petalled lotus that arises from Aniruddha, here a form of the supreme god (18,19). Brahmâ sees the world full of water and, establishing himself in **sattva**, starts to create beings - **sattvasthah parameṣṭhî sa tato bhûtagaṇân sṛjat** (20). At this point Madhu and Kaiṭabha are introduced into the narrative, springing up from two drops of water endued with the qualities of tamas and rajas which Nârâyaṇa had cast into the lotus (which is again **sûryâm susaprabha** - radiant as a ray of the sun) (21-23). They see Brahmâ commencing the process of creation by producing the Vedas, seize them and dive to the bottom of the ocean (25-27). Brahmâ bemoans the Vedas' loss and lauds Purûṣa, asking for their return (28-42). Purûṣa awakes from his sleep and assumes another form:

tasya mûrdhâ samabhavad dyauh sanakṣatratârakâ
keśâś cânyâ 'bhavan dîrghâ raver
aṃśusamaprabhâh (45)

karṇâv âkâśapâtâle lalâṭam bhûtadhâriṇî
gaṅgâ sarasvatî puṇyâ bhruvâv âstâṃ mahânadî
(46)

caksusî somasûryau te nâsâ saṃdhyâ punah
smṛtâ
aumkâras tv atha saṃskâro vidyujjihvâ ca nirmitâ
(47)

dantâś ca pitaro râjan somapâ iti viśrutâḥ
goloko brahmalokaś ca auṣṭhâv âstâṃ
mahâtmanah
grîvâ câ 'syâ 'bhavad râjan kâlarâtrir guṇottarâ
(48)

etad bhayaśirah kṛtvâ nânâmûrtibhir âvṛtam
antardadhe sa viśveśo viveśa ca rasâṃ
prabhuḥ (49)

His skull was the sky together with its asterisms and stars, and his long hair was of the same lustre as the rays of the sun. (45)

His ears were the atmosphere and the underworld, his forehead the earth, Gañgâ and the holy great river Sarasvatî were his eyebrows. (46)

The moon and sun were those eyes, the twilight was said to be his nose, the syllable aum was his adornment and his tongue was formed of lightning. (47)

And his teeth, O king, were the pitṛs known as the soma drinkers, Goloka and Brahmaloka were the great-souled person's lips; his neck, O king, was the excellent night of destruction. (48)

Having made this terrible head full of different forms, that mighty lord of the universe disappeared and entered the underworld. (49)

Viṣnu tricks the asuras into leaving the Vedas and then goes and rescues them and restores them to Brahmâ (50-53). Madhu and Kaiṭabha return to the lotus and there find Purûṣa once again stretched out in sleep:

śvetaṃ candraviśuddhâbham aniruddhatanau
sthitaṃ
bhûyo >py amitavikrântaṃ nidrâyogam upâgataṃ
(57)

âtmapramâṇaracite apâṃ upari kalpite
śayane nâgabhogâdhye jvâlâmâlâsamâvṛte (58)

(There) he was in his aniruddha form, white with the pure splendour of the moon, of exceedingly immeasurable power, absorbed in yogic sleep (57)

> On a couch placed above the water, made to his own measurement, abounding in serpent coils and covered with garlands of flames. (58)

The asuras wake him (62), fight him (63) and again he kills them for the gain of Brahmâ - brahmanopacitim (64). Visnu gives the Vedas back to Brahmâ (65) and then:

> tatah parivrto brahmâ hatârir vedasatkrtah
> nirmame sa tadâ lokân krtsnân sthâvarajañgamân
> (66)

> Thereupon Brahmâ who had (previously) been held back, his enemies slain and honoured by the Vedas, then created the entire world of immobile and mobile creatures. (66)

This version adds a number of things to our understanding of the myth. Firstly it ties it in more coherently with the sâmkhya philosophy and shows the mechanism for this yoking quite clearly. In the opening verses (17-19), the narrative continually slips between the philosophical and mythological mode and the mythical image of Hari producing Brahmâ is dovetailed with the philosophical expression of emanation from aniruddha to ahamkâra. Brahmâ, Madhu and Kaitabha are then firmly identified with the three gunas, which can again be seen as a philosophical rendering of the more mythically expressed light/dark polarity in 12.200.14 [24].

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24 That there are <u>three</u> gunas whereas the relationship in the other version is essentially dual is not really significant as it seems likely that the desire to tie up the myth with sâmkhya philosophy obscured its real structure. Kaitabha does not play any rôle apart from Madhu (as is emphasised by the fact that Visnu is primarily known as <u>Madhusûdana</u>) and Kaitabha's identification with rajas could well have been thrown in for good measure. Here, as before, the important

*(insert): This congruity emphasises the suggestion that their presence serves a particular rôle and forms an integral part of the myth.

Secondly, and more importantly for an understanding of the myth, this account of the creation and slaughter of Madhu (and Kaiṭabha) serves to stress the two points raised by the second version of the myth. There we saw that Madhu arose at the same time as Brahmâ and in the third version, the significance of that point is reinforced by the fact that they spring up from drops of water expressly created by Nârâyaṇa himself, again at the same time as he created Brahmâ.* Again, the fact that they are meant to represent a dark parallel to the creator god is reinforced, with the mythical light/dark polarity of version 2 being expressed philosophically in this version as sattva versus rajas and tamas. In order to understand the full significance of the demons' rôle, I suggest that it is necessary to return to an idea found in the Vedic texts, and especially underlying the Brâhmana myth of the falling apart of Prajâpati, viz. that the seeds of destruction are inherent in the very act of creation and will put a necessary limit to its existence [25]. This is made clear in these two versions, where the anti-creative forces Madhu and Kaiṭabha are literally formed from darkness (an enduring image of non-creation and chaos as light is of

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opposition is **sattva/tamas** and the introduction of **rajas** serves no real function in the subsequent unfolding of the myth.

25 As I have already put forward my arguments as to the essential Vedic cosmogonic themes in the previous chapter, I will not refer back to the details of the Vedic evidence again here.

creation and order) at the same time as the creative urge, Brahmâ.

That the real significance of Madhu and Kaiṭabha is that they are anti-creative becomes apparent in the rest of the myth. Whereas in the version 2 this is only hinted at by the fact that Brahmâ did not begin creation until after the death of Madhu, in version 3 the implication is made explicit and the demons are seen to be threatening Brahmâ **qua** creator and to obstruct the process of creation: they seize the Vedas with which Brahmâ begins the process, and creation is arrested until the Vedas are recovered and Brahmâ's enemies killed 40 verses later.

In the course of this recovery and slaughter, two interesting words are used. Firstly, in verse 64, Viṣṇu again kills the demons **brahmaṇopacitim** - for the **upaciti** of Brahmâ, the same phrase as was used at the death of Madhu in 12.200.15. While **upaciti** can be translated as 'gain' or 'advantage', its first meaning is 'accumulation' or 'increase', from its root √ ci: 'to heap up/collect'. √ ci is also the root that supplies **cayana** in **agnicayana**, and is the word used for the act of constructing a sacrificial altar, which act was seen in Chapter 2 to represent the reconstruction of Prajâpati after his post-creative disintegration. Thus in presenting Viṣṇu as acting **brahmaṇopacitim** in versions 2 and 3, the composers could well be drawing

resonance from the root of the word used, just as Viṣṇu, by slaying the demons, could be seen to echo the purpose of the altar-construction, namely ensuring the continued existence of the creative power after neutralising the threat of destruction neccesarily arising from it. Both in structure and in the resonance of its vocabulary, the epico-classical slaying of Madhu and Kaiṭabha can therefore be seen to bear strong echoes of the Vedic disintegration and reconstruction of Prajâpati, a myth which I have argued to provide a likely foundation for the cycle of cosmic creation and destruction itself.

As well as this resonance with the Brâhmaṇa Prajâpati myth, another earlier vedic myth is suggested by a word used to describe Brahmâ in verse 66, when he resumes the creation. Here, Brahmâ is said to be **parivṛta**, a word which has obviously caused problems during the epic's transmission as the C.E. designates it an uncertain reading and the commentary provides a gloss, **devaiḥ**, to make it more intelligible. The most usual translation of **parivṛta** would be 'surrounded', but without the gloss **devaiḥ** - by the gods - (and the gods should not yet be in existence), or possibly the understanding **āpobhiḥ** - by the waters -, referring back to verse 20, 'surrounded' has no meaning in the context of the passage. Another possible translation of **pari** and √**vṛ** would make more sense, however, in the light of the rest of the myth, and that is 'held back/hemmed in'. Using this, Brahmâ, who was 'held back' is now, with his

enemies slain - **hatâriḥ**, able to pour forth the creation again. This, of course, takes us back to the **saṃhitâ** myth of the **vṛtrahatyâ**, which we have seen presented as the most fundamental Ṛgvedic creation myth, where Indra must kill Vṛtra, the 'obstructor' (whose name derives from the same root √vṛ as is found in **parivṛta**) so that the imprisoned waters can run free and Indra can find the sun and place it in the sky to dispel the darkness [26].

Working from this, the connections between the **vṛtrahatyâ** and the lotus creation myth now become apparent: for the cosmos to come into being, Viṣṇu/Aniruddha (lit. the unobstructed one), who is presented as the supreme creator above the creative agent Brahmâ, must remove the obstructive force, born of darkness at the same time as Brahmâ, which is preventing creation's unrolling. He does this to 'build up' Brahmâ whose association with the sun (the symbol of the ordered universe in the **vṛtrahatyâ**) is stressed. In doing so, he takes on a cosmic form which serves both to reinforce his rôle as ultimate creator by introducing another cosmogonic theme (creation from the body of God), and also to display the universe, whose fate is in the balance, as contained within him in potential, a potential which his act of slaying Madhu and Kaiṭabha will convert to actuality. The importance of this battle is stressed by the fact that from it Viṣṇu gains one of his most frequently used epithets, Madhusûdana, just as

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26 For a simple resumé of the **vṛtrahatyâ** myth c.f., Macdonell (1917) pp.42ff.

Indra won his equally important epithet Vṛtrahan from his most significant cosmogonic act, the slaying of Vṛtra [27].

That these epic accounts should be drawing resonance from both the myths of Prâpati's disintigration/reconstruction and the **vṛtrahatyâ**, is not surprising. As we saw in chapter 2, in one variation on the basic Prajâpati myth in the ŚB, the destructive concomittant of creation, represented by Prajâpati's falling apart, was expressed precisely in terms of the unavoidable creation of the **asuras** and darkness, following that of the gods and light. Moreover, the fact that the texts themselves conflate the two myths is further borne out by the ŚB telling of the **vṛtrahatyâ**, at 1.6.3.1ff, where Indra first kills Vṛtra's 'elder

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27 The root √vṛ also appears rather strangely in the first version of the myth, in Madhu and Kaiṭabhas' request that Viṣṇu should perform the slaughter 'where space is **anâvṛta** - uncovered. At first sight this could be understood as relating to the pralaya waters which cover the earth (although √vṛ is not used to describe them in any of the three versions). However, if that was the case, the use of space - **ākâsa** - would be strange, as it means more space in the sense of 'ether/atmosphere' than in the sense of 'area/place'. Moreover, Viṣṇu cannot find **anâvṛtam avākâsam** - uncovered space - on earth or in the sky, and this would again point away from understanding the phrase in relation to the **pralaya** waters. Here too, therefore, it is possible that the passage is drawing resonance from another meaning of **â** and √vṛ, namely, 'obstruct/hold captive/fence in'. Once again, such an interpretation would help to explain an episode that at first sight seems to have no real meaning. [Although elements of **bhakti** are probably present in the fact that the **asuras'** stipulation results in them being killed on Viṣnu's body, which makes their willingness to be slaughtered an act of devotion. However, the emphasis of the request is primarily that the slaughter should be **anâvṛte ākâse**, rather than **svake ûrvoḥ**, so this would seem to be a secondary significance].

brother', Viśvarupa [28]. In revenge for this, when Viśvarupa's father Tvaṣṭṛ presents Indra with soma, it makes him ill and flows from every opening in his body. This malady strongly recalls Prajâpati's falling apart, and is again remedied by a sacrifice, the sautrâmani iṣṭi.

Thus in this most classical of creation myths, the abiding influence of Vedic cosmogonic themes can be seen to find echoes in its underlying structure, and to provide a background which serves to make the initially discrepant elements of the myth fall into place.

2) Creation from the body

While the connections between creation from the lotus and the Vedic cosmogonies only become fully apparant when the classical myth is analysed, the other epic creation myths are more immediately obviously founded on Vedic themes. This is certainly the case with the cosmogonic account of creation from the body of a primeval being, which goes back to the Puruṣasûkta in the Ṛgveda (10.90). Here Puruṣa was dismembered in a sacrifice, and the different parts of the cosmos and its

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28 Viśvarûpa is the first creation of Tvaṣṭṛ and Vṛtra is created to avenge his death. It is also very likely that Tvaṣṭṛ is the father of Indra in the Ṛgveda (c.f. Macdonell [1917] pp.42,44).

inhabitants were created from different parts of his body:

> The Man has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He pervaded the earth on all sides and extended beyond it as far as ten fingers.
> . . .
>
> When they divided the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms and thighs and feet?
>
> His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born.
>
> The moon was born from his mind; from his eye the sun was born. Indra and Agni came from his mouth, and from his vital breath the Wind was born.
>
> From his navel the middle realm of space arose; from his head the sky evolved. From his two feet came the earth, and the quarters of the sky from his ear. Thus they set the worlds in order.
>
> There were seven enclosing-sticks for him, and thrice seven fuel-sticks, when the gods, spreading the sacrifice, bound the Man as the sacrificial beast. (1,11-15) [29]

This cosmogony is known and developed in the Mbh, although there it is presented in terms of Brahmâ, Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, or, more rarely, Śiva, while Puruṣa takes on a philosophical significance that serves to strengthen the links between the philosophical and mythological modes of expression.

The most straightforward expression of the theme occurs at 12.175.15f, where the world is created from the

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29 Trans. O'Flaherty [1981] pp.30-1.

body of Brahmâ who has sprung from a lotus and is identified with the mahâbhûtas [30]:

ahamkâra iti khyâtah sarvabhûtâtmabhûtakrt
brahmâ vai sumahâtejâ ya ete pañca dhâtavah (16)

śailâs tasyâ 'sthisamjñâs tu medo mâmsam ca
medinî
samudrâs tasya rudhiram âkâśam udaram tathâ
(17)

pavanaś cai 'va nihśvâsas tejo >gnir
nimnagâh sirâh
agnîsomau tu candrârkau nayane tasya viśrute
(18)

nabhaś co 'rdhvam śiras tasya ksitih pâdau
diśo bhujau
durvijñeyo hy anantatvât siddhair api na
samśayah (19)

Known as the ahamkâra, the soul of all beings and their creator, he is very glorious Brahmâ who is these five elements (previously mentioned). (16)

The mountains are called his bones and the earth his fat and flesh; the oceans are his blood and the sky likewise his belly. (17)

The wind is his breath, fire his energy and rivers are his veins. Agni and Soma, viz., the sun and the moon, are known as his eyes. (18)

The sky above is his head, the earth his feet and the directions his arms. Truly because he is infinite he is hard for even perfected beings to know - this is without doubt. (19)

Corresponding even more closely to the Purusasûkta is a description of the creation of the castes from Krsna's body (12.200.31f):

tatah krsno mahâbâhuh punar eva
yudhisthira

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30 The appearence of the lotus in this cosmogony again illustrates the free admixture of themes within the mythical mode, and the identification with the mahâbhûtas, the easy transition between philosophical and mythical terms of expression.

brâhmanânâm ṡatam ṡreṣṭam mukhâd
asṛjata prabhuḥ (31)

bâhubhyâm kṣatriyaṡatam vaiṡyânâm
ûrutaḥ ṡatam
padbhyâm ṡûdraṡatam cai 'va keṡavo
bharatarṣabha (32)

Then mighty strong-armed Kṛṣṇa also created a hundred excellent brahmins from his mouth, O Yudhiṣṭhira; (31)

From his arms a hundred kṣatriyas, from his thighs a hundred vaiśyas and from his feet a hundred śûdras - (thus created) Keśava, O bull among the Bharatas. (32)

Or, echoing the idea that Puruṣa's body extends everywhere, is a passage which states that Śambhu's body pervades everything:

sarvataḥ pânipâdântam
sarvatokṣiṡiromukham
sarvataḥ ṡrutimal loke sarvam âvṛtya
tiṣṭhati

With the ends of his hands and feet (extending) everywhere, with eyes, face and mouth dwelling everywhere, having ears everywhere in the world; having covered everything, he remains. *

Although all connected through the idea that the cosmos is related to the body/essence of the creator, there are, in fact, three different relationships at play in these passages, as in the Puruṣasûkta before them, viz., that everything is created from the body of the god, exists in the body of the god, and is identical with the body of the god. All three can be seen in the extended Āraṇyakaparva passage that presents Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa as the supreme creator god. Here the idea is most

* 12.291.16

literally expressed when Mârkaṇḍeya physically enters the body of the divine child and finds <u>within</u> it the entire world which he had previously seen destroyed [31]. Questioned by Mârkaṇḍeya when he leaves the body again (3.187.7f), the child (who is Viṣṇu) identifies himself <u>as</u> all the gods, the physical world and the castes:

> agnir âsyaṃ kṣitiḥ pâdau candrâdityau ca locane
> sadiśam ca nabhaḥ kâyo vâyur manasi [var nâsike] me sthitaḥ (7)
>
> Fire is my mouth, earth my feet and the sun and moon my eyes; the sky with the cardinal points is my body and the wind is in my nose [32]. . . . (7)
>
> brahma vaktraṃ bhujau kṣatram ûrû me samśritâ viśaḥ
> pâdau śûdrâ bhajante me. . . (13)
>
> Brahmins are my mouth, kṣatriyas my arms, the vaiśyas dwell in my thighs and the śûdras share in my feet. . . (13)

Further on, the child tells Mârkaṇḍeya that when Brahmâ awakes he (the child) shall create the world again <u>from</u> his body:

> tato vibuddhe tasmiṃs tu sarvalokapitâmahe
> ekîbhûto hi srakṣyâmi śarîrâd dvijasattama (46)
>
> âkâśaṃ pṛthivîṃ jyotir vâyuṃ salilam eva ca
> loke yac ca bhavec cheṣam iha sthâvarajaṅgamam (47)
>
> Then, when this Grandfather of all the world awakes, united with him I shall create from my body, O best of the twice-born, (46)

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31 3.186.91-113, cited pp 167-9 below.

32 I am following van Buitenen in taking the variant nâsike.

> The air, the earth, light, wind and the sea and whatever else there may be in the world, moving or immobile. (47)[33]

Thus the image identifying the universe with the body of the creator god can be seen to work in a number of different ways and it is easy to understand how these can be extended to form a continuum between the most literal mythological image of the Puruṣasûkta dismemberment or the universe inside the body of the Viṣṇu-child, and the most abstract philosophical expressions of creation and destruction as being manifest and unmanifest puruṣa. Moreover, the fluidity of the image means that it can be used for different purposes in the narrative. Thus in the third version of the lotus cosmogony we found the image of the cosmic body introduced to reinforce Viṣṇu's creative rôle in the myth and declare the superiority of the creative force over the anti-creative. Again, in the main narrative of the epic, the two visions of Kṛṣṇa as the embodiment of the cosmos, in the fifth and sixth **parvas**, are used to affirm Kṛṣṇa's divinity, and, occurring as they do in the build-up to the battle, set the cosmic framework for the struggle that is about to take place [34].

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33 C.f. also 13.143.29f for a similar identification of Kṛṣṇa as the universe and its constituents and creator of the universe (although without the image of the body being used). For creation from Kṛṣṇa's body - dehât - c.f. also 13.143.fnt.655 (variant on C.E. vs.7).

34 5.129.3f;6.33.7f (BhG 11.7f). On these theophanies, c.f. Hiltebeitel [1976] pp.114ff.

3) Creation from the egg/hiraṇyagarbha

The Mbh also knows the theme of creation from the splitting open of a divine egg - aṇḍa - or from the hiraṇyagarbha - golden embryo, which was familiar to the Vedic bards. In the epic, it appears in its most complete form in the very first adhyâya, again serving to emphasise the cosmic context of the events that are about to unfold (1.1.27f):

nisprabhe >smin nirâloke sarvatas tamasâ 'vṛte
brhad aṇḍam abhûd ekaṃ prajânâṃ bîjam
akṣayaṃ (27)

yugasyâ 'dau nimittaṃ tan mahad divyaṃ
pracakṣate
yasmiṃs tac chrûyate satyaṃ jyotir brahma
sanâtanam (28)

adbhutaṃ câ 'py acintyaṃ ca sarvatra samatâṃ
gatam
avyaktam kâraṇam sûkṣmaṃ yat tat
sadasadâtmakaṃ (29)

yasmât pitâmaho jajñe prabhur ekaḥ prajâpatiḥ
brahmâ suraguruḥ sthâṇur manuḥ kaḥ
parameṣṭhy atha (30)

prâcetasas tathâ dakṣo dakṣaputrâṣ ca sapta
ye
tatah prajânâṃ patayaḥ prâbhavann
ekaviṃśatiḥ (31)

puruṣaṣ câ 'prameyâtmâ yaṃ sarvam ṛṣayo
viduḥ
viśvedevâs tathâ 'dityâ vasavo >thâ 'śvinâv api
(32)

yakṣâḥ sâdhyâḥ piśâcâṣ ca guhyakâḥ
pitaras tathâ
tatah prasûtâ vidvamsah śiṣṭâ
brahmarṣayo >malâḥ (33)

râjarṣayaṣ ca bahavaḥ sarvaiḥ samuditâ
gunaiḥ
âpo dyauh pṛthivî vâyur antarikṣaṃ diśas
tathâ (34)

samvatsarartavo mâsâḥ pakṣâhorâtrayaḥ
kramât

yac câ 'nyad api tat sarvaṃ saṃbhûtaṃ
lokasâkṣikam (35)

When (all) this was bereft of radiance and dark and surrounded by darkness in every direction, a single great egg arose, the imperishable seed of (all) creatures. (27)

At the beginning of the yuga they say that that was the great, divine cause, in which is known to be that true light, eternal brahman. (28)

It was marvellous and inconceivable, everywhere the same, that unmanifest, intangible primal cause which is both existent and non-existent. (29)

Then, from that (egg) was born the Grandfather, the one Lord Prajâpati, Brahmâ, the elder of the gods, (also known as) Sthânu, Manu, Ka, Paramesthin. (30)

Then Dakṣa, the son of Pracetas, and the seven sons of Dakṣa came forth, then the twenty-one Lords of creation; (31)

Puruṣa, the immeasurable-souled one, whom the sages know; then the Viśvedevas, the Âdityas, the Vasus, then the Aśvins also; (32)

Yakṣas, Sâdhyas, Piśâcas, Guhyakas and Pitrs were produced and the wise and learned pure Brahmarṣis; (33)

Numerous Râjarṣis, endowed with every virtue, the waters, the sky, the earth, the wind, the atmosphere and the directions; (34)

The years and seasons, the months, fortnights, days and nights and others were all produced in due course and witnessed by the world. (35)

A simple telling of the myth also occurs in a passage which refutes it:

andajâtam tu brahmâṇam kecid icchanty
apaṇḍitâḥ
aṇḍâd bhinnâd babhuḥ śailâ diśâ >mbhaḥ
pṛthivî divam (16)

Some illiterates hold that Brahmâ was born from an egg and that mountains, the directions, the

> waters, the earth and the sky came from the egg when it broke asunder. (16)[35]

The Vedic origins of the myth are acknowledged in another passage which also serves to connect it to the myth of Prajâpati's year-long gestation found in the Brâhmaṇas :

> tato brahmânam asṛjad
> dhairanyândasamudbhavam
> sâ mûrtiḥ sarvabhûtânâm ity evam anuśuśruma
> (3)
>
> samvatsaram uṣitvâ 'ṇḍe niṣkramya ca
> mahâmuniḥ
> samdadhe >rdham mahîm kṛtsnâṃ divam
> ardhaṃ prajâpatiḥ (4)
>
> dyâvâprthivyor ity eṣa râjan vedeṣu
> paṭhyate
> tayoḥ śakalayor madhyam âkâśam akarot
> prabhuḥ (5)
>
> Then (avyakta) created Brahmâ who arose from a golden egg. We have heard that that is the body of all beings. (3)
>
> The great sage Prajâpati dwelt in the egg for a year and then left it and placed together half as the entire earth and half as the sky. (4)
>
> It is mentioned in the vedas, O King, that the lord made the atmosphere in between the two halves of the eggshell, heaven and earth. (5)[36]

While these passages use the word aṇḍa, the word hiranyagarbha, used in the Vedic cosmogonies, is also found with cosmogonic implications in the epic, used as a

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35 13.138.16. The passage goes on to argue that Brahmâ is the creator of the world and that the egg could not have been created before him.

36 12.299.3-5. For Brahmâ's birth from an egg created by Śiva c.f. also 13.App.I.5.15-16. In another Śaiva passage, Śiva is called aṇḍa-śanaḥ - the destroyer of the egg - with the egg here symbolizing the whole creation it produces.

name for Brahmâ, for the lotus he is born in, and for Viṣṇu [37].

Although the egg/**hiraṇyagarbha** is mainly presented as a symbol of creation, one passage interestingly uses an egg in connection with the destruction of the world. Here, in the context of a journey round the world, Nârada takes Mâtali to the under-world and there shows him an egg, very like that which brings forth creation in its description, except that this time it is pregnant with the fire of destruction:

aṇḍam etaj jale nyastaṃ dîpyamânam iva
śriyâ
â prajânâṃ nisargâd vai no 'dbhidyati na sarpati
(17)

nâ 'sya jâtiṃ nisargaṃ vâ kathyamânaṃ
śṛnomi vai
pitaram mâtaraṃ vâ 'pi nâ 'sya jânâti kaś ca
na (18)

atah kila mahân agnir antakâle samutthitaḥ
dhakṣyate mâtale sarvaṃ trailokyaṃ
sacarâcaram (19)

This egg set down in the water, seeming to blaze with splendour, neither bursting nor creeping about since the very creation of creatures, (17)

Was neither born nor created, I have heard it said, and likewise no-one knows it to have a mother or a father. (18)

37 C.f. 12.291.17;12.335.18;13.135.57 respectively. In the latter, pertaining to Viṣṇu, **hiraṇyanâbha** is given as a variant and this, as well as **hiraṇyagarbha's** use in relation to Brahmâ and the lotus, illustrates how the different cosmogonic themes merge in the minds of the epic's composers, with the vocabulary of one myth being freely used in the context of another. As we shall see, Brahmâ's identification with **hiraṇyagarbha** at 12.335.18 occurs in a telling of the creation from the lotus and similarly the epithet **padmajan**, which arises from the lotus creation theme, is used to refer to Brahmâ in other cosmogonic contexts.

> Then, it is said, at the time of the end, a great fire will spring forth and burn the entire triple universe with its moving and immovable objects, O Mâtali. (19)[38]

While this egg is not put in explicit juxtaposition with the egg of creation, it is tempting to see the use of the same symbol in this way as another potential manifestation of the underlying connections between creation and destruction that were noted in the lotus cosmogonies [39].

4) Creation from the sacrifice

Another extended creation myth in the Mbh, serves to unite the early theme of cosmogony from a primeval sacrifice [40] with a number of other Vedic cosmogonic themes, namely creation from the incestuous union of Prajâpati with his daughter [41], and creation from initial heat or desire [42]. It also provides another example of creation from the body, and shows how these different themes fit together.

The myth, at 13.85.1-23, opens with Rudra, bearing the form of Varuṇa - **vâruṇîm bibhratas tanum** - holding a

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38 5.97.17-19

39 The idea is also present, although not brought out in the epic telling, in the theme of creation from the body, going back as it does to the Puruṣasûkta, where Puruṣa was dismembered (just as Prajâpati falls apart) in order for the several parts of creation to come into existence.

40 Found, for example at RV 10.81;10.130; AV 13.1.46-55

41 C.f., e.g. RV 1.71.5;1.164.33;10.61.5-7;;AiB 3.33-4;BrAU 1.4.1-6.

42 C.f. e.g. RV 10.129.3;10.190

sacrifice attended by the gods, in which he offered libations to himself (as the presiding deity), and into himself (as the sacrificial fire) - juhvac câ 'tmany athâ 'tmânaṃ svayam eva tadâ - (2-6). The wives, daughters and mothers of the gods all come to the sacrifice (7) and when Brahmâ sees them, he becomes aroused and his semen falls on the ground (8). Pûṣan collects up the semen and throws it in the sacrificial fire (9) and the sacrifice turns into a cosmogony:

> tatas tasmin sampravṛtte satre jvalitapâvake
> brahmaṇo juhvataṣ taṭra prâdur bhâvo babhûva ha
> (10)
>
> skannamâtraṃ ca tac chukraṃ sruveṇa
> pratigṛhya ṣah
> âjyavaṇ mantrâvac câ 'pi so >juhod bhṛgunanadana
> (11)
>
> tataḥ samjanayâmâsa bhûtagrâmam sa vîryavân
> tataṣ tu tejasas tasmâj jajñe lokeṣu taijasam
> (12)

Then, when that sacrifice was taking place with its blazing fire, a manifestation [which the commentator glosses as semen] appeared from Brahmâ as he was offering libations. (10)

And taking up that semen, just as it fell, with the sacrificial ladle, he offered it as a libation with ghee and mantras, O Delighter of the Bhṛgus. (11)

Then he, full of potency produced all created beings. Then from that semen (everything) endued with vigour was born in the world. (12)

Mobile and immobile creatures spring up from different parts of the fire, as do Bhṛgu, Aṅgiras, Kavi and other seers (13-18).

At this point the emphasis of the cosmogony changes and the sacrificial fire becomes personified as the god Agni, with creation coming from different parts of his body in a way we have seen before. The personification is not complete, however, and the image of the sacrificial fire, as fire, still comes through:

. . .
aśruto >sya samutpannâv aśvinau rûpasaṃmatau (18)

śesâh prajânâṃ patayaḥ srotobhyas tasya jajñire
rsayo lomakûpebhyaḥ svedâc chando malâ [var. balâ]tmakam (19)
. . .

yâni dârûni te mâsâ niryâsâḥ
paksasamjñitâḥ
ahorâtrâ muhûrtâs tu pittaṃ jyotiś ca vâruṇam (21)

raudraṃ lohitam ity âhur lohitât kanakaṃ smrtam
taṅ maitram iti vijñeyaṃ dhûmâc ca vasavaḥ smṛtâḥ (22)

arciso yâś ca te rudrâs tathâ 'dityâ mahâprabhâḥ
uddiṣtâs te tathâ 'ṅgârâ ye dhiṣṇyeṣu divi sthitâḥ (23)

. . . From his tears the Aśvins, esteemed for their beauty, were born. (18)

The other lords of creation were born from the apertures of his body; the ṛṣis from the pores of his skin; and the mighty [taking var.] veda from his sweat. (19)

. . .

The sticks (which fuel the fire) are the months, the resins (from them) are called the fortnights. The day and night and the hours are his bile as is the western fire. (21)

They say his blood is fierce and gold is said (to come) from his blood - that is to be regarded as his excrement - and the Vasus are said to have come from the smoke. (22)

> From the flames came those who are the Rudras and also the lustrous Ādityas. Likewise the coals which are on the fire-mounds are taught to be established in the sky (as stars). (23)

The different stages in this myth are very interesting because while the various themes are explicitly brought together in the narrative, this serves to highlight an implicit, conceptual similarity which already underlies the seperate cosmogonies themselves. This is clear in the case of creation from the body and creation from the sacrifice, for as we have seen, creation from the body, certainly as it is found in the Puruṣasûkta, is primarily creation from the body that is being offered as the primeval sacrificial victim. Similarly, in Vedic myths of creation from the sacrificial act itself, the constituents of the universe arise from the different parts of the sacrificial fires and apparatus [43], which is to say, in a sense from the body of the sacrifice, a point which is made very clear in the Mbh myth, with its slipping from the actual sacrifice to an image of Agni's body, which represents a sort of sacrificial victim, as well as an embodiment of the sacrifice itself. Again, the cosmogonic strand of creation from desire or heat, expressed more abstractly in terms of the ahamkâra or tamas, has obvious links with the more corporeally expressed image of Prajâpati or Brahmâs' physical desire and sexual heat [44]. These two

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43 For a very clear example of this, c.f. AV 13.1.46-55.

44 This image in turn connects back to creation from the body again, in the biological creation of off-spring from the sexual union of human bodies, an image for creation sometimes used, especially in more philosophical passages (c.f., e.g., 6.36.3-4 [BhG 14.3-4]).

strands of sacrifice/body and mental/physical desire, are further combined in the Mbh myth, where the cosmogony comes about when semen produced by Brahmâ's desire is offered as an oblation in the sacrifice.

4.3 Destruction

The periodic destruction of the universe is described in some detail in the epic, as well as being used as a recurring image in short references throughout the narrative and it also finds important structural echoes in some of the myths and events recounted. Because of this, the **pralaya** is the aspect of the yuga theory that is most important to the epic as a whole, and its relationship to the narrative events has been discussed by a number of scholars [1]. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I am leaving aside the question of the wider significance of the **pralaya**, and am concerned simply to establish the details that are given in the Mbh references, and, where they differ, to contrast them to those found in the Purâṇic accounts. To facilitate this, I shall open with a brief account of the Purâṇic portrayal of the **pralaya** as it occurs in the Visnu Purâna, and then turn to the extended passages

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1 C.f. Biardeau [1976] pp.203ff; Scheuer [1982] pp.326ff; Hiltebeitel [1976] pp.299ff. As well as looking at its rôle in the Mbh, Biardeau has analysed the wider significance of the **pralaya** in great depth, and this is the subject of EMH 4 [1976].

which treat of it in the epic, where I shall especially be looking at how the mythological and philosophical expressions of the theme relate. I shall then move on to the shorter references to the **pralaya** in the Mbh and an examination of the extra details these provide. Throughout this exploration I shall mainly be looking for 1) evidence of the typically Purâṇic distinction between the **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika pralayas**; and 2) the identity of the presiding deity of the destruction. These are both areas where the Mbh shows some differences from the Purâṇic picture.

Purâṇic pralaya

The account of the **naimittika pralaya** in Viṣṇu 6.3,4 is representative of most of the Purâṇas in the main points of the description [2]. The account opens by distinguishing three sorts of **pralaya**: incidental - **naimittika** - which occurs at the end of Brahmâ's day/kalpa; elemental - **prâkṛtika** - which occurs at the end of Brahmâ's life/para; and absolute - **atyantika** - which occurs when an individual attains **mokṣa**. This series is extended by the Kûrma and Bhâg., which include nitya pralaya, the repeated, biological death of living things, at the head of the list [3].

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2 For some other accounts of the **pralaya** c.f. also Kûrma 2.43,44; Garuda 233; Bhâg. 12.4; Matsya 2.3-10;165;166.

3 C.f. Kûrma 2.43.5; Bhâg. 12.4.

The Viṣnu next goes into a description of the naimittika pralaya, which occurs after a thousand caturyugas. This begins with a 100 year drought, during which all creatures perish. Viṣnu then takes the form of Rudra, enters the seven rays of the sun which dry up all the moisture left on earth and then become seven suns. These burn the earth until it resembles the back of a tortoise, and cause a great fire which burns the first three (of seven) cosmic spheres, viz., the earth (including the hells), sky and heaven. At this point the inhabitants of the last two spheres, viz., gods, ṛṣis and other beings [4] move up to the next one, maharloka, and then up another sphere to janaloka when maharloka gets too hot from the fire below it. When these beings have gone, the second part of the pralaya gets under way and great clouds appear in the sky which pour down rain for another 100 years, extinguishing the fire and inundating the world of earth, atmosphere and heaven with water, until everything is covered by an uninterrupted ocean. The clouds are then dispersed by a wind which blows for another 100 years, at the end of which only Viṣnu is left, sleeping on the ocean in the form of Brahmâ, ready for the new creation. This completes the naimittika pralaya which thus, in its essentials, presents a two-fold destruction: by heat (drought, sun, fire), followed by water (clouds, rain, wind).

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4 Not specified in the Viṣnu: this is from the Vâyu account, c.f. Wilson's footnote, Viṣnu p.632, fnt.7.

The Viṣṇu's account of the **prākṛtika pralaya** begins in the same way, with dessication of the world by drought and fire, but then goes into the more abstract dissolution of the elements - **mahâbhûtas** - and principles into each other, in the order: earth water > fire > wind > ether > **ahaṃkāra** > **mahat**. While the elemental dissolution in the Viṣnu is still expressed in fairly mythological terms, the Bhâg. and Kûrma both finish the mythological mode of narration with the stages that are common to the **naimittika pralaya** (the burning of the earth in Kûrma, and flooding in Bhâg.) [5], and then go into a philosophical mode of expression for the dissolution of the **mahâbhûtas** peculiar to the **prâkṛtika** [6]. Thus, typically, the Purâṇic **prâkṛtika** differs from the **naimittika** both in its mode of expression - philosophy/mythology - and in its structure of earth > water > fire > air > ether, instead of the simpler fire/water.

Epic **pralaya** - extended references

In the various Mbh accounts, the **pralaya** is described in different ways which, in their details, correspond quite closely to the **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika** **pralayas** distinguished in the Purâṇas. However, there

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5 C.f. Kûrma 2.44.13f; Bhâg. 12.4.1f.

