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ŚAKUNTALĀ, THE SWAN WOMAN

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Introduction[1]

One of the most famous Indian narratives, celebrated by the indigenous tradition, is the tale of Śakuntalā. The story deals with the begetting and birth of the half nymph Śakuntalā and her son Bharata who was to become the progenitor (*janitā* Mahābhārata 1.67.28) of the house of the Bhāratas or Bharatids[2]. The modern political state of the Indian Union is named after him, i.e. Bhārata (or 'Bharat' in Indo- English publications), the 'state of the Bhāratas', that is to say of the Indians who trace themselves back to Bharata and regard themselves as Bharata's sons. We are therefore justified in looking upon Śakuntalā as the legendary 'mother of the Indians' as well as the 'Mother of India'[3].

The oldest version (known to us) of the mythic-genealogical Śakuntalā narrative can approximately be dated back to the last centuries B.C. It is

1 This article is the English version of my inaugural lecture ('Antrittsvorlesung') at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, held on the 30th October, 1997, under the German title 'Śakuntalā, Ahnfrau und Schwanfrau: Vorschläge zur Analyse einer altindischen Sage'. My thanks are due to Dr. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst who was kind enough to polish my English.

2 The Sanskrit tradition considers begetting and birth of the son Bharata to be the more important events by putting them first: *saṃbhavaṃ bharatasya... caritaṃ ca...śakuntalāyāś cotpattim...* which in the text of the Poona edition is to be found as a an insertion (just before Mhbh 1.63.1) only in a part of the manuscript tradition. A bronze statue depicting Bharata can be found in C. Sivaramamurti: *Masterpieces of Indian Sculpture in the National Museum*. New Delhi 1971, plate 39.

3 There exists, by the way, a very recent goddess 'Bhāratamātā', 'Mother India', an embodiment of the country of India, which has been achieving an ever growing popularity especially in right-wing fundamentalist Hindu circles. This goddess, however, has nothing whatsoever to do with Śakuntalā. See K. Meisig: *'Mutter Indien' (Bhāratamātā). Zur Personifizierung kosmologischer Vorstellungen im politischen Hinduismus*. In: Zeller, Dieter (ed.): *Religion im Wandel der Kosmologien* (Religionswissenschaft, Bd. 10). Peter Lang: Frankfurt a.M. 1999, pp. 281-285; and K. Meisig: *Fremdenkritik und Selbstkritik. Die Göttin 'Mutter Indien' in den Anfängen der modernen Hindi-Prosa*. In: Rothermund, D. (ed.): *Aneignung und Selbstbehauptung. Antworten auf die europäische Expansion*. R. Oldenbourg: München 1999, pp. 235-246.

part of the Mahābhārata[4] (Mhbh), the 'Great [Sanskrit epos about the war between] the descendants of Bharata'. In this title we find the name of Śakuntalā's son as a patronymic again. The most prominent reworking of the Śakuntalā theme is Kālidāsa's play (written in the beginning of the fifth century A.D.) *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* 'Śakuntalā or the Recognition' or—I interpret the title of the play ambiguously—'Śakuntalā or the acceptance (scil. of the son)'[5], a unique piece of world literature which, by the way, marks the very beginning of the Germans' acquaintance with Indian literature. Sir William Jones had published the first English translation in 1789. Two years later (1791) Georg Forster (after whom the inter-disciplinary 'Club Georg Forster' of the Mainz university has named itself) translated this first English version into German. And it was Forster's secondary rendering of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* that impressed Goethe so much that he shaped the prologue of his *Faust* after the model of his great Indian predecessor. The play was translated into German several times and played on German stages over and over again; it is even said to have temporarily been on the curricula of German grammar schools.

4 Cited according to: *The Mahābhārata*. For the first time critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar (Aug. 1925-Jan. 1943), S.K. Belvalkar (since April 1943). Books 1-18, + Harivaṃśa 1,2, + Index volumes. Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute: Poona 1927-1971. The *Śakuntalopākhyāna* is to be found in vol. 1, 1933, adhyāya 62-69 (pp. 282-318; 62,1-14; 63,1-26; 64,1-42; 65,1-42; 66,1-17; 67,1-33; 68,1-80; 69,1-51).

5 As for the title of Kālidāsa's play cf. Mhbh 1.68.72*: na putram abhijānāmi tvayi jātaṃ śakuntale* 'I do not accept the one who is born (or: who has arisen) inside you as [my] son.' (PW, s.v. abhi- jñā), and Mhbh 1.68.80 *nāhaṃ tvām abhijānāmi* (king addressing Śakuntalā) 'I do not recognize you' or, accordingly (which is the second meaning of *abhi-√jñā* in PW), 'I do not accept you'. The meaning 'Anerkennung' ('acceptance') should be added in PW s.v. *abhijñāna*.—The use of the word *abhijñāna* by Kalidāsa himself, on the other hand, is rather in favour of a third meaning 'ornament of recognition', i.e. concretely 'signet ring' (as in PW). The title of the drama reappears in the text of the play itself at two places*: kiṃ tv abhijñānābharaṇadarśanena śāpo nirvartiṣyata iti* 'But by showing (or: at the sight of) a piece of jewellery [serving for] recognition the curse will be reversed.' (4.1, ed. Kale p. 126) These are words of the maid Priyaṃvadā when reporting on Durvāsas' curse. At the second place we read Anasūyā's thought: *tad ito 'bhijñānam aṅgulīyakaṃ tasya visṛjāvaḥ* / 'Therefore let us send him (the king) the ring as a sign of recognition.' (4.3, ed. Kale p. 130). Basically, *abhijnāna* 'cognition' must be understood in the sense of *pratyābhijñāna* 'recognition', as becomes clear from 4.19 (ed. Kale p. 154).

There is no doubt that the Mhbh contains the older text version as com- pared with Kālidāsa's and further adaptations[6]. And it is only the Mhbh text which forms the textual basis for the following exposition, though I will not be able to refrain entirely from casual side-glances at Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*.

Summary of the Śakuntalā legend

What follows is a short summary of the Śakuntalā legend[7] as contained in the Mhbh.

6 Another related version which could be about 1000 years younger than the Mhbh wording is to be found in the Padmapurāṇa, a text belonging to late epic Hinduism: *The Svargakhaṇḍa of the Padmapurāṇa*. Crit. ed. by A.C. Śāstrī. Varanasi 1972, chapter 1.44-4.23. Apparently the Padmapurāṇa presents a contamination of the Mhbh episode and Kālidāsa's play. However, the mutual relationship between those three source areas has not yet been satisfactorily clarified by scientific research. Some observations have been made by M.B. Emeneau: *Kālidāsa's Śakuntalā and the Mahābhārata*, in: JAOS 82, 1962, p. 41-44. Emeneau argues (against M. Winternitz) that not the Padmapurāṇa, but the Mhbh has served as Kālidāsa's source and quotes two examples where Kālidāsa has apparently borrowed from the Mhbh text. Apart from the bibliographical references given in Emeneau's article and the 'studies of the Śakuntalā episode from the literary angle' which are listed by John Brockington: *The Sanskrit Epics*, Leiden [1]1998, p. 137, I should mention here the (unpublished) M.A. thesis by M. Treu: *Die Śakuntalā-Erzählung im Mhbh, im Padmapurāṇa und bei Kālidāsa*, Münster 1982. Unfortunately, I have so far not been able to have a look at the first attempt ever to solve this problem by B. Müller: *Kālidāsas Śakuntalā und ihre Quelle*. Gratulationsschrift des Breslauer Elisabethgymnasiums. Breslau 1874.—The latest contribution to the question of the sources of the Śakuntalā narrative was made by Claude Rapin: *Indian Art from Afghanistan. The Legend of Śakuntalā and the Indian Treasure of Eucratides at Ai Khanum*. New Delhi 1996. According to Rapin (pp. 99-102), part of the remains found at Ai Khanum in Afghanistan is a plaque which can be dated 'certainly anterior to 145 B.C.' This plate 'combines the theme of a chariot hunt with that of an amorous encounter' and can undoubtedly be identified as an illustration of the Śakuntalā legend. Due to certain 'discrepancies between this version and versions of literary sources' Rapin thinks 'that this representation does not reflect the form that the legend assumes in the play of Kālidāsa or the *Mahābhārata*, both later in date than the plaque, but that it either corresponds to an older version of it or a local variant'.

7 I am using the term 'legend' here in a broader sense that I would actually like to. The Śakuntalā narrative should rather be termed a 'saga', at least according to the scientific usage of German 'Sage', as opposed to the 'legend'. For details see below, n. 41.