6 In this context, by 'mythological', I am meaning the use of naturalistic descriptions which present the details as concrete events; and by 'philosophical', I am meaning the use of abstract statements to express the idea. The two obviously overlap, but I think the distinction will become obvious in the accounts which follow.

are a number of important differences. Firstly, the terms **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika** are not used by the epic: if any designation other than **pralaya** is used, the descriptions which correspond to the **prâkṛtika** are called **bhûtapralaya avyakta** [7] or **mahâbhûtavinâśânta pralaya** [8]. Secondly, and more importantly, in the epic the different descriptions of the **pralaya** offered are never distinguished in relation to each other, nor put in series, as are the **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika**: both are simply given as descriptions of the destruction of the world without any reference to other types of destruction, cosmic or individual. Moreover, neither are they distinguished by the time of their occurrence, with one at the end of Brahmâ's day and the other at the end of Brahmâ's life, and this would relate back to the fact that these two periods are not put into any serial relationship in the Mbh either. Where the time of the **pralaya**'s occurrence is specified, it is at the end of 1,000 (mahâ)**yugas** [9], otherwise expressed as the end of a Brahmâ day [10], or else simply at the end of the **yuga** cycle, and these settings are irrespective of whether the description that follows corresponds to the Purâṇic **naimittika** or **prâkṛtika**.

Without the two descriptions therefore being related to each other as different levels of **pralaya**, it becomes clear that the distinction is essentially between a

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7 12.335.11.
8 14.42.3.
9 3.186.56.
10 12.300.3.

mythological account of destruction and a philosophical one, which will be seen to follow the sâmkhya emanation theory of creation in reverse order. The mechanisms of this, obscured by the Purâṇic systematization, become apparent when the Mbh accounts are examined.

The most purely mythical account of the pralaya occurs in the session with Mârkaṇḍeya at 3.186.56f, following a description of the four yugas:

tasmin yugasahasrânte samprâpte câ 'yuṣaḥ kṣaye
anâvṛṣṭir mahârâja jâyate bahuvârṣikî (56)

tatas tâny alpasârâṇi sattvâni kṣudhitâni ca
pralayaṃ yânti bhûyiṣṭhaṃ pṛthivyâṃ pṛthivîpate (57)

tato dinakarair dîptaiḥ saptabhir manujâdhipa
pîyate salilaṃ sarvaṃ samudreṣu saritsu ca (58)

yac ca kâsthaṃ tṛṇam câ 'pi śuṣkaṃ câ 'rdraṃ ca bhârata
sarvam tad bhasmasâd bhûtaṃ dṛśyate bharatarṣabha (59)

tataḥ samvartako vahnir vâyunâ saha bhârata
lokaṃ âviśate pûrvam âdityair upaśoṣitam (60)

tataḥ sa pṛthivîṃ bhittvâ samâviśya rasâtalam
devadânavayakṣâṇâṃ bhayam janayate mahat (61)

nirdahan nâgalokaṃ ca yac ca kiṃcit kṣitâv iha
adhastât pṛthivîpâla sarvaṃ nâśayate kṣaṇât (62)

tato yojanaviṃśânâṃ sahasrâṇi śatâni ca
nirdahaty aśivo vâyuḥ sa ca saṃvartako >nalaḥ (63)

sadevâsuragandharvaṃ sayakṣoragarâkṣasam
tato dahati dîptaḥ sa sarvaṃ eva jagad vibhuḥ (64)

tato gajakulaprakhyâs taḍinmâlâvibhûṣitâḥ

uttiṣṭhanti mahâmeghâ nabhasy
adbhutadarśanâḥ (65)

kecin nîlotpalaśyâmâḥ kecit kumudasamnibhâḥ
kecit kiñjalkasaṃkâśâḥ kecit pîtâḥ
payodharâḥ (66)

kecid dhâridrasaṃkâśâḥ kâkâṇḍakanibhâs
tathâ
kecit kamalapatrâbhâḥ kecid dhiṅgulakaprabhâḥ
(67)

kecit puravarâkârâḥ kecid gajakulopamâḥ
kecid añjanasamkâśâḥ kecin
makarasamsthitâḥ
vidyunmâlâpinaddhâṅgâḥ samuttiṣṭhanti vai
ghanâḥ (68)

ghorarûpâ mahârâja ghorasvananinâditâḥ
tato jaladharâḥ sarve vyâpnuvanti nabhastalam
(69)

tair iyam prthivî sarvâ saparvatavanâkarâ
âpûryate mahârâja salilaughapariplutâ (70)

tatas te jaladâ ghorâ râvinah puruṣarṣabha
sarvatah plâvayanty âśu coditâḥ
parameṣṭhinâ (71)

varṣamâṇâ mahat toyam pûrayanto vasumdharâm
sughoram aśivam raudram nâśayanti ca
pâvakam (72)

tato dvâdaśa varṣâṇi payodâs ta upaplave
dhârâbhiḥ pûrayanto vai codyamânâ mahâtmanâ (73)

tato samudraḥ svâm velâm atikrâmati bhârata
parvatâś ca viśîryante mahî câ 'pi viśîryate
(74)

sarvataḥ sahasâ bhrântâs te payodâ nabhastalam
samveṣṭayitvâ naśyanti vâyuvegaparâhatâḥ
(75)

tatas tam mârutam ghoram svayambhûr
manujâdhipa
âdipadmâlayo devaḥ pîtvâ svapiti bhârata (76)

At the end of the thousand yugas, when life is being destroyed, a drought occurs, lasting for many years. (56)

Then, almost all of the creatures on the earth, weak and hungry, go to their destruction, Lord of the earth. (57)

Then all the water in the oceans and rivers is drunk up by seven blazing suns, Lord of men, (58)

And that which is wood or grass, dry or moist, Bhârata, is all seen to be reduced to ashes. (59)

Then the samvartaka fire, accompanied by wind, overpowers the world, which was previously dessicated by the suns. (60)

After it has split the earth and entered hell, the fire makes the gods, dânavas and yakṣas very fearful. (61)

Burning up the world of the snakes and any thing on earth, it destroys everything here below in a moment. (62)

Then that samvartaka fire and the inauspicious wind burn up (everything) for hundreds and thousands of twenty yojanas. (63)

The Lord (Fire), blazing, burns the whole world, including the gods, asuras, gandharvas, yakṣas, snakes and râkṣasas. (64)

Then great clouds, marvellous to see, arise in the sky, looking like herds of elephants and adorned with flashes of lightning. (65)

Some are dusky like blue lotuses; some are like the white night lotus; some resemble stamens and some clouds are yellow. (66)

Some are the colour of turmeric and also like crows' eggs; some have the lustre of lotus petals and some the beauty of vermilion. (67)

Some appear like great cities, some like large herds of elephants; some look like collyrium and some have the form of sea-monsters. With limbs encircled with garlands of lightning, the clouds gather. (68)

Then all those clouds with their dreadful shapes and resounding with terrible roars, filled the surface of the sky, Great king. (69)

They completely fill up all this earth with her mountains, forests and mines, Great king, and deluge her with floods of water. (70)

Then those terrible, roaring clouds quickly submerge everything, urged on by Parameṣṭhin, Bull among men. (71)

Showering great quantities of water and filling up the earth, they douse the very terrible, fierce, inauspicious fire. (72)

When those clouds, driven on by the Great-souled one, fill (the earth) for twelve years with rain in a flood, (73)

Then the ocean overflows its own boundary, O Bhârata, and the mountains are destroyed, and the earth, too, is destroyed. (74)

Suddenly, the clouds which are roaming everywhere, covering the surface of the sky, perish, driven away by a blast of wind. (75)

Then, O Lord of men, [Brahmâ] Svayambhû, the god who dwells in the primaeval lotus, sucks in that terrible wind and sleeps, O Bhârata. (76)

Apart from the smaller time-scale of 'many years' drought and twelve years rain instead of a hundred, this passage agrees quite closely with the Visnu Purâna account of the naimittika pralaya, from its basic structure of fire followed by flood, down to the detailed description of the clouds. However, one important difference is that the Mbh account contains no mention of the Purânic migration to higher spheres: rather, it is apparent that the destruction of beings in the samvartaka fire is total (v.64) [11].

The other major epic accounts of the pralaya all correspond more closely to the description of the prâkrtika pralaya in the Visnu Purâna, and are expressed either philosophically or in a mixture of philosophy with mythological details added. The most succinct of the

11 Apart, of course, from the Visnu-child and Mârkandeya, who is required by the narrative. I shall return to the question of the fate of beings during the period of non-creation in 4.4.

purely philosophical accounts occurs at 12.326.28-30 in a eulogy of Nârâyaṇa in the Nârâyaṇîya section. This passage contains no reference to any other aspect of the yuga theory and its point is to assert the superiority of Nârâyaṇa as the only principle which is not subject to periodic destruction:

jagatpratiṣṭhâ devarṣe pṛthivy apsu pralîyate
jyotiṣy âpaḥ pralîyante jyotir vâyau pralîyate (28)

khe vâyuḥ pralayaṃ yâti manasy âkâśam eva ca
mano hi paramaṃ bhûtaṃ tad avyakte pralîyate (29)

avyaktam puruṣe brahman niṣkriye sampralîyate
nâ 'sti tasmât parataraṃ puruṣâd vai sanâtanât (30)

The earth, O divine seer, the foundation of the world, is dissolved into the waters; the waters are dissolved into light; light is dissolved into wind; (28)

Wind is dissolved into ether and ether into manas, for manas is the highest element and that is dissolved into the unmanifest. (29)

The unmanifest, O brahmin, disappears into inert puruṣa - there is nothing greater than this eternal puruṣa [which is identified in the next verse with Vâsudeva]. (30)

In another passage treating of the dissolution in which the great elements are destroyed - mahâbhûtavinâśânta pralaya (v.3) - the relationship between this destruction and the emanation theory of creation is made explicit:

yady asmâñ jâyate bhûtam tatra tat pravilîyate

līyante pratilomāni jāyante co 'ttarottaram

The elements disappear into that from which they were produced: they disappear and are born in reverse order successively.[12]

More complex are the two remaining extended descriptions of the **pralaya** which display a mixture of both philosophical and mythological elements. That the two modes of expression are being merged is clearest in the account at 12.300.1f, which begins like a simple, abbreviated mythological description:

tattvānāṃ sargasaṃkhyā ca kālasaṃkhyā tathai
'va ca
mayā proktā 'nupūrvyeṇa saṃhāram api me
śṛṇu (1)
. . .

ahahkṣayam atho buddhvā niśi svapnamanās
tathā
codayāmāsa bhagavān avyakto >haṃkṛtaṃ naram
(3)

tatah śatasahasrāṃśur avyaktenā
'bhicoditah
kṛtvā dvādaśadhātmānam ādityo jvaladagnivat (4)

caturvidham prajājālam nirdahaty āśu tejasā
jarāyvaṇḍasvedajātam udbhijjaṃ ca narādhipa
(5)

etad unmeṣamātreṇa vinaṣṭaṃ
sthānujaṅgamam
kūrmaprsthasamā bhūmir bhavaty atha
samantatah (6)

jagad dagdhvā 'mitabalaḥ kevalaṃ jagatīṃ
tatah
ambhasā balinā kṣipram āpūryata samantatah (7)

I have told you about the system of the creation of the principles (of **sāmkhya** philosophy) and also the periods of time with their proper order: listen to me as I tell you about their destruction (1)

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12 14.42.4. A similar philosophical rendering occurs at 12.335.11-14.

. . .

When the blessed Unmanifest one becomes aware of the day's decline and desires to sleep during the night, he urged on the self-conscious man. (3)

Then the sun of a hundred thousand rays, urged on by the unmanifest, made itself into twelve, each like a blazing fire. (4)

And with its fiery force it quickly burns up the four-fold multitude of beings: those born from the womb, egg, humidity and plants, O king. (5)

In a mere wink of an eye, this standing and moving creation is destroyed and the earth becomes bare like the back of a tortoise in all directions. (6)

After (the sun) of immeasurable force had completely burned up the earth, it was then quickly filled with mighty water on all sides. (7)

At this point the account, while still expressed mythologically, starts to deviate from the myth's fire/water structure by reintroducing fire again:

tataḥ kâlâgnim âsâdya tad ambho yâti
samkṣayam
vinaṣṭe >mbhasi râjendra jâjvalîty analo mahân

Then that water meets with the fire of annihilation and evaporates. As the water is destroyed, O king, the great fire blazes up. (v.8)

This is followed by wind and space, and by verse 12 it becomes clear that despite the mythical detail, the account is following the pattern of the philosophical pralaya that was seen above:

tam aprameyo >tibalam jvalamânam vibhâvasum
ûsmânam sarvabhûtânâṁ saptârciṣam
aṫhā'ñjasâ (9)

bhakṣayâmâsa balavân vâyur aṣṭâtmako balî
vicarann amitaprâṇas tiryag ûrdhvam adhas tathâ
(10)

tam apratibalam bhîmam âkâśam grasate >>tmanâ
âkâśam apy atinadan mano grasati cârikam
[var:câdhikam] (11)

mano grasati sarvâtmâ so >haṃkâraḥ
prajâpatiḥ
ahamkâram mahân âtmâ bhûtabhavyabhaviṣyavat
(12)

tam apy anupamâtmânam viśvaṃ śaṃbhuḥ
prajâpatiḥ . . . (13)

Then, straightaway, an immeasurable, mighty, powerful wind with eight forms, roving sideways, upwards and downwards with boundless vigour (9)

Devoured that exceedingly powerful, blazing fire of seven flames, the heat of all beings. (10)

(Then) with its own essence, space swallows up that irresistibly strong, formidable (wind) and mind which is superior still [taking var.], swallows up the greatly roaring space. (11)

(Then) that soul of everything, ahamkâra, the lord of all creation, swallows mind and the great soul, like the past, present and future (swallows) the ahamkâra. (12)

Śambhuḥ Prajâpati (swallows) that incomparable soul entire . . . (13)

While the mythical mode of narration is maintained until a very late stage in this account with the elision between the two structures almost imperceptible, in the description at 12.225.1f the mixture of philosophy and mythology inclines more strongly towards philosophy from the very beginning, and the whole passage corresponds more closely to the blend of the two modes found in the prâkṛtika pralaya of the Viṣnu Purâṇa. Again, however, there is no clear demarcation to announce the beginning of the elemental dissolution proper:

pṛthivyâm yâni bhûtâni jaṅgamâni dhruvâṇi ca

tany evâ 'gre pralîyante bhûmitvam upayânti ca (1)

tatah pralîne sarvâsmin sthâvare jañgame tathâ
akâṣṭhâ nistrnâ bhûmir dṛśyate
kûrmaprṣṭhavat (2)

bhûmer api gunam gandham âpa âdadate yadâ
âttagandhâ tadâ bhûmiḥ pralayatvâya kalpate (3)

âpas tatah pratiṣṭhanti ûrmimatyo
mahâsvanâḥ
sarvam eve 'dam âpûrya tiṣṭhanti ca caranti ca
(4)

apâm api gunâms tâta jyotir âdadate yadâ
âpas tadâ âttaguṇâ jyotiṣy uparamanti ca (5)

yadā 'dityam sthitam madhye gûhanti śikhino
>rcisah
sarvam eve 'dam archirbhiḥ pûrṇam jâjvalyate
nabhah (6)

At first, all mobile and immobile beings which are on the earth disappear and become (united with) the essence of the earth. (1)

When all this moving and stationary (creation) has disappeared, the earth, without wood or grass, looks like the back of a tortoise. (2)

When water takes the quality of earth, too, which is smell, then the earth, with smell removed becomes ready for dissolution. (3)

Then the resounding wave-filled waters rise up. They completely cover everything and (only) they remain and move about. (4)

When light takes the qualities of the waters likewise, then the waters, deprived of their qualities, come to rest in light, my dear. (5)

When the flames of the fire conceal the sun which is situated in their midst, everything is filled with flames and the sky blazes up. (6)

and so on through the other elements and principles.

In the extended passages treating of cosmic destruction, therefore, it appears that the Mbh knows two distinctly structured **pralaya** accounts, the mythological

at 3.186.57f and the more or less philosophical in the Śânti and Aśvamedhaparvas. However, while these correspond to the **pralayas** designated **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika** by the Purâṇas, in the epic they are clearly not yet systematised into a distinct hierarchy. This point, apparent from the lack of any explicit mention of a two-tiered destruction or any reference in one destruction to another greater or lesser **pralaya**, is reinforced by the two passages which do seem to bring the two accounts together, viz., 12.300.1f and 12.225.1f. From these passages, and especially the former, it appears that the epic, recognizing a discrepancy between the two descriptions that it variously offers, has tried to synthesize the two originally separate accounts of the **pralaya** - one purely mythological and the other according to the **sâṃkhya** emanation philosophy - into a single coherent whole. Thus, although aware of the problem, the Mbh has not yet reached the Purâṇic solution of clarifying the differences between the two accounts and joining them to the day of Brahmâ/life of Brahmâ distinction, which thereby sets them into a hierarchy which serves to keep them distinct yet systematically related. That the Mbh should not do this is not surprising, given the lack of a clear distinction between the two units in the epic divisions of time [13].

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13 C.f. below. Indeed, the fact that the epic makes no naimittika/prâkṛtika distinction serves to reinforce the absence of a significant day/life distinction.

Shorter references

As well as these extended accounts, the Mbh contains many shorter references to aspects of the **pralaya**. These are predominantly concentrated in the battle **parvas** but they also occur in other sections describing battles or the preparation for war. These references take the form of similes emphasizing the fierce nature of a warrior, weapon or event and typical examples would be as follows:

> drṣṭvâ hi samare bhîṣmaṃ vyâttânanam ivâ
> 'ntakam
> bhayârtâḥ saṃpraṇaśyanti siṃhaṃ
> kṣudramṛgâ iva

> Seeing Bhîṣma in the battle, like the Destroyer with gaping mouth, they are lost, stricken with fear like little deer seeing a lion. [14]

> utsmayann iva bhîmasya kruddhaḥ kâlânalaprabhaḥ
> dhvajaṃ ciccheda râdheyaḥ patâkâś ca
> nyapâtayat

> Seeming to smile, the enraged son of Râdha [Karṇa], radiant as the yuga fire, cut off Bhîma's banner and cast down his flags. [15]

> tayos tu senayor âsîd adbhutaḥ sa samâgamaḥ
> yugânte samanuprâpte dvayoḥ sâgarayor iva

> The encounter between those armies was wonderful, like that of two oceans when the end of the yuga has arrived. [16]

While most of the references are to aspects of the pralaya already mentioned in the longer descriptions,

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14 6.55.45.
15 7.114.46.
16 6.1.24.

some of them give details not found elsewhere. These could either be considered as due to the poetic license of the narrator or else to point to more detailed descriptions of the **pralaya** existing in the oral corpus available to the epic's compilers.

The most commonly used simile is with the fire of the **pralaya**, which is designated by a number of compounds bringing together words for fire, with words which identify it with the **pralaya**. The commonest of these are **kâlâgni/kâlânala** - the fire of time - and **yugântâgni** - the fire at the end of the **yuga**. The word **samvartaka** is also used quite often, as in 6.9.17: **samvartako nâma kâlâgnir**. Elsewhere, the fire is also called simply **pâvaka**, **hutâśana** and **dhûmaketu** [17]. The sun which appears at the **pralaya** is also identified by similar

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17 To indicate the distribution of the names, references to the **pralaya** fire are as follows:
kâlâgni -
1.49.22;3.218.32;4.64.14;5.81.15;174.23;6.15.12;
88.13;7.14.5;70.28;8.34.14;9.11.2;12.273.7;13.140.7;145.2
9
kâlânala -
1.52.20;3.195.21;216.14;6.78.34;96.50;7.114.46;
172.6;13.14.124
kâlavahni - 6.55.92
kâlajvalana - 7.141.29
yugântâgni - 5.164.10;6.65.30;81.26;114.6;7.64.16;67.15;
90.21;8.17.118;11.21.8;12.145.8
yugântajvalana - 3.84.10
yugântânala - 10.14.7
samvartaka - 3.195.25;6.9.17;6.91.52;7.172.27;9.16.43;
13.14.112;13.135.38
antakajvalana - 1.17.22
antakâgni - 3.120.10
The fire is also called simply:
pâvaka - 6.59.12;7.135.53;10.8.137
hutâśana - 6.80.8
dhûmaketu - 7.31.45

compounds, kâlasûrya, yugântârka, etc. [18]. Twelve suns are mentioned in one reference [19] and a second sun - dvitîya sûrya - in two others [20]. In other references the sun is said to be thrown down from the sky by time - kâlena pâtitaṃ sûryam ambarât - [21] and to deviate from its usual course - kâṣṭhât îta ivâ 'dityaḥ [22]. The wind and the clouds of the pralaya are also used in these similes, again designated as yugântânila, kâlamegha etc., [23] and the clouds are further described as roaring - nardamâna [24]. The seas are said to be in conflict at the time of the pralaya [25] and described as agitated [26] or noisy [27].

Details not already documented in the extended passages are mainly to do with celestial phenomena. Thunderbolts occur [28] and meteors are mentioned in several places, described as blazing [29], terrible [30], covering the sky [31] or striking the sun and falling down

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18 kâlasûrya - 5.9.44;7.7.29;15.15;76.7;93.35;9.54.32; 13.14.136
yugântârka - 7.31.44;8.12.43,51
yugântasûrya - 8.57.55;64.10
yugântâditya - 6.80.12
antakâlârka - 5.182.6
19 5.182.8
20 3.23.32;42.11
21 11.23.15
22 7.65.13
23 yugântânila - 1.125.5; kâlamegha - 1.185.11; yugântamegha - 6.76.19; jalada - 6.88.15.
24 1.185.11.
25 6.1.24.
26 6.165.42.
27 6.114.17.
28 8.10.22.
29 5.182.5.
30 6.73.40.
31 8.11.25.

from the sky [32]. Planets arise in the sky [33], fill the sky [34], surround the sun [35] and battle with each other [36]. Five [37] or seven [38] planets afflict the moon, and the crescent moon - **târâpati apûrna** - is thrown down [39]. On the earth, the mountains are riven with thunder [40], the earth is strewn with hills [41], there are rivers of blood [42] and the universe shakes [43]. In two references the **pâśupata/brahmaśiras** weapon is mentioned as destroying the world [44].

The identity of the destroyer

The majority of **pralaya** similes used in this way involve comparisons with the presiding deity of the destruction, and it is here that the smaller references show the greatest differences from the more extended accounts. In the Purâṇas and later texts, the deity of the destruction is typically identified as Rudra/Śiva [45].

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32 10.6.13.
33 8.63.16.
34 7.131.118;136.8.
35 6.73.10.
36 8.11.22.
37 6.96.36.
38 7.112.22.
39 6.102.69.
40 9.8.27.
41 7.64.54.
42 4.57.17;7.13.8. This is a very common metaphor in the battle **parvas**, but not often identified with the **pralaya**.
43 7.51.42.
44 3.41.7-8;5.195.13.
45 C.f. e.g., Viṣṇu 6·3 (Wilson [1840] p.632) where Viṣṇu assumes the form of Rudra at the end of the **kalpa**; Bhâg. 2.6.31, where Brahmâ creates, Viṣṇu protects and Śiva destroys; Kûrma 2.44.1f, which shows Śiva at the time of the **pralaya**, destroying the world with his tâṇḍava dance (2.44.11).

This identification has been seen in a few of the Mbh references already examined, where the coupling of Rudra as destroyer and Brahmâ as creator is clearly known, either as part of the classical triumvirate or closely prefiguring it [46]. If this identification was as firmly established in the bulk of the epic as it is in the Purânas, however, it would be expected that the many briefer references to the deity of the destruction would accord with it, and this is not the case. Instead, the orchestrator of the **pralaya** is only clearly identified as Rudra/Śiva in a few references. In others, the identification is with Yama or, most commonly, with no specific god at all, and here the deity or personification of the destruction is simply named according to the rôle as **antaka/kṛtânta** - destroyer, ender - or **kâla** - time. As the various identifications of the destroyer offered by the Mbh are significantly different from the accepted classical picture, I shall examine these references in some detail in order to establish the epic's position more clearly [47].

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46 For these references c.f. 4.1. Also in that section, references were given where Śiva is presented as encompassing both destruction and creation in his rôle as supreme mover of the cycle. However, as Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa is also presented as the cosmic destroyer in the same context, these references add nothing to the discussion of the particular nature of the deity, but are rather concerned with establishing the supremacy of either god.

47 While Rudra/Śiva as the destroyer is certainly the most pervasive classical and contemporary identification, it should be noted that I have not studied the Purânas in sufficient detail to state that identifications with other deities never occur. Indeed I would expect to find occasional references to Yama, **antaka**, etc. as the deity of the destruction, given that the demarcation between 'earlier' and 'later' ideas is never clear and Purânic narrators could well draw on similes more properly belonging to the epic.

In each of the ways in which the destroyer is identified there is a certain ambiguity as to the nature of the destruction which it is important to note. In some of the references the destruction is clearly cosmic and refers to the **pralaya**; in others it is clearly individual and refers to the personal death of mortal creatures; and in many it could equally refer to either. While it is the clearly cosmic references which are the immediate concern of this thesis, the presence of the ambiguity should be noted.

1) **antaka**

These different applications of 'destroyer' and 'destruction' are clearly displayed in the references which employ the word which is by far the most commonly used designation, viz. **antaka**. This means simply 'ender' and may be used to refer to either the destroyer of the world or the harbinger of individual death. In the Mbh it is used with explicitly cosmic reference in a number of passages:

> yugântakâlasamaye daṇḍahastam ivâ 'ntakam
>
> like antaka with staff in hand when it is the time of the end of the yuga[48]

> yugânte sarvabhûtânâṃ kâlasṛṣṭa ivâ 'ntakaḥ

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48 7.131.70.

like antaka let loose by time (destroying) all beings at the end of the yuga [49]

lokasya samudîrnasya nidhanâyâ 'ntako yathâ

[Bhîma is the match of Jarâsaṃdha] as antaka is of the world thrown to its destruction [50]

[Paraśurâma and Bhîma are the equal of] yugânte câ 'ntako ... - antaka at the end of the yuga [51]

In some others, while the context is not made explicitly cosmic by phrases such as yugânte etc., the passages would seem to have connotations more of universal destruction than individual death, although the latter possibility is not excluded. Thus, for example:

antakaḥ sarvabhûtânâṃ prânân kâla ivâ 'gate

like antaka (taking) the life-breaths of all beings when the time arrives [52]

kâlasṛṣṭa ivâ 'ntakaḥ

like antaka created by time [53]

kupitenâ 'ntakene 'va prajâḥ sarvâ

like all beings (destroyed) by enraged antaka [54]

In the majority of passages that employ antaka, however, either an individual or cosmic interpretation is

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49 7.170.1.
50 2.18.6.
51 7.33.4.
52 7.44.1.
53 10.8.71.
54 8.46.10 For similar references c.f. also,3.153.25; 7.101.44;166.17.

possible, and these two possibilities are continued in the adjectives which are used to qualify the word. These either tend towards strengthening the cosmic connotations: **vyâttânana, vyâditâsya** - with gaping mouth, **kruddha, kupita** etc. - enraged, angry; or else to be more appropriate to the picture of death coming to claim the lives of mortals: **daṇḍapâṇi, daṇḍahasta** - staff in hand, **pâśahasta** - noose in hand. The last are all common epithets of Yama as the god of the dead and I shall return to this point below [55].

2) kâla

Kâla - time - occurs less frequently than antaka but carries more consistently cosmic connections. These are made explicit in a number of instances as, for example:

> **yugânte sarvabhûtâni kâlasye 'va didhakṣataḥ**
>
> [Bhîma's face is] like that of Kâla wishing to consume all creatures at the end of the yuga [56]

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55 To give a picture of the balance of these connotations, the occurrences of **antaka** and its qualifications are as follows:
antaka (unqualified) - 3.46.18;7.38.17;112.10;128.25;166.17;172.6;8.15.5;18.47;22;1;45.47;46;9;50.59;51.39;62.7;9.5.7;18.59;10.8.73;11.11.26;13.38.25,29
kruddha etc. - 7.50.80;63.29;75.29;100.31;128.25;8.33.7;39.35;46.10;9.9.24;13.31;16.30
daṇḍapâṇi - 2.72.31;6.58.51;59.11;78.57;103.68;8.43.70;9.18.46;24.28
daṇḍahasta - 3.153.25;6.98.35;7.14.5;131.30;9.25.2;31.39
pâśahasta - 6.105.10;8.40.91,95;9.11.2;13.14.136
vyâditâsya - 6.58.33;59.20;102.18;112.74;7.81.10;85.30;92.27;120.42;137.49
vyâttânana - 6.55.45;59.23;103.93;104.37;7.144.9;8.45.7

56 2.39.12 For other references including **yugânte, yugakṣaye**, etc. c.f. also, 6.53.2;59.12,17;73.37;98.14;100.4;7.134.55;8.55.28

Where the cosmic context is not made explicit in this way, the connotations of world destruction rather than individual death are still present, although once again the latter interpretation is possible. Thus, for example:

> âpânabhûmim kâlasya
>
> [the battle-field was like] the drinking area of Kâla,[57]

Kâla is qualified less often than antaka, but where qualifications do occur, they are similar ones [58].

3) kṛtânta etc.

kṛtânta - the end-maker - and kâlântaka are other less frequently used words. Kṛtânta occurs in one explicitly cosmic context:

> yugântakâle samprâpte kṛtântasye 'va
> rûpiṇaḥ
>
> [Bhîma's face] was like that of kṛtânta incarnate when the time for the end of the yuga arrives[59]

Apart from this, however, the majority of passages would seem to refer more readily to individual death and in one case this is made fairly obvious by reference to the

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57 12.48.5. C.f. also 9.6.29, and for other less explicitly cosmic references, c.f. 3.12.20;5.164.11; 166.19;7.170.46;8.62.4.

58 Viz., vyâttânana - 6.80.19;8.54.8; attadaṇḍa - 8.54.7;62.17 (daṇḍa is also mentioned in relation to kâla at 9.10.37). bhûtântakṛt (8.54.7) and mṛtyukṛta (6.81.20) are also used as qualifications.

59 2.64.15

death of Abhimanyu and in another from the context of a dialogue between a jackel and a vulture vying for the body of a dead child at a burning-ground [60].

Kâlântaka occurs occasionally on its own [61], but more frequently in the compound **kâlântakayama** [62]. This is translated in different ways: van Buitenen takes it as a **dvandva** 'Time, the Finisher and Yama' [63]; Roy has 'Yama at the season of universal destruction' [64], or else glosses it as 'the destroyer at the end of the yuga' [65]; while Monier-Williams gives 'all-destroying time in the form of Yama' [66]. Yet another possibility, and the one that I would offer, is to take **kâlântaka** as a qualification of Yama, giving the compound the general sense of 'Yama become **kâlântaka**, the ender of time', or 'Yama in his form of **kâlântaka**'. Thus **kâlântakayama** could point to Yama being extended into a cosmic rôle. However, despite the cosmic connotations of these translations, none of the passages employing the compound offer an explicitly cosmic context by the use of yugakṣaye etc., although a few do lend themselves more readily to a cosmic than an individual interpretation:

60 12.149.10. For other references to kṛtânta, c.f., 5.163.8;6.58.55;7.55.19;62.3;11.8.38;12.34.35

61 6.109.13;12.160.43;13.3.4

62 3.23.30;28.23;175.15;297.19;6.50.42;51.38;87.7; 90.20;7.95.19;134.35;8.11.30;35.18;40.18;10.13.20; 14.73.75. C.f. also, 7.110.9 - yamakâlântaka; 8.15.29 - antakâlântaka; 8.17.43 - mṛtyukâlântaka

63 C.f. for example his translation of 3.23.30.

64 C.f. for example 6.50.42.

65 C.f. for example 6.51.38.

66 Monier-Williams p.279.

pradhakṣyann iva lokâṃs trîn
kâlântakayamopamaḥ

[Of the fire in the blade of grass which Aśvatthâman inspires with the brahmaśiras weapon] like kâlântakayama, as if it would burn the three worlds [67].

4) Yama

Yama is referred to fairly frequently in the Mbh, but mainly in a non-cosmic rôle, most commonly as the presiding deity of death and the dead. The majority of references consist of threats to dispatch enemies to Yama's realm and this functions as a synonym for death. Thus, for example, enraged at the dicing, Bhîma threatens the followers of Duryodhana with neṣyâmi yamasâdanam - I will send (you) to the dwelling place of Yama, a phrase commonly used in this context [68]. Again, Sâtyaki in mortal danger is said to be yamadaṃstrântaraṃ gatam - within the jaws of Yama [69], and elsewhere Yama is said to put an end to the bodies of men - śarîrântakaraḥ [70]. The most sustained description of Yama in this role as the overseer of individual death occurs in the passage where he appears to Sâvitrî as she sits by her dead husband:

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67 For more cosmic uses c.f. 8.11.30, which occurs in a passage where other clearly **pralaya** inspired imagery is repeatedly employed; and also 3.23.30;12.160.43. There is nothing to stop the other references to **kâlântakayama** being taken cosmically either, but equally nothing that particularly points to this interpretation.

68 2.68.18. Brockington [1984] p.196f discusses the use of similar phrases in the Râm.

69 7.85.18.

70 3.52.4.

muhûrtâd iva câ 'paśyat puruṣam pîtavâsasam
baddhamauliṃ vapuṣmantam âdityasamatejasam

śyâmâvadâtaṃ raktâkṣaṃ pâśahastaṃ
bhayâvaham
. . .

viddhi mâṃ tvaṃ śubhe yamam . . .

ayaṃ te satyavân bhartâ kṣîṇâyuḥ
pârthivâtmajaḥ
neśyâmy enam ahaṃ baddhvâ . . .

tataḥ satyavataḥ kâyât pâśabaddhaṃ
vaśaṃ gatam
aṅguṣṭhamâtraṃ puruṣaṃ niścakarṣa
yamo balât

yamas tu taṃ tathâ baddhvâ prayâto
dakṣiṇâmukhaḥ

After a moment she saw a person in a yellow robe with a turbanned head, handsome with a splendour like that of the sun.

Dark and clear, red-eyed, noose in hand, he was terrifying. . .

"Know me to be Yama, good woman . . .

"This your husband, Prince Satyavat, has come to the end of his allotted life-span: I will bind him and lead him (away). . ."

Then Yama forcibly pulled out from the body of Satyavat a thumb-sized person bound with the noose and in (his) power.

Then Yama, having bound him, set out southwards.[71]

Here Yama is depicted with his characteristic noose, but in other references mention is made of his staff - **danda** - also [72].

Related to this rôle as god of the dead, Yama is also characterized as the lord of the pitṛs - **yamah**

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71 3.281.8,9,12,13,16,17.
72 C.f., for example, 3.12.43;5.164.10;185.5;6.90.21; 7.92.38;9.10.43.

pitṝnâm iśvaraḥ [73] - and the guardian of dharma and punisher of evil:

gurur âtmavatâṃ śâstâ śâstâ râjâ durâtmanâm
atha pracchannapâpânâṃ śâstâ vaivasvato yamaḥ

The guru is the chastiser of the self-controlled; the king the chastiser of the wicked; while Yama Vaivasvata is the chastiser of those whose sins are hidden [74]

Together with Indra, Agni and Varuṇa, he is also named as one of the four world guardians - lokapâla [75].

While these non-cosmic characteristics make up the bulk of the references to Yama, in a few passages the cosmic extension of Yama's rôle is made clear and it is explicit in the extended description of Yama in the Nalopâkhyâna:

tathâ lokântakṛc chrîmân yamaḥ sâkṣât
pratâpavân
mûrtyamûrtidharaiḥ sârdhaṃ pitṛbhir
lokabhâvanaiḥ

dandapânir acintyâtmâ sarvabhûtavinâśakṛt
vaivasvato dharmarâjo vimânenâ 'vabhâsayan

trîl lokân guhyakâṃś cai 'va gandharvâṃś
ca śapannagân
dvitîya iva mârtaṇḍo yugânte samupasthite

Then (came) the blessed Yama, the glorious destroyer of the world, along with the pitṛs, embodied and disembodied, who promote the welfare of the world.

With his staff in his hand, Vaivasvata of inconceivable soul (came), the destroyer of all beings, the king of dharma, illuminating

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73 3.134.7.
74 5.35.61.
75 3.52.5.

> The three worlds, the guhyakas, gandharvas and snakes with his celestial chariot, like a second sun when the end of the yuga arrives 76

Elsewhere, Pretarâja (Yama) is said to kill all beings at the end of time [77] and Narâyaṇa, identifying himself with the pralaya, says:

> aham saṃvartako jyotir aham saṃvartako yamaḥ
> aham saṃvartakaḥ sûryo aham saṃvartako >nilaḥ

> I am the fire of annihilation, I am the Yama of annihilation, I am the sun of annihilation, I am the wind of annihilation [78]

5) Rudra/Siva

Comparison is made with Rudra/Śiva or an epithet of that god in only a few of the similies. Three verses explicitly refer to cosmic destruction and clearly identify Rudra as the diety of this. Thus Garuḍa is said to be:

> yugântakâle saṃkruddhaḥ pînâkî 'va mahâbalaḥ

> like mighty Pinâkin enraged at the time of the end of the yuga. [79]

Again, the battle ground is:

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76 3.42.9-11.
77 8.10.16.
78 3.187.17.
79 1.28.20 C.f. also 5.168.5 where Dhrstadyumna is like Pînâkin yugasamkṣaye.

âkrîḍa iva rudrasya ghnataḥ kâlâtyaye paśûn

Like the pleasure-grove of Rudra when he slays creatures at the end of time. 80

In other references the cosmic connotations are not made explicit but again could be taken as present. Thus Arjuna will slay enemies in the battle kruddho rudraḥ paśûn iva - like the enraged Rudra (slays) creatures [81]. Bhîma on the battle-ground is compared to Śankara dancing - nṛtyantam iva śaṃkaram [82] and his feats in battle to those of Rudra slaying all beings - nighnataḥ sarvabhûtâni rudrasya [83]. Duryodhana also threatens his enemies prajânâm iva saṃkruddhaṃ śûlapânim iva - like the angry Śûlapâni (threatens) created beings [84].

6) Mixed passages

In a few passages similies employing different designations are used side by side, showing a simultaneous awareness of the various possibilities and suggesting that they were all part of the narrators' stock in hand. In one passage, for example, Bhîma is daṇḍapâṇir ivâ 'ntaka in v.51 and pinâkî 'va in v.52. A little further on at v.55 he is kṛtânta iva and then in v.56 we find the simile with nṛtyantam iva śaṃkara [85].