Śakuntalā's lineage is half divine, half human. Her mother Menakā, an *Apsaras*, i.e. an heavenly dancer, was once sent down to earth by Indra (who is here called Śakra), the king of gods, in order to break the chasteness of the seer Viśvāmitra by her seductive charms. For by his magically accumulated ascetic power the hermit was about to become dangerous even for the king of gods. Viśvāmitra did indeed capitulate to her celestial charm, and it was Śakuntalā who became the offspring of her union. Menakā, the nymph, however, turned out to be a cruel mother since she abandoned her newborn child in the jungle. The girl was found by a certain Kaṇva, the abbot of an hermitage. She was lying there in the forest, surrounded by birds that protected her against predators. The Sanskrit word for 'bird' is *śakunta*, therefore Kaṇva called the foundling Śakuntalā, 'Little Bird'. Kaṇva adopted the girl as his foster-child, and so it happened that Śakuntalā grew up in his *āśrama* in the forest jungle of the Himālayas.

One day, when Śakuntalā had reached a marriageable age (*yauvana*, puberty), Duṣyanta, the king of Hastināpura (near present day Delhi), having been separated from his hunting party, entered the hermitage where he found the enchanting girl alone. He fell in love with her at first sight, Śakuntalā's charm makes him, as it were, mad. He urges her to become his wife, asks her to consent to the so called *gāndharva* marriage[8], i.e. a spontaneous love marriage under four eyes (*rahas* 67.16b), without wooing and without approval by the bride's father but legally valid because it is sanctioned by the Hindu law code. Śakuntalā yields to him, but only under the condition that if a son should be produced by their union he shall become the king's legal heir, and in particular the immediate heir to the throne: ''The son who might be born by me shall become your immediate heir apparent, oh great king; tell me this as [an oath of] truth. If this be so, oh Duṣyanta, then my union with you shall happen.'—'It shall be so,' the king

8 'Danach ist also eine *gāndharva*-Eheschliessung ursprünglich der Vollzug des Liebesaktes nach Art des gandharva, das heisst mit einer mannbaren Jungfrau, die noch unter der Botmässigkeit des Vaters steht: weder ist sie bereits vom Vater 'weggegeben' (*dattā*), noch ist sie ihm 'geraubt' (*hṛtā*).' (Thieme, *Jungfrauengatte*, p. 201). As to the nature of the *gandharvas*, the male companions of the *apsaras*, usually imagined as celestial musicians, cf. below, n. 40.

answered her without thinking about it.''[9] After their union the king returns to his capital Hastināpura.

Three years of a supernaturally long pregnancy go by and Śakuntalā gives birth to a son. As soon as the boy is six years old Kaṇva has mother and son taken to the capital to the royal court. They are admitted to an audience, but the king denies any acquaintance of Śakuntalā, and accordingly refuses to accept her son as his own, let alone as the legal heir to his throne. When Śakuntalā reminds him of their marriage contract, of the particular hereditary precondition made by her at that time, the king does not want to know anything of it, he even insults her in offensive, in fact obscene, language and sends her away. At that moment, however, a voice can be heard from heaven admonishing the king to accept his son, declaring the king to be the begetter and Śakuntalā to have spoken the truth. Now the king cannot but publicly accept Śakuntalā's son as his legal heir, and he bestows all honours on Śakuntalā as his favourite consort. He names his son Bharata and consecrates him as the successor to the throne. In the course of time Bharata became an universal monarch (*cakravartin*, 69.47a) and the progenitor of the renowned family of the Bhārata.

The problem: why does the king deny paternity?

The question which is crucial for a thorough understanding of the Śakuntalā legend (although it has never, as far as I can see, been put forward in the not at all sparse literature on Śakuntalā) is: why does king Duṣyanta deny his love affair with Śakuntalā and, consequently, his paternity of her son? Does he perhaps already have a son (as is the case for instance in the Rāma legend) who he has designated the heir to the throne? We can negate this hypothesis from the start because in the whole of the Śakuntalā tradition we do not find any other son mentioned except Bharata.

The reason offered by the text of the Mhbh for the king's denial of paternity is that Duṣyanta, because of his spontaneous love adventure, fears a public scandal. For, after the decision of the gods in favour of Śakuntalā, the king tries to justify his behaviour by the conjecture that 'his people

9 *mama jāyeta yaḥ putraḥ sa bhavet tvadanantaram// yuvarājo mahārāja satyam etad bravīhi me/ yady etad evaṃ duṣyanta astu me saṃgamas tvayā// evam astv iti tāṃ rājā pratyuvācāvicārayan/* 67.16cd-18a.

would have been in *doubt' (bhaved hi śaṅkā lokasya* 36c), if he, just on Śakuntalā's saying so (36a), had accepted the son, his son would not have been 'clean' (*śuddha* 36d) then. That is why he let his son be 'cleansed by the messenger of the gods' (*taṃ viśodhya tadā rājā devadūtena* 37ab).

On the basis of the Mhbh version the king's conduct remains morally questionable, as the king would in any case have been obliged publicly at his court to stand by his love affair and by its issue, his son. For in contrast to what we read in Kālidāsa's play, Duṣyanta is in full possession and control of his memory. He is consciously lying to avoid public scandal. Only by the intervention of the gods does the plot reach a happy end when the deus ex machina, the voice from heaven, urges the king to accept his son, giving celestial authority to the king's action.[10]

This theological interpretation goes back to the traditional Hindu pundits, the śāstrīs who are notorious for their prudishness. In their anxiety to legalize Duṣyanta's union with Śakuntalā they declared their love adventure to be the classic example of the *gāndharvavivāha*, the spontaneous love marriage which is regarded as one of the eight kinds of legal wedding in the Hindu law codes, the *śāstras*. The heavenly voice, however, does not know the *gāndharvavivāha* at all, it mentions neither the term nor the fact, but provides instead a folk etymology of the name Bharata by deriving it from the verbal root √*bhṛ*, 'to carry': '*bharasva putraṃ*' 'carry away (= win = possess) [this] son...' 69.29 (cf. PW, and also the similar statement in 32cd-33d). One has to remember that the son's name had been Sarvadamana as long as he lived with his mother in the hermitage (or in the wilderness, respectively). Be it as it may, this belated legalization belongs to a secondary text stratum (which will be discussed in detail below). By it the king may juridically or canonically be exculpated by the gods; but his cowardice and guilt endure from the viewpoint of the every day inter- human sense of morality .

To Kālidāsa (to turn our attention but briefly to his play) this central question seemed so important that he worked two conclusive turns into the plot of his drama: firstly, the curse (*śāpa*) of the irascible sage Durvāsas which causes the king to forget Śakuntalā in the same way as she forgot her duties as a hostess and did not take care of Durvāsas, her guest, when he

10 This at least is how e.g. Apte (in his dictionary, s.v. *duṣyanta*) sees the matter. His explanation shall be cited here as an example for the traditional opinion: '...for fear of public scandal... but a heavenly voice told him that she was his lawful wife'.

unexpectedly visited the hermitage; and secondly the ring motif[11] which reverses the curse when the king sees his signet ring, the token of recognition (*abhijñāna*, cf. n. 5), which he had given to Śakuntalā at his departure, and immediately regains his memory. (According to the laws of magic a curse can be reversed by a counter-curse.) By both these motifs the moral questionability of the king's conduct is explained by supernatural constraints and is thus removed. Kālidāsa was a court poet, his drama was designed to be played in front of the king; criticism of the royals, as implied by the Mhbh version, had by all means to be avoided by Kālidāsa, and this is what he did making use of his natural inventiveness, regardless of whether the loss of memory or the ring motif were invented by Kālidāsa himself or adopted from an unknown source.[12]

Nevertheless, the question after the deeper, the actual motive for Duṣyanta's denial of paternity still remains an open problem. The king's fear of public scandal? This answer is rash, too shallow and one- dimensional, and it does not do justice to the complexity of the legend. The king must have had more compelling reasons.

Of course we do not want to reduce the Śakuntalā legend to this one central question. The tale has absorbed many more motifs, narrative and didactic textual material. During the more than one thousand years of oral tradition in which the Mhbh emerged by successive anonymous historical shaping as today's overall epic, several levels, layers or strata developed also in the textgestalt of the Śakuntalā legend which conceal the true and original motives for the king's action. These layers must be levelled down.

11 The ring motif in connection with swans can be observed also in European folk beliefs of the 19th century: 'Dass die Liebe nicht gebrochen werde, nehme man einen Ring des Geliebten und lege ihn nebst einem von sich in das Nest eines Schwans. (Belgien).' (HDA, s.v. Schwan, Sp. 1404). In a similar way to what we read in Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*, where a fisherman accidentally finds the ring lost by Śakuntalā in the entrails of a fish, in a fairy tale of the Grimm brothers ('Die weisse Schlange', KHM 17), too, a fish returns a ring lost in the water. In KHM 126 'Ferenand getrü und Ferenand ungetrü' it is again a fish which returns an item lost in the water. On both fairy tales, cf. L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen*, p. 221.