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80 7.18.35 C.f. also 7.100.39 for comparison with Rudra's pleasure grove, but here not qualified as kâlâtyaye.

81 7.18.3 For the same phrase c.f. also 8.32.14; 9.15.51 and for similar c.f. 7.165.1;6.58.58;59.16

82 6.58.56.

83 8.App.I.17.28-9.

84 9.31.38.

85 6.58.51-56.

Similar juxtapositions occur in 6.59.11f where Bhîma is variously compared to daṇḍapâṇi antaka (v.11); vyâditâsya antaka (v.20); vyâttânana antaka (v.23); kâla (vs.12,17) and, in the midst of this, his mace is said to be pinâkam iva rudrasya (v.16).

It should be clear from this analysis of the nomenclature of the destroyer that for the bulk of the epic Rudra/Śiva is by no means the most obvious deity of the pralaya, as he is in the Purâṇas. Instead, there are equally clear instances of Yama taking this rôle in his own right. His claim to be the more typically epic deity of destruction is strengthened by the frequent use of the more abstract designations, viz., antaka, kâla, kṛtânta and kâlântaka, as not only are the words often qualified by descriptions which would link them with the iconography of Yama - daṇḍapâṇi, pâśahasta, etc.[86] , but they are in themselves commonly used epithets of Yama [87]. This identification is made explicit in the case of kâlântakayama, with its strongly cosmic connotations.

That there should have been some vying for the rôle between Śiva and Yama is further evinced by the fact that a fluidity between the rôles of the two gods is evident elsewhere in the epic also. The most significant and

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86 C.f. Monier-Williams pp.466,467,623.

87 For antaka, c.f. Monier-Williams p.43, who notes its use as an epithet for Yama from the AV onwards; Apte I p.118; Macdonell p.17. NB also Mbh 2.16.15, which has yamântaka as a designation. For kâla, c.f. Monier Williams p.278 and for kṛtânta, c.f. Ibid. p.303; Apte I p.595; Macdonell p.73.

direct instance of this occurs at 3.226.10, where Duryodhana is said to shine among the Kurus 'as Yama amidst the Rudras and Indra amidst the Maruts' - **rudrair iva yamo râjâ marudbhir iva vâsava.** Other references, too detailed to enter into here, suggest that there is a certain fluidity of identification between Śiva and Agni, and also between both Yama and Śiva and Kubera [88].

All of this would suggest that the typically epic picture is of a situation where the rôles assigned to Śiva in classical mythology are not yet firmly established, although in the process of being made so. It would therefore be in accordance with this that the bulk of the epic should present the older god Yama as the presiding diety of the **pralaya.** Moreover, the logic behind Yama's portrayal in this rôle is clear: Yama presiding over the **pralaya** is merely the extension of his habitual rôle as god of death into the cosmic arena. His presence there serves to strengthen the connections between the individual death of mortals and the collective destruction of the world, which we have already seen to be inherent in the individual/cosmic ambiguity of the very words used.

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88 Thus, for example, in the epic's account of the birth of Skanda (3.213.1ff), although Skanda is begotten by Agni, the text is at great pains to also connect the birth to Śiva (3.218.25-31), Skanda's father in Purâṇic accounts. Elsewhere, there is some confusion over whether Kubera or Yama is the **lokapâla** of the south (3.165.15;259.33;265.13); and whether Kubera or Śiva resides on Kailâsa (3.151.2;174.2).

4.4 Non-creation

After the **pralaya**, the period of creation is followed by a corresponding period of non-creation when all existence is withdrawn. In the more ordered Purâṇic schema, the day of Brahmâ (1,000 **mahâyugas**) is followed by a night of 12,000,000 divine years (12,000 [= 1 **mahâyuga**] x 1,000) in the **naimittika** cycle; and the longer life of Brahmâ is followed by a corresponding period of 432,000,000,000 divine years (12,000,000 x 360 [= year of Brahmâ] x 100) in the **prâkṛtika** cycle [89]. In the less systematised Mbh accounts it is simply stated that the durations of creation and non-creation are the same and follow each other in a regular pattern [90].

The period of non-creation is described in different ways in the Mbh, but most often by the familiar image of Viṣṇu Nârâyaṇa lying on the waters in a state of yogic sleep, existing alone in an empty universe [91]. During this time he maintains the potential for the continued creation, and this is expressed either in terms of keeping it alive in his thoughts:

> apsv eva ṣayanam cakre nidrâyogam upâgataḥ
> jagataṣ cintayan ṣṛṣṭim citrâm
> bahuguṇodbhavâm

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89 C.f. e.g.; Viṣnu 1.3.
90 C.f. e.g.; 12.224.30;6.30.17, cited below, Chapter 3; 6.30.18,19, cited below, 4.1.
91 An image already seen to precede creation, c.f., e.g.: 3.194.9;12.200.10, cited below, 4.2, and found elsewhere.

> Falling into yogic sleep, he made his bed on the waters, thinking about the manifold creation of the world, produced from many qualities [92]

or else, using the image which formed an important cosmogonic theme, it is expressed by Nârâyaṇa preserving the world within his body:

eso >ham vyaktim âgamya tiṣṭhâmi divi
śâśvataḥ
tato yugasahasrânte samhariṣye jagat punaḥ
kṛtvâ 'tmasthâni bhûtâṇi sthâvarâṇi carâṇi ca
(66)

ekâkī vidyayâ sârdham viharisye dvijottama
tato bhûyo jagat sarvam kariṣyâmī 'ha vidyayâ
(67)

I am this, becoming manifest I remain in heaven for ever. Then at the end of a thousand yugas, I will destroy the world again, having situated mobile and immobile beings in myself. (66)

> I shall pass the time alone, together with knowledge, O best of the twice-born. Then I shall make the whole world anew here with that knowledge [93]
> (67)

This is expressed most literally and in the greatest detail in the session with Mârkaṇḍeya when the sage enters the Viṣṇu-child's body and sees within it the whole world existing in a state of perfect physical and social order:

tatah praviṣṭas tat kukṣim sahasâ
manujâdhipa
sarâṣṭranagarâkīrnâm kṛtsnâm paśyâmi
medinîm (92)

gaṅgâm śatadrum sitâm ca yamunâm atha
kauśikîm . . . (93)
. . .

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92 12.335.17.
93 12.326.66-7.

etâś câ 'nyâś ca nadyo >haṃ pṛthivyâṃ yâ
narottama
parikrâman prapaśyâmi tasya kukṣau mahâtmanaḥ
(96)

tatah samudram paśyâmi yâdogaṇaniṣevitam
ratnâkaram amitraghna nidhânaṃ payaso mahat (97)

tatah paśyâmi gaganam candrasûryavirâjitam
jâjvalyamânam tejobhiḥ pâvakârkasamaprabhaiḥ
paśyâmi ca mahîṃ râjaṅ kânanair upaśobhitam
(98)

yajante hi tadâ râjan brâhmaṇâ bahubhiḥ
savaih
ksatriyâś ca pravartante sarvavarṇânurañjane
(99)

vaiśyâḥ kṛṣiṃ yathânyâyaṃ kârayanti
narâdhipa
śuśrûṣâyâm ca niratâ dvijânâṃ vṛṣalâs
tathâ (100)

tataḥ paripatan râjaṃs tasya kukṣau
mahâtmanaḥ
himavantaṃ ca paśyâmi hemakûṭaṃ ca parvatam
(101)
. . .

simhân vyâghrân varâhâṃś ca nâgâṃś ca
manujâdhipa
prthivyâṃ yâni ca 'nyâni sattvâni jagatîpate
tâni sarvâṇy ahaṃ tatra paśyan paryacaraṃ
tadâ (106)

kukṣau tasya naravyâghra praviṣṭaḥ
samcaran diśaḥ
śakrâdîṃś câ 'pi paśyâmi kṛtsnân
devagaṇâṃs tathâ (107)

gandharvâpsaraso yakṣân ṛṣîṃś cai 'va
mahîpate
daityadânavasaṃghâṃś ca kâleyâṃś ca
narâdhipa
simhikâtanayâṃś câ 'pi ye câ 'nye
suraśatravaḥ (108)

yac ca kimcin mayâ loke dṛṣṭaṃ
sthâvarajaṅgamam
tad apaśyam ahaṃ sarvam tasya kukṣau
mahâtmanaḥ . . . (109)

Then, having entered into his belly, O lord of men, I suddenly saw the whole earth, filled with her kingdoms and cities. (92)

The Ganges, Śatadru and Sîtâ, the Yamunâ and likewise the Kauśikî . . . (93)
. . .

These and any other rivers that are on the earth I see as I wander about in the belly of that great-souled one, O best of men. (96)

Then I see the ocean, inhabited by herds of sea-monsters, the mine of jewels, O enemy destroyer, a great receptacle of water. (97)

Then I see the sky resplendent with the sun and moon, shining brilliantly with lights of the same brilliance as the sun and fire. And I see the earth, O king, adorned with forests. (98)

At that time the brahmins sacrifice with many sacrifices and the kṣatriyas set about gaining the affection of all the castes. (99)

The vaiśyas duly produce the harvest, O lord of men, and the śûdras likewise take delight in obeying the twice-born. (100)

Then flying about in the belly of that great-souled one, King, I see the Himâlaya and the Golden Peak mountain. (101)
. . .

Lions, tigers, boars and snakes, Lord of men, and whatever other animals there are on earth, O king, I wander around, seeing them all there. (106)

Entered into his body, O king and wandering about in all directions, I also see all the hosts of the gods headed by Indra, (107)

Gandharvas, apsarases, yakṣas and ṛṣis, O lord of the earth, the throngs of daityas and dânavas and the kâleyas, O king, and also the sons of Simhikâ, and whatever other enemies of the gods there are; (108)

And whatever, moving or stationary, I had seen in the world, I saw that all in the belly of that great-souled one. . . (109)[94]

In one passage a different image of the state of the universe in this period is offered, an image which consciously goes back to a Vedic description of the time

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94 3.186.92,93,96-101,106-109 C.f. also 4.2 above, where this passage is cited.

before creation. It is describing the world after the destruction by flood, after the passing of the fourth thousandth yuga - samprakṣâlanakâle >tikrânte caturthe yugasahasrânte [95].

jyotirdharaṇivâyurahite >ndhe tamasi
jalaikârṇavè loke (3.iii)

tama ity evâ 'bhibhûte >samjñake >dvitîye
pratisthite (3.iv)

nai 'va râtryâm na divase na sati nâ 'sati na
vyakte nâ 'vyakte vyavasthite . . . (3.v)

nidarśanam api hy atra bhavati (4.i)

nâ 'sîd aho na râtrir âsit (4.ii)

na sad âsîn nâ 'sad âsît (4.iii)

tama eva purastâd abhavad viśvarûpam (4.iv)

When the world was a solitary sea of water in the pitch-black, bereft of light, earth and wind, (3.i)

When darkness alone exists without a second, overcome, unconscious, (3.ii)

When neither night nor day, being nor non-being, manifest nor unmanifest exist . . . (3.iii)

There is also authority on this (point): (4.i)

Day was not, night was not, (4.ii)

Being was not, non-being was not. (4.iii)

Only darkness existed in the beginning, manifold. [96] (4.iv)

Apart from these general descriptions of the fate of the world and its occupants, the Mbh and Purâṇas both speculate about what happens to different beings in the

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95 I.e., presumably, the last of 1000 x 4 yugas.
96 12.329.3-4, echoing RV 10.129.

period after the **pralaya**. While epic references to this aspect of the yuga theory are rather sparse, the Purâṇas treat it in more detail.

In the Purâṇic treatment, the fate of different beings is tied up with both the two levels of **pralaya**, **naimittika** and **prâkṛtika**, and with the structure of Purâṇic cosmography. This, according to the Visnu Purâna (2.7), divides the cosmos into seven spheres which are encompassed within the egg of Brahmâ, itself further surrounded by a seven-layered shell:

pradhāna
intellect
ahamkāra
mind
air
fire
water

satyaloka }	
tapoloka }	akṛtika
janaloka }	(durable)
maharloka }	mixed
svarloka }	
bhuvarloka}	kṛtika
bhûrloka }	(transitory)

The first three spheres **bhûr**, **bhuvar** and **svar**, which constitute **trailokya** are classified as **kṛtika** - transitory - and they are created and destroyed during the **pratisarga/naimittika pralaya** cycle. The top three spheres, **jana**, **tapas** and **satya** by contrast are classified as **akṛtika** - durable. This is because they are unaffected during the **naimittika pralaya**, and are only destroyed in the **prâkṛtika pralaya** at the end of a para. The middlemost sphere, **maharloka**, is of a mixed nature: it is not destroyed by the **naimittika pralaya**, but is affected and rendered uninhabitable by the heat of the blazing **trailokya** beneath it. Because of this it is

deserted by its inhabitants whom the Vayû Purâṇa details to be Viṣnu bhaktas, pitṛs, manus, saptarṣis, devas, etc. These go up to the next sphere, janaloka, in subtle bodies and wait there to be reimbodied with the new pratisarga [97]. Meanwhile, according to Viṣnu 6.4, the inhabitants of janaloka pass the period of non-creation glorifying the sleeping Viṣnu, while the inhabitants of brahmaloka spend their time contemplating him. When, during the prâkṛtika pralaya, the entire egg of Brahmâ is destroyed, those beings who are inhabiting the highest sphere at the time, whom the Viṣnu describes as 'anxious for final liberation' [98] and 'ignorant of death' [99], go on to attain final liberation through union with brahman [100].

In the Mbh, which, as we have seen, has no clear distinction between a naimittika and prâkṛtika pralaya, such a systematic description is not found. Instead, there are a few isolated references which concur with the general idea that it is possible for some beings to escape the cycle of creation and destruction. Thus, in

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97 C.f. Viṣnu 6.3 p.632 fnt.7; Mârk 46.39 also mentions this migration to janaloka as does Garuḍa 233, which extends it to the inhabitants of bhûr, bhuva and svar also. Mitchiner (1978) p.11f mentions this migration in relation to the saptarṣis and gives a more detailed list of Purâṇic references to it.

98 Viṣnu 6.4.

99 Viṣnu 2.7.

100 C.f. Viṣnu 6.3; c.f. also Viṣnu p.213, fn 3. Garuḍa 233. Biardeau discusses the significance of the fate of beings during these two pralayas in great detail, and it plays an important part in her interpretation of the structuring of time in the Purâṇas· c.f. Biardeau [1971].

one passage, describing the pralaya qualified as mahâbhûtavinâśânta [101], it is said:

> tatah pralîne sarvasmin bhûte sthâvarajañgame
> smṛtimantas tadâ dhîrâ na lîyante kadâcana
>
> Then, when all this moving and stationary creation is dissolved, the wise who are versed in law, never vanish.

Elsewhere, in the Gîtâ section, Krsna says:

> paraṃ bhûyaḥ pravakṣyâmi jñânânaṃ jñânam uttamam
> yaj jñâtvâ munayaḥ sarve parâṃ siddhim ito gatâḥ (1)
>
> idaṃ jñânam upâśritya mama sâdharmyam âgatâḥ
> sarge >pi no 'pajâyante pralaye na vyathanti ca (2)
>
> I will again proclaim the supreme knowledge which is the very highest of all knowledge, knowing which all the sages here achieve the highest fulfilment. (1)
>
> Having had recourse to this knowledge, they obtained identity with me; they are not born even at the creation and nor are they afflicted at the dissolution. (2) [102]

It can be seen, therefore, that the idea that the pralaya should have some import for the fate and liberation of certain beings can be inferred from a few Mbh references, but is certainly not set out in any developed form.

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101 14.42.5, discussed above, 4.3.
102 6.36.1-2 (BhG 14.1-2).

CHAPTER 5 - CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR YUGAS

5.1 Descriptions of all four yugas

Descriptions of the state of the cosmos in different yugas occur both in passages treating all four yugas in series and in those which depict an individual yuga in rather more detail. Consequently, I shall begin by examining the descriptions of all four yugas and then move on to those of the individual ages, beginning with the kali. After establishing the essential characteristics of each yuga, I shall look at the nature of the decline through the mahâyuga as a whole, attempting to analyse its significance and underlying structures.

The most detailed description of all four yugas occurs at 3.148.5-37, when Bhîma meets Hanumân in the forest and asks to see the form the monkey assumed when he jumped across the ocean to Laṅkâ. Hanumân replies that this is impossible because conditions reflect the time, and goes on to describe the different yugas:

na tac chakyam tvayâ draṣṭum rûpam nâ
'nyena kenacit
kâlâvasthâ tadâ hy anyâ vartate sâ na sâmpratam
(5)

anyah kṛtayuge kâlas tretâyâm dvâpare
>parah
ayam pradhvamsanah kâlo nâ 'dya tad rûpam
asti me (6)

bhûmir nadyo nagâḥ śailâḥ siddhâ devâ
maharṣayaḥ
kâlaṃ samânuvartante yathâ bhâvâ yuge yuge
balavarṣmaprabhâvâ hi prahîyanty udbhavanti ca
(7)

tad alaṃ tava tad rûpaṃ draṣṭuṃ
kurukulodvaha
yugaṃ samanuvartâmi kâlo hi duratikramaḥ (8)

bhîma uvâca
yugasamkhyâṃ samâcaksva âcâraṃ ca yuge yuge
dharmakâmârthabhâvâṃś ca varṣâṃ vîryaṃ
bhavâbhavau (9)

hanumân uvâca
kṛtaṃ nâma yugaṃ tâta yatra dharmaḥ
sanâtanaḥ
kṛtam evâ na kartavyaṃ tasmin kâle yugottame
(10)

na tatra dharmâḥ sîdanti na kṣîyante ca vai
prajâḥ
tataḥ kṛtayugaṃ nâma kâlena guṇatâṃ gatam
(11)

devadânavagandharvayakṣarâkṣasapannagâḥ
nâ 'san kṛtayuge tâta tadâ na krayavikrayâḥ
(12)

na sâmayajurgvarnâḥ kriyâ nâ 'sîc ca mânavî
abhidhyâya phalaṃ tatra dharmaḥ saṃnyâsa eva
ca (13)

na tasmin yugasaṃsarge vyâdhayo ne
'ndriyakṣayaḥ
nâ 'sûyâ nâ 'pi ruditaṃ na darpo nâ 'pi
paiśunam (14)

na vigrahaḥ kutas tandrî na dveṣo nâ 'pi
vaikṛtam
na bhayam na ca saṃtâpo na ce 'rṣyâ na ca
matsaraḥ (15)

tatah paramakam brahma yâ gatir yoginâṃ parâ
âtmâ ca sarvabhûtânâṃ śuklo nârâyaṇas tadâ
(16)

brâhmanâḥ kṣatriyâ vaiśyâḥ śûdrâś ca
kṛtalakṣaṇâḥ
kṛte yuge samabhavan svakarmaniratâḥ prajâḥ
(17)

samāśramam samâcâram samajñânamatîbalam
tadâ hi samakarmâṇo varṇâ dharmân avâpnuvan
(18)

ekavedasamâyuktâ ekamantravidhikriyâḥ

prthagdharmâs tv ekavedâ dharmam ekam anuvratâḥ
(19)

câturâśramyayuktena karmaṇâ kâlayoginâ
akâmaphalasaṃyogât prâpnuvanti parâṃ gatim
(20)

âtmayogasamâyukto dharmo >yaṃ
kṛtalakṣaṇaḥ
kṛte yuge catuṣpâdaś câturvarṇyasya
śâśvataḥ (21)

etat kṛtayugaṃ nâma traiguṇyaparivarjitam
tretâṃ api nibodha tvaṃ yaśmin satraṃ
pravartate (22)

pâdena hrasate dharmo raktatâṃ yâti câ 'cyutaḥ
satyapravṛttâś ca narâḥ
kriyâdharmaparâyaṇâḥ
(23)

tato yajṇâḥ pravartante dharmâś ca vividhâḥ
kriyâḥ
tretâyâṃ bhâvasaṃkalpâḥ
kriyâdâṇaphalodayâḥ (24)

pracalanti na vai dharmât tapodânaparâyaṇâḥ
svadharmasthâḥ kriyâvanto janâs tretâyuge >bhavan
(25)

dvâpare >pi yuge dharmo dvibhâgonaḥ pravartate
viṣnur eva pîtatâṃ yâti caturdhâ veda eva ca
(26)

tato >nye ca caturvedâs trivedâś ca tathâ 'pare
dvivedâś cai 'kavedâś câ 'py anṛcaś ca
tathâ 'pare (27)

evaṃ śâstreṣu bhinneṣu bahudhâ nîyate kriyâ
tapodânapravṛttâ ca râjasî bhavati prajâ (28)

ekavedasya câ 'jñânâd vedâs te bahavaḥ kṛtâḥ
satyasya ce 'ha vibhraṃśât satye kaścid
avasthitaḥ (29)

satyât pracyavamânânâṃ vyâdhayo bahavo >bhavan
kâmâś co 'padravâś caî 'va tadâ
daivatakâritâḥ (30)

yair ardyamânâḥ subhṛśaṃ tapas tapyanti
mânavâḥ
kâmakâmâḥ svargakâmâ yajñâṃs tanvanti câ 'pare
(31)

evaṃ dvâparam âsâdya prajâḥ kṣîyanty
adharmataḥ
pâdenai 'kena kaunteya dharmaḥ kaliyuge sthitaḥ
(32)

tâmasam yugam âsâdya kṛṣṇo bhavati
keśavaḥ
vedâcârâḥ praśâmyanti dharmayajñakriyâs tathâ
(33)

îtayo vyâdhayas tandrî doṣâḥ krodhâdayas tathâ
upadravâś ca vartante âdhayo vyâdhayas tathâ (34)

yugeṣv âvartamâneṣu dharmo vyâvartate punaḥ
dharme vyâvartamâne tu loko vyâvartate punaḥ (35)

loke kṣîṇe kṣayam yânti bhâvâ
lokapravartakâḥ
yugakṣayakṛtâ dharmâḥ prârthanâni vikurvate
(36)

etat kaliyugam nâma acirâd yat pravartate
yugânuvartanam tv etat Kurvanti cirajîvinaḥ
(37)

It is not possible for you nor anyone else to see that form, for then there was a different condition of time and that does not exist now. (5)

Time was different in the kṛtayuga, in the tretâ and then in the dvâpara. This is the age of destruction and that form of mine does not exist today. (6)

Earth, rivers, mountains, peaks, siddhas, gods and great seers conform to time as do all existent things yuga after yuga. For strength, size and power deteriorate and increase (with time). (7)

So enough of your desire to see that form, O descendant of Kuru. I too conform to the yuga, for time is hard to escape from. (8)

Bhîma said:
Tell me the calculation of the yugas and the manner of behaviour in each yuga, and the state of dharma, kâma and artha. Tell me about valour, size, prosperity and decline. (9)

Hanumân said:
That yuga in which eternal dharma rules is called the kṛta, my friend. In that time, the best of yugas, things are actually done and not just what should be done. (10)

Then dharmas do not weaken and the creatures do not perish. Therefore it is called the kṛtayuga which becomes excellent in time. (11)

In the kṛta yuga there were no gods, dânavas, gandharvas, yakṣas, râkṣasas nor snakes, my friend. At that time there was no buying and selling. (12)

The sound of the sâma, yajus and ṛg were not heard, nor was there human labour. As soon as it is desired, the fruit appeared there and dharma consisted of renunciation. (13)

At that moment in the yugas, there were no diseases nor declining of the senses, no anger nor again weeping, no pride nor again slander, (14)

Nowhere was there discord, nor sloth, hatred nor again hostility, no fear and no pain, no jealousy nor envy. (15)

Then supreme brahman was the highest goal of the yogins and white Nârâyana was the soul of all beings. (16)

In the kṛta yuga, brahmins, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śūdras were distinguished (from each other) and the creatures were devoted to their own duties. (17)

There were equal stages of life, equal rules of conduct, equal wisdom, worship and vigour, for then the castes, whose occupations were equal, fulfilled (their own) dharmas. (18)

They were endowed with a single veda and had a single spell, command and rite: with one veda but separate dharmas, they were devoted to a single dharma. (19)

With actions suitable to the four āśramas and connected to the right time the people reach the supreme goal because they acted without desire for results. (20)

Concentrated on the self, this well-defined dharma of the four castes is constant and has four feet in the kṛtayuga. (21)

This is called the kṛtayuga, free from the three guṇas. Now pay heed to the tretâ in which the sacrifice comes into being. (22)

Dharma decreases by a foot and Acyuta becomes red. Men are devoted to truth and intent on rites and dharma. (23)

Then sacrifices arose and various sorts of dharma and rites which in the tretâ were motivated by attachment and resulted in the fruit of rites and gifts. (24)

People intent on austerities and giving do not diverge from dharma. In the tretâyuga people were established in their appropriate dharma and performed sacred rites. (25)

In the dvâparayuga dharma carries on incomplete by half. Viṣnu becomes yellow and the veda fourfold. (26)

And then some people have four vedas and others have three vedas, two vedas and one veda, and others do not have any hymns at all. (27)

When the scriptures are thus split, rituals are conducted in various ways and, being full of passion, the people are devoted to austerities and giving. (28)

And from ignorance of the one veda, the veda becomes many and because of the decline of truth only some people are truthful. (29)

Those who were thus falling away from truth had many diseases and desires and calamities caused by the gods. (30)

Tormented by these some humans suffered very rigorous penances and others, being full of many desires and desiring heaven, held sacrifices. (31)

Thus having reached the dvâpara, creatures perish from adharma. In the kaliyuga, dharma stands on only one foot, Kaunteya. (32)

Having reached the tamas dominated yuga Keśava becomes black. Vedic behaviour, dharma, sacrifice and rites are extinguished then. (33)

Plagues, diseases, sloth, vices like anger, etc., and calamities occur, as do anxieties and illnesses. (34)

As the yugas revolve, dharma withdraws further; as dharma withdraws, the world sinks further; (35)

As the world declines, the conditions that impel the world decline, and the dharmas created at the end of the yuga are changed into wishes. (36)

This is called the kaliyuga which will soon be set in motion. Those who live long adapt to the yugas. (37)

This passage introduces many of the different strands which run through the cycle of decline in the

yugas and it is worth examining them in some detail. One of the most basic is the way that the decline is measured in quarters to correspond to the number of the yugas: dharma is complete in all four parts in the kṛta, diminishes to three parts in the tretâ, two in the dvâpara and one in the kali (vs.21,23,26,32). Also important is the fact that this decline is consecutively played out in the three spheres of society, nature and human ethical and religious consciousness. This fundamental symbiosis is best expressed in vs.35,36:

> As the yugas revolve, dharma withdraws further; as dharma withdraws, the world sinks further; (35)
>
> As the world declines, the conditions that impel the world decline, and the dharmas created at the end of the yuga are changed into wishes. (36)

In the social sphere the decline is expressed in terms of adherence to varṇâśramadharma which is only strictly maintained in the kṛta and the tretâ (vs.17,25). This harmony in society is paralleled in the natural world, with a kṛtayuga that is free from death and disease (vs.11,14) and where the necessities of life are produced without labour (v.13). By the time of the dvâpara diseases and natural disasters appear (v.30) and the social collapse of the kali is echoed by more disease and calamities (v.34).

In the sphere of religion and ethics the decline is more complex. In the kṛta, action is performed without desire (v.20), brahman is the goal of yogins (v.16) and the main form that dharma takes is renunciation (v.13).

In the tretâ sacrifice appears for the first time (v.22) and rituals are now motivated by the desire for their results (v.24). The virtues of truthfulness, austerities and generosity predominate (v.25). In the dvâpara rituals are increased and are now motivated by greed, while truthfulness collapses (v.28) and in the kaliyuga sacrifice, rituals and rules disappear and various sins are rife (vs.33,34). Thus it would appear that the predominant ethos of the kṛtayuga displays distinctly ascetic values, while that of the tretâ has householder values properly maintained, and it is these that decline through the dvâpara and kali. This fits uneasily with the perfect varṇâśramadharma of the kṛta in the social sphere and these two badly reconciled ideas of the kṛta will be found in various other descriptions.

The pattern of the ethico/religious sphere, where the kṛta is qualitatively separated from the other ages, is strengthened by the links that this passage makes between the yugas and the guṇa system. This is quite explicit in the case of the kṛtayuga, which is said to be 'free from the three guṇas' (v.22). However, it is also present in the descriptions of the dvâpara and kali: the people of the dvâpara are râjasî - full of rajas (v.28) and the kaliyuga is tâmasa - dominated by tamas (v.32). Although the connection between the tretâyuga and sattva needed to complete the series is not made in this

passage, it does occur in the Purâṇas where links between the guṇas and the yugas are also found [1].

Another pattern which begins to emerge from this passage and which will recur elsewhere is that of an original unity which multiplies into a self-destructive diversity as the yugas unfold. Thus, in the kṛtayuga there is only a single Veda (vs.13,19) which becomes fourfold by the dvâpara (vs.26,29) and perishes in the kali (v.33). Again, the single mantra and dharma and rite in the kṛta (v.19) become various laws and rites in the tretâ (v.24) and manifold rites in the dvâpara (28), while rites and sacrifice perish in the kali (v.33). It is also possible to read v.12 as an example of an original state of simplicity, with beings not yet diversified into these different categories. Finally, the passage introduces the idea that Viṣṇu has different forms in the four yugas: white, red, yellow and black in descending order [2].

From this passage in the Âraṇyakaparva therefore, it is already possible to see the essential pattern of the decline through the yugas to be a fall from an ordered

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1 C.f. Matsya 165.6-18 which gives;- tretâ:sattva, dvâpara:rajas, kali:tamas. However, Garuḍa 232 (pp.738f) has kṛta:sattva, tretâ:rajas, dvâpara:rajas and tamas, kali:tamas.

2 Hiltebeitel [1976] has commented on the different colours associated with the yugas, and how these operate in the epic narrative. He connects them, for example, with the colours associated with the Kaurava senâpatis (p.283ff) and the presence of the black Kṛṣṇa (p.62/3). He also cites a passage in the Vâmana Purâṇa (49.36-9), which associates these colours with Śrî, again in the same order (p.63).

and regulated harmony to a state of chaos. This is expressed in a number of different ways: the breakdown of social, natural and metaphysical order; the movement from a state of unity to chaotic plurality; the diminution of dharma.

These strands of expression can also be found in other passages describing the yugas, with different passages emphasising different themes. The idea of the yugas deteriorating in quarters is common to most passages and this is most frequently expressed in terms of dharma, as it was in 3.148.5f. The most succinct statement of this is at 3.188.10-13:

kṛte catuṣpâtsakalo nirvyâjopâdhivarjitaḥ
vṛṣaḥ pratiṣṭhito dharmo manuṣyeṣv
abhavat purâ (10)
adharmapâdaviddhas tu tribhir aṃśaiḥ
pratiṣṭitaḥ
tretâyâṃ dvâpare >rdhena vyâmiśro dharma ucyate
(11)

tribhir aṃśair adharmas tu lokân âkramya
tiṣṭhati
caturthâṃśena dharmas tu manuṣyân
upatiṣṭhati (12)

âyur vîryam atho buddhir balaṃ tejaś ca
pâṇḍava
manuṣyâṇâm anuyugaṃ hrasatî 'ti nibodha me
(13)

At first, in the kṛta, the bull of dharma stood firmly among humans, complete with four feet, without deceit and free from deception. (10)

Wounded in one foot by adharma, in the tretâ it stood with three parts and in the dvâpara, dharma is said to be mixed half and half. (11)

(Now in the kali) adharma is established, overspreading the worlds with three parts and

dharma is present in men with (only) the fourth part. (12)

Learn from me that the length of life, vigour, intellect, strength and splendour of humans are diminished according to the four ages, Pâṇḍava. (13)[3]

This quarter pattern is also found in other areas of the decay. The most obvious example is the lengths of the yugas themselves (4000, 3000, 2000, 1000 with dawns and dusks of corresponding hundreds) and this is followed by the human life-spans in each yuga:

catvâri ca sahasrâṇi varsânam kurusattama
âyuḥsaṃkhyâ kṛtayuga saṃkhyâtâ râjasattama (5)

tathâ trîṇi sahasrâṇi tretâyâm manujâdhipa
dvisahasraṃ dvâpare tu śate [var: yuge]
tiṣṭhati saṃprati (6)

na pramâṇasthitir hy asti puṣye >smin
bharatarṣabha
garbhasthâś ca mriyante >tra tathâ jâtâ mriyanti
ca (7)

In the kṛtayuga, best of the Kurus, the life-span is reckoned as 4000 years, O best of kings. (5)

Likewise three thousand in the tretâ, O king and two thousand remain now in the dvâparayuga [taking variant]. (6)

Life has no fixed measure in this puṣya [= kali], Bull of the Bharatas and here people die[4] while still in the womb or die when just born. (7)

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3 The idea is also found at 1.57.72;3.187.32; 12.70.13,15,17;224.23;259.32-3;327.73-6.

4 6.11.5-7. The passage is set at the end of the dvâpara and goes on to say that only a little time remains before the kaliyuga commences (c.f. yugânta below). This explains the fact that both dvâpara and tretâ seem to be mentioned in the present. For similar life-spans, c.f. also 12.224.24 where the measurement is given in hundreds.

The same pattern can be seen in the amounts of **dandaniti** the king must use in the description at 12.70.6-28. This passage is otherwise notable for its clear depiction of the symbiosis between **dharma**, nature and society, with the parallel breakdown of order in each sphere closely maintained:

dandanîtyâ yadâ râjâ samyak kârtsnyena vartate
tadâ kṛtayugam nâma kâlaḥ śreṣṭaḥ
pravartate (7)

bhavet kṛtayuge dharmo nâ 'dharmo vidyate kvacit
sarveṣâm eva varṇânâm nâ 'dharme ramate
manaḥ (8)

yogakṣemâḥ pravartante prajânâm nâ 'tra
samśayaḥ
vaidikâni ca karmâṇi bhavanty aviguṇâny uta (9)

ṛtavaś ca sukhâḥ sarve bhavanty uta
nirâmayâḥ
prasîdanti narâṇâm ca svaravarṇamanâmsi ca
(10)

vyâdhayo na bhavanty atra nâ 'lpâyur dṛśyate
naraḥ
vidhavâ na bhavanty atra nṛśaṃso nâ 'bhijâyate
(11)

akṛṣṭapacyâ pṛthivî bhavanty oṣadhayas
tathâ
tvakpatraphalamûlâni vîryavanti bhavanti ca (12)

nâ 'dharmo vidyate tatra dharma eva tu kevalaḥ
iti kârtayugân etân guṇân viddhi yudhiṣṭhira
(13)

dandanîtyâ yadâ râjâ trînamśân anuvartate
caturtham amśam utsṛjya tadâ tretâ pravartate
(14)

aśubhasya caturthâṃśas trîn aṃśân
anuvartate
kṛṣṭapacyai 'va prthivî bhavanty
oṣadhayas tathâ (15)

ardham tyaktvâ yadâ râjâ nityardham anuvartate
tatas tu dvâparam nâma sa kâlaḥ sampravartate
(16)

aśubhasya tadâ ardham dvâv aṃśâv anuvartate

kṛṣṭapacyai 'va pṛthivî bhavanty alpaphalâ
tathâ (17)

daṇḍanîtiṃ parityajya yadâ kârtsnyena
bhûmipaḥ
prajâḥ kliśnâty ayogena praviśyati tadâ
kaliḥ (18)

kalâv adharmo bhûyiṣṭhaṃ dharmo bhavati tu
kvacit
sarveṣâm eva varṇânâṃ svadharmâc cyavate
manaḥ (19)

śûdrâ bhaikṣeṇa jîvanti brâhmaṇâḥ
paricaryayâ
yogakṣemasya nâśaś ca vartate
varṇaśaṃkaraḥ (20)

vaidikâni ca karmâṇi bhavanti vigunâny uta
ṛtavo nasukhâḥ sarve bhavanty âmayinas tathâ
(21)

hrasanti ca manuṣyâṇâṃ svaravarṇamanâṃsy
uta
vyâdhayaś ca bhavanty atra mriyante câ
'gatâ[var:śatâ]yuṣaḥ (22)

vidhavâś ca bhavanty atra nṛśaṃsā jâyate
prajâ
kvacid varsati parjanyaḥ kvacit sasyaṃ
prarohati (23)

rasâḥ sarve kṣayaṃ yânti tadâ ne 'cchati
bhûmipaḥ
prajâḥ śamraksitum samyag
daṇḍanîtiśamâhitaḥ (24)

When the king properly and entirely practises the science of government, then that best age called the kṛtayuga is set in motion. (7)

Dharma existed in the kṛtayuga; adharma was not known anywhere. The minds of people of all varnas take no delight in adharma. (8)

The creatures prosper - there is no doubt on this - and Vedic rites are not deficient. (9)

All the seasons are pleasant and salubrious and mens' voices, complexions and minds are clear. (10)

At this time there are no diseases and no short-lived man is seen. Women are not widowed and no base (men) are born. (11)

The earth ripens without being ploughed, plants too spring up, and bark, leaves, fruit and roots are strong. (12)

Then, no adharma is known; only dharma exists. Know these to be the characteristics of the kṛtayuga, Yudhisthira. (13)

When the king follows three parts of the science of government, having disregarded the fourth, then the tretâ is set in motion. (14)

A fourth part of evil follows those three parts. The earth ripens only after tilling and then plants spring up. (15)

When the king follows the science of government but casts off half of it then the age called the dvâparayuga begins. (16)

Then a half of evil follows the two parts [of daṇḍanîti]. Even ripening after tilling, the earth yiélds little fruit. (17)

When the king completely abandons the science of government and oppresses his subjects improperly then the kali takes hold. (18)

In the kali adharma is predominant but dharma still exists here and there. The minds of people in all varṇas swerve from their own duties. (19)

Sûdras live by begging and brahmins by service and the mixture of varṇas occurs which is the destruction of prosperity. (20)

Vedic rituals become ineffective and all the seasons are unpleasant and unhealthy. (21)

The voices, complexions and minds of men diminish. Diseases abound now and humans die at 100 [taking variant] years old. (22)

Now there are widows and creatures are born base. Parjanya rains at any time and crops grow at any time. (23)

All liquids are destroyed when the king refuses to protect his subjects, being properly devoted to the science of government. (24) [5]

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5 12.70.7-24 This is a passage which argues that the king determines the character of the yuga and I shall return to this point in the next chapter. Here I am simply using it as a straightforward description of the yugas.