12 Thieme (*Jungfrauengatte*, 1963, p. 198), by the way, in his remarks on the legality of the *Gāndharva* marriage, does not provide any grounds for Duṣyanta's denial: 'In der Natur der Sache liegt es, dass die Gültigkeit der unter vier Augen geschlossenen Ehe praktisch von der Anerkennung des Mannes [und der Frau natürlich! KM] abhing, wofür die epische Fassung der Śakuntalā-Sage ein anschauliches Beispiel bietet: der König erinnert sich wohl, aber leugnet, sich zu erinnern (Mhbh 1.68.18).'

To this end the Śakuntalā legend has to be thoroughly analysed. I will carry out this analysis below in a couple of steps, approaching the complex structure of motifs from the outside to the inside, from the known to the unknown, until we will finally be able to answer the central question.

The solution: suggestions for the analysis of the legend

In the textual tradition of the Śakuntalā legend I discern the following six layers or strata:

1) one or even more than one outer strata which developed only very shortly before the completion of the textual history of the giant epic Mhbh, embedments and embellishments which have nothing whatsoever to do with the narrative proper, which, however, have seemed important to later redactors in pursuit of their respective tendencies,
2) interpolations of poetic sayings and utility lyrics (*subhāṣita*)
3) the *Dharmaśāstra* level, in particular the reworking in order to legalize the *Gāndharva* marriage (*gāndharvavivāha*), the common-law marriage, as canonized in the Hindu law codes, the *Dharmaśāstras*, and above all, in the 'Laws of Manu' (*Mānavadharmaśāstra*),
4) the mythological layer representing the high religion (in contrast to folk religion) of epic Hinduism, in which earlier folk religious motifs have become integrated into the Hindu pantheon (of the 'Thirty Gods', Mhbh 1.69.2) and in which the original swan women appear as *apsaras*, i.e. heavenly dancers,
5) traces of the world wide belief in swan women, i.e. the folk religious substratum, and
6) the real social conditions of the late Vedic period in which the Mhbh has its roots, that is to say the socio-historical or paleo-sociological layer.

1) and 2): late imbedments and interpolations of utility lyrics

I may confidently skip both the youngest, outermost strata. They contain nothing new or exciting, but only the sufficiently known encumbrances which during the more than thousand years of textual history have inflated the corpus of the Sanskrit epics. I mean those late imbedments like when Śakuntalā resorts to religious brooding explaining to herself the fact that

she as a baby had been abandoned (*tyaktā*) by her parents and is now abandoned by the king in turn by reference to the doctrine of karma, as a result of her own evil deeds in former lifes (68.70).[13] And I also mean the interpolations of utility lyrics[14] (so called *subhāṣita*) in which e.g. the assets of a wife or the bliss of fatherhood are praised. All this has no connection at all with the Śakuntalā legend.

13 This somewhat unexpected thoughtfulness has an even more disturbing effect on the coherence of the context as we must presuppose in the oldest layers of the Mhbh (which we are trying to reconstruct) the more ancient Vedic conception of time and human existence, and that was not yet cyclic, as in later Hinduism, but linear: after death, according to Vedic belief, one was not reborn in a new existence in this world, but departed instead to the yonder world of the ancestors. Hence the importance of male descendants, for it was the grandsons who offered their grandfathers the rice dumplings during the sacrifice for the ancestors in the *śrāddha* ceremony. The man who remained without male offspring was in danger of enduring after his death until the end of time a miserable existence as a hungry ghost (*preta*) instead of indulging in heavenly pleasures in the paradise of the fathers. This is what is meant when it is said in the text of the Śakuntalā legend at another place (30ab) that a son possessing male descendants rescues his father from annihilation by the judge of the dead, Yama.
Moreover, the stanzas 64.26,27,29 as well as the redundant chapter-ending Vaṃśastha verse 64.42 are late interpolations and must be eliminated. They contradict verse 64.2a where it had already been said that the king went on all alone (*eka eva*). There is no need for him to send his retinue back a second time.
65.30-42: The enumeration of Viśvāmitra's heroic deeds is nothing but a late scholarly embellishment, and there is no real need for Menakā to ask Indra to send the wind god as her helper. Finally, the mnemotechnic verse 68.67 containing the names of the best of the *Apsaras*, i.e. Urvaśī, Pūrvacitti, Sahajanyā, Menakā, Viśvācī und Dṛtācī does not seem to have been part of the original narrative.

14 Such sayings occur quite frequently e.g. in Śakuntalā's long monologue when she appeals to the king's conscience, lists the assets of a good wife and the advantages of life as a husband, when she describes the bliss of fatherhood and cites the opinion that the father is reborn in his son (68.24-65). In a similar way, we find sayings about the independence of the human self (61.7, but compare 15b), or sayings introduced and completed by the key word 'truth' (*satya*) (69.5-15): *satyaś cāpi pravādo 'yaṃ* 'And truth moreover is the following dictum...'. The subject matter of this dictum is collected sayings on the theme of truth and untruth which are only very vaguely related to the plot of the Śakuntalā episode.

3) The *Dharmaśāstra* level

More important than that is the third level on which the king's love union with Śakuntalā is explained and subsequently legalized by quotations from the Hindu juridical literature as the so called *gāndharva* marriage. It is explicitly stated that Śakuntalā's union with the king does not violate the *dharma* because the *gāndharva* marriage which ought to take place 'by a loving woman with a loving man, without ritual spells and in secret' (*sakāmāyāḥ sakāmena nirmantro rahasi* 67.26) is judged as the best for a *kṣatriya* (a 'warrior'). The importance of this third text-historical layer lies in the fact that we are faced here with the traditional interpretation of the Śakuntalā legend according to the opinion of orthodox Hinduism. The love sick king, having met Śakuntalā alone in the hermitage, urges her to surrender to him of her own free will (*icchāmi tvāṃ... bhajamānām* 67.6), 'to the loving man as a loving woman' (*sakāmasya sakāmā* 67.14), which is the vital condition for the *gāndharva* marriage (67.1-6; 67,14). As soon as Śakuntalā informed the king about her lineage he, bluntly and abruptly, presses her to become his wife (*bhāryā me bhava* 67.1,3, twice!). Then however, dryly and in great detail, the king enumerates the eight kinds of marriage which are judged as lawful according to the Laws of Manu. On formal critical grounds alone most of these verses (67.7-13) have to be removed from the original text. In the immediate context, the ardent wooing of the lecherous king, they are simply preposterous.

These and other, quite extensive[15], insertions in the Śakuntalā episode which are centred around the *gāndharva* wedding and the importance of

15 During the audience at court Śakuntalā reminds the king that he made her pregnant when she was still a virgin and living at home, in her fathers hermitage, which implicitly means that he had not abducted (√*hṛ*) her before (cf. above, n. 8). This situation has consequences for the son's succession rights: further requirements for the *gāndharva* marriage are given, and her son must be regarded as fully entitled to inherit (cf. P. Thieme, *Jungfrauengatte*, p. 201).—Similarly, the chapter ending verses 67.31cd-33 must be regarded as a secondary addition. They, again and quite superfluously, are meant to destroy all doubts as to the lawfulness of the *gāndharvavivāha*. As for the weakening of the *gāndharva* marriage in later times, see again Thieme, loc.cit.
Further interpolations following the *Dharmaśāstra* tendency must be seen in the following verses. 68.11: Although the boy's supernatural power had already been said to be the reason why he must be taken to the royal court, Kaṇva quotes a further cause, namely: it damages a woman's reputation, her character and her *dharma* if she stays at

dharma, the religious law which sanctions the *gāndharva* marriage, serve a double purpose. Firstly, they function as a belated justification for the king's love adventure by assigning it to a kind of marriage which is canonized by the Hindu law codes. Secondly, they also legitimize the son who is born out of this union as fully entitled to inherit the throne,[16] a purpose which, as we shall immediately see, brings us much nearer to the original and deeper matter of the Śakuntalā legend.

4) The mythological layer representing the high religion of epic Hinduism

If we briefly look back at the passages which have concerned us so far, we recognize well known and unproblematic aspects of epic Hinduism and its literature. We have observed how later redactors brought in the doctrine of *karma* in order to give reasons for certain aspects of the Śakuntalā legend, how they enriched the narrative material with mostly irrelevant wise sayings, and how the original Mhbh poetry was superseded by quotations from the literature of religious law. There is one further level which also belongs to orthodox Hinduism, and this is 4) the mythological layer representing the high religion of epic Hinduism. It is in contrast to the traces and relics

home with her relatives for too long after her marriage (*vivāha*, here: her *gāndharva-vivāha*).— 69.22-24: The terms *satya* 'truth' and *dharma* 'religious law' are connected by the statement that *satya* is the highest *dharma*.—69.16-21: In order to stress the importance of a son, quotations are given from the *Dharma-śāstras*, esp. the Laws of Manu (69.18); sons are said to be '*dharma* rafts' (*putrā dharma-plavāḥ*, 69.19) of the fathers into the next world (again the older Vedic linear world conception).—69.29ab: *bhastrā mātā pituḥ putro yena jātaḥ sa eva saḥ*. 'A hose (i.e. a receptacle for semen) is the mother; the son is the father's [product and possession]: by whom he was begotten, that's who he is.' That is to say the son is identical to the father, the father is reborn in the son; van Buitenen's translation is tautological, if not wrong ('The mother is the father's water sack—he is the father who begets the son.' p. 170).