The underlying connections between the **yugas** and the guṇa system discernible in 3.148.5ff (cited above) are not found in other Mbh passages, but a relationship between the **yugas** and the **varṇa** system does emerge. This is never systematised but the juxtaposition of descriptions of the **yugas** with expositions of **varṇadharma** is sufficiently frequent to point to some connection in the minds of the narrators [6]. Moreover, in a few passages one or other of the **yugas** is expressly connected with a **varṇa**. This is most obvious in 6.11.8f:

[var. prajñā]

mahâbalâ mahâsattvâḥ prajâ/guṇasamanvitâḥ
ajâyanta kṛte râjan munayaḥ sutapodhanâḥ (8)
. . .

âyusmanto mahâvîrâ dhanurdharavarâ yudhi
jâyante ksatriyâḥ śûrâs tretâyâm
cakravartinaḥ (10)

sarvavarnâ mahârâja jâyante dvâpare sati
mahotsâhâ mahâvîryâḥ parasparavadhaiṣiṇaḥ
(11)

tejasâ 'lpena saṃyuktâḥ krodhanâḥ puruṣâ
nṛpa
lubdhâś câ 'nṛtakâś cai 'va puṣye jâyanti
bhârata (12)

In the kṛta mighty and noble sages were born, O king, endowed with virtue and wisdom, and exceedingly wealthy in asceticism. (8) [taking var.]
. . .

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6 C.f. description of the **yugas** at 12.224.62-67 which follows a list of the sacrifices appropriate to each **varṇa** in v.61; 12.70.6-28 which follows a passage on the **varṇas** (vs.3-5); 12.230.7-17 where the description of the **yugas** is interrupted by a passage on the **varṇas** at v.12; and 3.148.5f which is followed by a passage on **varṇadharma** at 3.149.24f. The association continues into the Manusmṛti and Purâṇas also: Matsya 142.50-5 inserts a passage on the **varṇas** into a description of the **yugas** and Manu p.125 follows its description of the **yugas** with a passage on **varṇadharma**. Again, this is something which Hiltebeitel [1976] treats [1976] pp.63;283, cited above.

In the tretâ heroic kṣatriyas were born, long-lived great heroes, the best archers in battle and world rulers. (10)

All varṇas are born in the current dvâpara, Great king, very powerful, very vigorous and seeking to vanquish each other. (11)

Men born in the puṣya are endowed with little strength; they[7] are passionate, greedy and false, O Bhârata. (12)

While the connection between brahmins and the kṛtayuga can only be inferred from this passage, it is made clear elsewhere. When Kalkin comes to usher in the kṛtayuga after the long description of the kaliyuga at 3.188.15f, his brâhmaṇa connections are heavily emphasised:

> kalkir viṣnuyaśâ nâma dvijaḥ
> Kâlapracoditaḥ
> utpatsyate mahâvîryo mahâbuddhiparâkramaḥ (89)
>
> sambhûtaḥ sambhalanâme brâhmaṇâvasathe
> śubhe . . . (90)
> . . .
>
> sa sarvatra gatân kṣudrân brâhmaṇaiḥ
> parivâritaḥ
> utsâdayiṣyati tadâ sarvân mlecchaganân dvijaḥ
> (93)

Impelled by time, a brahmin by the name of Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will be born, mighty, very clever and powerful. (89)

Born in the village of Sambhala, in a pure brahmin household . . . (90)
. . .

Surrounded by brahmins, that brahmin will exterminate all those[8] hordes of base barbarians who are everywhere. (93)

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7 6.11.8,10-12.

8 3.188.89,90,93 The emphasis on brahmins continues in the next few verses also.

The relationship is also brought out by the verse which concludes the description of the yugas at 12.224.62-7:

> kṛte yuge yas tu dharmo brâhmaṇeṣu
> pradṛśyate
> âtmavatsu tapovatsu śrutavatsu pratiṣṭhitaḥ
>
> The dharma which existed in the kṛtayuga can (now) be seen established in brahmins who are self-controlled and devoted to asceticism and sacred knowledge.[9]

Finally, a striking but more lateral association between the yugas and the varṇa system can be made by comparing the colours of Viṣṇu in each yuga at 3.148.5f viz., kṛta:white, tretâ:red, dvâpara:yellow, kali:black, with the following verse about the varṇas:

> brâhmaṇânâṃ sito varṇaḥ kṣatriyâṇâṃ
> tu lohitaḥ
> vaiśyânâṃ pîtako varṇaḥ śûdrâṇâṃ asitas
> tathâ
>
> White is the colour of brahmins, red of kṣatriyas, yellow the colour of vaiśyas and black of śûdras.[10]

Other descriptions of the four yugas add only a few details to the picture given by 3.148.5f. A passage at 13.143.9 states that Kṛṣṇa has a different manifestation in each yuga:

> kṛte yuge dharma âsît samagras tretâkâle jñânam
> [var: yajñam]anuprapannaḥ

---

9 12.224.67 The links between the kṛtayuga and ascetic values explored above could also be seen as strengthening the brahmin connection.

10 12.181.5. The words used for the colours of Viṣṇu, however do not correspond exactly: śukla, rakta, pîta, kṛṣṇa.

balam tv âsîd dvâpare pârtha kṛṣṇaḥ kalâv
adharmaḥ kṣitim âjagâma

In the kṛtayuga he was dharma in entirety; at the time of the tretâ he turned to knowledge; Kṛṣṇa was might in the dvâpara, O Pârtha; in the kali he çame to earth as adharma.
11

and a verse at 12.224.27 gives different duties for the different yugas:

tapaḥ paraṃ kṛtayuge tretâyâṃ jñânam
uttamam
dvâpare yajñam evâ 'hur dânam eva kalau yuge

Asceticism is supreme in the kṛtayuga, wisdom highest in the tretâ, sacrifice is said to be best in the dvâpara and giving in the kaliyuga.
12

A description of the four ages at 12.200.34-7 distinguishes different means of procreation in each yuga:

yâvad yâvad abhûc chraddhâ dehaṃ dhârayituṃ
nṛṇâm
tâvat tâvad ajîvaṃs te nâ 'sîd yamakṛtaṃ
bhayam (34)

na cai 'ṣâṃ maithuno dharmo babhûva
bharatarṣabha
samkalpâd eva cai 'teṣâm apatyam udapadyata
(35)

tatra tretâyuge kâle samkalpâj jâyate [var:
sparśâd utpadyate] prajâ
na hy abhûn maithuno dharmas teṣâm api janâdhipa
(36)

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11 C.f. also Viṣṇu 3.2 (p.270) where Viṣṇu is: sages in the kṛta, the monarch in the tretâ, Vyâsa in the dvâpara and Kalki in the kali.

12 The idea of different duties predominating in each yuga (but without specification as to what they are) is also found at 12.252.8. Kûrma I.27.17 also lists different duties for the yugas, descending from dhyâna to jñâna, yajña and dâna.

dvâpare maithuno dharmaḥ prajânâm abhavan nṛpa
tathâ kaliyuge râjan dvaṃdvam âpedire janâḥ
(37)

As long as men wished to remain embodied, so long did they live - there was no fear of Yama. (34)

Neither was there copulation among them, Bull of the Bharatas and their offspring were produced just by the desire (for them). (35)

Then at the time of the tretâyuga creatures were produced by touch [taking variant] - again there was no copulation amongst them, O king. (36)

Creatures' copulation arose in the dvâpara, O king and in the kaliyuga, likewise, people form couples. (37)

Apart from this, the remaining descriptions at 12.224.62-67 and 12.230.7-12 serve to strengthen trends already seen, with the krtayuga being associated with ascetic values [13], while sacrifice and other householder virtues are followed properly in the tretâ but fall off in the dvâpara to disappear in the kali. The loss of varṇâśramadharma in the kali is also made explicit in 12.230.16. Again, 12.224.62 reinforces the association of the tretâ with the appearance of sacrifice by saying that it was first practised in that yuga and goes on to state that in that age, mighty men appeared who completely controlled the world - mahâbalâḥ saṃyantâraḥ sthâvarânâṃ jaṅgamânaṃ ca sarvaśaḥ (v.64). This could be seen to add weight to the links between this yuga and ksatriyas. The suggestion of an original unity in the krtayuga is also borne out by these passages, with 12.224.63 stating that there was only one dharma and one

13 12.224.62,63 and 12.230.7, which says that humans then were: tapaṣvinaḥ praśântâś ca sattvasthâś ca - ascetic, tranquil and firm in sattva.

veda in the kṛta, while 12.230.63 says that the vedas were regarded as identical [14].

5.2 The Kaliyuga

When it comes to passages dealing with individual yugas, the kaliyuga is the age described at greatest length in the Mbh and the details of its evils are set down with a horrified fascination by the epic narrators. From the extended picture provided by these individual descriptions it is obvious that the kaliyuga is being used to reflect upon the shortcomings of contemporary society, while the kṛtayuga, also described in detail, serves the same purpose by opposition.

Many of the details of the kaliyuga simply point to a society and world that is in decline: people do not behave in ways conducive to harmonious living, they maltreat each other, disobey laws, are afflicted by diseases and natural disasters and live in fear and oppression. However, underneath this description

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14 For further reinforcement of this idea, c.f. also 12.60.45, which says that the vedas were originally one; and 12.181.10, which says that there was originally no difference between the varṇas and that the distinctions evolved because of peoples' actions - na viśeṣo >sti varṇânâṃ sarvam brâhmam idam jagat / brahmaṇâ pûrvasṛṣṭam hi karmâbhir varṇatâṃ gatam. Neither of these passages is explicitly set in the kṛtayuga, however. The idea of unity in the kṛta is also well-documented in the Purâṇas: Kûrma I.27.22 states that in the kṛta everyone was equal and there were no distinctions; Mârk 49.24 says that everyone was alike in the kṛta; and Bhâg. 12.3.20 that the men of the satyayuga observe equality.

applicable to any badly functioning society, a pattern begins to emerge in the details of the decay which displays the fundamental concerns of the epic narrators, viz., the loss of ordered distinctions in the chaos of social and natural anarchy. This has already been seen to underlie the changes through all four yugas and its importance to the theory is reinforced whenever the yugas are described in more detail.

Both the general picture of the kaliyuga, and the concerns underlying it, can be seen in the description of the age which Mârkaṇḍeya gives after enumerating the divisions of time to Yudhiṣṭhira:

alpâvaśiṣṭe tu tadâ yugânte bharatarṣabha
sahasrânte narâḥ sarve prâyaśo >nṛtavâdinaḥ
(24)

yajñapratinidhiḥ pârtha dânapratinidhis tathâ
vratapratinidhiś cai 'va tasmin kâle pravartate
(25)

brâhmaṇâḥ śûdrakarmâṇas tathâ śûdrâ
dhanârjakâḥ
kṣatradharmeṇa vâ 'py atra vartayanti gate yuge
(26)

nivṛttayajñasvâdhyâyâḥ
piṇḍodakavivarjitâḥ
brâḥmaṇâḥ sarvabhakṣâś ca bhaviṣyanti
kalau yuge (27)

ajapâ brâhmaṇâs tâta śûdrâ japaparâyaṇâḥ
viparîte tadâ loke pûrvarûpaṃ kṣayasya tat (28)

bahavo mlecchharâjânaḥ pṛthivyâṃ manujâdhipa
mithyânuśâsinaḥ pâpâ mṛṣâvâdaparâyaṇâḥ
(29)
. . .

na tadâ brâhmaṇaḥ kaścit svadharmam upajivati
kṣatriyâ api vaiśyâś ca vikarmasthâ narâdhipa
(31)

alpâyuṣaḥ svalpabalâ alpatejaḥparâkramâḥ

alpadehâlpasârâś ca tatha satyâlpabhâṣiṇaḥ
(32)

bahuśûnyâ janapadâ mṛgavyâlâvṛtâ diśah
yugânte samanuprâpte vṛthâ ca brahmacâriṇaḥ
bhovâdinas tathâ śûdrâ brâhmaṇâś câ
'ryavâdinaḥ (33)

yugânte manujavyâghra bhavanti bahujantavaḥ
na tathâ ghrâṇayuktâś ca sarvagandhâ viśâṃ
pate
rasâs ca manujavyâghra na tathâ svâduyoginaḥ (34)

bahuprajâ hrasvadehâh śîlâcâravivarjitâḥ
mukhebhagâh striyo râjan bhaviṣyanti
yugakṣaye (35)

attaśûlâ janapadâḥ śivaśûlâś
cátuspathâh
keśaśûlâḥ śtriyo râjan bhaviṣyanti
yugakṣayé (36)

alpakṣîrâs tathâ gâvo bhaviṣyanti janâdhipa
alpapuṣpaphalâś ca 'pi pâdapâ bahuvâyasâḥ
(37)

brahmavadhyâvaliptânâṃ tathâ
mithyâbhiśamsinâm
nṛpânâṃ pṛthivîpâla pratigṛhṇanti vai
dvijâḥ (38)

lobhamohaparîtâś ca mithyâdharmadhvajâvṛtâḥ
bhiksârthaṃ pṛthivîpâla cañcûryante dvijair
diśaḥ (39)

karabhârabhayât puṃso gṛhasthâḥ
parimoṣakâh
municchadmâkṛticcannâ vâṇijyam upajîvate (40)

mithyâ ca nakharomâṇi dhârayanti narâs tadâ
arthalobhân naravyâghra vṛthâ ca
brahmacâriṇaḥ (41)

âśramesu vṛthâcârâḥ pânapâ gurutalpagâḥ
ehalaukikaṃ îhante mâṃsaśoṇitavardhanaṃ (42)

bahupâṣaṇḍasamkîrnâh
parânnaguṇavâdinaḥ
âśramâ manujavyâghra na bhavanti yugakṣaye (43)

yathartuvarṣî bhagavân na tathâ pâkaśâsanaḥ
na tadâ sarvabîjâni samyag rohanti bhârata
adharmaphalam atyarthaṃ tadâ bhavati câ 'nagha
(44)

tathâ ca pṛthivîpâla yo bhaved dharmasamyutaḥ
alpâyuḥ sa hi mantavyo na hi dharmo >sti
kaścana (45)

bhûyiṣṭhaṃ kûṭamânaiś ca paṇyaṃ
vikrîṇate janâḥ
vaṇijaś ca naravyâghra bahumâyâ bhavanty uta
(46)

dharmiṣṭhâḥ parihîyante pâpîyân vardhate
janaḥ
dharmasya balahâniḥ syâd adharmaś ca balî tathâ
(47)

alpâyuṣo daridrâś ca dharmiṣṭhâ mânavâs
tadâ
dîrghâyuṣaḥ samṛddhâś ca vidharmâṇo
yugakṣaye (48)

adharmiṣṭhair upâyaiś ca prajâ vyavaharanty
uta
samcayenâ 'pi câ 'lpena bhanty âdhyâ madânvitâḥ
(49)

dhanaṃ viśvâsato nyastaṃ mitho [var: mithyâ]
bhûyiṣṭhaśo narâḥ
hartuṃ vyavasitâ râjan mâyâcârasamanvitâḥ (50)

puruṣâdâni sattvâni pakṣiṇo >tha mṛgâs
tathâ
nagarâṇâṃ vihâreṣu caityeṣv api ca śerate
(51)

saptavarṣâṣṭavarṣâś ca striyo garbhadharâ
nṛpa
daśadvâdaśavarṣâṇâṃ puṃsâṃ putraḥ
prajâyate (52)

bhavanti ṣoḍaśe varṣe narâḥ palitinas
tathâ
âyuḥkṣayo manuṣyâṇâṃ kṣipram eva
prapadyate (53)

kṣîne yuge mahârâja taruṇâ
vṛddhaśîlinaḥ
taṛunânâṃ ca yac chîlaṃ tad vṛddheṣu
prajâyate (54)

viparîtâs tadâ nâryo vañcayatvâ rahaḥ patîn
vyuccaranty api duḥśîlâ dâsaiḥ paśubhir eva
ca (55)

When only a little time remains at the end of the yuga, at the end of the thousand years, O bull of the Bharatas, practically all men speak falsely. (24)

At that time, substitute sacrifice takes place O Pârtha, substitute giving, substitute vows. (25)

Then brahmins have the work of śûdras and the śûdras are procurers of wealth or live by kṣatriyadharma when the yuga is ending. (26)

In the kaliyuga the brahmins will fail to perform sacrifices and the repetition of the veda, not make the offerings of rice-balls and water (to the pitṛs) and eat anything in the kaliyuga. (27)

The brahmins will have no murmured prayers, my dear, and the śûdras will be devoted to muttering prayers. When the world is upside down, it is the omen of destruction. (28)

There will be many barbarian kings on the earth, O lord of men, evil, punishing unfairly and fond of lies. (29)

. . .

Then no brahmin at all will practice his own dharma and kṣatriyas and vaiśyas will follow unlawful occupations too, O king. (31)

The people will be short-lived, weak, with little strength and power, of small stature and little wealth, speaking little truth. (32)

When the end of the yuga is at hand the countries have many empty places, everywhere full of wild animals and poisonous snakes and the people practise religious chastity lightly. Then the śûdras say 'hoy you' while the brahmins say 'noble sir'. (33)

At the end of the yuga, Tiger among men, there are many offspring. Then none of the fragrances have any smell, O lord of people and none of the flavours are palatable, Tiger among men. (34)

When the yuga is declining, there will be many offspring of small stature who lack the rules of good behaviour, and the women, O king, will practise oral intercourse. (35)

At the end of the yuga the countries will be spiked with towers, the crossroads spiked with jackals and the women spiked with hair, O king. (36)

The cows will have little milk, Lord of men, and the trees little fruit or flowers but many crows. (37)

Then the twiceborn receive from kings who are besmeared with (the sin of) brahmanicide and who give false accusations, O lord of the earth. (38)

And (these brahmins) are overcome by greed and delusion, falsely concealed behind a banner of righteousness. They wantonly roam everywhere for the sake of alms, O king. (39)

From fear of the burden of taxes, householder men will become thieves, and others hiding under the guise of hermits will live by trade (40)

Then men will falsely wear their nails and hair long and falsely pose as religious students out of greed for rewards, tiger among men. (41)

Behaving wrongly in the hermitages, drinking intoxicating liquor, violating their teachers' beds, they strive after worldly ways of furthering their flesh and blood. (42)

Full of heresies and people discussing the qualities of supreme food, hermitages will not exist at the end of the yuga, tiger among men. (43)

Then the blessed chastiser of Pâka will not rain in season and nor will all the seeds grow properly, O Bharata, but the fruit of unrighteousness will be great, O blameless one. (44)

Similarly, Lord of the earth, he who might be righteous cannot be expected to be long-lived, for no dharma exists at all. (45)

People sell very many wares with false measures and the merchants also have many tricks, tiger among men. (46)

The very virtuous come to grief but the very wicked man prospers. Similarly, the strength of dharma wanes and adharma becomes powerful. (47)

Virtuous men are short-lived and poor while wrong-doers are long-lived and affluent at the end of the yuga. 48)

People employ means that are very unrighteous and the wealthy are filled with pride by even a little wealth. (49)

Most men being full of deceitful behaviour falsely [taking var.] aim to take the wealth trustfully deposited (with them), O king. (50)

Man-eating beings, birds and wild animals lie down in the cities' pleasure gardens and even in the temples. (51)

Girls become pregnant at seven and eight years old, O king and sons are born to ten and twelve year-old boys. (52)

Boys become grey-haired in their sixteenth year. The end of life comes quickly for humans. (53)

When the yuga is exhausted, Great king, the young behave like old men, and the old behave like the young. (54)

The women, perverse and wicked, secretly deceive their husbands and are dissolute with slaves and even animals. (55)[15]

That the evils of the age are brought about by the breakdown of order can again be seen in the parallel conditions of society and nature. In the social sphere the lack of order is once again largely expressed in terms of the breakdown of the varṇas: people do not perform the tasks appropriate to their caste and the practices which keep them distinct are ignored (vs.26,27,31). In society as a whole no-one is what they seem and nothing can be trusted (vs.24,25,39,41,46). In the natural world the lack of order is shown by the rain failing to come at the proper time and seeds not growing as they should (v.44), while people are weak, age too young and procreate unnaturally early (vs.32,52,53). An important feature of this and other epic kaliyuga descriptions is the way in which the breakdown of the ordered universe is further emphasised by the details which escalate the lack of order into an actual reversal of categories and values, leading to a world which is 'upside-down' - viparīta (v.28). Thus, brahmins do not just fail to perform their own tasks, as a simple breakdown of varṇadharma would demand, they actually do

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15 3.186.24-29,31-55.

the tasks of śûdras (v.28), treating the lowest caste respectfully, while śûdras in turn are cavalier towards brahmins (v.33). Again, the young behave like the old, while the elderly behave like children (v.54) and creatures of the forest are found in the civilized heart of the towns where nature should be most ordered (v.51). Rewards do not follow actions in the expected way, rather the good are punished and the evil prosper (vs.47,48). Another of the strands already seen in the decline through all four yugas, which this passage brings out more clearly, is the emphasis on unwholesome multiplication seen in vs.34-37: women have too many children and too much hair; the countryside is over-full of towers and jackals and the trees of crows.

These patterns underlying the state of decay in the kaliyuga can be seen even more clearly in the longer description of the age which occurs a few adhyâyas later, at 3.188.15f, in answer to Yudhiṣṭhira's request for more information on the subject [16]. This passage depicts a society where the defining marks of civilization have been lost and this is expressed by the many references to the barbarism of the times which characterise this particular description: the earth will be filled with barbarians - mlecchasamâkîrnâ (v.70); all men will become omnivorous barbarians - mlecchâh . . . sarvabhakṣâ (v.52); and:

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16 A device which the epic often employs in order to amplify a theme already treated.

mlecchabhûtaṃ jagat sarvaṃ niṣkriyaṃ
yajñavarjitaṃ
bhaviṣyati nirânandam anutsavam atho tathâ

The whole world will be barbarised, without rites, devoid of sacrifices, joyless and lacking festivals (v.29)[17]

This barbarity is clearly due to the loss of the ordering regulations of civilization, and the breakdown of order in every sphere is clearly charted, strengthening the emphasis of the previous passage.

Social chaos is again expressed in terms of varṇadharma:

brâhmaṇâḥ kṣatriyâ vaiśyâḥ
saṃkîryaṇtaḥ parasparam
śûdratulyâ bhaviṣyanti tapaḥsatyavivarjitâḥ

Brahmins, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas, mixing (in marriage) with each other will become equal to śûdras, devoid of asceticism and truth. (v.18)

brâhmaṇâḥ kṣatriyâ vaiśyâ na śiṣyanti
janâdhipa
ekavarṇas tadâ loko bhaviṣyati yugakṣaye

The brahmin, kṣatriya and vaiśya will no longer be distinguished, O king; then the world will have one caste at the end of the yuga. (v.41)

Other distinctions are lost also: people all eat the same food - ekâhâryaṃ jagatsarvam (v.40) [18], and live in impure countries:

ye yavânnâ janapadâ godhûmânnâs tathai 'va ca

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17 Similar emphasis on barbarism etc. also occurs in vs.37,45.

18 Also found at v.44.

tân deśân samśrayiṣyanti yugânte
paryupasthite

They will resort to those countries which have barley-food and also wheat-food when the end of the yuga is at hand. (v.43)[19]

Familial hierarchies break down:

na kṣamsyanti pitâ putraṃ putraś ca
pitaraṃ tathâ
bhâryâ ca patiśuśrûṣâṃ na kariṣyati
kâcana

Father will not endure his son and son likewise his father and no wife will be obedient to her husband. (v.42)[20]

There will be no students or teachers (v.46), and the situation is summed-up at v.72: 'When the world is thus confused there will be no proper boundaries' - evam paryâkule loke maryâdâ na bhaviṣyati.

In the natural world also, distinctions are lost: flowers propagate in flowers and fruit propagates in fruit - puṣpe puṣpam yadâ râjan phale phalam upâśritam (v.68); and the order of the planets and the seasons runs askew:

diśaḥ prajvalitâḥ sarvâ nakṣatrâṇi calâni
ca
jyotîmsi pratikûlâni vâtâḥ paryâkulâs tathâ
ulkâpâtâś ca bahavo mahâbhayanidarśakâḥ (74)

sadbhir anyaiś ca sahito bhâskaraḥ
prâtapiṣyati
tumulâś câ 'pi nirhrâdâ digdâhâś câ 'pi
sarvaśah
kabandhântarhito bhânur udayâstamaye tadâ (75)

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19 For wheat as the food of barbarians c.f. Monier-Williams p.837, mlecchabhojana.

20 C.f. also v.25: fathers and sons use each other; v.78: sons kill their parents and wives their husbands.

akâlavarṣî ca tadâ bhaviṣyati sahasradṛk
sasyâni ca na rokṣyanti yugânte paryupasthite
(76)
. . .

aparvaṇi mahârâja sûryam râhur upaiṣyati
yugânte hutabhuk câ 'pi sarvataḥ prajvaliṣyati
(79)

All the directions will begin to blaze and the asterisms to move; the heavenly bodies will be adverse, the winds disordered and there will be many meteor showers foreboding great danger. (74)

The sun will shine with six others and there will be tumultuous sounds and an unnatural red sky everywhere. The sun will be covered by [inauspicious] clouds at sunrise and sunset. (75)

Then thousand-eyed [Indra] will not rain at the proper time and the crops will not grow when the end of the yuga is at hand. (76)
. . .

Râhu will approach the sun when the time is out of joint and fire will blaze everywhere at the end of the yuga. (79)

Again, the symbiosis between the different spheres of nature, ethos and society is stressed:

akâlavarṣî parjanyo bhaviṣyati gate yuge
akrameṇa manuṣyâṇâm bhaviṣyati tadâ
kriyâ
virodham atha yâs yanti vṛṣalâ brâhmaṇaiḥ
saha

When the yuga has expired the rain god will not rain at the right time and the rituals of men will be without regular order. Then śûdras will pick quarrels with brahmins. (v.69)

The expression of the breakdown in terms of rôle reversal is also found again and is especially clearly emphasised in two passages which stress the characteristic dislocation of values in different ways:

antyâ madhyâ bhaviṣyanti madhyâṣ câ
'ntavasâyinah
îdṛṣo bhavitâ loko yugânte paryupasthite (19)

vastrâṇâm pravarâ ṣâṇî dhânyânâm
koradûṣakâh
bhâryâmitrâṣ ca puruṣâ bhaviṣyanti
yugakṣaye (20)
. . .

viparîtaṣ ca loko >yam bhaviṣyanty
adharottarah
edûkân pûjayiṣyanti varjayiṣyanti devatâh
ṣûdrâh paricariṣyanti na dvijân
yugasaṃkṣaye (64)

âṣrameṣu maharṣîṇâm brâhmaṇâvasatheṣu
ca
devasthâneṣu caityeṣu nâgânâm âlayeṣu ca (65)

edûkacihnâ pṛthivî na devagrahabhûṣitâ
bhaviṣyati yuge kṣîṇe tad yugântasya
lakṣaṇam (66)

The lowest will become the middle and the middle become untouchables - such is what the world must become when the end of the yuga is at hand. (19)

Hemp garments will be the best of clothes and the grain that the poor eat now, the best of cereals. Men will become their wives' enemies at the end of the yuga. (20)
. . .

This world will be upside-down, topsy-turvy:- men will worship rubbish tips [21] and shun the gods; śûdras will not serve the twice-born, at the end of the yuga. (64)

In the hermitages of the great seers and the abodes of brahmins, in the temples where the gods dwell and the dwellings of the snakes, (65)

The earth will be marked with rubbish tips and not adorned with temples, when the yuga is expired. That is the sign of the end of the yuga. (66)

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21 Translating eḍuka. Following Monier-Williams p.231, this seems a legitimate translation, and one that would be in keeping with the tenor of the description, but both Hopkins [1901] p.391; and Biardeau take it in the sense of Buddhist relics.

Again, the reversal of brahmins and śûdras is used to illustrate this:

> śûdrâ dharmaṃ pravakṣyanti brâhmaṇâḥ
> paryupâsakâḥ
> śrotâraś ca bhaviṣyanti prâmâṇyena
> vyavasthitâḥ
>
> Śûdras will proclaim dharma and brahmins, respecting them, will listen to them, abiding by their authority. (v.63)

and the reversal of young and old is supplemented by that of timid and brave:

> satyam samkṣipyate loke naraiḥ
> panditamâninbhiḥ
> sthâvarâ âlamatayo bâlâḥ sthavirabuddhayaḥ
> (38)
>
> bhîravaḥ śûramâninaḥ śûrâ
> bhîruviṣâdinaḥ
> na viśvasanti cân 'nyonyaṃ yugânte paryupasthite
> (39)
>
> Truth will be destroyed in the world by men who think they are wise; the old will have the minds of children and the young the minds of old men. (38)
>
> The cowardly will consider themselves heroic, the brave will have the despair of cowards and they will not trust each other when the end of the yuga is at hand. (39)

The theme of multiplication is not emphasised in this passage, however, and only occurs in a repeat of the verse at 3.186.36 [22].

Descriptions similar to these Āraṇyakaparva passages are found elsewhere in the Mbh, usually describing a period of evil which is clearly applicable to the kaliyuga, if not explicitly named as such. These all

22 v.51.

display the same concerns in their description and, as they are less detailed, allow the essentials of the decay to appear more clearly, reinforcing the patterns of breakdown which characterise the longer passages. Thus in a description of the debased age to come, the loss of order in the family and society and the reversal of rôles and values are very clearly seen as the essence of the decay, with no other details to obstruct them:

> yadâ śvaśrûṃ snuṣâ vṛddhâṃ paricâreṇa
> yokṣyate
> putraś ca pitaraṃ mohât preṣayiṣyati
> karmasu (111)
>
> brahmanaiḥ kârayiṣyanti vṛṣalâḥ
> pâdabhâvanam
> śûdrâś ca brâhmanîṃ bhâryâm upayâsyanti
> nirbhayâḥ (112)
>
> viyoniṣu ca bîjâni mokṣyante puruṣâ yadâ
> saṃkaraṃ kâṃsyabhâṇḍaiś ca baliṃ câ 'pi
> kupâtrakaiḥ (113)
>
> câturvarṇyaṃ yadâ kṛtsnaṃ unmaryâdaṃ
> bhaviṣyati . . . (114)

> When the daughter-in-law applies the elderly mother-in-law to service and when the son, through delusion sends the father to work; (111)
>
> When śûdras have their feet washed by brahmins and fearlessly approach brahmin wives (112)
>
> And humans release their seed into animal wombs; when sweepings are (carried in) brass vessels and oblations in unworthy vessels; (113)
>
> When all four castes become without fixed boundaries . . . (114)[23]

The same themes are clear in the description of an evil age at 12.139.1f, where Yudhiṣṭhira asks how brahmins and the king should live at a time:

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23 12.220.111-14.

hîne paramake dharme sarvalokâtilaṅghini
adharme dharmatâṃ nîte dharme câ 'dharmatâṃ
gate (1)

maryâdâsu prabhinnâsu kṣubhite dharmaniścaye
. . . (2a)

When most excellent dharma, abandoned, has left the whole world; when adharma has become dharma and dharma has become adharma; (1)

When the boundaries are broken and the certainties of dharma are thrown into confusion. (2a)[24]

The final description of a period corresponding to the kaliyuga, at 13.96.10-13, also emphasizes the lapse of varṇadharma but is otherwise unremarkable. [25]

5.3 The kṛtayuga

The kṛtayuga is the only other period treated individually at any length in the epic. However, it is described in considerably less detail than the kaliyuga and the picture that is given is a clear counterpart to the evils of the fourth age. Just as the kaliyuga has been seen to be primarily characterised by the breakdown

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24 12.139.1-2a.

25 Purânic descriptions of the kaliyuga also provide evidence of similar concerns, although on the whole, purânic accounts seem to tend more towards being simply descriptions of a bad society. For themes similar to those in the Mbh c.f., for example, Viṣnu 6.1, which is generally similar to epic descriptions; Kûrma 1.27.9, where the people are described as varṇâśramavivarjitâh - those who have abandoned varṇâśramadharma; 28.1f, where the description of the kaliyuga emphasises the varṇa mix, with śûdra/brahmin role reversal; Matsya 144.32: there are no criteria left when the kaliyuga settles down; 144.77-79: everyone eats the same food, so all become one caste.

of order in the social and natural world, so too does the **kṛtayuga** present a picture of order perfectly established and boundaries maintained. This is particularly clear in the description of the **kṛtayuga** which follows the long passage on the **kaliyuga** at 3.188.15f, the second **Āraṇyakaparva** passage discussed above. When Kalkin arrives he will bring this turbulent world to tranquillity - imaṃ saṃkulaṃ lokaṃ prasâdam upaneṣyati (v.91) and in doing so, replaces the chaos reigning in each sphere:

> kâlavarsî ca parjanyo naksatrâṇi śubhâni ca
> pradakṣiṇâ grahâś câ 'pi bhaviṣyanty
> anulomagâh
> ksemam subhiksam ârogyaṃ bhaviṣyati
> nirâmayam (88)
> . . .
>
> brâhmaṇâh sâdhavaś cai 'va munayaś ca
> tapasvinah
> âśramâh saha[var: hata]pâṣaṇḍâḥ
> sthitâḥ satye janâḥ prajâḥ (9)
>
> jâsyanti sarvabîjâni upyamânâni cai 'va hi
> sarvesv rtuṣu râjendra sarvaṃ sasyaṃ
> bhaviṣyati (10)
>
> narâ dâneṣu niratâ vrateṣu niyameṣu ca
> japayajñaparâ viprâ dharmakâmâ mudâyutâḥ
> pâlayiṣyanti râjâno dharmene 'mâṃ
> vasuṃdharâm (11)
>
> vyavahâraratâ vaiśyâ bhaviṣyanti kṛte yuge
> ṣadkarmani ratâ viprâḥ kṣatriyâ rakṣaṇe
> ratâḥ (12)
>
> śuśrûṣâyâṃ ratâḥ śûdrâs tathâ
> varṇatrayasya cа. . . (13a)

And the rains will come at the right time, the stars will be auspicious and the planets will be favourable and go in their proper directions. There will be security, an abundance of food, and health, free from disease. (88)
. . .

Brahmins will be good, sages ascetic, the hermitages' heretics slain [taking var.] and the people and creatures established in truth. (9)

All seeds that are sown will grow and, Lord among kings, all crops will prosper in all the seasons. (10)

Men will delight in giving, vows and religious observances; priests will be intent on sacrifices of prayers; joyful and desiring dharma, kings will protect this earth with dharma. (11)

The vaiśyas will delight in trade in the kṛtayuga; the brahmins in the six duties and the kṣatriyas in protection. (12)

Then the śûdras also will delight in obedience to the three varṇas. . . (13) [26]

This emphasis on properly maintained order is also very clear in the description of the kṛtayuga at 1.58.8-24 where it can be seen especially in the way that proper time and place are stressed. The passage is describing the perfect society which follows the massacre of the kṣatriya men by Paraśurâma [27]:

. . .
catvâro >pi tadâ varṇâ babhûvur
brâhmaṇottarâḥ (8)

abhyagacchann ṛtau nârîṃ na kâmân nâ 'nṛtau
tathâ
tathai 'vâ 'nyâni bhûtâni tiryagyonigatâny api
ṛtau dârâṃś ca gacchanti tadâ sma
bharatarṣabha (9)
. . .

tathâ dharmapare kṣatre sahasrâkṣaḥ
śatakratuḥ
svâdu deśe ca kâle ca vavarṣâ 'pyôyayan prajâḥ
(14)

na bâla eva mriyate tadâ kaścin narâdhipa
na ca striyaṃ prajânâti kaścid
aprâptayauvanaḥ (15)
. . .

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26 3.188.88;189.9-13a.

27 This is another example of the age being dependent on the country's ruler, and I shall discuss it again in that context in 6.1.

svakarmaṇi ratâś câ 'san sarve varṇâ narâdhipa
evam tadâ naravyâghra dharmo na hrâsate kvacit
(22)

kâle gâvaḥ prasûyante nâryaś ca bharatṛsabha
phalanty ṛtuṣu vṛkṣâś ca puṣpâṇi ca
phalâni cà (23)

. . .At that time the four castes existed with the brahmins at their head. (8)

Then men had intercourse with women at the right time for conception, not from desire, nor at the wrong time; and other beings, even though born from animals went to their mates at the right season then, O bull of the Bharatas (9)

. . .

While the kṣatriyas were thus intent on dharma, thousand-eyed Indra [Śatakratu] rained sweet rain at the proper place and time, prospering the creatures. (14)

Not any child died then, O king, nor did anyone know a woman before reaching manhood (15)

. . .

And all castes delighted in their own duties, O king, and thus dharma did not decrease anywhere, O tiger among men. (22)

Cows and women gave birth at the proper time, O bull of the Bharatas, and trees yielded flowers and fruits in the right seasons. (23)[28]

In the third extended description of the kṛtayuga, order is less emphasised and the passage offers a more universal picture of a kingdom blessed with prosperity and happiness. However, even here the characteristic symbiosis between society and nature is very apparent in the opening verses:

tesu trisu kumâresu jâtesu kurujâṅgalam
kuravo >tha kurukṣetram trayam etad avardhata
(1)

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28 1.58.8,9,14,15,22,23.

ûrdhvasasyâ 'bhavad bhûmiḥ sasyâni phalavanti ca
yathartuvarṣî parjanyo bahupuṣpaphalâ drumâḥ
(2)

vâhanâni prahṛṣṭâni muditâ
mṛgapakṣiṇaḥ
gandhavanti ca mâlyâni rasavanti phalâni ca (3)

vanigbhiś câ 'vakîryanta nagarâṇy atha
śilpibhiḥ
śûrâś ca kṛtavidyâś ca santaś ca sukhino
>bhavan (4)

nâ 'bhavan dasyavaḥ kecin nâ 'dharmarucayo
janâḥ
pradeśeṣv âpi râṣṭrâṇâm kṛtam yugam
avartata (5)

When these three princes [viz. Dhṛtarâṣṭra, Pâṇdu and Vidura] were born , the Kurus, Kurujângala and Kurukṣetra prospered all three. (1)[29]

The earth had tall crops and the produce was successful. It rained in season and the trees had many flowers and fruit. (2)

The draught animals were happy, the game and fowl joyful, garlands were fragrant and fruits succulent. (3)

The towns were full of merchants and craftsmen and people were valiant, learned, virtuous and happy. (4)

There were no robbers and none of the people followed adharma. The kṛtayuga unfolded in all the regions of the kingdoms. (5)[30]

Apart from a few exceptions, the many smaller references to the kṛtayuga add nothing of any significance to the mythical picture of the age but instead show how the concept is being used in different ways that have little to do with the yuga theory proper. In some passages the setting of the kṛtayuga is used to reinforce approved codes of practice, by saying that they were what happened during that period of exemplary

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29 Again, I shall return to the identification of the period as following these princes' birth in 6.2.
30 1.102.1-5. The description continues to v.15.

behaviour. In that context, the **kṛtayuga** setting simply serves the purpose of a golden age in the more general meaning of the term. In some cases this is employed for obviously didactic purposes to recommend practices for the present day and even where this is not made explicit, the underlying purpose is still apparent. Thus at 3.159.1-3 Vaiśravana uses the **kṛtayuga** as an example when he admonishes Yudhiṣṭhira about Bhîma's behaviour:

> yudhiṣṭhira dhṛtir dâkṣyaṃ deśakâlau
> parâkramaḥ
> lokatantrâvidhânânâm eṣa pañcavidho vidhiḥ (1)
>
> dhṛtimantaś ca dakṣâś ca sve sve karmaṇi
> bhârata
> parâkramavidhânajñâ narâḥ kṛtayuge >bhavan (2)
>
> dhṛtimân deśakâlajñaḥ sarvadharmavidhânavit
> kṣatriyaḥ kṣatriyaśreṣṭha pṛthivîm
> anuśâsti vai (3)
>
> Yudhiṣṭhira, fortitude, ability, power, place and time are the five-fold method of regulating the course of the world. (1)
>
> In the **kṛtayuga** men knew the regulation of power, O Bhârata, and were resolute and able in their own actions. (2)
>
> The **kṣatriya**, O Best of **kṣatriyas**, who is constant, knows place and time and understands all the rules of dharma: he governs the earth. (3)[31]

At 12.324.5, although not explicitly held up as an exemplar in this way, reference to the **kṛtayuga** is clearly being used to promote **ahiṃsa**:

> nai 'ṣa dharmaḥ satâṃ devâ yatra vadhyeta vai
> paśuḥ
> idam kṛtayugaṃ śreṣṭhaṃ kathaṃ
> vadhyeta vai paśuḥ

---

31 3.159.1-3.

> O Gods, this is not the **dharma** of the good where an animal may be killed (in sacrifice): this is the most excellent **kṛtayuga** - how can an animal be killed (now)?

Another use of the **kṛtayuga** is as a setting for various myths and deeds which have no intrinsic relevance to this period, and the phrase 'in the **kṛtayuga**' here acts simply as a 'once upon a time', guaranteeing the antiquity of the tale. A myth about a **ṛṣi**, for example, begins **ṛṣir āsīt kṛte yuge . . .** [32]; and another about someone becoming a brahmin begins **purâ kṛtayuge . . .** [33].

Some of the myths related, however, do have more claim to take place in the **kṛtayuga** and this is the case with the **vṛtrahatyâ** and the churning of the ocean [34], which were well-established as occurring shortly after the creation. Their setting in the **kṛtayuga** would therefore follow naturally once they were brought into contact with the **yuga** system as the measure for mythic chronology, and do not necessarily reveal anything of significance for the essential nature of the **kṛtayuga** [35].

There are, however, a group of myths set in the **kṛtayuga** which can be seen as relevant to the essential

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32 13.14.70.

33 9.39.3 For other uses of the **kṛtayuga** (also called **deva-**, **dharma-** and **âdi-** in these references) as an ancient setting, c.f. also: 9.36.39;46.5;12.3.19-20;37.4;39.3;248.7;308.7;321.9;327.50;13.14.75;16.12.

34 Set in the **kṛta** at 3.98.3 and 6.76.18 respectively.

35 Beyond the fact that the **vṛtrahatyâ**, at least, has been seen to be highly significant for Vedic ideas of creation and, as such, will be shown to share many underlying concerns with the nature of the **yugas**.

character of the period, and these are mainly to do with the overthrow of the **dânavas** by the gods. This is another post-creation event which mythic chronology demands be placed in the **kṛtayuga** when it is juxtaposed with the **yuga** system, but this time it appears that this mere necessity has been utilised to provide a means of reflecting on the nature of the **yugas** themselves. The myth occurs first and most succinctly at 3.92.6-12:

purâ devayuge cai 'va dṛṣṭaṃ sarvaṃ mayâ
vibho
arocayan surâ dharmaṃ dharmaṃ tatyajire
>surâḥ (6)

tîrthâni devâ viviśur nâ 'viśan bhâratâ
'surâḥ
tân aḍharmakṛto darpaḥ pûrvam eva samâviśat
(7)

darpân mânah samabhavan mânât krodho vyajâyata
krodhâd ahrîs tato >lajjâ vṛttaṃ teṣâṃ tato
>naśat (8)

tân alajjân gatahrîkân hînavṛttân vṛthâvratân
kṣamâ lakṣmîś ca dharmaś ca na cirât
prajahus tatah
lakṣmîs tu devân agamad alakṣmîr asurân nṛpa
(9)

tân alakṣmîsamâviṣtân darpopahatacetasaḥ
daiteyân dânavâmś cai 'va kalir apy
âviśat tataḥ (10)

tân alakṣmîsamâviṣtân dânavân kalinâ tathâ
darpâbhibhûtân kaunteya kriyâhînân acetasaḥ (11)

mânâbhibhûtân acirâd vinâśaḥ pratyapadyata
niryaśasyâs tato daityâḥ kṛtsnaśo vilayaṃ
gatâḥ (12)

Long ago, in the yuga of the gods, I saw it all, Lord, how the gods took pleasure in dharma and the asuras abandoned it. (6)

The gods entered the sacred fords but the asuras did not, O Bhârata. Pride coming from their adharma had already taken possession of them. (7)

From pride arrogance sprang up; from arrogance, anger was born, from anger shamelessness, then lack of shame: their good conduct was destroyed. (8)

The earth, fortune and dharma soon abandoned them who were shameless, lacking shame, without good conduct and making vows falsely. So fortune went to the gods and misfortune to the asuras, O king. (9)

Then strife (kali) entered the daityas and dânavas who were possessed by misfortune and whose minds were destroyed by pride. (10)

> Then destruction soon came to those dânavas possessed by misfortune and by kali, who were overcome by pride and arrogance, Kaunteya, foolish and lacking rites. Then those daityas, their good name gone, were completely destroyed. (11,12)

That this decay represents a fall from an original state of grace, is shown by the longer description of Śrî deserting the dânavas (but not set in the kṛtayuga) at 12.221.27-79. Here the dânavas were originally dharmic in their behaviour and only turned to adharma over time. After a detailed account of their earlier behaviour Śrî continues:

> tatah kâlaviparyâse teṣâṃ guñaviparyayât
> apaśyaṃ vigataṃ dharmaṃ
> kâmakrodhavaśâtmanâm
>
> Then, as the times changed, their character changed and because of this I saw dharma leave them whose souls were now overcome by desire and anger.[36]

Another passage, following an account of creation and Brahmâ's ordinance of dharmic behaviour, again describes the rebellion and rule of the dânavas:

> dânavendrâs tv atikramya tat pitâmahaśâsanam
> dharmasyâ 'pacayam cakruh
> krodhalobhasamanvitâḥ (26)
> . . .

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36 12.221.49.

ete câ 'nye ca bahavaḥ saganâ daityadânavâḥ
dharmasetum atikramya remire >dharmaniścayâḥ
(28)

But the lords of the **dânavas**, full of anger and greed, went against the decree of the grandfather [which all other beings were happy to obey] and caused **dharma** to diminish. (26)
. . .

These and many other **daityas** and **dânavas**, surrounded by their troops went beyond the limits of **dharma** and enjoyed themselves, resolved on **adharma**. (28)[37]

In a much shorter reference to the myth at 12.64.10, the period of the **dânava's** rule is simply characterised as **nirmaryâda** - without limits or boundaries.

A different myth set in the **krtayuga** shows a very similar pattern, except that here the decay arises spontaneously in the society of the time, because of the lack of **dandanîti**, rather than being imposed by the **dânavas**:

nai 'va râjyam na râjâ 'sin na dando na ca
dândikaḥ
dharmenai 'va prajâḥ sarvâ rakṣanti ca
parasparam (14)

pâlayânâs tathâ 'nyonyam narâ dharmena bhârata
khedam paramam âjagmus tatas tân mohâ âviśat
(15)
. . .

tâms tu kâmavaśam prâptân râgo nâma
samaspṛśat
raktâś ca nâ 'bhyajânanta kâryâkâryam
yudhiṣṭhira (19)

agamyâgamanam cai 'va vâcyâvâcyam tatai 'va ca
bhakṣyâbhakṣyam ca râjendra doṣâdoṣam
ca nâ 'tyajan (20)

viplute naraloke >smims tato brahma nanâśa ha

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37 12.160.26,28.

nâśâc ca brahmaṇo râjan dharmo nâśam athâ
'gamat (21)

There was no sovereignty nor king, no chastisement nor chastiser and all creatures protected each other with dharma itself. (14)

But men, governing each other with dharma in that way, became very distressed, O Bhârata and then delusion entered them, [followed by greed (v.17) and desire (v.18)]. (15)

. . .

And then passion touched those men who had come under the power of desire and, impassioned, they could not recognize what should be done and what should not be done, Yudhisthira. (19)

Then, illicit intercourse (took place), and they abandoned all (distinctions between) what should and should not be said, what should and should not be eaten and what was vice or virtue, Lord of Kings. (20)

Then, when this world of men had thus gone astray, the Vedic texts perished, and because of the destruction of the Vedas, O king, then dharma was destroyed. (21)[38]

Although set early in the **kṛtayuga** these myths describe a progressive decay that shows a marked similarity to the essential features of the **kaliyuga**. Dharma diminishes or becomes destroyed and the characteristic breakdown of ordered distinctions can be clearly seen: people no longer distinguish between proper and improper in any sphere (12.59.19,20); the ordained limits of **dharma** - **dharmasetu** - are transgressed (12.160.28); the world is without boundaries (12.64.10) and the word used here - **nirmaryâda** - is one employed elsewhere to describe conditions in the **kaliyuga** proper

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38 12.59.14-15,19-21.

39. In the Aranyakaparva passage also, the connections can be seen: the **dânavas** are possessed by **adharma** (v.7) and, more significantly, at the end of their decline they are possessed by **kali** and are utterly destroyed (3.92.10-12). In each case the period of decay is brought to an end, so that (implicitly) the **kṛtayuga** is allowed to continue on its course. The adharmic dânavas are replaced by the gods (3.92.13) or exterminated by the sword which arises out of Brahmâ's sacrifice accompanied by various images of the **pralaya** [40]; the chaos caused by the lack of **daṇḍanîti** is terminated by the inauguration of the king and composition of 100,000 **adhyâyas** on **dharma, artha** and **kâma** [41].

It would appear then, that with some regularity, the progress of the **kṛtayuga** is interrupted by a period which shows all the signs of being a **kaliyuga** in miniature. Either this can be seen as an accident of historical contingency arising from the need to place closely post-creation events and charter myths (such as the origins of kingship or **daṇḍanîti** etc) in the **kṛtayuga** once the **yuga** system was established, or else as a genuine reflection on the nature of the **kṛtayuga** and the decline that will follow it. While the first possibility cannot be ruled out and, indeed, is very likely to be the original cause

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39 C.f. 3.188.72,114;12.139.1;220.114, discussed above in 5.2.

40 12.160.43, where it is likened to **kâlântaka** and in v.48 to **kâlârkânala**.

41 12.59.29f. A similar pattern of decline and re-establishment (although not specifically set in the kṛtayuga) occurs at 12.283.7f.

of the juxtaposition, the case for arguing that this has been transformed into a genuine mythical exploration of the theme will be strengthened when the decline through the yugas is analysed further [42].

5.4 The middle yugas

In the descriptions of all four yugas the middle two ages were treated in far less detail than the kṛta or kali. Whereas the first and last yugas can be seen to be characterised by distinct and opposing descriptions, the tretâ and dvâpara, by contrast, simply serve to measure out stages in the overall decline, possessing few distinctive features of their own. The only exceptions to this generalisation are the association between the tretâyuga and the appearance of sacrifice, which is fairly widespread [43], and the emphasis on well-performed varṇâśramadharma in this yuga when it follows a kṛtayuga with particularly ascetic values [44].

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42 In the Purâṇas, a similar decline is sometimes found in the tretâyuga, and here the decline and renewal happens several times, with a series of lapses and reinstatements of dharmic behaviour and conditions before the yuga continues on its natural course. C.f. e.g., Kûrma 1.27.25-48, and Mârk 49.26-65.

43 3.148.24;12.224.64. But see, however, 12.224.27, where it is the dvâparayuga which is associated with sacrifice.

44 3.148.25;12.224.64. This characteristic was discussed above in 5.1.

The relative unimportance of the middle **yugas** is reinforced by their treatment in individual references, where the **tretâ** is discussed in only a few passages, while the **dvâpara** is given no separate mention at all. The association between the **tretâ** and sacrifice is continued in a reference at 10.18.1, which sets Daksa's sacrifice at the beginning of the **yuga**, when the **devayuga** [= kṛtayuga] had elapsed - tato devayuge >tite.

5.5 The nature of the decline through the yugas

This examination of the characteristics of the four yugas has so far revealed a number of recurring themes and patterns. The passages describing all four **yugas**, in 5.1, showed the decline running through them to follow a parallel course in the three interdependent spheres of society, nature and religion. It began to appear as if the decline was from a state of order, marked by properly maintained distinctions and boundaries, to a state of chaotic undifferentiation. This was also expressed in terms of a decline from an original unity to multiplicity, and then disintegration: one Veda in the **kṛta** multiplied to three by the **dvâpara**, and perished in the **kali**; one rite in the **kṛta** multiplied to manifold rituals in the **dvâpara**, and none at all in the **kali**. Some connection was also seen between the **yugas** and both the **varṇas** and the **guṇas**, and it was noted that the

kṛtayuga often displayed ascetic values, which became properly maintained householder values in the tretâ and disintegrated by the kali.

Descriptions of the individual yugas confirmed these trends. In 5.2, accounts of conditions in the kaliyuga emphasised the fact that the decline was essentially a movement from order to chaos. In the social world, this was seen in the breakdown of varṇadharma and familial hierarchies, and in the loss of distinctions between right and wrong behaviour. In the natural world, the seasons were disordered, the planets out of place and neither people nor crops procreated or grew in the way that they should. The loss of the boundaries - maryâda, setu - that kept order in place was very clear in these descriptions, and the lack of order was also expressed as an actual reversal of values and conditions: the world was 'upside-down', 'topsy-turvey' - viparîta, adharottara. The characteristic of unwholesome multiplication was again emphasised.

These essential features of the kaliyuga were borne out by descriptions of the kṛtayuga, which was seen to be mainly characterised by a contrasting state of order, where the proper boundaries were maintained, again expressed in both social and natural terms. In some passages, the kṛtayuga was shown to contain a temporary decline in dharma, and again, this was described in similar terms to that of the greater decline, with

emphasis on the breakdown of proper boundaries. The examination of the two intervening **yugas** added very little to the picture. The **tretâ** was rarely mentioned alone, and the **dvâpara** never, and neither showed particularly distinctive features, apart from the fairly consistent association of the **tretâ** with sacrifice.

A number of points could be made about these features but here I shall concentrate on only two: the connections between the decline throughout the **yugas**, on the one hand, and the cycle of creation and destruction, on the other; and the implications of these characteristics for the essential structure of the yuga system [45].

The connections between the decline throughout the yugas and the cycle of creation and destruction are apparent when the structures of the two are compared. The primeval ordering of chaos was found to be an important and abiding cosmogonic theme, and the cycle of creation and destruction was seen as an alternation between the existence of the ordered universe and the undifferentiated state of non-creation. Moreover, it was found that from at least the Brâhmanas onwards, the

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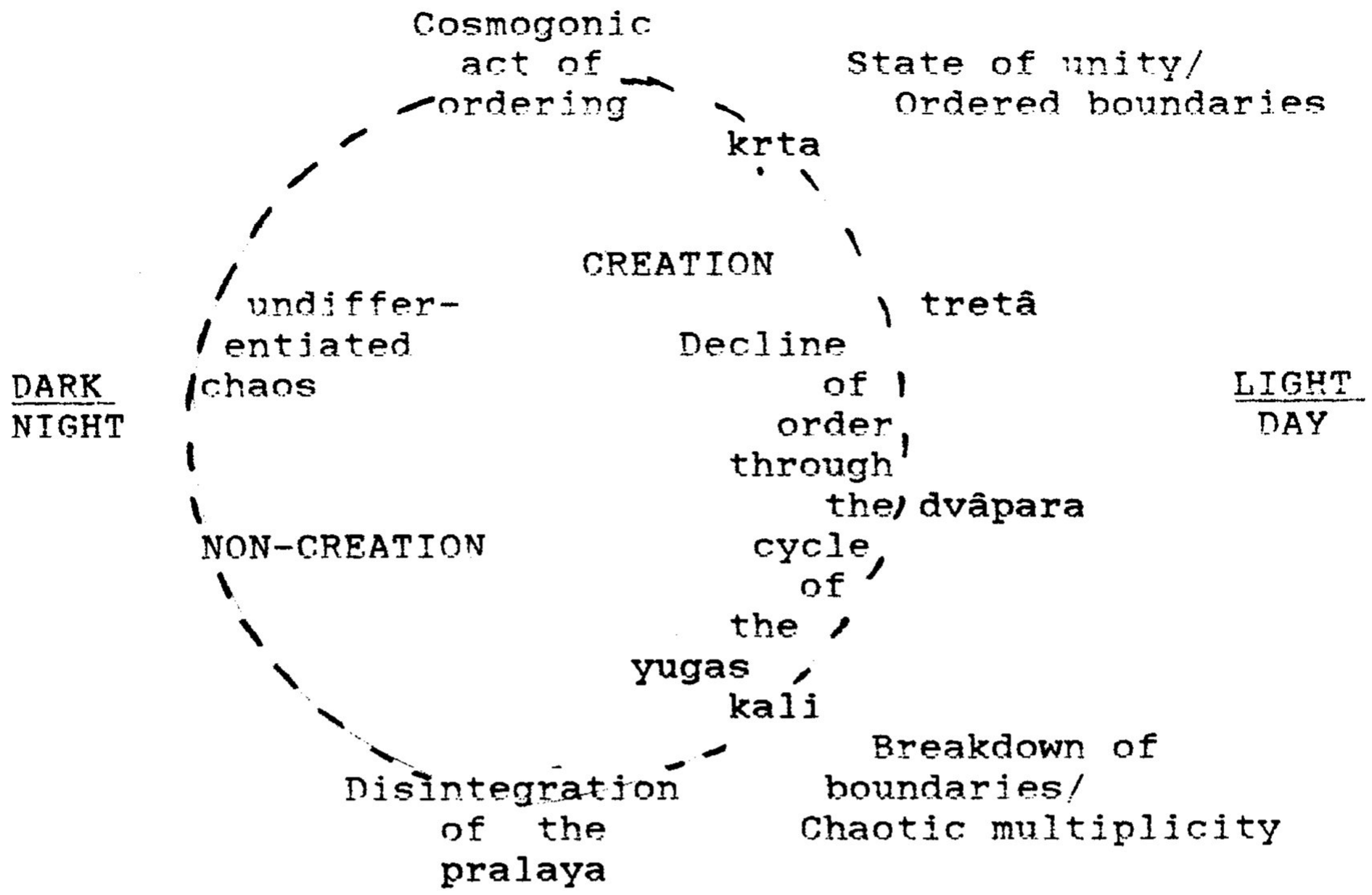
45 Other points that could be explored (and have been to some extent by other scholars) include: the relationship with the **varnas**; the characteristics of the **kaliyuga** in relation to behaviour in the Mbh and especially the breakdown of the rules of combat throughout the battle; the relationship between the Kaurava **senâpatis** and the different **yugas**. These topics, however, are more to do with the wider significance of the **yuga** theory and its rôle in the Mbh, and are, therefore, outside the immediate brief of this thesis.

creative act carried with it a concomitant of destruction: expressed either in terms of a post-creative disintegration (Prajâpati falling apart, etc.) or as the simultaneous production of the forces that will eventually undermine the created universe (creation of the asuras and darkness, etc.).

These same patterns can be seen in the decline through the yugas, where the movement is from the order of the krta to the chaos of the kali, involving the breakdown of proper boundaries; and from unity to a disintegration in multiplicity. The parallels are echoed in the finer details of the pattern also, and the light/dark polarity found in the cosmogonies, can be seen through the yugas, in the movement from sattva or nirguna to tamas, and from white to black. When the cycle and decline are juxtaposed, the underlying entropy of the caturyuga can be added to the destruction latent in the creative act, to form a logically coherent structure. From the moment of the world's creation, its decay is set in motion and will take it back to its starting point: the undifferentiated ocean of the pralaya waters, lying inert in the pitch-black:



That the decline through the **caturyuga** conforms so closely to the cycle of creation and destruction, has a number of implications for its essential structure. The first is that it bears out the suggestion that the simple cycle of four yugas bounded by creation and destruction is the more fundamental. The extension to 1000 is unnecessary for the logic of the process, where the disintegration of order in the **kaliyuga** is most naturally completed by the **pralaya** and return to chaos

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46 Although it should be noted that the same patterns can still, in fact, be seen in the extended **kalpa** structure, where the greater cycle of order > chaos (creation/destruction) is made up of smaller cycles of order > chaos in the revolving **caturyugas**.

Secondly, the fact that the real importance of the decline lies in the movement from order > chaos, suggests that the four-fold structure of the **yugas** is also unnecessary, and merely serves to punctuate the decline. That is to say, the fact that there are <u>four</u> **yugas** has no essential significance: for the logic of the myth to work, there could as well be three or five, or simply an unbroken decline. Such an idea is supported by the descriptions of the **yugas**, where it was seen that it is only ever the **kali** and **krta** that are described in detail: the intervening **yugas** have few distinctive characteristics, and only serve to separate the first from the last. This is not to say that the fact that there are four **yugas** has not acquired a number of meaningful connections: the relationship with the **varnas**; the four throws of the dice; the decline in quarters; but that this meaning is secondary to the essential structures of the myth. Given the play on numbers and their significance found throughout the Indian texts, almost any division of the **yuga** cycle could have several meaningful connotations [47].

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47 C.f., e.g., the riddle of numbers between Āstâvakra and Bandin (3.134.6ff), where each lists things that correspond to a number (three Vedas, three worlds; five fires, five senses, etc.) and the contest only finishes when Bandin cannot complete a list for thirteen. Similarly, it appears that the dice-game was played with various numbers of dice, and that four was by no means the standard: c.f. Panduranga Bhatta [1985] pp 86ff and Heesterman [1957] pp.140ff.

CHAPTER 6 - OTHER AREAS OF THE YUGA THEORY

6.1 Yugas and the king

In my treatment of the kṛtayuga , I examined three extended passages which set out the characteristics of the age. All three passages displayed similar concerns, but only one, at 3.188.15f [1], corresponds to the idea established in the majority of yuga theory references, namely that the four ages inevitably deteriorate over a set period of time. The other two passages were describing a kṛtayuga which had been inaugurated not by a periodic creation, nor by the arrival of Kalkin, but by an occurrence in the royal sphere which improved the conditions of society: Bhiṣma's regency after the birth of Pâṇḍu, Dhṛtarâṣṭra and Vidura at 1.102.1-15 and the repopulation of kṣatriyas by brâhmaṇas following Paraśurâma's massacre at 1.58.8-24. Thus, in place of conditions in nature and society conforming to their age, these passages instead present a situation where the age set in motion is determined by the conditions in society. These are in turn determined by the way the society is ruled [2].

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1 This was the kṛtayuga set in motion by Kalkin discussed in 5.3.

2 It is important to note that the passages only differ from the bulk of yuga theory references on this point: apart from this, the details of their description are sufficiently similar to have allowed me to use them indiscriminately to establish the characteristics of the four yugas in 5.3.

That these passages are not just aberrations, but belong to a coherent body of opinion, can be seen by the fact that there are a number of other references which clearly state that the **yuga** is set in motion by the king. Moreover, the forcefulness with which this idea is expressed would suggest that it was a point of some controversy. Thus, for example, the description of the four **yugas** at 12.70.6-27 begins:

> **kâlo vâ kâraṇam râjño râjâ vâ kâlakâraṇam**
> **iti te saṃśayo mâ bhûd râjâ kâlasya kâraṇam (6)**
>
> Does the age produce the king, or the king produce the age? Have no doubt: the king is the cause of the age. (6)

and concludes its description of the **yugas** by stating the fruits that a king can expect for setting the different ages in motion:

> **râjâ kṛtayugasraṣṭâ tretâyâ dvâparasya ca**
> **yugasyâ ca caturthasya râjâ bhavati kâraṇam (25)**
>
> **kṛtasya karaṇâd râjâ svargam atyantam aśnute**
> **tretâyâḥ karaṇâd râjâ svargam nâ 'tyantam aśnute (26)**
>
> **pravartanâd dvâparasya yathâbhâgam upâśnute**
> **kaleḥ pravartanâd râjâ pâpam atyantam aśnute (27)**
>
> The king is the author of the **kṛtayuga** and the king is the cause of the **tretâ**, **dvâpara** and the fourth **yuga**. (25)
>
> By causing a **kṛta**, the king attains endless heaven. By causing a **tretâ**, the king attains heaven, but not for ever. (26)

> By setting in motion a dvâpara, the king fares as his luck allows. By setting in motion a kali, the king attains endless misfortune. (27)

A set of verses identical to 12.70.6,25-27a are found at 5.130.14-18, but this time the passage concludes with a verse which begins to throw some light on the reasoning behind the idea, pointing as it does to the underlying symbiosis between the king and his kingdom:

> tato vasati duṣkarmâ narake ṣâṣvatîḥ
> samâḥ
> râjadoṣeṇa hi jagat spṛṣyate jagataḥ sa
> ca
>
> Therefore an evil (king) dwells in hell for evermore; for the world is touched by the faults of the king and he by those of the world. (18)

Two other passages amplify this theme. 12.139.9-10 emphasises the symbiosis to the point where the kingdom can almost be seen as an extension of the king, so firmly is it rooted in his person:

> râjamûlâ mahârâja yogakṣemasuvṛṣṭayaḥ
> prajâsu vyâdhayaṣ cai 'va maraṇaṃ ca bhayâni
> ca (9)
>
> kṛtaṃ tretâ dvâparaṣ ca kaliṣ ca
> bharatarṣabha
> râjamûlâṇi sarvâṇi mama nâ 'sty atra
> saṃṣayaḥ (10)
>
> Great king, prosperity and good rainy seasons have their roots in the king, as do the diseases of his subjects and their death and fears. (9)

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3 vs.25-27. This is the passage discussed in 5.1, where the yuga is dependent on the amount of daṇḍanîti the king uses: complete daṇḍanîti gives a kṛtayuga (v.7); three-quarters gives a tretâ (v.14), etc. (vs.17,18).

> kṛta, tretâ, dvâpara and kali: all are rooted in the king, O Bull of the Bharatas, I have no doubt about this. (10)

A reference at 12.92.6-8 takes this further: it extends the symbiosis into a cosmic reference:

> **râjai 'va kartâ bhûtânâṃ râjai 'va ca vinâśakaḥ**
> **dharmâtmâ yaḥ sa kartâ syâd adharmâtmâ vinâśakaḥ**
>
> The king is the creator of beings and the king is their destroyer. That one whose nature is dharmic is a creator but the adharmic one may be (considered) a destroyer. (8)

and strengthens the connection between the king and the yuga to such a point that the two become identical:

> **kṛtaṃ tretâ dvâparaś ca kaliś ca**
> **bharatarṣabha**
> **râjavṛttâni sarvâṇi râjai 'va yugam ucyate**
>
> kṛta, tretâ, dvâpara and kali: all these are set in motion by the king, Bull of the Bharatas. The king is said to be the yuga. (6)

By now the themes emerging from behind this connection between the king and the yugas begin to look familiar: 1) the well-being of the kingdom, (i.e. the maintenance of social and natural order through the inauguration of the **kṛtayuga**) is dependant upon the king; 2) this stretches beyond the terrestrial kingdom into the cosmos as a whole; 3) the king is identified with a unit of time and its establishment in the world. These ideas take us back to Heesterman's study of the **râjasûya**, where, as we saw, the **yajamâna**/king was elaborately

identified with the cosmos and its yearly cycle of disintegration and renewal:

> ... the sacrificer, realizing through the ritual symbols his identity with the universe, performs through the sacrifice the cyclical rhythm of the universe in a series of deaths and births. [4]

The **râjasûya**:

> ...is originally not an investiture of the king, but a yearly recurring festival by which the regeneration of the powers of fertility and renewal of the universe are effected. The festival centres round the king whose rebirth is equivalent with the universal regeneration and renewal. [5]

The connections between the king and the state of the cosmos, and the king and time and its renewal, can thus be seen to have a long history. This history, moreover, is one which reaches back to a sacrifice which we have already seen to be fundamental to the Vedic concept of cyclical time and which provides a partial foundation for the structures of the classical **yuga** theory. Translated into classical terms, where sacrifice declines in importance and is replaced by conduct [6], the

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4 Heesterman [1957] pp.6/7 cited above.

5 Ibid. p.159

6 The translation of ritual sacrifice into conduct of various sorts is an important theme throughout the Mbh. It is found explicitly, for example, in the BhG, where Arjuna's work, i.e. fighting, is a form of sacrifice (3.9-15 = Mbh 6.25.9-15) as are **yoga**, learning etc. (4.23-33 = Mbh 6.26.23-33). The good rule of the kingdom is stressed throughout as the primary **dharma** of the king, and the king's rôle as literal **yajamâna** is played down, although, of course, still present. Yudhiṣṭhira's performance of the **râjasûya** and **aśvamedha** are pivotal to the epic, but the details of the sacrifice and the ideology behind it are not expressed. The physical sacrifice is largely replaced by the sacrifice as a highly important symbol against which ideas of **dharma**,

king as **yajamâna** is superseded by the king as ruler; the yearly renewal is replaced by the return of the **kṛtayuga**, i.e. a renewal of the **yuga** cycle [7]; and, in accord with this extension of the time cycle, the identification between the king/**yajamâna** and the year becomes an identification between the king and the **yuga**.

These connections back to the significance of the king's role in the **râjasûya** are reinforced in the epic by the many descriptions of kingdoms under good or bad kings. These again stress the symbiosis between the king and his kingdom and while the temporal connection is never actually made, the descriptions of the ensuing state of society and nature are significantly similar to those of the **kṛta** and **kali yugas**. As was the case in the temporal setting, so too in these descriptions good and bad reigns are largely informed by ideas of order and chaos. Thus, for example, the reign of King **Duḥṣanta** is characterised by order in the social and natural spheres, and the same examples of this are given as were found in descriptions of the **kṛtayuga**: people follow their

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yoga, etc. are defined. It would be interesting to see how far the re-interpretation of sacrifice into different spheres takes with it the cosmogonic significance. This has already been seen in that where the literal sacrifice is important, the king as **yajamâna** represents the cosmos; where **dharma** is stressed, it is the king as ruler who represents it. In E.M.H. Biardeau has also shown the identification between the **yogin/bhakta** and the cosmic process, where **yoga** and **bhakti** dominates. This transformation of the sacrifice has been treated by several other scholars, including Hiltebeitel [1976], Dumézil [1968], Gehrts [1975] and Scheuer [1982].

7 Further evidence of the identification between the Vedic year and the classical **yuga** was discussed in 3.3 below.

svadharma; there is no disease; the earth yields without ploughing or mining; rain comes in season and the harvests are good [8]. Another reference, showing the depth of the parallel, states that when the king rules well, the boundaries are laid out - **tadâ bhavati lokasya maryâdâ suvyavasthitâ**, with the characteristic **maryâdâ** being used [9], and elsewhere, Mithilâ, governed by the good king Janaka, is described as **dharmasetusamâkîrṇâm** - filled with the boundaries of **dharma** [10]. Conversely, when the king is bad or absent, society and nature fall apart, resulting in a situation that resembles the **kaliyuga**: there is no rain [11]; people are tormented by plague and disasters [12]; the **vedas**, sacrifice and **dharma** are lost and the **varṇas** mixed [13]. Again, in direct contrast to the reign of a good king, all wholesome barriers are swept away - **bhidyeran sarvasetavah** [14].

The connections with the cosmogonically significant **râjasûya**, and the similarities between the well or badly ruled kingdom and the **kṛta** and **kali yugas**, show that assertions that the king makes the **yuga** are understandable in terms of the central concerns of the **yuga** theory, even if they appear heterodox in the stricter terms of the theory's detail. In so far as this is the case, they are not a significant variation to the

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8 1.62.6-10. For similar, c.f. also, e.g.: 2.30.1-5;3.198.25-29;4.27.12-24.
9 3.149.39
10 3.198.6
11 1.99.40
12 5.10.44-47;145.24-27
13 12.68.21-22,29
14 12.68.27

more established ideas and the controversy suggested by their terms of expression is not a real one [15]. The fact that the connections leading to this idea were made, however, could prove significant for some other aspects of the theory, and I shall return to this idea below.

6.2 Avatâras and the yugas

The concept of the avatâra and its development and rôle in the Mbh and Purâṇas is an extremely complex subject and I am not going to attempt to treat it in any detail here. Rather, I am simply concerned with the areas where it relates to the theories of time and must leave some of the wider questions unexplored [16]. Moreover, the relationship between the avatâras and the

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15 The idea of the king making the age is found in Manu c.f. Bühler [1967] p.224, and the Râm: c.f. Brockington [1984] p.232, who suggests connections between Mbh 12.67-8 and Râm 2.61. It seems less immediately common in the purâṇas, however, although the well-known story in the Bhâg. (1.17.42) where Pariksit stops Kali tormenting the bull of dharma, could well be based on the idea that he stops the kaliyuga happening in his kingdom because he is a good king. The purâṇic idea that the kaliyuga could not commence while Krsṇa was on the earth (c.f. 6.3) could also be related to this. Interestingly, an identification between the king and the age seems to have also been made in Babylonia, c.f. Jeremias [1908] p.187. The significance of the king making the yuga is also discussed by Scheuer [1982] p.110f.

16 This means, for example, that I shall be using the terms 'avatâra' and 'avatâra doctrine' fairly loosely to refer to Visṇu's incarnations, despite the fact that the root √tr and its derivatives are not widely used in this context in the Mbh. I shall indicate other major limitations in my treatment as they occur. The nature of the avatâra and his relationship to the structures of time is a subject that Biardeau has covered in great depth: c.f. EMH 4,5.

yugas is closely connected to the nature of the yugânta period, to be discussed in the next section, and I shall leave some of my analysis of the subject until then. Consequently, in this section I shall only attempt to examine how the avatâras are connected to the yugas and other aspects of the cycle, both theoretically and in terms of their occurence, and then attempt to establish that their connection is essentially with the yugânta period.

The best known expression of the avatâra doctrine, occurs in the BhG section of the Mbh and shows how a relationship with the yuga theory is embedded in the very way that the idea is formulated:

yadâ yadâ hi dharmasya glânir bhavati bhârata
abhyutthânam adharmasya tadâ 'tmânaṃ sṛjâmy
aham (7)

paritrâṇâya sâdhûnâm vinâśâya ca duskṛtâm
dharmasaṃsthâpanârthâya saṃbhavâmi yuge yuge
(8)

Whenever there is a decrease of dharma and a rise of adharma, then I send myself forth, O Bhârata. (7)

For the protection of the good, the destruction of the wicked and the establishment of dharma, I come into being yuga after yuga (8) [17].

Other references to the theory of the avatâras' appearances serve to reinforce this relationship, and to indicate something of the context in which the idea should be understood. A passage at 3.187.26-30 begins

17 6.26.7,8 (BhG 4.7,8)

with an almost identical verse to BhG 4.7, but then expresses the decline of **dharma** in terms of the **devâsura** struggle:

> daityâ himsânuraktâś ca avadhyâḥ
> surasattamaih
> râkṣasâś câ 'pi loke >smin yado 'tpatsyanti
> dârûṇâḥ (27)
>
> tadâ 'haṃ samprasûyâmi gṛheṣu
> śubhakarmaṇâṃ
> praviṣṭo mânuṣaṃ deham sarvam
> praśamayâmy ahaṃ (28)
>
> When daityas devoted to injury, inviolable to the best of the gods, and **râkṣasas** appear in this world, terrible;
>
> Then I am born in the houses of the virtuous and, having assumed a human body I subdue them all. (v.27,28)

The Viṣṇu-child, who is speaking, then goes on to identify himself as the creator and destroyer of the world:

> srstvâ devamanûsyâmś ca
> gaṅdharvoragarâkṣâṅ
> sthâvarâṇi ca bhûtâni saṃharâmy âtmamâyayâ
>
> Having created the gods, men, gandharvas, snakes, **râkṣasas** and immovable beings, I destroy them with my own marvellous power (v.29)

and concludes by reiterating the purpose of his incarnation:

> karmakâle punar deham anucintya sṛjâmy aham
> praviśya mânuṣam deham
> mâryâdâbandhakâraṇât
>
> When it is again the time for action, I think of a body and I create myself, having entered a human body in order to produce the bonds of moral law.