16 This aspect of the Śakuntalā legend has especially been stressed by P. Thieme: 'Die ohne Ritus und im Geheimen, allein durch Vollzug des Liebesaktes zwischen Liebenden geschlossene *gāndharva*-Hochzeit ist rechtsgültig. In der epischen Fassung der Śakuntalā-Sage kommt es dabei auf die Legitimität und volle Erbfähigkeit des der Eheschliessung entsprossenen Sohnes an. Diese ergeben sich aber aus der Tatsache, dass Śakuntalā die rechtmässige Gattin (*bhāryā*) des Duṣyanta und er ihr Gatte (*bhartṛ, pati*) geworden ist. Dass der König sie selbst verstösst, will Śakuntalā ertragen, aber den Sohn darf er nicht verstossen (1.68.71). (*Jungfrauen-gatte*, p. 197; on the *gāndharva* marriage esp. in the Śakuntalā legend op.cit., pp. 195-201).

of the folk religious substratum with which we will deal immediately and which will lead us a great deal further back into the prehistory of Hinduism.

The mythological layer, too, appears to be fully developed in the Śakuntalā legend. Śakuntalā, for instance, insists on being the daughter of the best of all *apsaras*, Menakā; and Menakā, herself, was an offspring of none less than god Brahmā (*brahmayoni* 68.68). This verse was recognized as 'late' already by E. Washburn Hopkins in his *Epic Mythology* (1915, p. 160). In contrast to the original strata which are moulded by the warrior religion of Indraism, it is now Brahmā who appears here as the highest god, in accordance with the divine hierarchy of priestly Brahmaism. By pointing to her partly divine genealogy Śakuntalā wishes to emphasize her high social position. Her father Viśvāmitra is a *kṣatriya* by birth, and her mother a divine nymph, even the most preeminent of all the *apsaras*. Śakuntalā explicitly maintains that her mother Menakā belongs to the Thirty Gods, i.e. to the divine beings, that the Thirty Gods even came only 'after *Menakā' (tridaśāś cānu menakām*), and that she herself, therefore, as far as her social standing is concerned, excelled the king by birth,—the king of course could be proud of his birth in the class of the *kṣatriyas*, but could not boast of celestial forefathers. The difference between them was as big as that between a mustard seed and mount Meru, the axis of the world.—There are other references like that to the epic-hinduistic pantheon, to quote just one more example, where it is said that Śakuntalā's supernatural power was so great that she was able to go to the abodes of the gods Indra, Kubera, Yama and Varuṇa (69.4).

5) The swan woman motif

In all that we have remarked only on such aspects of the Śakuntalā tale as stay inside the frontiers of what is generally called traditional Hinduism. However my contention is that the Śakuntalā legend has preserved traces of an older religious-historical state, residues of which we are able to recognize above all by comparison with other cultures and identify by the form catalogue of the phenomenology and history of religion. Here I enter the

fifth layer where I intend to locate the celestial nymphs of Hindu mythology, the *apsaras*, the swan woman known world wide.[17]

Animal transformation. Indispensable for an adequate understanding of the nature of the swan women, it seems to me, is the motif of animal transformation[18] which again has its context in archaic religious concepts such as animism, totemism, and shamanism. This transformation, the free and effortless transition between animal and human existence, is made possible by the fundamental equality of the nature of man and animal in the archaic notions of 'primitive' people.