A similar pattern is followed in a reference at 14.53.11-15. After explaining that he takes birth for the protection and establishment of dharma - dharmasaṃrakṣanârthâya, dharmasaṃsthâpanâya (vs.11,12), Kṛṣṇa again identifies himself as creator and destroyer - bhûtagrâmasya sarvasya sraṣṭâ saṃhâra eva ca (v.14), and follows this with:

> dharmasya setuṃ badhnâmi calite calite yuge
>
> As the yugas constantly move, I fix the bounds of dharma. (v.15)

Two other references add to this contextualising of the avatâra doctrine. 13.143.7-8 also sets it next to Viṣṇu's rôle as creator and then continues:

> sa viśvasya asya jagataś cê 'pi gopatâ (10b)
>
> yadâ dharmo glâyati vai surânâṃ
> tadâ kṛṣṇo jâyate mânuṣeṣu (11a)
> . . .
>
> tyâjyâṃs tyaktvâ 'thâ 'surâṇâṃ vadhâya (12a)
>
> He is also the protector of all this world.
>
> When dharma declines for the gods, then Kṛṣṇa is born among men.
> . . .
>
> Sparing those who should be spared, he slaughters among the asuras.[18]

At 7.28.23-6, Kṛṣṇa explains that he has four forms continually engaged in protecting the world - catur mûrtir ahaṃ śaśvaḷ lokatrânârtham udyataḥ (v.23). One

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18 13.143.10b;11a;12a

performs tapas (presumably Nârâyaṇa alongside Nara) (v.24); one watches good and bad actions in the world; while of the other two, one enters the world of men and performs deeds - **aparâ kurute karma mânuṣaṃ lokam āśritâ** (v.25); and the fourth rests in a thousand-year sleep (i.e. during the period following the **pralaya**) - **śete caturthî tv aparâ nidrâṃ varṣasahasrikâm** (v.25).

Already then, from these purely theoretical statements of the **avatâra's** incarnation, it is possible to sketch out some indications as to his nature and relationship to the cycle of time. Firstly, they show that the **avatâra** is connected with the **yugas**: the incarnations occur within the framework of the four ages and this is most likely to mean that the avatâra's deeds and purpose can only be understood in relation to them. This is reinforced by the way in which the **avatâra's** purpose is stated in these passages, with the establishment of **dharma** being expressed once more in terms of the underlying concern for limits/boundaries - **maryâdâ/setu**, which was seen to characterise descriptions of the decline through the yugas [19]. Secondly, these references set Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa's rôle as **avatâra** next to some other rôles important for the cycle of time: as the creator and destroyer of the cosmos; and as the receptacle that preserves the world and its beings during the **pralaya**. Moreover, they also connect his incarnation

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19 Although **maryâdâ** is the more usual word in these passages, **dharmasetu** occurs, for example, at 12.160.28, cited below, 5.1.

and rôle in the world with the perpetual struggle between the **devas** and the **asuras**, a struggle that we have seen to be fraught with cosmogonic implications. That the connections sketched out in these passages are not mere accidents of juxtaposition will become obvious as they re-appear and prove significant in accounts of the **avatâras'** incarnations and their relationship with the nature of the yugânta period [20].

Epic and purâṇic accounts of the incarnations do not specify the precise times of the different avatâras' appearances very clearly. In the most detailed account of the **avatâras** in the Mbh, at 12.326.72-97, only the three fully human incarnations, Paraśurâma, Râma Dâśarathi and Kṛṣṇa, are given a specific temporal setting:

> tretâyuge bhaviṣyâmi râmo bhṛgukulodvahaḥ
> kṣatraṃ co'cchâdayiṣyâmi samṛddhabalavâhanam
> (77)
>
> saṃdhau tu samanuprâpte tretâyâṃ dvâparasya ca
> râmo dâśarathir bhûtvâ bhaviṣyâmi jagatpatiḥ
> (78)
> . . .

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20 There are a few other passages which connect incarnations and Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa with the **yugas**, but they do not add anything of significance to the subject. The other references to incarnation within the **yuga** framework are at 7.172.81, where Nara and Nârâyaṇa are said to be born in each **yuga**, in order to maintain the world - **lokayâtrâvidhânârthaṃ saṃjâyete yuge yuge** and 8.65.18, where Arjuna is said to fight **asuras** and **râkṣasas** in each **yuga**. Elsewhere, Kṛṣṇa and/or Arjuna are said to be 'of the three **yugas**' - **triyugau. . . vâsudevadhanaṃjayau** (3.84.4;5.67.3;12.43.6), with the fourth presumably being omitted because of its **adharmic** nature. Other references which give different forms for Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa in the **yugas** (but not related to **avatâras**) were discussed above in 5.1(3.148.16,23,26,32;187.32;13.143.7f).

dvâparasya kaleś cai 'va saṃdhau paryavasânike
prâdur bhâvah kaṃsahetor mathurâyâṃ
bhaviṣyati (82)

tatrâ 'ham dânavân hatvâ subahûn devakaṇṭakân
kuśasthalîṃ kariṣyâmi nivâsaṃ dvârakâṃ
purîm (83)

In the tretâyuga I will become Râma, the descendent of Bhṛgu and I will exterminate the kṣatriyas, with their abundant troops and animals. (77)

When the juncture of the tretâ and dvâpara arrives, as Râma Dâśarathi, I will become the lord of the world. (78)

. . .

At the end of the juncture between the dvâpara and the kali, there will be another manifestation of me, in Mathura, on account of Kaṃsa. (82)

Then, after killing the very many dânavas who were thorns in the sides of the gods, I will make my residence the city of Dvâraka at Kuśasthalî. (83)

[21]

The earlier avatâras: the boar - varâha, the man-lion - narasiṃha, and the slayer of Bali, viz. the dwarf - vâmana [22], are, by default, situated in the kṛtayuga, although if Vâmana's position is juxtaposed with a reference which situates Bali in the kṛta/tretâ yugânta, it could be possible to put his incarnation at this juncture [23]. Kṛṣṇa's situation at the juncture between the dvâpara and kali yugas is well-established in the epic, of course [24], and is specified in one other reference:

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21 vs.77-78,82-83. Partial lists of avatâras (Varâha, Narasiṃha, Vâmana) are also given at 3.100.19-21 and 12.337.34-6 but without any temporal setting.

22 Not named as such here, but identified as the son of Aditi and Kaśyapa (v.75). The other two avatâras are mentioned in vs.72,73.

23 C.f. 5.72.12 cited below in 6.3.

24 C.f 6.3 below for setting of the Mbh battle at this point.

dvâparasya yugasyâ 'nte câ 'dau kaliyugasya ca
sâtvatam vidhim âsthâya gîtaḥ
saṃkarṣaṇeṇa yaḥ

He who having assumed the guise of a Sâtvata [Yâdava] is proclaimed in verse with Saṃkarṣaṇa [Balarâma] at the end of the dvâparayuga and the beginning of the kaliyuga.[25]

Elsewhere, however, conflicting temporal associations are given for the other human avatâras. At 1.2.3 it is Paraśurâma, rather than Râma Dâśarathi who is situated at the tretâ/dvâpara juncture:

tretâdvâparayoḥ saṃdhau râmaḥ
śastrabhṛtâṃ varaḥ
asakṛt pṛthivaṃ kṣatraṃ jaghânâ
'marṣacoditaḥ

At the juncture of the tretâ and dvâpara Râma, the best of warriors, repeatedly destroyed the royal kṣatriyas, urged on by his anger. (v.3)

and at 12.323.50-51, Ekata, Dvita and Trita, who are usually associated with Râma Dâśarathi, are told they will be born in the juncture between the kṛta and tretâ yugas:

mahat kâryaṃ tu kartavyaṃ yuṣmâbhir
dvijasattamâḥ
itaḥ kṛtayuge >tîte viparyâsaṃ gate >pi ca
(50)

vaivasvate >ntare viprâḥ prâpte tretâyuge
tathaḥ
surânâṃ kâryasiddhyarthaṃ sahâyâ vai
bhaviṣyatha (51)

---

25 6.62.39

> O Best of twice-born, you have to perform a great task: henceforth, when the **krtayuga** has gone by and moreover (the world) has fallen into error;
>
> and the **tretâyuga** has arrived in the **vaivasvata** cycle [manvantara] you, brahmins, will become the gods' assistants, in order to ensure their success.
> [26]

It can be seen, therefore, that where the Mbh does specify a time for the **avatâras'** appearances, a connection with a **yugânta** is fairly common. Indeed, in these few passages, each **yugânta** is somewhere explicitly given an **avatâra**, despite divergence as to which **avatâra** it should be. Thus, the **dvâpara/kali** has Kṛṣṇa (and Balarâma); the **tretâ/dvâpara** has Râma Dâśarathi (12.326.78) or Paraśurâma (1.2.3); while the **kṛta/tretâ** could have Râma Dâśarathi (through the association with Ekata, Dvita and Trita) or Vâmana (through the association with Bali).

Although it is only these human **avatâras** who have such explicit **yugânta** associations, it is possible to draw out similar connections from descriptions of other **avatâras** in the epic and from additional information in the **purâṇic** accounts [27]. Indeed, such an association

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26 For these sages incarnating as Râma Dâśarathi's animal allies, c.f. 12.326.79. Although they are also known separately from Râma in the epic, and are not mentioned in the **râmopâkhyâna**, it still seems likely that the passage is referring to this.

27 The lists of **avatâras** seem to be no better systematised in the **purâṇas** than in the epic and different temporal associations are given to the **avatâras** there also. Dimmitt and van Buitenen note this; 'The **avatâra** doctrine so clearly defined today appears to have been somewhat in flux at the time of the compilation of the Purâṇas.' [1978]p.63

between the yugânta period and the avatâras as a whole is expressly stated in a Matsya Purâṇa passage:

> tyaktvâ divyâṃ tanuṃ viṣṇur mânuṣeṣv
> iha jâyate
> yuge tv atha parâvṛtte kâle praśithile
> prabhuḥ
>
> When the yuga turns and time is feeble, then Lord Viṣnu abandons his divine body and is born here among humans.[28]

The non-human avatâras' connections with a yugânta situation can be seen most clearly in the cases of the first three avatâras and the last [29]. While the fish - matsya, the tortoise - kûrma, and the boar - varâha, have various myths associated with them, they all include a myth which is to do with the recovery of the Earth and/or Vedas from under the pralaya waters, and the destruction of any asuras who are impeding this. The Mbh account of Vârâha is an example of this:

> sattvair âkrântasarvâṅgâṃ naṣṭâṃ
> sâgaramekhalâm
> ânayiṣyâmi svaṃ sthânaṃ vârâhaṃ rûpam
> âsthitaḥ (72)

---

28 MP 47.34. This passage again links the avatâra with the devâsura struggle, continuing, 'When the gods and demons go to war, then Hari is born' - devāsuravimardeṣu jâyate harir îśvaraḥ

29 As there is no standardised daśâvatâra list in the Mbh or Purâṇas (lists have fewer or greater numbers and different constituents), I am taking the following avatâras as most normative: Matsya, Kûrma, Varâha, Narasiṃha, Vâmana, Paraśurâma, Râma Dâśarathi, Kṛṣṇa, Kalkin. Although this does not correspond to any one list in the Mbh or the Purâṇas I am using, these avatâras are the most commonly known in the texts, if not yet uniformly connected with Viṣnu in the epic. A variant on a C.E. verse gives a very similar list: haṃsaḥ kûrmaś ca matsyaś ca prâdur bhâvâ dvijottama / vârâho nârasiṃhas ca vâmano râma eva ca / râmo dâśarathiś cai 'va sâtvataḥ kalkir eva ca (variant on 12.326.94).

hiranyâksam hanisyâmi daiteyam
balagarvitam (73a)

With resolution I shall assume the form of a boar and fetch up the sea-girt earth to her own place when she is lost and overspread [with water] in her entirety. (72)

I shall kill Hiranyâksa, the son of Diti, proud of his strength. (73a)[30]

As well as this, the **matsyâvatâra** is probably better known for its rôle as the preserver of Manu and his 'ark' when the world is covered with water, and thus, again requires a **pralaya** setting in the classical schema [31]. All of these myths clearly must be situated at a time when the cosmos is still covered by the **pralaya** waters, just prior to creation [32]. Thus they occur before the krtayuga properly commences, in the extended yugânta situation between the **kali** of one cycle and the **krta** of the

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30 12.326.72-3a. The **kûrmâvatâra** is, of course, best known for its rôle in the churning of the ocean: c.f. Agni 3.1-22.

31 Such a setting is made explicit, both in the **purânas** and in its Mbh telling (3.185.1f), when the fish warns Manu that the time is coming when - **bhaumam idam sthâvarajañgamam / sarvam eva. . . pralayam vai gamişyati** (v.26), and c.f. also Matsya 1.11-35;2.1-37, where the setting at the **naimittikapralaya** is made very clear. However, it seems very likely that this is an independent and ancient myth which has been assimilated into the **pralaya** structure and it would be interesting to examine it and its place there in more detail (on this c.f. Sukthankar [1937] p.29f Most of the incarnations, especially the (mythically) earlier ones, have had their own myths associated with them since before the Epic and it is generally accepted that they had an autonomous existence before being brought together by the **avatâra** idea. While this is undoubtedly the case, however, I would argue that this does not preclude us from legitimately viewing them as a whole and seeking structural similarities between them, as is the view of Biardeau: c.f. [1976] p.175ff.

32 I.e. at a similar time to the myth of the appearance and defeat of Madhu and Kaitabha, c.f. 4.2, below.

next. I shall present the arguments for equating the yugânta and the **pralaya** in the next section, but even without them, it is obvious that these **avatâras** are situated in a juncture period, rather than a **yuga** proper. Both the Bhâgavata and Matsya Purâṇas acknowledge this in the case of **matsyâvatâra** and place him at the end of a **yuga** and the end of a **manvantara** respectively [33], thereby making explicit what is implicit in the myths.

At the other end of the process, Kalkin, the final **avatâra**, incarnates in another extreme **yugânta** situation, again at the juncture between the **kali** of one **mahâyuga** and the **kṛta** of another, but this time in the schema where the **caturyugas** repeat a thousand times [34]. As Kalkin's primary purpose is precisely to kill off the evil-doers of the **kaliyuga** and re-establish the **dharma** of the **kṛtayuga**, his association with a **yugânta** is incontestable [35].

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33 C.f. Bhâg. 2.7.12; Matsya 1.11-35.

34 C.f. Chapter 3 below. The fact that the Epic knows both schemata makes it necessary to jump between them in this way. In the Purâṇas, of course, the two cycles are theoretically put together, so thus it should be possible to say that the **matsya**, **kûrma** and **varâha avatâras** occur at the **kali**[**pralaya**]/**kṛta** juncture of each **kalpa**, while Kalkin occurs at the **kali**/**kṛta** **yugânta** of the **mahâyuga** (i.e. 1,000 times more frequently). Although there are occasional references which show an awareness of inconsistencies (Matsya 47.237f, for example, puts different **avatâras** in different **kalpas** where they would otherwise clash) the fact that the texts themselves so often read as if the **kalpa** and **mahâyuga** cycles were the same (e.g. by having **matsya**, **kûrma** and **varâha** occurring in every **caturyuga**) it reinforces my point that in the minds of the narrators, the **mahâyuga** is the essential cycle, and its theoretical systematisation into a **kalpa** does not really percolate down to the level of the myths themselves.

35 Kalkin is an interesting figure and much has been written on him (c.f., e.g. Mitchiner [1978] p.29). In

This leaves only two avatâras, Vâmana and Narasiṃha without clear-cut yugânta associations. However, here, too, connections can be traced, even though they are less immediately obvious. Vâmana's connection is the weakest of all the avatâras', resting on the reference which places Bali at the kṛta/tretâ yugânta. Narasiṃha's association is only made directly in one Matsya Purâna reference, which places his incarnation at the anniversary of the beginning of a yuga [36]. Although this at first appears a very weak connection, the fact that it is made at all is, when taken with the overwhelming evidence of the other avatâras a very strong indication of how deeply the avatâra and the yugânta must be related in the minds of the narrators and the culture they are drawing from: that the connection can emerge tangentially in this way shows the pains they were willing to take to make the association. Moreover, the nature of the Narasiṃha myth itself shows such a profound structural similarity to yugânta concerns that any temporal association is rendered superfluous. As we shall see in more detail below, the yugânta period, like many 'junctures', is essentially a time between times

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the Mbh he is only identified as an avatâra in a variant to the C.E. (at 12.326.24 cited above) and seems to be more of a human figure, with his actions occurring outside the devâsura struggles which characterise the other avatâras, (apart from Paraśurâma whom he strongly resembles). While I cannot examine this in any detail here, it seems very likely that he is closely connected to the idea that a good king can inaugurate a kṛtayuga by his rule. This, at least, could throw light on the dynamics of his actions. His turning of the yuga will be described in more detail in the next section.

36 47.237f.

that is seen as highly dangerous and unstable, fraught with the potential for destruction [37]. Narasiṃha, incarnating in a particular way to circumvent the conditions of Hiraṇyakaśipu's boon [38], is nothing if not a study in such 'betweens' and 'junctures': he is a man-lion (neither man nor beast); kills the **asura** on his thigh (neither earth nor air); on a veranda (neither inside nor outside); and at twilight (neither day nor night). Where else should he belong then, except in a period that is neither one **yuga** nor another?

All of the **avatâras**, therefore, can be seen to have a close relationship with the **yugânta** period, both as the setting for their incarnations, and, in some cases, through underlying connections of purpose and structure. That this should be the case need not surprise us: the **avatâra** incarnates when **dharma** declines and **adharma** flourishes and the obvious place for this in the pattern or the four **yugas** is the peculiar 'gap' of the juncture, when the flow of the decline through the **yugas** is interrupted and a period of disorder and cosmic crisis sets in. That this is the characteristic of the **yugânta** period will become clear in the following section, and I shall return to a discussion of the **avatâras** in that context.

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37 Temporally, it is Mary Douglas's 'matter out of place'.

38 That he cannot be killed by day or by night, on the earth or in the air, inside or outside, by man or by god. Boons such as this, which make the task of the gods in the **devâsura** struggle more difficult, are fairly common and are usually granted by Brahmâ. On the significance of this, c.f. Biardeau [1976] p.178.

6.3 The yugânta period

To understand the relationship between the avatâras and the yugas/yugântas more fully, it is necessary to examine the nature of the yugânta period in detail. The idea of the yugânta - lit. the end of a yuga and, by extension, the juncture between two yugas - is an interesting aspect of the yuga theory and one that is very important for the Mbh: the epic events are set in the juncture between the dvâpara and kali yugas and gain much of their significance from this context. In my examination of the yugânta, I shall begin by establishing the characteristics of the period presented by the Mbh references, showing that each yugânta is a time of crisis for nature, society and the cosmos. I shall then proceed to analyse the nature of the crisis more closely and explore some of the ideas underlying it.

Characteristics of the yugânta

Most epic references to the junctures between yugas present them as a dangerous time, marked by natural or social calamities. This is true whichever yugas they join, kṛta and tretâ as much as dvâpara and kali and thus, at the least, they represent an interruption to the smoothly gradated flow of the decline from kṛta to kali.

The dangerous and unusual nature of the yugânta period is obliquely referred to in a number of small references. At 5.158.16, Duryodhana boasts (ironically) that Yudhiṣṭhira's chances of winning the battle are as unlikely as other seemingly impossible and calamitous events:

> anilo vâ bahen merum dyaur vâ 'pi nipaten mahîm
> yugaṃ vâ parivarteta yady evaṃ syâd yathâ 'ttha
> mâm
>
> The wind may carry off Meru, or the sky may even fall down upon the earth, or the yuga[39] turn round if what you said to me can come about.

Elsewhere, in a strange reference leading up to Hanumân's description of the characteristics of the **yugas** (cited in 5.1 above), Bhîma is described running through the forest in search of flowers for Draupadî:

> kampayan medinîṃ padbhyâṃ nirghâta iva parvasu
> trâsayan gajayûthâni vâtaraṃhâ vṛkodharaḥ
>
> Shaking the Earth with his feet like the whirlwinds at the joints of time, frightening the herds[40] of elephants went Wolf-belly, fleet as the wind.

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39 The irony is, of course, that Yudhiṣṭhira does win and the **yuga** does turn round.

40 3.146.38. Although the word **yuga** is not used here and **parvan** seems to be more usually associated with smaller periods of time, it is hard to see how else to understand this passage. For **parvan** Monier-Williams (p.609) gives knot, joint, period of fixed time, especially the **câturmâsya** festival; days of the four changes of the moon (Mbh); division of time, e.g. a half month (Mbh); moment, instant. **samdhi** [Monier-Williams (p.1144): juncture, hinge, boundary; interval] is more common for **yugas**, c.f. following, cited below; 1.2.3;3.121.19;12.326.78,82. **antara** [Monier-Williams (p.48): interior... interval, period] is used in 1.2.9.

The most detailed description of a **yugânta** occurs in a discussion about good behaviour in the worst of all times - **jaghanye kâla â gate**, when the world becomes impure - **loke kalusatâm gate** [41]. Bhîṣma describes the period between the **tretâ** and **dvâpara yugas** as an example of such a time:

tasmims tv abhyâgate kâle prajânâṃ doṣakârake
vijñâṅabalam âsthâya jîvitavyaṃ tadâ bhavet (11)

atrâ 'py udâharantî 'mam itihâsaṃ purâtanam
viśvâmitrasya saṃvâdaṃ caṇḍâlasya ca
pakkaṇe (12)

tretâdvâparayoh samdhau purâ daivavidhikramât
anâvṛṣṭir abhûd ghorâ râjan
dvâdaśâvârṣikî (13)

prajânâm abhivṛddhânâṃ yugânte paryupasthite
tretânirmokṣasamaye dvâparapratipâdane (14)

na vavarṣa sahasrâkṣaḥ pratilomo abhavad
guruḥ
jagâma dakṣiṇaṃ mârgaṃ somo
vyâvṛttalakṣaṇaḥ (15)

nâ 'vaśyâyo >pi râtryante kuta evâ 'bhrarâjayaḥ
nadyaḥ samkṣiptatoyaughâḥ kvacid
antargatâ 'bhavan (16)

sarâṃsi saritaś cai 'va kûpâḥ prasravaṇâni
ca
hatatviṭkâny alakṣyanta nisargâd daivakâritât
(17)

upaśuṣkajalasthâyâ vinivṛttasabhâprapâ
nivṛttayajñasvâdhyâyâ nirvaṣaṭkâramaṅgalâ
(18)

utsannakṛṣigoraksyâ nivṛttavipaṇâpaṇâ
nivṛttapûgasamayâ sampranaṣṭamahotsavâ (19)

asthikaṅkâlasamkîrṇâ hâhâbhûtajanâkulâ
śûnyabhûyiṣṭhanagarâ dagdhagrâmaniveśanâ
(20)

kvacic coraiḥ kvacic chastraiḥ kvacid râjabhir
âturaiḥ
paraspârabhayâc cai 'va śûnyabhûyiṣṭhanirjanâ
(21)

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41 12.139.6,8

gatadaivatasaṃkalpâ vṛddhabâlavinâkṛtâ
gojâvimahiṣair hînâ paraspara harâharâ (22)

hataviprâ hatâraksâ pranastausadhisamcayâ
śyâvabhûtanaraprâyâ babhûva vasudhâ tadâ (23)

tasmin pratibhaye kâle kṣîṇe dharme yudhiṣṭhira
babhramuḥ ksudhitâ martyâḥ khâdantaḥ sma parasparam (24)

When that time arrives, causing evil to all creatures, having resorted to the strength of knowledge, it may still be possible to sustain life then. (11)

On this point they relate this ancient story of a conversation between Viśvâmitra and a caṇḍâla in a caṇḍâla village. (12)

Formerly, at the juncture between the tretâ and the dvâpara, because of the course of fate, there was a terrible drought, O king, lasting for twelve years. (13)

When the end of the yuga was at hand for the increased creatures, at the time of the passing of the tretâ and the starting of the dvâpara, (14)

Thousand-eyed Indra did not pour rain, the elder [Bṛhaspati] was contrary to natural order, Soma went on a southern path, his characteristics hidden. (15)

There was not even any dew at the end of the night, to say nothing of lines of clouds. The rivers, with reduced quantities of water, were hidden somewhere. (16)

Lakes, rivers, wells and springs looked as if their lustre had been dimmed because of the condition which had been produced by fate. (17)

Water reservoirs were dried up, the water tanks at travellers' huts disappeared, sacrifices and repetition of the Vedas ceased and there were no sacrifices and festivals. (18)

Harvests and cattle breeding were wretched; trading stalls and markets disappeared; society was altogether lost and the great festivals disappeared. (19)

Full of bones and skeletons, overwhelmed with wailing people, cities nearly empty, with wretched villages alone for abodes; (20)

(Afflicted) here by robbers, there by weapons, elsewhere by weak kings and from fear of each other the earth became very empty and deserted. (21)

Holy images and the will to ritual observances disappeared, lacking the old and the young, the earth was bereft of cows, goats, sheep and buffaloes who had robbed each other (of food). (22)

Brahmins were killed, protection destroyed, multitudes of plants lost and most of the people became dark brown; then did the earth become like this. (23)

During that terrible time, when dharma was exhausted, Yudhisthira, the starving people roamed about eating each other. (24)[42]

This passage has many similarities to descriptions of the kaliyuga, displaying their characteristic emphasis on social and natural chaos: the planets are out of place, Vedas and rituals lost, the people oppressed and unconcerned by rules of varna. The absence of seasonal rain is always a component of the natural disorder in the kaliyuga, but the severity of the drought in this passage more particularly recalls the drought which ends the kaliyuga and leads up to the destruction of the world by the pralaya fire:

tasmin yugasahsrânte samprâpte câ 'yuṣaḥ
kṣaye
anâvṛṣṭir mahârâja jâyate bahuvârṣikî

When that end of the thousand yugas has arrived and life is declining, a drought occurs, lasting for many years.[43]

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42 12.139.11-24. This follows an assertion that the king makes the age (vs.9,10) cited above.

43 3.186.56

Significant similarities with the **kaliyuga** are also brought out by a commentary on the reference at 12.323.50 which situated Ekata, Dvita and Trita at the **kṛta/tretâ yugânta** (cited 6.2). Here, the nature of the error - **viparyâsa** that the world has fallen into at that time, is elaborated in familiar terms:

> viparyâsam gate: viparîtasvabhâve râkṣasâdibhir adharmabahulam iti
>
> 'fallen into error' means when nature is inverted by râkṣasas etc, adharma is abundant.[44]

Apart from natural calamities and a general decline of dharma and society, the yugânta is also characterised by particular battles and other socio-cosmic crises. While these are nearly all associated with the incarnations of the **avatâras** discussed above, in one reference at 5.72.11-18, Duryodhana is likened to other destructive kings who rose up in a yugânta period:

> aṣṭâdaśe 'me râjânaḥ prakhyâtâ madhusûdana
> ye samuccicchidur jñâtîn suhṛdaś ca sabândhavân (11)
>
> asurânâm samṛddhânâm jvalatâm iva tejasâ
> paryâyakâle dharmasya prâpte balir ajâyata (12)
>
> haihayânâm udâvarto nîpânâm janamejayaḥ
> bahulas tâlajaṅghânâm kṛmîṇâm uddhato vasuḥ (13)
> . . .
>
> śamaś ca nandivegânâm ity ete kulapâṃsanâḥ
> yugânte kṛsna sambhûtâḥ kuleṣu puruṣâdhamâḥ (17)
>
> apy ayam naḥ kurûṇâm syâd yugânte kâlasaṃbhṛtaḥ

---

44 viparîta - inverted - was also used in descriptions of the kaliyuga in 5.2.

duryodhanaḥ kûlâñgâro jaghanyaḥ
pâpapûruṣaḥ (18)

There were eighteen famous kings, Madhusûdana, who exterminated their relations, friends and kinsmen. (11)

When the time of the turn of the dharma (yuga) had arrived, Bali was master of the flourishing asuras who seemed to blaze with splendour. (12)

Udâvarta was the king of the Haihayas, Janamejaya of the Nîpas, Bahula of the Tâlajañghas, arrogant Vasu of the Kṛmis. (13)
[and on through other kings]. . .

And Śama of the Nandivegas - these disgracers of their families sprang up at the end of the yuga, Kṛṣṇa, the vilest of men in their families. (17)

And this Duryodhana, the vilest, evil man, may (now) be produced by time at the end of the yuga as the family fire-brand of us, the Kurus.(18)[45]

Paraśurâma's massacre of kṣatriyas and Râma Dâśarathi's battle with Râvana are examples of yugânta calamities connected with avatâra-gestes, as is the Mbh conflict itself, which is firmly situated in the dvâpara/kali yugânta by a number of references. As was seen in the last section, the setting is made clear at the very beginning of the epic, by the reference which identifies Kuruksetra as Samantapañcaka, the setting of Paraśurâma's massacre in the tretâ/dvâpara yugânta and now:

antare cai 'va samprâpte kalidvâparayor abhût
samantapañcake yuddhaṃ kurupâṇḍavasenayoḥ

---

45 vs.11-13,17,18. As argued above, the presence of Bali in this reference suggests a connection with the avatâras here also.

> And when the interval between kali and dvâpara arrived, the battle between the Kaurava and Pâṇḍava armies was at Samantapañcaka.[46]

In most of the references, it is the battle which is presented as the turning-point for the **yugas** and during the preparations for the fighting, this is stated three times:

> [Arjuna speaking]
>
> udvartayan dasyusaṃghân sametân
> pravartayan yugam anyad yugânte
> yadâ dhaksyâmy agnivat kauraveyâṃs
> tadâ taptâ dhṛtarâṣṭraḥ saputraḥ
>
> When I, like fire, burn the Kauravas, destroying the assembled hosts of the dasyus and setting in motion another yuga at the end of the yuga[47] then Dhrtarâṣṭra and his sons will be tormented.
>
> [Dhṛtarâṣṭra speaking]
>
> vîthîṃ kurvan mahâbâhur drâvayan mama vâhinîm
> nṛtyann iva gadâpâṇir yugântaṃ
> darśayiṣyati
>
> The great-armed one [Bhîma], making a path and putting my army to flight as if dancing, club in hand,[48] will indicate the end of the yuga.
>
> [Kṛṣṇa speaking]
>
> yadâ draksyâsi saṃgrâme śvetâśvaṃ
> kṛṣṇasârathim
> aindram astraṃ vikurvâṇam ubhe cai 'va
> 'gnimârute (6)
>
> gâṇḍîvasya ca nirghoṣaṃ visphûrjitam ivâ
> 'śaṅeh
> na tadâ bhavitâ tretâ na kṛtaṃ dvâparaṃ na ca
> (7)

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46 1.2.9

47 5.47.59

48 5.50.32 This could, however, simply be read as a pralaya simile - yugânta = yugakṣaye - and one variant takes it like this, having - yugâṃtâgnir ivo 'tthitaḥ.

When in the battle you see him of the white horses, who has Krṣṇa for his charioteer, whose missiles are from Indra, destroying both fire and wind, (6)

And hear the sound of Gâṇḍiva like the roar of a thunderbolt: then there will no longer be tretâ nor kṛta nor dvâpara. (7)
49

Just before the battle commences, Saṃjaya, after describing the four yugas, tells Dhṛtarâṣṭra:

saṃkṣepo vartate râjan dvâpare >smin narâdhipa

Only a small part of this dvâpara remains, O king
50

and, at the other end of the battle, Krṣṇa pacifies the angry Balarâma by saying, prâptaṃ kaliyugaṃ viddhi - know that the kaliyuga has arrived. 51

Another event identified as the turning point of the yugas is the dyûta. Here, Yudhiṣṭhira loses his kingdom to Duryodhana/Kali, who is represented in the dice match by Śakuni/Dvâpara. The yugânta implications of these two taking part in the dice-game are reinforced by Vidura's reaction to the proposal to play:

tac chrutvâ viduro dhîmân kalidvâram upasthitam
vinâśamukham utpannaṃ dhṛtarâṣṭram
upâdravat

---

49 5.140.6,7. The same formula is applied to the other Pândavas and some Kaurava warriors (vs.8-15)
50 6.11.14a. This follows 6.11.5-7, cited below, 5.1
51 9.59.21a. Balarâma is angry at the unfair club-blow which Bhîma used to defeat Duryodhana.

> Hearing that the doorway to kali was at hand and the jaws of destruction were ready, wise Vidura hastened to Dhṛtarâṣṭra. [52]

A final reference extends the yugânta setting to the Mbh period as a whole, and here Vyâsa is told that he will beget the Kauravas when the kaliyuga (here called tiṣya) sets in [53].

If each yugânta is a period of danger and crisis, this should be especially true of the most significant of all the junctures, namely the kali/kṛta yugânta which replaces the pralaya when the cycle is extended to 1,000 mahâyugas. The calamitous nature of this yugânta is clear in the Āraṇyakaparva account which follows Mârkaṇḍeya's second description of the kaliyuga [54]. Like the description of the drought between the tretâ and dvâpara yugas, the passage displays a marked similarity to aspects of the pralaya accounts, and in this case, the eschatological details are much more pronounced. I include some verses that end the description of the kaliyuga:

> nirviśeṣâ janapadâ narâvṛṣṭibhir arditâḥ
> âśramân abhipatsyanti phalamûlopajîvinaḥ (71)

---

52 2.45.50. The fact of the dice-game itself may be an indication of the yugânta period, given the connections between the yugas and dice. Scheuer also sees Duryodhana and Śakunis' relationship to Gândhârî as pointing to the yugânta setting: Gândhârî is handed over to Dhṛtarâṣṭra by Śakuni/Dvâpara, her brother, and gives birth to Duryodhana/Kali. Thus, he argues, Gândhârî represents the juncture between the two.

53 12.337.42,43

54 The first was followed by an account of the pralaya and Mârkaṇḍeya's discovery of the Viṣṇu-child.

. . .

diśaḥ prajvalitâḥ sarvâ nakṣatrâṇi calâni
ca
jyotîmsi pratikûlâni vâtâḥ paryâkulâs tathâ
ulkâpâtâś ca bahavo mahâbhayanidarśakâḥ (74)

sadbhir anyaiś ca sahito bhâskaraḥ
prâtapiṣyati
tumulâś câ 'pi nirhrâdâ digdâhâś câ 'pi
sarvaśaḥ
kabandhântarhito bhânur udayâstamaye tadâ (75)

akâlavarṣî ca tadâ bhaviṣyati sahasradṛk
sasyâni ca na rokṣyanti yugânte paryupârthite
(76)
. . .

aparvaṇi mahârâja sûryaṃ râhur upaiṣyati
yugânte hutabhukcâ 'pi sarvataḥ prajvaliṣyati
(79)
. . .

tatas tumulasaṃghâte vartamâne yugakṣaye
dvijâtipûrvako lokaḥ krameṇa prabhaviṣyati
(85)

tataḥ kâlântare >nyasmin punar lokavivṛddhaye
bhaviṣyati punar daivam anukûlaṃ yadṛcchayâ
(86)

yadâ candraś ca sûryaś ca tathâ
tiṣyabṛhaspatî
ekârâśau sameṣyanti prapatsyati tadâ kṛtam
(87)
kâlavarṣî ca parjanyo nakṣatrâṇi śubhâni ca
pradakṣiṇâ grahâś câ 'pi bhaviṣyanty anulomagâḥ
kṣemaṃ subhikṣam ârogyaṃ bhaviṣyati nirâmayam (88)
kalkir viṣnuyaśâ nâma dvijaḥ kâlapracoditaḥ
utpatsyante mahâvîryo mahâbuddhiparâkramaḥ (89)

sambhûtaḥ sambhalagrâme brâhmanâvasathe śubhe
manasâ tasya sarvâṇi vâhanâny âyudhâni ca
apasthâsyanti yodhâś ca śastrâṇi kavacâni ca (90)
sa dharmavijayî râjâ cakravartî bhaviṣyati
sa ce 'mam saṃkulaṃ lokaṃ prasâdam
upaneṣyati (91)

utthito brâhmaṇo dîptaḥ kṣayântakṛd
udâradhîḥ
sa saṃkṣepo hi sarvasya yugasya parivartakaḥ
(92)

sa sarvatra gatân kṣudrân brâhmaṇaiḥ
parivâritaḥ
utsâdayiṣyati tadâ sarvân mlecchaganân dvijaḥ
(93)

tataś coraksayam kṛtvâ dvijebhyaḥ
prthivîm imâm
vâjimedhe mahâyajñe vidhivat kalpayiṣyati (1)

sthâpayitvâ sa maryâdâḥ svayaṃbhuvidhitâḥ
śubhâḥ
vanam punyayaśahkarmâ jarâvân
saṃśrayiṣyati (2)

tac chîlam anuvartsyante manusyâ lokavâsinaḥ
vipraiś coraksaye cai 'va kṛte kṣemam
bhavisyati (3)

krsnâjinâni śaktîś ca triśûlâny
âyudhâni ca
sthâpayan vipraśârdûlo deśeṣu vijiteṣu ca
(4)

samstûyamâno viprendrair mânayâno dvijottamân
kalkiś cariṣyati mahîṃ sadâ dasyuvadhe
rataḥ (5)

hâ tâta hâ sute 'ty evaṃ tâś tâ vâcaḥ
sudârunâḥ
vikrośamânân subhṛśaṃ dasyûn neṣyati
samkṣayam (6)

All the countries alike will be tormented by drought and, resorting to hermitages, people will live off fruits and roots. (71)
. . .

All the directions will begin to blaze and the asterisms to move; the heavenly bodies will be averse, the winds disordered and there will be many meteor showers foreboding great danger. (74)

The sun will shine with six others and there will be tumultuous sounds and an unnatural red sky everywhere. The sun will be covered by inauspicious clouds at sunrise and sunset. (75)

Then thousand-eyed [Indra] will not rain at the proper time and the crops will not grow, when the end of the yuga is at hand. (76)
. . .

Râhu will approach the sun when the time is out of joint and fire will blaze everywhere at the end of the yuga. (79)
. . .

Then, when the end of the yuga is happening with violent tumult, the earth, lead by the brahmins, will gradually prevail again. (85)

Then at this time, so that the world will prosper again, fate spontaneously becomes favourable again. (86)

When the moon, sun, Tiṣya and Bṛhaspati come together in one sign of the zodiac, then the kṛta will begin. (87)

And the rains will come at the right time, the stars will be auspicious and the planets will be favourable and go in their proper directions. There will be security, an abundance of food, and health, free from disease. (88)

Impelled by time, a brahmin by the name of Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will be born, mighty, very clever and powerful. (89)

Born in the village of Sambhala, in a pure brahmin household, all vehicles, weapons, warriors, arms and armour will come to him at his thought. (90)

This dharma-triumphing king will become the world emperor and will bring this disordered world to clarity. (91)

That brilliant brahmin of exalted intellect, coming forth and ending the destruction, will be the destruction of everything and cause the change of the yuga. (92)

Surrounded by brahmins, that brahmin will exterminate all those hordes of base foreigners who are everywhere. (93)

Then, having destroyed the robbers, he will bestow this earth on the brahmins according to rule in a great horse sacrifice. (1)

Having established the holy rules ordained by Svayambhu, and grown old, he of good fame and deeds, will retire to the forest. (2)

Humans living in the world will be guided by those moral rules and when the brahmins have destroyed the robbers there will be peace. (3)

Establishing the black antelope skins, śaktis, tridents and weapons in the regions and conquered countries, that tiger among brahmins, (4)

Kalki, praised by the lords of the brahmins and honouring the best of the twice-born, will continually roam the earth, delighting in the slaughter of Dasyus (5)

> As they call aloud the very harsh words 'Oh father, Oh son', he violently leads the Dasyus to their destruction. (6)[55]

In these Mbh passages, therefore, the yugânta period is presented as a time of upheavals and reversals in the social and natural world. These echo both the disintegration of order which characterises the kaliyuga and the eschatological crisis of the pralaya. Moreover, each crisis is centred on the avatâra's work as the champion of the gods in their struggle against the asuras. When these themes are examined in more detail, their connections and ramifications begin to emerge.

6.4 The nature of the yugânta crisis

1) The yugânta as cosmic crisis

As I suggested above, the description of the kali/kṛta yugânta between two mahâyugas contains a large amount of clearly eschatological imagery and is the most obvious example of the juncture being an echo of the pralaya. This has been noted before, with Dimmit and van Buitenen stating that:

> . . . there ensue mini-dissolutions of the cosmos after each Kali, intermediate dissolutions after each day and night of Brahmâ, and a complete dissolution at the end of his lifetime.[56]

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55 3.188.71,74-6,79,85-189.6. Much of this is cited below in 5.2 and 3.

56 Dimmitt and van Buitenen [1978] p.21

This is something of a simplification, as the 'dissolution' occurs largely in terms of imagery and **pralaya** connections, and I would prefer to say instead that the events surrounding the **mahâyugânta** represent an echo of the greater turmoil and eventual destruction to come [57]. This is most obvious in the two accounts of the **kaliyuga** and its termination given by Mârkaṇḍeya in the Āraṇyakaparva.

In the first, the description of the **kaliyuga** ends with the drought at 3.186.57 and then goes straight into the **pralaya** of fire and water [58]. In the second description, instead of the **pralaya**, the account terminates with the coming of Kalkin given at the end of the last section. Most significantly, however, as we saw, this second account, while excluding the **pralaya** itself, does include a great deal of **pralaya** imagery, and this is completely absent in the first **kaliyuga** description. Thus the **pralaya** of the first account has been transformed into **pralaya** echoes in the second and, moreover, the transformation holds good for each important detail in the **pralaya** description. The seven suns that desiccate the world in the **pralaya** (3.186.58), become the sun shining with six others as an evil omen at the end of the **kaliyuga** (3.188.75); the **pralaya** fire which destroys the world (3.186.60) is replaced by the

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57 Indeed, it is hard to see what a 'mini-dissolution' could consist of.

58 Cited above, 4.3. The description of the kaliyuga is cited above, 5.2.

directions blazing and fire blazing everywhere - diśaḥ prajvalitâḥ sarvâ. . . yugânte hutabhuk ca 'pi sarvataḥ prajvaliṣyati (188.74,79); the wind of the pralaya (3.186.63), by disordered winds - vâtâḥ paryâkulâs (3.188.74); the roaring of the pralaya clouds (186.69), by tumultuous sounds - tumulâś ca 'pi nirhrâdâ (188.75); and, most tellingly, instead of the destructive rains and flood of the pralaya in the first account, the drought at the end of the kaliyuga is relieved by the life-giving and ordered seasonal rains that are the first occurrence at the commencement of the kṛtayuga (188.88). The echo of the pralaya is thus complete, but the destruction that seemed imminent is this time turned aside for another mahâyuga.

While this echo of the pralaya is, predictably, most obvious in the description of the mahâyugânta, it is still present, as we saw, in the extended description of the the yugânta at 12.139.13f, where the severity of the drought recalled that preceding the pralaya. This recollection is reinforced by the fact that the yugânta drought lasts for twelve years. Twelve is an extremely significant number in the Mbh and elsewhere, as was seen in the discussion of the yuga as a pratimâ of the year in 3.3. The significance that I would like to draw out of the account of the yugânta, however, is that twelve years seems to be the duration of the pralaya drought known by the Mbh. While the description at 3.186.56 gives it a non-specific duration of 'many years' - bahuvârṣikî, the

rains which follow the fire in this account, last for twelve years - **dvâdaśa varṣâni** (v.73). As most **purâṇic** passages which specify a duration for the drought and rains make them the same, it seems very likely that in the Mbh schema, with its reduced time-scale, the **pralaya** drought lasted for twelve years also [59].

Of the other **yugânta** events, neither **Paraśurâma's** massacre nor Râma's battle with **Râvaṇa** display **pralaya** echoes as they are told in the Mbh and indeed, the account of the fighting in the Râmopâkhyâna stands out from most of the other battles in the epic by containing no **pralaya** imagery whatsoever [60]. **Paraśurâma's** confrontations with Râma in the **Râmâyana** and **Bhîṣma** in the Mbh do have clear eschatological connections, however, as we shall see in 6.5, and both his massacre of the **kṣatriyas** and Râma's struggle with **Râvaṇa** carry some suggestion of a cosmic dimension in that both conflicts

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59 For equal durations c.f:-
Viṣṇu : 100 year drought; 100 year rains; 100 year winds
Bhâg. : " 100 year winds; 100 year clouds
Garuḍa : " 100 year rains; 100 year winds
kûrma : " "

60 Apart from one reference to Râma and Lakṣmaṇa falling to the ground like the sun and moon (3.272.27) which could well be leaving **yugakṣaye** understood (c.f. **pralaya** imagery in Destruction). The Râmopâkhyâna is, of course, the Mbh telling Râma Dâśarathi's story for its own purposes and the emphasis seems rather different from that of the **Râmâyana** (making it more parallel to Yudhiṣṭhira's situation). But this makes it even stranger that **pralaya** imagery should be absent. Again, neither the Râma story nor **Paraśurâma's** massacre are associated with the **yugânta** in their main narrations (the association is only made in other references) and that could account for the absence of such imagery.

involve the whole world: Paraśurâma kills all the earth's kṣatriyas (1.2.3,4); Râma (in the Râmopâkhyâna) has all the gods incarnated as his animal allies (3.260.11), searches the whole earth for the abducted Sîtâ (3.266.17), and the battle at Laṅkâ distresses all three worlds (3.269.14).

This idea of the conflict involving the cosmos is much more obviously the case for the **yugânta** event best documented, namely the Bhârata war, and the epic continually stresses that the fate of the whole world is caught up in the struggle for the kingdom. This is a complex subject and one that it would be interesting to pursue [61], but briefly, the **pralaya** echoes are most noticeable in:- the burning of the Khâṇḍava forest (1.214f); the battle itself which is strikingly full of **pralaya** imagery, providing most of the smaller references discussed in Chapter 4.3; Aśvatthâman's **sauptika**, with its many parallels to the dakṣayajña; and the massacre of the Yâdavas in the Mausalaparva [62].

2) The yugânta as temporal crisis

As well as echoing the **pralaya**, the **yugânta** also showed many of the characteristics associated with the **kaliyuga**, including the underlying concern with the disintegration of order and the boundaries of **dharma**. This was most obvious in the description of the

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61 I shall return to it in Chapter 7.
62 All discussed by Hiltebeitel, Scheuer and others.

tretâ/dvâpara drought and the commentary on the verse describing the kṛta/tretâ yugânta at 12.323.50, but it can also be seen in the Mbh events, where the battle essentially charts the gradual breakdown of **dharma** from the well-maintained rules of conduct in the first days, to the chaotic bloodbath of the **sauptika** [63]. The yugânta thus represents an interruption to the flow of **dharma's** decline through the **yugas**, a period of chaos and **adharma** which is worse than either of the **yugas** that it joins. Taken together with the eschatological significance of the yugânta crisis, this suggests that it is a time when the fate of the cosmos and its ordered succession is in the balance and that the chaos which threatens it must be overcome before the next yuga can commence. Why should this be? From the Vedic idea of the intercalary thirteenth month onwards, the junctures between units of time have been presented as dangerous and unstable. As Heesterman says in his study of the **râjasûya**:

> At this particular moment, the joint between two years. . . disintegration and dispersion are immanent. . . [64]

The performance of the different parts of the **râjasûya** is precisely to ensure the successful navigation of this dangerous time and to reinforce order and creation for another year. He continues the passage:

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63 Again, this would be a very worthwhile subject to pursue in some detail. It has, of course, been long noted as a feature of the epic and the moral ambivalence it lends to Kṛṣṇa as the main instigator of each specific breach of **dharma** has been the centre of much past Mbh scholarship.

64 Heesterman [1957] p.46

> ... the restructuring of space and the concentration of the social forces, effected through these triad of offerings [the **trisaṃyuktaṃ havis**], prevent the powers involved from dispersion and direct them towards new production.

Again, this is linked to the theme seen in the building up of Prajâpati in the **agnicayana**, and the threatening of Brahmâ by Madhu and Kaiṭabha, namely that the act of creation is fraught with the seeds of destruction. The potential for destruction, set in motion at the same instant as the ordered cosmos (in the Madhu and Kaiṭabha myth), or inherent in the very ordering of the cosmos (in the falling apart of Prajâpati), evolves and develops through time, and the created world of order is under perpetual siege, locked in a battle where first order and then chaos gains the upper hand. This was seen in both the decline through the **yugas**, where the increasing disorder of the **kaliyuga** finally dissolves into the undifferentiated **pralaya** waters, and is also represented in the more concentrated attacks on the world's stability when the **asuras** gain the upper hand and threaten the sovereignty of the **devas**. As was seen with Madhu and Kaiṭabha and in the cosmogonic implications of the **vṛtrahatyâ**, the significance of the **asuras** can be understood as personifying in a particular place and time the underlying entropy of the cosmos. The continual struggle between the **devas** and the **asuras**, is thus a parallel to the cosmic alternation between creation and non-creation and, like that, has no permanent winner. That this struggle should peak at the dangerous joints in

time when order is at its weakest and in need of regeneration is therefore not surprising.

3) The yugânta as devâsura crisis

As was seen in 6.2, the **avatâras'** stated rôle is the re-establishment of **dharma** when it declines:

yadâ yadâ hi dharmasya glânir bhavati bhârata
abhyutthânam adharmasya tadâ 'tmânaṃ sṛjâmy
aham (7)

paritrâṇâya sâdhûnâṃ vinâśâya ca duṣkṛtâm
dharmasaṃsthâpanârthâya saṃbhavâmi yuge yuge
(8)

Whenever there is a decrease of dharma and a rise of adharma, then I send myself forth, O Bhârata. (7)

For the protection of the good, the destruction of the wicked and the establishment of dharma, I come into being yuga after yuga (8)[65]

However, this is not, in fact, exactly what the **avatâra** does and indeed, within the **yuga** system, it cannot be what he does, for **dharma** declines steadily throughout the **mahâyuga** and the **avatâra** can do nothing to stop this. Kalkin, because of his situation at the kali/kṛta yugânta, is the only **avatâra** who really does re-establish a situation of **dharma**: all the other **avatâras**, standing between one **yuga** and another, inaugurate in the new **yuga** a period when **dharma** must, of necessity, decline further than it did in the previous one [66]. What the **avatâra**

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65 BhG 4.7,8

66 A contradiction that offers a promising explanation of Krsna's moral ambivalence in the Mbh. The **avatâras**

does instead, I would argue, is what the **yajamâna** did in the **râjasûya**: he re-establishes **dharma**, and specifically the boundaries of **dharma** - **dharmasetu/maryâdâ** - at the juncture between two periods of time, when they are most vulnerable to disintegration. By fighting the inherent tendency to chaos, personified by the **asura** that he defeats, the **avatâra** guarantees a safe passage into the next **yuga**. He overcomes the intensified **adharma** of the juncture, when the tendency to chaos is <u>acute</u>, but only rescues **dharma** from the trough of the **yugânta** period to re-establish it at the next stage of its <u>chronic</u> decline through the **yugas**. Such an understanding of **dharmasamsthâpanârthâya** in the **avatâra** formula would explain both why the incarnations should be so closely connected to the **yugântas** and why the establishment of **dharma** in principle should, in practice, turn out to be the destruction of an **asura**.

As we saw, however, Viṣṇu's rôle as **avatâra** was set beside other contexts than just the **devâsura** struggle: it was also juxtaposed with Viṣṇu as creator (and destroyer) and as the preserver of the universe during the **pralaya**. Again, the logic behind these juxtapositions is clear. Just as the **yugânta** is an echo of the **pralaya** as a temporary (and averted) eschatological crisis, so too is Viṣṇu's rôle as **avatâra** at the **yugânta** an echo of his rôle in the cosmic cycle, where the same struggle between order and chaos is being played out on a larger time-

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re-establishment of **dharma** is again treated by Biardeau in EMH 4,5.

scale. The **avatâras** establishment of the boundaries of **dharma** is essentially the same act as the creator's establishment of the ordered boundaries of the universe. Thus the **avatâra's** defeat of his **asura** enemy, like Indra's defeat of Vrtra, is still closely connected to cosmogonic concerns.

4) The **yugânta** and sacrificial crisis

Before leaving the subject of the **yugânta**, I should like to look at one other aspect of the crises that occur there, and that is their connection with a dangerous and interrupted sacrifice. While the relationship between the **pralaya**, time and the **avatâra** is clear, it is more difficult to see how the sacrificial connection relates to these themes, except in terms of the abiding significance of the sacrifice for both creation and destruction and the renewal of time. However, a dangerous and interrupted sacrifice appears with such striking regularity in the **yugânta** events, that I feel it is worth briefly documenting, although at this stage, I shall only be pointing to the connections, rather than trying to systematise them in any way 67.

The **avatâra** gestes en masse are identified as sacrificial in a Matsya Purâṇa passage, in the same adhyâya as the verse linking the **avatâras** with the yugântas:

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67 Biardeau has discussed the connections between the avatâras and sacrifice [1976].

> [Lord Viṣnu] incarnated himself as Nṛsimha for the destruction of Hiraṇyakaśipu. Rudra officiated as the sacrificail priest.
>
> In the seventh Tretâ yuga, when king Bali was in power, Dharma was the sacrificial priest - **puraḥsara** -at the time of the Lord manifesting Himself as Vâmana. [68]

Sacrifice can also be seen to play a central rôle in the individually narrated accounts of each of the human avatâras specifically associated with a yugânta. This is most obvious in the case of Vâmana, who, as we saw, could be situated at the tretâ/kṛta yugânta. Vâmana's avatâra geste is set at a sacrifice and, indeed, the performance of the sacrifice and Bali's adherence to its rules are used as the means to defeat the asura. Although Vâmana's defeat of Bali is known in the Mbh [69], the story is not told in any detail there. It is told in the Râmayana, however, where it is made very clear that Bali's sacrifice is interrupted and that his defeat rests on Vâmana interrupting it:

> [The Gods said]: O Viṣnu, Bali Vairocana is performing a great sacrifice. Our objective must be achieved before he completes this rite.
>
> He is giving away virtually everything he has. . . to anyone who comes to him from anywhere asking for a gift.
>
> When you have accomplished this task, lord of the gods, this place will, by your grace, be called the Ashram of the Perfected Being. Lord, please go forth from here.

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68 Etc.: Paraśurâma (Viśvâmitra); Râma Dâśarathi (Vaśiṣtha); Kalki (Pârâśarya Vyâsa). Translated by Akhtar.

69 C.f., e.g.: 3.81.87;100.21;126.32.

> Then mighty Viṣṇu, taking on the form of a dwarf, was born of Aditi and approached Vairocana.
>
> He begged as much land as he could traverse in three paces and accepted it respectfully. [70]

This story of Bali's sacrifice interrupted by the avatâra Vâmana is recounted by Viśvāmitra, at the point where Râma Dâśarathi must himself interact with an interrupted sacrifice, protecting Viśvâmitra's sacrifice as the first deed of his avatârahood. Demons are preventing Viśvāmitra from completing his sacrifice by defiling his altar at the crucial moment and he asks Râma to destroy them [71]. That the two sacrifices are connected in the minds of the narrators is clear from the fact that Viśvāmitra's interrupted sacrifice is taking place on the very site of Bali's defeat:

> "Since the Dwarf himself once dwelt here, this ashram allays all weariness. Now, because of my devotion to him, it has become mine."
>
> "But of late, râkṣasas have been coming to this ashram to interfere with me, and it is here, tiger among men, that you must kill these evildoers." [72]

Moreover, when Viśvāmitra, protected by Râma, finally completes the sacrifice, the connection is again made:

> His sacrifice at last completed, Viśvâmitra, seeing that all directions were free from those pests, said this to Kâkutstha:
>
> "Great-armed warrior, I have accomplished my purpose. You have carried out the orders of your

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70 1.28.5-6,8-10. Goldman's translation.
71 1.19.4-9;29.8-23. Goldman's translation.
72 1.28.12,13. Goldman's translation.

> father. Renowned Râma, you have made this truly an ashram of a perfected being." [73]

Parasurâma's deeds are also presented in a sacrificial framework. As we shall see, after massacring the **kṣatriyas**, he offers up their blood as an oblation to his **pitṛs**, and this gory sacrifice which almost empties the world of **kṣatriyas** is interrupted by the **pitṛs** themselves.

In the longer versions of the myth, Parasurâma follows this by offering up a great sacrifice, which is identified as an aśvamedha, giving the earth as **dakṣinâ** to his sacrificial priest, Kaśyapa [74]. Although complete, this sacrifice is again seen as dangerous and Kaśyapa banishes Parasurâma and returns the earth to its rightful rulers, the remnant of **kṣatriyas** that Râma unwittingly left [75].

Kalkin, the other brahmin-warrior **avatâra**, similarly concludes his defeat of the **kaliyuga mlecchas** by giving away the earth at an **aśvamedha** [76], and while this sacrifice is not portrayed as either terrible or interrupted, it could be argued that by re-establishing

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73 1.29.22,23. Goldman's translation.
74 3.117.9-15. The sacrifice is identified as 7.App.I.8.861 - **hayamedha**; and 12.49.16 - **aśvamedha**.
75 7.App.I.8.851-866;12.49.16f, which makes it clear that the danger is that without **kṣatriyas** to protect it and impose rules, the earth will fall into **adharma**.
76 3.189.1. Another similarity to support the strong connection between Parasurâma and Kalkin suggested below.

the kṛtayuga at this point, he is interrupting the sacrifice of the pralaya.

The Mbh yugânta is full of dangerous sacrifices and sacrifice is one of the most important themes in the epic. The Mbh story opens with a sacrifice that is both terrible and interrupted: Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, which is interrupted by Āstīka before all the snakes can perish. Moreover, Āstīka's interruption of Janamejaya's sacrifice is strikingly similar to Vâmana's interruption of Bali's. Janamejaya has been warned that the sacrifice will be disrupted, so puts up barriers to keep all strangers out (1.47.13-16). Āstīka, however, as a brahmin child is deemed to be no threat so is allowed in and, as the rite nears completion, is offered a boon by Janamejaya:

> bâlâbhirûpasya tavâ 'prameya
> varaṃ prayacchâmi yathâ 'nurûpam
>
> O Immeasurable One, I grant a boon fitting for you who have the form of a child.[77]

Āstīka asks that the sacrifice be stopped and this boon, like Vâmana's, must be granted. Moreover the similarities with the Vâmana myth extend to Janamejaya himself, for while not an **asura** (he is Arjuna's great-grandson and Kṛṣṇa's great-grandnephew), his sacrifice borders on an **asuric** challenge to the **devas**' authority: its purpose is to destroy Takṣaka, a **nâga** friend of Indra whom the king of the gods is protecting in the hem of his

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77 1.51.15a

robe (51.10). Janamejaya, in his hatred of the snake (who had killed his father, Parîkṣit), even goes so far as to say:

> indrasya bhavane viprâ yadi nâgaḥ sa takṣakaḥ
> tam indreṇai 'va sahitaṃ pâtayadhvaṃ
> vibhâvasau

> Priests, if the snake Takṣaka is in Indra's abode, throw him into the fire with Indra himself.[78]

As well as this opening snake sacrifice, the epic is also, of course, structured around the performance of two other sacrifices, the **râjasûya**, dangerous and interrupted by Yudhiṣṭhira's defeat at the dice-game, and the **aśvamedha**, which again concludes the main action, as absolution and restorative. The Mbh also contains two symbolic sacrifices crucial to the narrative: the sacrifice of battle, terrible and dangerous; and the **sauptika**, a replay of the **dakṣayajña**, which is the interrupted sacrifice par excellence [79].

What are we to make of this recurrent theme? Certainly, it is not clear how it fits in with the **devâsura** theme, as the **avatâra** stands in different relationship to the sacrifice in each instance: Vâmana interrupts the sacrifice; Paraśurâma is the yajamâna interrupted; Râma Dâśarathi prevents the interruption, and Kṛṣṇa presides over the Mbh's sacrifice of battle and

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78 1.51.11

79 For the battle and the **sauptika** as sacrifice, c.f. Hiltebeitel [1976] and Scheuer [1982]. Space does not permit me to add my own reasons for accepting this interpretation of these events, or of the **râjasûya** or **aśvamedha**, but I would agree that there is a great deal of evidence in the Mbh to support them in each case.

safeguards a remnant from Aśvatthâman's holocaust [80]. One possible angle to approach it from seems to be to return to the **yugânta** as the echo of the **pralaya**, and to look at this interrupted sacrifice as an echo of the **pralaya's** sacrificial connotations. Then a significance to the interruption can begin to emerge: just as complete disintegration of the cosmos into the **pralaya** is averted at this weak joint in time's defences, so too is the completion of a destructive sacrifice averted and order restored in the world after the turmoil of the sacrificial period. This does not work very well for Viśvāmitra's sacrifice in the Râmayaṇa, but it does for Paraśurâma, who would have left the world without **kṣatriyas** (and protectors of **dharma**) but for the interruption; Bali, who's wrongful domination of the three worlds was terminated by the interruption; Janamejaya, who wanted to destroy all snakes and even threatened Indra; and the Mbh battle, which would have been devoid of survivors but for Kṛṣṇa. In each case, the destruction was allowed, but averted at the last moment so that a remnant would be left to carry on in the new yuga [81]. This is clearly paralleled in the case of Kalkin, where the actual **pralaya** is averted at the last

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80 By his removal of the Pâṇḍavas from the sleeping camp and his revival of Parikṣit. C.f. Hiltebeitel on these events.

81 This does not work so well for Bali, unless we see his wrongful dominion allowed up to a certain point and then averted. Then, Viśvāmitra's sacrifice could also possibly be seen as a 'mirror' image of this process: the desecration is allowed up to a certain point but then is averted and the successful completion of the sacrifice then symbolises the guarantee of the new **yuga**.

minute and the world regenerates from the brahmins (i.e. remnant of **dharma**) onwards [82].

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82 3.188.85. The theme of interrupted sacrifice can also be traced, obliquely, in one other 'yugânta' reference, namely in an obscure statement at 3.121.18,19, which says that Mt. Vaidûrya is the juncture of the tretâ and dvâpara - **samdhir eṣa tretâyâ dvâparasya ca** (v.19). It is hard to see what this reference can mean: there is no commentary or variant in the C.E. which helps and neither does the Vedic Index or a dictionary provide any useful association. However, the reference goes on to say that this is the site of Śaryâti's sacrifice - eṣa śaryâtiyajñasya deśas (v.20) and goes on to relate the story in the very interesting myth of Cyavana Bhârgava. Cyavana performs a sacrifice for Śaryâti, his father-in-law, and makes an offering to the Aśvins, not yet accepted as worthy recipients (124.9). Cyavana's sacrifice is interrupted by the indignant Indra, who makes to hurl his thunderbolt. Cyavana paralyses him, arm upraised (124.17) until Indra accepts the Aśvins into the sacrifice. C.f. below where I connect this myth to references to Kali and the Aśvins in the RV.

6.4 Paraśurâma and the yugânta

Before leaving the subject of the **avatâras**, I should like to return to Paraśurâma, whom the Mbh placed at the juncture between the **tretâ** and **dvâpara** yugas [1]. Although this is the only reference which expressly situates him in a **yugânta** [2], I think it can be argued that he is a figure so closely associated with this period in other myths, that he can almost be taken as representing a **yugânta** 'motif'. As he is very important for the Mbh and its events, I shall explore this in some detail.

The complete myth of Paraśurâma's own **avatârahood** is told at Mbh 3.115-117 and consists of three parts: his conception through an accidental mixture of **brahman** and kṣatra power; his slaughter of his mother Reṇukâ, at his father's behest; and his extermination of the kṣatriyas twenty-one times [3]. This last is the deed for which he is best-known in the Mbh and makes up the **geste** of his **avatârahood** [4]. The massacre comes about through Paraśurâma's feud with Arjuna Kârtavîrya [5].

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1 I shall call this **avatâra** Paraśurâma - Râma with the axe - as that is his best known name, but in the epics he is more commonly called Râma Jâmadagnya, Râma Bhârgava or simply Râma.

2 Mbh 12.326.77

3 Probably originally distinct, but Biardeau argues very convincingly for their structural relationship in the myth as we have it [1976] p.190.

4 C.f. Goldman [1977] p.140 who sees it as a Bhârgava 'trademark stamped across the face of the vast Epic'.

5 To whom, interestingly, Arjuna Pâṇḍava is occasionally compared, c.f., e.g.: 5.59.19;88.28-29. Scheuer comments on this [1982] p.166, pointing out that

Kârtavîrya's sons kill Râma's father and in revenge, he in turn kills them and all the other kṣatriyas for several generations, making five lakes with their blood and offering oblations to his pitṛs in them. Dissuaded from further slaughter by the pitṛs themselves, he offered up a great sacrifice and gave the whole earth as dakṣiṇâ to his priest, Kaśyapa.

Unlike the other avatâras, however, when his purpose is completed, Paraśurâma does not die or re-unite with Viṣṇu. Instead, Kaśyapa banishes him to Mount Mahendra and there he lives on, seemingly unageing, to return into the affairs of the world at two other crucial junctures: Râma Dâśarathi's marriage to Sîtâ, and the period surrounding the Bhârata war. Thus, of all the avatâras he is the only one who is not confined historically to a particular place and time but presents, rather, a strangely atemporal figure who overlaps with the two other human avatâras, participating in the consecutive yugântas allotted to them.

His intervention in the affairs of Râma Dâśarathi is perhaps the better known [6]. Here, Paraśurâma appears shortly after Sîtâ's svayaṃvara, presents a vaiṣṇava bow to parallel the śaiva one that Râma broke, and challenges

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Arjuna is a secret name for Indra, and suggesting that the two Arjunas, in their relationships to Kṛṣṇa and Parasurâma, represent the dharmic and adharmic king.

6 Taken from Râm 1.73.6f. The encounter with Paraśurâma does not appear in the Mbh râmopâkhyâna in the C.E., but does in some northern recensions (C.E. 3.App.I.14: Roy vol.2 pp.223f.

Râma to a duel [7]. Râma Dâśarathi wins effortlessly and Paraśurâma, recognising him to be Viṣṇu, honours him and returns to Mt. Mahendra:

> Then, as the world stood stunned and Râma held the great bow, Râma Jâmadagnya, robbed of his strength, stared at Râma.
>
> Jâmadagnya was stunned to feel his strength sapped by the power of lotus-eyed Râma and spoke to him in a voice grown very faint:
> . . .
>
> 'From the way you handle the bow, I know you to be Viṣṇu, lord of the gods, and imperishable slayer of Madhu. Hail, destroyer of your foes' [8]

Although it is not made explicit in the text, this episode is traditionally taken as representing the passing of the avatâra status from Paraśurâma to Râma Dâśarathi, and two commentators on v.11 cite a passage from the Nṛsimhapurâna to illuminate it:

> Then the power of Viṣṇu passed from the body of Paraśurâma, right before the eyes of all the gods, and entered Râma. [9]

Paraśurâma's appearance in the Mbh is less immediately obvious, but far more pervasive [10]. The Bhârgava's exploits are frequently referred to and his

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7 Despite the bow, and Paraśurâma's own association with Viṣṇu, in the Mbh his weapons have some connection with Śiva; c.f. 13.14.137-9, where he kills Arjuna Kârtavîrya with a śaiva weapon; and 8.24.133f, where he gains his knowledge of weapons from Śiva. Early on in the Râm episode also he is likened to Śiva (1.73.18).

8 Râm 1.75.11,12,17. The translation is from Goldman [1984].

9 C.f. Goldman [1984] p.395 (note on 1.75.11). The translation is Goldman's.

10 Again, C.f. Goldman [1977].

massacre of the ksatriyas is recounted at such significant points that it serves as a backdrop to the Bhârata battle, a conscious reference point for the epic's presentation of the events that unfold. Râma's deeds are first mentioned at the very beginning of the epic, at 1.2.3, where the Kaurava battle-field, Kuruksetra, is identified as Samantapañcaka, the scene of Parasurâma's massacre and lakes of blood [11]. The identification is again made, most tellingly, towards the close of the epic, when the battle is over: Krsna, leading the Pândava's over the battlefield now strewn with corpses from the war, points out the lakes and tells them Parasurâma's story [12]. As well as this conscious setting of the battle on the scene of Râma's massacre, the epic further states in several places that the warriors taking part in it are descended from the remnant of ksatriyas that Râma left [13]. Finally, the importance of the story as a setting is made clear when Vaisampayana begins his account of the Mbh incarnations by relating it [14].

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11 Cited above. The identity of Kuruksetra is also very rich and interesting. As well as being the scene of Parasurâma's massacre, it is called the altar of Prajâpati (3.129.22), presumably because it is the place where Prajâpati performed a thousand year sacrifice (3.129.1). It also seems to be the place of Daksa's sacrifice (3.130.1,2) which could well have significance for the Bhârata battle's setting there.

12 12.48.7f.

13 I.e. those who were born from the ksatriyas' widows and the brahmins who impregnate them. For the identification with the Mbh ksatriyas, c.f. for example, 2.13.2;12.49.19.

14 1.58.4

If this were the extent of Paraśurâma's appearance in the Mbh, it would be possible to explain his presence as an indication of the severity of the massacre of kṣatriyas that occurs there [15]. However, Paraśurâma also appears in person in the Mbh, being present at several crucial points, and playing a significant part in setting the course of narrative events [16]. He is said to be the weapons guru of Droṇa, Bhîṣma and Karṇa [17] and as Droṇa's guru especially, he is thus indirectly responsible for the martial knowledge of the principal warriors on both sides of the war [18]. As Karṇa's teacher, Paraśurâma is further responsible for the curse which incapacitates him at a crucial moment and allows Arjuna the victory [19].

Paraśurâma's most detailed and significant intervention in the Mbh narrative, however, comes in his battle with Bhîṣma at 5.174.23ff, where he champions the rejected bride, Ambâ, who goes on to become the Pâṇḍava

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15 Which is undoubtedly one rôle of these particular references.

16 His presence is noted at key moments in the Epic, such as the **râjasûya** (2.49.11) and at Kṛṣṇa's peace embassy to Hastinâpura, where it is Paraśurâma who identifies Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as Nara and Narâyaṇa and says it is futile to fight them. Interestingly, he is not at Draupadî's **svayamvara**, where a detailed list of all present is given, and he was not at that of Ambâ and her sisters, either, another event which 'all the kings; attended. At Draupadî's **svayamvara**, however, his presence is echoed, when Karṇa asks Arjuna, who is disguised as a brahmin and fighting the assembled kings alone, if he is another Paraśurâma (1.181.16).

17 C.f., e.g., 1.121.16f;5.178.17 and 3.286.8 respectively.

18 Droṇa being the teacher of the youthful Pâṇḍavas and Dhârtarâṣṭras.

19 For the main account of Râma's curse c.f.,12.2.4ff.

warrior Śikhandin. Once again, this episode is closely connected with the Pâṇḍava/Kaurava battle, and forms a clear prelude to it, recounted just before the two armies march out. Like the main battle, it takes place on Kuruksetra [20] and is similarly presented as a reluctant battle between a disciple and his guru, with Bhîsma asking for Paraśurâma's blessing before he fights, as Yudhisthira will in turn ask his [21]. The connection back to Paraśurâma's extermination of the ksatriyas is also made and Bhîsma boasts that Râma could only accomplish that deed because there were no ksatriyas like himself alive then [22]. After a battle lasting for twenty six days in which Bhîsma is aided by eight celestial brahmins and the gods [23], Paraśurâma reluctantly admits defeat and is persuaded to give up the fight by his pitrs [24]:

> vatsa paryâptam etâvad bhîmena saha samyuge
> vimardas te [var. nivartaśva] mahâbâho vyapayâhi
> raṇâd itaḥ (13)
>
> paryâptam etad bhadram te tava kârmukadhâraṇam
> visarjayai 'tad durdharṣa tapas tapyasva bhârgava
> (14)
>
> Child, this is far enough in the battle with Bhîsma. Desist [taking var.], Great-armed one: withdraw from this battle. (13)
>
> This is enough, bless you, of your bearing a bow: relinquish it, O terrible Bhârgava, and practice austerities. (14)

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20 5.178.31.
21 5.180.14
22 5.178.36,37
23 The brahmins being the Vasus, i.e. Bhîsma's divine brothers (5.184.9).
24 5.186.8-30

When this battle is compared in detail with Paraśurâma's confrontation with Râma Dâśarathi in the Râmayana, it becomes apparent that the two accounts show striking similarities:

	Râmayana	Mahâbhârata
1.	RD meets PR after his wedding to Sîtâ (1.72.17f)	Bhiṣma's battle with PR is consequent to his abduction of Ambâ at her **svayamvara** (5.170.9f)
2.	PR's appearance is accompanied by evil omens and **pralaya** imagery (73.7-19)	The battle is accompanied by **pralaya** imagery and upheaval (182.5-10;183.21-24; 185.15-21)
3.	The connection is made with PR's slaughter of the **kṣatriyas** (73.20)	The connection is made with PR's massacre (178.33-5 and passim)
4.	RD's father tries to stave off the battle (74.5-9)	Bhiṣma's mother tries to dissuade PR (179.22ff)
5.	RD expresses his respect for PR and says that he does not want to kill him (75.2,6)	Bhiṣma honours PR as his **guru** and says he does not want to fight with him (178.15-16)
6.	Gods, **ṛsis**, etc. witness the battle (75.9,10,18)	Gods, **ṛsis**, etc. witness the battle (179.19)
7.	The world 'stood stunned' (75.11)	The world 'cried alas' (185.22)
8.	PR loses his strength to RD (75.11,12)	PR reaches the limit of his strength against Bhiṣma (187.3)
9.	PR admits defeat, acknowledges RD as Viṣnu and honours him (75.12-23)	PR honours Bhiṣma (186.35)

There are, therefore, clear parallels to each stage of the Râmayana account in the longer Mbh episode, even down to the connection with a **svayaṃvara** and the intervention of the protagonists' parents. Most significant, however, are a) the eschatological emphases found in each narrative (stages 2,6,7); b) the connection back to Paraśurâma's own avatâra geste (stage 3); and c) the manner of his defeat and attitude to the vanquisher (stages 8,9).

a) In both accounts the battle is witnessed by representatives of most of the world's inhabitants (gods, rsis, etc,) and the cosmic significance of this not uncommon phenomenon [25] is emphasised by the phrases that suggest the fate of the world was in the balance: the world stood stunned - **jaḍîkṛte** (Râm); the world cried 'alas' - **hâhâkṛte loke** (Mbh). Both epics reinforce this sense of cosmic crisis by their use of **pralaya** imagery and other descriptions suitable to this:

> [Râmâyana]
>
> As they were discussing this [the mixture of good and evil omens], a sudden wind arose, shaking the whole earth and knocking down the lovely trees.
>
> The sun was shrouded in darkness, and it was impossible to see in any direction. Everything was covered with ash; the entire army stood stupefied.
>
> . . .
>
> In the dreadful darkness, their whole army covered with ash, they saw a dreadful-looking man as

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25 Several battles in the epic are witnessed by the gods.

unassailable as Mount Kailâsa and as irresistible as the fire that ends the world.[26]

[Mahâbhârata]

tatah śaktim prâhinod ghorarûpâm astrai
ruddho jâmadagnyo mahâtmâ
kâlotsrstâm prajvalitâm ivo 'lkâm
samdîptâgrâm tejasâ 'vrtya lokân (5)

tato >ham tâm iṣubhir dîptyamânaiḥ samâyântîm
antakâlârkadîptâm
chittvâ tridhâ pâtayâmâsa bhûmau. . . (6)

tasyâm chinnâyâm krodhadîpto >tha râmaḥ
śaktîr ghorâḥ prâhiṇod dvâdaśâ 'nyâḥ
. . . (7)

. . .
nânârûpâs tejaso 'greṇa dîptâ yathâ 'dityâ
dvâdaśa lokasaṃkṣaye (8)

Then, beseiged by my arrows, Great-souled Jâmadagnya discharged a terrible spear like a blazing meteor let loose by time, its burning tip filling the worlds with fiery light. (5)

Then, with blazing arrows, I cut in three that (spear) which was approaching, brilliant as the sun at the final hour, and made it fall to the earth. . . . (6)

Then, when it was severed, Râma, blazing with anger discharged twelve other terrible spears. . . (7)

. . . variously formed, blazing with terrible splendour like twelve suns at the end of the world.[27] (8)

samâśvastas tadâ râmaḥ
krodhâmarsasamanvitaḥ
prâduś cakre tadâ brâhmaṃ paramâstraṃ
mahâvrataḥ (15)

tatas tat pratighâtârthaṃ brâhmam evâ 'stram
uttamam
mayâ prayuktaṃ jajvâla yugântam iva darśayat
(16)
. . .

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26 Râm 1.73.13-16. Goldman's translation.
27 5.182.5-8

tato vyomni prâdur abhût teja eva hi kevalam
bhûtâni cai 'va sarvâṇi jagmur ârtiṃ viśâṃ
pate (18)

ṛsayaś ca sagandharvâ devatâś cai 'va
bhârata
samtâpam paramam jagmur
astratejobhipīḍitâḥ (19)

tataś cacâla prthivi saparvatavanadrumâ
samtaptâni ca bhûtâni viṣâdaṃ jagmur uttamam
(20)

prajajvâla nabho râjan dhûmâyante diśo daśa
na sthâtum antarikṣe ca śekur âkâśagâs tadâ
(21)

Then Râma of great vows, revived and filled with anger and impatience, manifested the supreme Brahmâ missile. (15)

Thereupon, in order to counteract it, I (too) employed the supreme Brahmâ missile and it blazed out as if it was showing the end of the yuga. (16)

. . .

Then nothing but fire appeared in the sky and all beings became pained, O king. (18)

And the ṛsis, gandharvas and gods suffered greatly, O Bhârata, tormented by the force of the weapons. (19)

Then the earth with her mountains, forests and trees trembled, and beings, tormented by heat, greatly despaired. (20)

The sky was blazing, king, the ten directions smoked and the birds were not able to remain in the sky then. (21) [28]

b) The connection back to Paraśurâma's annihilation of the ksatriyas is made in the Râm by Râma Dâśarathi himself:

> Bhârgava, I have heard about the feat you accomplished. We respect it, brahmin, for you were only discharging your debt to your father. [29]

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28 5.185.15-23

29 Râm 1.75.2, Goldman's translation. The connection is also made in other verses

In the Mbh, the connection is even stronger; referred to several times during the account and emphasised by the fact that the duel is fought in the same place as Râma's slaughter (and of the greater battle to come):

sa [var. tad] gaccha vinivartasva kuruksetram
raṇapriya
tatrai 'ṣyâmi mahâbâho yuddhâya tvâṃ tapodhana
(33)

api yatra tvayâ râma kṛtaṃ ṣaucaṃ purâ
pituh
tatrâ 'ham api hatvâ tvâṃ ṣaucaṃ kartâ 'smi
bhârgava (34)

Go, then [taking var.], return to Kuruksetra, O you who love war. I will go there to fight you, strong-armed ascetic. (33)

There where you previously performed the purification for your father, I, too, having killed you, will perform (your) purification, Bhârgava (34)[30]

Thus, in each case, the present crisis is clearly to be understood in relation to the one that Paraśurâma fought as the avatâra himself.

c) In the Râmayana narrative, as we have seen, Paraśurâma's defeat can be understood in terms of the power of the avatâra passing from him to Râma Dâśarathi: when Râma Dâśarathi picks up Viṣnu's bow Paraśurâma is robbed of his strength and feels his strength sapped - tejobhir hatavîryatvât. Once defeated, Paraśurâma relinquishes the unprovoked belligerence which triggered the confrontation and admits Râma his superior: both his

30 5.178.33,34.

power and position have been handed over. In the Mbh, although it cannot be a question of passing the avatârahood - that would have to be to Kṛṣṇa or, by extension Arjuna - it is clearly still a 'handing over' that is being presented. Paraśurâma again unilaterally provokes the conflict and seems certain of victory:

> tatra tvâm nihatam mâtâ mayâ śaraśatâcitam
> jâhnavî paśyatâm bhîṣma
> gṛdhraka ṅkabaḍâ[var balâ]śanam
>
> There your mother the Jahnavî may see you, Bhîṣma, filled with hundreds of arrows by me, slain and fodder for vultures, herons and crows [taking var.].[31]

However, when he is finally forced to admit defeat, his truculence evaporates and he greets Bhîṣma's victory with pleasure:

> . . . râmaś câ 'bhyutsmayan premṇâ mâm uvâca mahâtapâḥ (34)
> tvat samo nâ 'sti loke >smin kṣatriyaḥ pṛthivîcarah
> gamyatâm bhîṣma yuddhe >smiṃs toṣito >haṃ bhṛśaṃ tvayâ (35)
>
> . . . and Râma, the great ascetic, smiling affectionately said to me: (34)
>
> In this world there is no kṣatriya walking the earth equal to you. You may be gone, Bhîṣma: you have greatly satisfied me in this battle. (35)[32]

Moreover, he goes on to apologise to Ambâ with the words:

> na cai 'va yudhi śaknomi bhîṣmaṃ
> śastrabhṛtâṃ varam
> viśeṣayitum atyartham uttamâstrâni darśayan
> (2)
>
> eṣâ me paramâ śaktir etan me paramaṃ balam

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31 5.179.3

32 5.186.34-5

yathestam gamyatâm bhadre kim anyad vâ
karomi te (3)

I am not able to surpass Bhîṣma, best of warriors, in battle, (even though) fully displaying my best weapons. (2)

This is all of my skill; this is all of my strength. You may go as you wish, good woman - or what else can I do for you? (3)[33]

As with Râma Dâśarathi, he must acknowledge that he has met his match and reached a limit to his dominion [34].

How are these similarities to be explained? Goldman, writing on the Râmayana [35], and Sukthankar on the Mbh before him [36], take a text-historical approach and it is worth looking at their arguments in some detail as they illustrate the workings and results of a very different methodology to the one pursued in this thesis [37].

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33 5.187.2-3

34 Interestingly, the idea of boundaries in Paraśurâma's sphere of influence seems to be expressed spatially in the Mbh (Vulgate) telling of the PR/RD conflict, where the two protagonists meet at the borders of Daśaratha's domain - viṣayân (3.App.I.14.29: NB Macdonnell [1924] p.291 gives 'sphere of activity' for the first meaning of viṣayân. Apart from this, the narrative follows a similar structure to the Râm account (and the Mbh PR/Bhîsma fight). Râma is reluctant but provoked by PR; he strings the bow and displays his cosmic form to PR (= PR's recognition of him as Viṣnu in the Râm); his shooting of the bow is accompanied by images of cosmic crisis; PR admits defeat and dismissed by Râma as Viṣnu - viṣnunâ. . . abhyanujñâto (1.71) - returns to Mahendra. This version differs from the others, however, in that he is not happy with his defeat.

35 Goldman [1984] pp.79-81.

36 Sukthankar [1937] pp.1-76

37 Paraśurâma has also been discussed by Dumézil [1970] p.72; Scheuer [1982] pp.138-142; and Biardeau [1976] pp.185ff.

Goldman, seeing Paraśurâma as 'the menacing aspect of the father', complimentary to the Yakṣi Tâṭaka's 'terrifying mother figure', concedes that the encounter 'forms the culminating event of Book One' [38]. However, instead of this suggesting that the episode is essential to the Bâlakânda, Goldman continues:

> Nonetheless, it is clearly a later interpolation, for the figure of Râma Jâmadagnya is proper to the Mahâbhârata in its expanded form and was a product of the Bhârgava redactors of that work. Since the older portions of the Râmayaṇa are older than the Mahâbhârata and the development of the figure of Râma Jâmadagnya belongs to a relatively late stratum of the Bhârata corpus, it would follow that the episode of the encounter of the two Râmas must be a late development in the Bâlakânda. [39]

Moreover, just as the Râmayaṇa borrowed Paraśurâma from the Mbh, the Mbh, in turn, borrows the story back from the Râmayaṇa:

> The encounter of the two Râmas, which appears to be a Râmâyaṇa application of a figure drawn from the Mahâbhârata, in turn appears in a late stratum of the latter text where, in a Vaiṣṇava passage known to the Vulgate and a few northern manuscripts a version of it appears. . . In this way the Mahâbhârata has borrowed a Râmâyaṇa episode in which one of its own heroes is humiliated by the hero of the older epic. [40]

Thus, for Goldman, the fact that Paraśurâma appears in both epics is solely due to a complicated series of interpolations and not a matter of any significance for an understanding of either text.

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38 Goldman [1984] p.79
39 p.80
40 p.80 n.48. This is referring to the account in the Vulgate Âraṇyakaparva mentioned above. Brockington [1984] p.231 also argues that this Mbh account is borrowed from the Râm episode.

Sukthankar views Paraśurâma's appearance in the Mbh in a similar light, as one of the many Bhârgava myths scattered throughout the epic, with no relevance to the main narrative. As he works through the Mbh **parvan** by parvan, Sukthankar notes all of Paraśurâma's main interventions in the epic action but, one by one, dismisses them. Of Paraśurâma's mention at the beginning of the epic he says 'strangely enough' we meet a Bhârgava in the second chapter of the Ādiparvan:

> Râma Jâmadagnya . . . a character which <u>in reality</u> has no connection whatsoever with the action of the sublime tragedy which is going to be unfolded in the epic.[41]

His rôle as Droṇa's teacher is 'only symbolic': Paraśurâma lived in the **tretâ/dvâpara** juncture, so he cannot really live in the dvâpara/kali juncture as well. The fact that he is represented as alive in the Mbh is because:

> Once the symbol is accepted, it is treated as real, and the myth is worked out in great detail.[42]

His appearance with other sages at the **râjasûya** is incidental:

> These static figures are like mural decorations, and of no special interest to us. We shall therefore ignore them.[43]

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41 Sukthankar [1937] p.4 Sukthankar's emphasis.
42 Ibid. p.13
43 Ibid. p.17

and his intervention at Kṛṣṇa's embassy is 'an unnecessary digression' [44]. References to Paraśurâma's massacre at crucial moments are likewise dismissed: Kṛṣṇa mentions it at the **râjasûya** 'quite irrelevantly' [45], and its narration on the battlefield after the war is simply because the incident:

> . . . affords an easy opportunity for another repetition of the legend of Râma's heroic exploit. [46]

The encounter between Paraśurâma and Bhîṣma is dismissed as easily:

> In another context Râma is said to have fought with Bhîṣma, a fight which lasted for twenty-three days but was absolutely barren of any consequence. [47]

Both of these scholars, therefore, while emphasising the importance of Paraśurâma and his myths in the two epics fail to extract any significance from this for either text. Goldman needs to have recourse to a complicated scheme of mutual borrowings to explain the presence of Parasurâma in both texts and makes no connection between the Râmayaṇa Paraśurâma/Râma Dâśarathi confrontation and the Mbh Paraśurâma/Bhîṣma. Indeed, his

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44 Ibid. p.35
45 Ibid. p.17
46 Ibid. p.42
47 Ibid. p.25 Again, Sukthankar makes no connection between Paraśurâma's rôle in this episode with his confrontation with Râma Dâśarathi, even in the Vulgate Āraṇyakaparva (Sukthankar is working from the Vulgate), calling the latter a 'grotesque story' involving disrespect for a character held in esteem by the Mbh. As such it belongs to legends 'quite inharmonious with the Mbh context' (p.21).

argument that the humiliation of Paraśurâma in the Mbh Vulgate Paraśurâma/Râma Dâśarathi conflict is out of place, is considerably undermined by the fact that the longer epic does know Paraśurâma as the loser in his encounter with Bhiṣma. Sukthankar, similarly, in arguing that Paraśurâma has no real significance, fails to take into account even the straightforward relationship between Paraśurâma's massacre of ksatriyas and the slaughter in the Bhârata battle: a similarity which even on the most obvious level is surely significant. His wholesale dismissal of Paraśurâma's interventions in the epic narrative is equally shortsighted, for while his appearance or mention at one or two crucial points might be accidental, his consistent presence at all of them cannot be. Again then, like Goldman, Sukthankar has nothing to say that helps explain the similarities between Paraśurâma's rôle in the Mbh and the episode in the Râmayana.

Returning, then, to a more holistic approach to the text, the only explanation left is that both episodes follow a similar function, namely that of 'handing over' or progression from one sphere of influence to another. As the Mbh confrontation cannot be a question of the avatâra, it would follow that what, in fact, is being 'handed over' is the yuga, with Paraśurâma acting in some way as a custodian who appears at each juncture, standing guard at the gateway from one yuga to another. As well as accounting for the similarities between his rôle in

the Râmayaṇa and the Mbh, such an understanding of Paraśurâma helps to explain some of the more puzzling aspects of his characterisation: why he alone among the avatâras should be such an undying and atemporal figure; and why he alone should act significantly at each yugânta, apart from the kali/kṛta yugânta, where he is replaced by a very similar brahmin warrior, Kalkin. Thus I would argue that far from having 'no connection whatsoever' with the main events of the Mbh, Paraśurâma stands there both as a testimony to the significance of the Kuruksetra slaughter, and as a kind of yugânta 'motif', who, along with other connections examined above, helps to establish the Mbh events in their proper temporal setting.

6.5 The personification of kali

The ideas underlying the personification of Kali are of some interest for the yuga theory as a whole, but are especially important for the Mbh because of the identification of Duryodhana and Śakuni as incarnations of Kali and Dvâpara. A similar personification occurs in the Nalopâkhyâna and in both cases, these are usually understood in terms of the kali and dvâpara yugas. While this is undoubtedly the major part of their significance, there are a number of other associations that may lie behind these personifications, and it is worth clarifying

these, so that Duryodhana's identification in particular can be properly understood.

The kali and dvâpara yugas are the only two that are personified in this way, and of these, only the kali has a rich complex of associations. This can be seen in the number of different meanings that Monier-Williams assigns to the word, of which the most important for the personification are:

> . . . the losing die; (personified as an evil genius in the episode of Nala);. . . N of the last and worst of the four Yugas or ages, the present age, age of vice;. . . strife, discord, quarrel, contention;. . . the worst of a class or number of objects;. . . N of a class of mythic beings; N of a man.[48]

Thus, by no means all of the associations of kali are to do with the kaliyuga, or even the unwholesome characteristics of the age. Some of these other uses of the word are also personified in the Mbh and elsewhere and it is useful to examine them before turning to the epic's identification of Śakuni and Duryodhana.

Kali first appears as a proper noun in the Rgveda, where it appears to be the name of a ṛsi, rather than the personification of an abstract principle. In two references, Kali seems to have been especially associated with the Aśvins who are said to have honoured him when he gained a wife (1.112.15) and to have given him back his

48 [1899] pp.261/2

youth when he was approaching old age (10.39.8) [49]. The sons of Kali are mentioned in another passage in the Rgveda, and while Kali is here usually understood to be the ṛṣi of the hymn, the tone of the verses could possibly suggest some connection with calamity and suffering. The hymn is to Indra:

> From this our misery and famine set us free, from this dire curse deliver us. . .
>
> . . . be not afraid, O Kali's sons. This darkening sorrow goes away. . . [50]

Kalis are mentioned as a class of being in the AV (10.10.13) and seem to be akin to **gandharvas**. This association is known in the Mbh, where Kali is given as the name of a **gandharva** (1.59.41;114.45), and continues into the Hv and the Purâṇas [51].

Apart from the connection with dice, which I shall return to below, the other associations of **kali** seem to be unambiguously bad [52]. The epic knows **kali** as a word

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49 Interestingly, these two references must be connected to the myth of Cyavana Bhârgava which the Mbh relates (3.123.1f; mentioned above, 6.3). Cyavana, an old man, marries the youthful Sukanyâ, Śaryâti's daughter. To please his bride, the Aśvins give him back his youth and beauty and are consequently admitted to the sacrifice.

50 8.56.14,15. Griffith's translation.

51 Hv 2p.481; Mârk 62; Viṣnu p.260

52 Hopkins [1915] p.76, suggests that the harmless association with **gandharvas** on the one hand, and the bad associations on the other, stem from the two meanings of the root √**kal**, viz., 1) noise (**gandharvas** are musical) and 2) oppress, etc. But c.f. below for my arguments as to why the **gandharva** and harmful associations of **kali** should be connected.

for strife or discord [53] and this is personified in a number of instances. One example is the description of the fall of the dânavas in the kṛtayuga already examined, where it was said that 'kali/strife entered them when they were possessed by alaksmî/misfortune - tân alakṣmîsamâvistân . . . daiteyân dânavâṃś cai 'va kalir apy âvisat tataḥ and that destruction quickly came to them when they were possessed by alakṣmî and kali - tân alakṣmîsamâvistân dânavân kalinâ tathâ. . . acirâd vinâṣaḥ pratyapadyata [54]. Another verse, not included in the C.E., says that Kali is in a broken vessel - bhinnabhâṇde kaliṃ prâhuḥ - and this is listed along with other impure things [55]. The personification of this aspect of kali is made most complete in the Bhâg., where Kali and Durukti (bad speech) are the offspring of Krodha (anger) and Hiṃsâ (injury) and themselves beget Bhaya (fear) and Mṛtyu (death) [56].

The most significant personification of kali connected with this aspect of the word, however, is the association between Kali and bad kings that is made in a number of epic passages. At 12.92.27 Kali is said to possess kings who knowingly allow evil-doers to move freely among the good - yatra pâpâ jñâyamânâs caranti satâṃ kalir vindati tatra râjñaḥ; and elsewhere, this is

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53 C.f., e.g.: 5.70.49 yuddhe. . . kalir nityam - in war there is always discord; 3.171.9 [Arjuna speaking] smaratâ dyûtajam kalim - remembering the discord that was born from the dice-game.

54 3.92.10,11. Cited above, 5.3.

55 13.App.I.14.306-8

56 Bhâg.4.8.3,4

expressed in terms of bad kings being Kalis. An irate mother, urging her son to fulfill his kṣatriya duties, reviles him:

> avarṇakâraṇaṃ satsu kulavaṃśasya
> nâśaṇam
> kaliṃ putrapravâdena saṃjaya tvâm ajîjanam
>
> A cause of blame among the good, the ruin of your family and lineage, I gave birth to you, Saṃjaya, a Kali in the guise of a son. [57]

and a speech by Nakula to Yudhiṣṭhira expands this:

> râjñaḥ pramâdadoṣeṇa dasyubhiḥ
> parimuṣyatâm
> aśaraṇyaḥ prajânâṃ yaḥ sa kalir ucyate
> (27)
>
> aśvân gâś cai 'va dâsîś ca kareṇûś ca
> svalamkrtâh
> grâmâṅ janapadâmś cai 'va kṣetrâni ca
> gṛhâṇi ca (28)
>
> apradâya dvijâtibhyo mâtsaryâviṣṭacetasaḥ
> vayaṃ te râjakalayo bhaviṣyâmo viśâṃ pate
> (29)
>
> The king who does not grant protection to his subjects while they are being robbed by dasyus because of his fault of negligence is called Kali.
>
> Horses, cows, female slaves, well-adorned elephants, villages, districts, fields and houses:
>
> By not giving these to the twiceborn, O King, we will become those Kalis among kings, with hearts filled with envy. [58]

Apart from the identification of Duryodhana and Śakuni and the personifications in the Nalopâkhyâna, there is, to my knowledge, no clear instance of Kali

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57 5.131.27
58 12.12.27-29

personifying the **kaliyuga** in the epic or earlier literature. Such a personification does, however, occur in the Bhâg. where, in a well-known passage (1.17.1f) Parikṣit finds a one-legged bull being beaten by a **śûdra** dressed as a king. The bull is identified as **dharma**, now on his one remaining leg, and the **śûdra** as Kali (v.25), clearly in this context, the **kaliyuga** personified. Parikṣit refrains from killing Kali, but banishes him from the kingdom to take up his abode in five iniquitous things: gambling, drinking, women of ill-repute, slaughtering and gold; and five harmful states of mind: untruth, pride, passion, ignorance and enmity - **anṛtam madam kâmam rajo vairam ca pañcamam** (v.39). He then restores the bull's three maimed legs and continues his reign. As mentioned above, this is clearly a mythical rendering of the idea that the king makes the age, with Parikṣit banishing Kali and restoring the bull symbolising a good king setting the **kṛtayuga** in motion [59]. Moreover, it shows how Kali, personifying the **yuga**, is related to other aspects of the word's associations. Kali as a bad king is recalled by the fact that the **śûdra** is dressed in royal garments - **nṛpalâñchana** (v.1), and reinforced by Parikṣit's words as he banishes him:

> Whilst you were existing in the body of kings, a number of inequities (such as) avarice, untruthfulness, theft, vulgarity, renunciation of

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59 The **kaliyuga** is also personified in a similar way at Bhâg. 2.7.38, where it is said that Viṣṇu will incarnate and punish Kali at the end of the **yuga**. This also serves to reinforce the connections between the rôle of Kalkin and the idea that the king makes the **yuga**.

> religion, misfortune, fraud, quarrel and pride have followed. (32) [60]

Kali as the demon of strife and discord is suggested by his banishment to places where this would be rife and states of mind closely related to it.

Turning now to the main occurrences of kali's personification in the Mbh, we are in a better position to understand their ramifications. The identification of Śakuni and Duryodhana with Dvâpara and Kali is well attested in the epic, and it is first made in the list of incarnations, where all of the central epic characters are related to a god or an asura:

> śakunir nâma yas tv âsîd râjâ loke mahârathaḥ
> dvâparaṃ viddhi taṃ râjan saṃbhûtam
> arimardanam (72)
> . . .
> kaler aṃśât tu saṃjajñe bhuvi duryodhano
> nṛpaḥ
> durbuddhir durmatiś cai 'va kurûṇâm
> ayaśaskaraḥ (80)

> As for that great warrior Śakuni, who was a king on earth, know that enemy-crusher, O king, as the reborn Dvâpara. (72)
> . . .
> King Duryodhana, evil-minded miscreant and disgracer of the Kurus, was born on earth from a portion of Kali. (80) [61]

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60 Translated by Tagare.

61 1.61.72,80. This is, however, not the only identity that the epic knows for Duryodhana: in one passage he is also said to have been made by Śiva and Devî to perform the dânavas' work (3.240.1f), an interesting variation which Scheuer discusses [1982] pp.266-74.

Later, when Saṃjaya describes the slaughtered warriors lying on the battlefield, he comes to Duryodhana and again makes the identification:

> **sa eṣa te suto. . .**
> **kaler aṃśaḥ samutpanno gândhâryâ jaṭhare nṛpa**
> This is your son. . . a portion of Kali born from Gândhârî's womb, O king [62]

The double identification is repeated at 15.39.10 - **kaliṃ duryodhanaṃ viddhi śakuniṃ dvâparaṃ tathâ**; and Sakuni is said to have re-entered Dvâpara - **dvâparaṃ śakuniḥ prâpa** - when he was killed in the battle (18.5.18).

The presence of Śakuni as the incarnation of Dvâpara, alongside Duryodhana's Kali, makes it clear that the over-riding intention of the epic narrators is to present a personification of the last two **yugas**, a personification that can only be meant to intensify awareness of the **yugânta** setting of the Mbh events. However, this is at once both reinforced and undermined by the fact that Dvâpara's personification carries no real depth. Dvâpara does not seem to be personified outside the Mbh or Nalopâkhyâna identification and the word has none of the variety of **kali**: apart from these personifications and the dice and **yuga** associations, Monier-Williams only lists 'doubt, uncertainty' as another meaning [63]. Thus it seems very likely that the

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62 11.8.27

63 [1899] p.503. This meaning is only based on lexicographical sources and probably arises out of the

personification of dvâpara is only made analogously to that of Kali as the kaliyuga. By its very artificiality, this reinforces the epic's intention of depicting the two yugas, but, at the same time, suggests that while this may be the contrived intention, it is perhaps a secondary identification, built onto an identification of Duryodhana as Kali which has its roots in the word's other associations: strife, discord and bad kings. This is certainly how Duryodhana as Kali would be understood if Dvâpara were not present and the fact that these resonances were recognised by the epic's composers is suggested by the verse which follows Duryodhana's first identification as an aṃsa of Kali, where the other meanings of the word are clearly being played upon:

jagato yaḥ sa sarvasya vidviṣṭaḥ
kalipuruṣaḥ
yaḥ sarvâṃ ghâtayâmâsa pṛthivîṃ
puruṣâdhamaḥ
yena vairaṃ samuddiptaṃ bhûtântakaraṇaṃ
mahat

He who was hated by all the world, that man of strife - kalipuruṣa - and vilest of men who slew the whole earth, by whom was kindled the quarrel that caused the great destruction of beings.[64]

It is easy to see the connections that would lead to an identification with the kaliyuga being superimposed upon an identification with Kali as a bad king/strife. Duryodhana is the cause of the strife which is the event that heralds the start of the kaliyuga - kali is always

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growth of doubt and uncertainty in the dvâparayuga (c.f. 5.1 above).
64 1.61.81

present in battles; Arjuna remembers the **kali** that was born from the **dyûta**. Once the identification of Duryodhana as the **yuga** has been established, it is but a short step for the epic, always aware of its **yugânta** situation, to bring in an analogous personification of the departing yuga, Dvâpara. Given the importance of the **dyûta** for the epic events, and the underlying connections between both the **yugas** and the dice, and Kali and the dice, it is easy to see why the 'expert gambler' - **akṣavit** (2.51.4)- Śakuni should be chosen for this [65].

The likelihood of the **yuga** identification being a secondary one is made stronger by the fact that a similar process seems to have taken place in the Nalopâkhyâna, the other extended occurrence of **kali's** personification. Dvâpara and Kali first appear after the wedding of Nala and Damayanti, when the gods are returning home (3.55.1f). Kali, hoping to try his luck at Damayanti's

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65 I shall discuss the connections between the dice and Kali in relation to the Nalopâkhyâna below. Although I am expressing this exploration of Śakuni/Dvâpara and Duryodhana/Kali in terms of 'steps' or 'stages', I am essentially trying to establish the underlying logic of the connections, rather than make any statement about the chronology of the idea's development. This is both because I think it unlikely that the epic composition worked in this way: I think it is more a case of an awareness of connections that the composers use to enrich their themes by resonance, rather than a set of consequentially reasoned ideas; but also, because even if the chronology of the identification can be arrived at, it would need a much more detailed study that I can offer here. The dice-game is so important to the epic and so deeply embedded in its structure that a proper treatment of it, and of a figure so central to it as Śakuni, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

svayaṃvara, learns from the gods that he is too late and swears revenge on the innocent Nala:

> . . .nale vatsyâmi dvâpara (12)
> bhraṃśayiṣyâmi taṃ râjyân na bhaumyâ saha
> ramsyate
> tvâm apy akṣân samâviśya kartuṃ sâhâyyam
> arhasi (13)
>
> I shall enter Nala, O Dvâpara.(12) I shall make him lose his kingdom - he'll not enjoy himself with Bhîma's daughter! You must enter into the dice and assist me.(13)[66]

Kali waits for his chance and, after twelve years, Nala performs the evening rites in a state of impurity. At this lapse, Kali is able to enter him, and arranges a game of dice with his brother Puṣkara. Possessed by Kali - āviṣṭaṃ kalinā (v.9), Nala looses his kingdom, abandons Damayantî in the forest and wanders, crazed - naṣṭâtmâ kalinâ (59.25). Two events serve to free Nala. Firstly, he saves the nâga Karkoṭaka from a fire and in return, the snake bites Nala, so that Kali, inside him, will burn from the poison (63.13-16). Later, while acting as Ṛtuparṇa's charioteer, Nala exchanges his knowledge of the horses for a knowledge of the dice - akṣahṛdayajña (70.27). As soon as this happens, Kali leaves him and enters the Vibhîtaka tree (Vibhîtaka nuts are used in dice games) which, possessed by Kali, became a thing of ill omen (v.36). Free from Kali, Nala regains Damayantî and his kingdom, and the account closes with the words:

> itihâsam imaṃ ca 'pi kalinâśanam ucyate

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66 3.55.12,13

> And this history is called the destruction of Kali (78.10)

The personification of Kali in the Nalopâkhyâna is usually understood in terms of the **kaliyuga** [67]. However, again, without the presence of Dvâpara, which is incidental and very shadowy [68], there is nothing to connect the character of Kali with the **kaliyuga** [69]. Instead, as well as the close connection with dice that is evident in the episode, once more he seems to bear more relation to the word's association with strife and things of bad luck and impurity (**vide** Nala's impurity and the Vibhîtaka tree). Indeed, he seems most closely connected to the kind of 'folk demons' who are associated with, for example, Nirṛti and Kârttikeya, and this would fit the simple, 'fairy-tale' quality of the episode [70].

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67 C.f., e.g.: Peile [1881] p.81; Monier-Williams [1879] p.ix (but in [1899] p.503, he says he is the dice personified). Jarrett [1875] p.108, however identifies Kali as 'battle, strife: the demon of strife; the age of strife'.

68 He only appears as Kali's companion at the beginning of the story and is not, in fact, mentioned at the time of the dicing itself.

69 Monier-Williams [1879] p.xi cites Brockhaus who argues that the personification of Kali as the **kaliyuga** instead of the dice, shows that the Mbh arranger of the story misunderstood the word and did not know its Vedic associations with dice. I think this is very unlikely, given the variety of meanings known for **kali** in the Epic: even if the identification with the **yugas** suggested by the inclusion of Dvâpara is a conscious overlay, as I argue, it is still possible for the other associations to be known and played upon by the authors.

70 van Buitenen comments on the likelihood of the Nalopâkhyâna's folk-tale origins in his introduction to the episode [1975] pp.183-5. for these 'folk-demons' in classical literature (begging the question of their relationship to the sanskritic tradition), c.f., e.g. Mbh 3.219.24f, where the male and female 'graspers' - **graha** - who follow Skanda are described; and Mârk (Pargiter [1904] p.250f) where the offspring of Daksa are listed.

Once again, therefore, it would seem that the personification of Dvâpara has been added to make the association with the yugas. As there is nothing to suggest that the Nalopâkhyâna should be given a yugânta setting, this can only have been done to enhance the already considerable similarity between Nala's loss (and regaining) of his kingdom through a dice game and Yudhiṣṭhira's situation in the forest [71].

These consist of the personifications of good and bad principles (like the list in the Bhâg. which included the personification of kali as strife) including Mṛtyu and his wives, Nirṛti and Alakṣmî. Alakṣmî has fourteen sons, who look very similar to the Mbh graspers. Duḥsaha, the only one of these sons described in detail, bears a strong resemblance to Kali: his allotted food is what is contained in broken pots; he can possess people who sacrifice without the proper ablutions, and conquer those who transgress the evening rites; his business is creating social dissensions and his dwelling is in household wranglings; he is married to Nirmâṣṭi, the daughter of Kali's wife (Kali, however, is not mentioned in the list of Dakṣa's progeny, so this marriage serves to strengthen, rather than weaken the connection). Duḥsaha is identified as a yakṣa and this would show the link between kali/strife and the gandharva kalis, as gandharvas can also be malevolent to humans: they are included among the 'graspers' in the Mbh (and c.f. also Monier-Williams p.346, col.1). Moreover, the detailed list of conditions where Duḥsaha thrives, is similar to conditions that would prevail in the kaliyuga, so the conceptual link can be seen here also. Another possible link with the gandharva connection is that Duryodhana/Kali is born from Gândhârî, the princess of the Gândhâras and there seem to be links between these and the Gandharvas as the N. of a people (c.f. Monier-Williams [1899] p.346, col.2).

71 In this, the Nalopâkhyâna is a good example of the conscious structuring of the Âraṇyakaparva, whereby many of the episodes related in the forest are used to reassure the Pâṇḍavas of their coming victory. That the many parallels between Nala's situation and Yudhiṣṭhira's suggest that the Pâṇḍava will overcome his misfortune as Nala did his, is true on the most obvious level: Bṛhadaśva tells Nala's story to console Yudhiṣṭhira that he is not the only king to lose his kingdom in this way. However, the parallels also operate on a deeper level. Nala is freed of Kali, the cause of his misfortune, when he learns the secret of the dice and it is this knowledge

which enables him to win back his kingdom in a replay of the dice game with Puṣkara (3.77.4f), where he offers Puṣkara a game of dice or the gamble of battle - yuddhadyûtam (3.77.8). Yudhisthira too, learns the secret of the dice immediately after hearing the Nalopâkhyâna (3.78.15-17) and thus his victory is ascertained as Nala's was, when he plays Duryodhana for the kingdom again, this time in the battle, which the epic presents as being a replay of the dyûta.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

Little remains to be said by way of conclusion, beyond briefly summarising the arguments put forward in the previous chapters, pointing out the limitations of the study, and suggesting areas of further research arising from it. This thesis has attempted to provide a detailed study of the classical theories of time as they appear in the Mbh, and to see how they relate to those that came before and after. Although made up of different elements, the theories were found to display a strong internal coherence, with the same essential concerns and structures that had informed earlier ideas of time and cosmogony reflected in different ways throughout them. These earlier ideas were examined in Chapter 2, where a clear foundation for the cycle of creation and destruction was found in the myths and ideas associated with the agnicayana and **râjasûya** sacrifices. Moreover, from the earliest texts onwards the ordering of primordial chaos was seen to be an important cosmogonic principle, expressed, amongst other ways, in the vṛtrahatya and the devâsura struggle.

The examination of the epic ideas began in Chapter 3, where the divisions of time were found to differ from those in the Purâṇas in a number of particulars. These differences probably represent a simpler stage of the theories' development, with a cycle based on a single revolution of the **caturyuga**. It was suggested that the

caturyuga unit represented a pratimâ of the year, and this was seen as further evidence that the classical theories were based upon the Vedic yearly cycle. In Chapter 4, the cycle of creation and destruction presented in the epic was examined in detail. Differences were again found from the Purâṇic material and these, too, seemed to point to a simpler schema, with the prâkṛtika and naimittika cycles not yet hierarchised, and the identity of the destroyer not yet established as Rudra/Śiva. The Mbh creation myths were found to have strong connections with those of the earlier texts and this was especially striking in the accounts of creation from the lotus, which is the cosmogony with the least immediately obvious Vedic roots.

When the characteristics of the four yugas were examined in Chapter 5, the nature of the decline running through them was seen to be informed by similar concerns of order and chaos as were apparent in the cycle of creation and destruction. When the two were juxtaposed, they expressed a logically coherent structure, where the decline through the yugas was an extension of the destructive potential inherent in the creative act.

In Chapter 6, the inquiry was extended into some of the more obscure areas of the yuga theory. It was found that by using the understanding of the theories' essential concerns established in the earlier chapters, promising avenues of interpretation were opened.

Passages which stated that the **yuga** is based on the conduct of the king became more meaningful when read in the context of the **râjasûya** and the king's responsibility for renewing the cosmos for the coming year. The series of investigations in sections 2-4, began to show how the **avatâras** were related to the yugas, and especially examined their connection with the period of the **yuga** juncture. This period was presented as a dangerous time, when the fate of the cosmos was temporarily held in balance, and it was suggested that this danger went back to the potential for disintegration seen in the joint of the yearly cycle. Just as in the **râjasûya** the king had to bridge this period, and guarantee the ordered cosmos for another year, so too did the avatâra have to overcome the special disorder of this period, symbolised by the demon that he incarnates to overcome. This was seen to go back to the cosmogonic dimension of the **vṛtrahatya**, and to explain how the **avatâra's** establishment of **dharma** could be reconciled with the decline of **dharma** through the **yugas**.

This study has been limited in a number of ways, and most of the areas for further research which suggest themselves would serve to expand the inquiry beyond those limitations. The most promising subject for further study arising directly from the thesis, would seem to be a more detailed investigation of the relationship between Vedic, and especially Brâhmaṇa theories of time, and

those of the classical texts. Hopefully I have been able to demonstrate that there seem to be considerable and well-founded connections between the epic and earlier ideas, but I would like to examine these much more thoroughly. Because my concern was primarily with the epic material, I was unable to examine the Vedic ideas extensively or in great depth, but it seems very likely that further research would bear out the arguments put forward.

In particular, it would be interesting to explore further the cosmogonic potential of the **vṛtrahatya** and the **devâsura** struggle, and to see how the presentation of these changes in the different texts. The connections between the **vṛtrahatya** and the **avatâra** geste were only really touched on, and it could be rewarding to examine these in more detail, and see how, for example, the influence of **bhakti** has changed the rôle of the **asura** and the emphasis of the myth.

Again, although clear roots were found for the cycle of creation and destruction and the principles underlying classical cosmogonies, the Vedic foundations for the **pralaya** were not really treated, and it would be interesting to follow up the work of Biardeau, Hiltebeitel and Scheuer in this area. Connections with the **dakṣayajña** seem a fruitful avenue to explore, and I would particularly like to examine whether Dakṣa's sacrifice had any cosmogonic significance, as his

connections with Prajâpati would suggest that its destruction could echo the theme of post-creative disintegration.

Apart from these topics to do with the structures and origins of the theories of time themselves, there also are the areas which I excluded from my brief at the beginning, namely the wider significance of the theories and their rôle in the Mbh. It would also be interesting to bring a comparative perspective into the inquiry, as a very superficial glance in this direction has suggested a number of possible connections.

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