Animal marriage.[19] This essential equality is the precondition for the animal marriage, the union between man and animal:

> 'Vielfach wird die *Tierehe* als etwas Selbstverständliches geschildert, denn in einer naturnahen Auffassung betrachtet der Mensch das Tier wie sich selbst als einen Teil der Schöpfung, und menschliche und tierische Welt gehen ineinander über.' ... 'Im Naturvölkermärchen... ist es vielfach ein Tier,

17 The comparison of the *apsaras* with the 'Motiv der Schwanenjungfrau' was already drawn, but not elaborated upon, by Ulrich Schneider (*Einführung in den Hinduismus*, Darmstadt 1989, p. 158). Helmut Birkhan: *Kelten. Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung ihrer Kultur*. Wien [1]1997, p. 676, refers to the similarity of the Indian *apsaras* with the Teutonic Valkyries who also appear as hetairas in the paradise of warriors. Birkhan seems to have borrowed this reference from Schneider's *Einführung in den Hinduismus* which is listed in his bibliography.

18 A general discussion with relevant references is to be found in great detail in: L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen* (first published in 1953): 'Die Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Tier ist ein Hauptthema des primitiven Märchens, besonders der Jägervölker... Nach der ursprünglichen volklichen Auffassung... steht der Mensch in der Natur ohne Grenze den anderen Geschöpfen gegenüber...'. (p. 225). '...im Naturvölkermärchen wechselt man mit Selbstverständlichkeit die Erscheinungsform zwischen menschlicher und tierischer Gestalt.' (p. 232). This is '... eine sehr ursprüngliche Vorstellung, nach der das Tier im wörtlichen Sinne einen menschlichen Kern hat, und wenn es seine Tierhaut ablegt, ist es auch ein Mensch.' (p. 241, 245). 'Die Verwandlungsfähigkeit wird als eine selbstverständliche Wirklichkeit hingenommen. ... Diese Verwandlung ohne Zauber ist weit urtümlicher als die durch Zauber bewirkte.' (p. 235f). It is about an 'Entwicklungsstufe des Menschen, in der man an die Ablegbarkeit der Tierhaut und das dadurch bewirkte Hervortreten des Menschen im Tier glaubt... die Rückkehr zum Menschlichen durch Ablegen der Tiergestalt.' (p. 246). Examples from European folk tales can be found with the help of the index in D. Röth: *Kleines Typenverzeichnis der europäischen Zauber- und Novellenmärchen*, s.v. 'Tierverwandlung' (p. 206).

19 See S. Thompson: *The Folktale*, pp. 353ff., chapter 'animal wives and husbands'.

> das sich in einen Menschen verwandelt, eine Ehe eingeht und sich später wieder zum Tier verwandelt. ... Im Naturvölkermärchen... sind es oft zwar richtige Tiere, die die Partner stellen; allerdings sind diese meist zugleich auch Wesen, die willkürlich zwischen tierischer und menschlicher Existenz wählen können.' (L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen*, pp. 239, 245.)

Swan woman.[20] Swan women—this (minor) point must be made clear from the outset—are not (as they are often called) 'swan maidens' in the sense of virgins, since chastity and virginity are those qualities which are quite the opposite of the nature of a swan woman, as will be discussed very soon.

As mentioned above, the belief in the existence of swan women is connected with the motifs of animal transformation and animal marriage.

> 'Auch das weltverbreitete *Schwanenjungfrau*-Märchen zeigt noch die alte Vorstellung der willkürlichen Ablegbarkeit des Tiergewandes, d.h. noch keine eigentliche Verwandlung im Sinne der späteren Märchenentwicklung: Der Held beraubt eine badende Schwanenjungfrau ihres abgelegten Tierge-

20 Bibliographical references are to be found in L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen*, n. 75, with reference to KHM 193 'Der Trommler' (who finds a piece of white linen on the bank of a lake which turns out to be the garment of an enchanted princess who came there by flying but cannot get away without her plumage), also in S. Thompson: *The Folktale*, 87f.—As stated by Röhrich, we find an abundance of ethnological and folkloristic instances of the swan woman motif, see e.g. Thompson, Stith: *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*. 6 vols. Copenhagen 1955-58, here vol. 2, D-E, p. 34, s.v. *swan maiden*. Also: *Handwörterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens*, s.v. *Schwan*, col. 1404, or s.v. *Dämonisches Tier*.—Examples for the swan woman motif from the Indian oral tradition can be found in S. Thompson/J. Balys: *The Oral Tales of India*, nos. 361.1. and 361.1.1. (p. 103) and K1335 (p. 325).—In Europe the swan woman motif is found already in the Edda (approximately 9th-12th century A.D.), e.g. at the beginning of the 'Wölund song' (*Heldenlieder der Edda. Auswahl*. Übertragen, eingeleitet und erläutert von Felix Genzmer, Reclam Universal-Bibliothek no. 7746, Stuttgart 1982, p. 19; 'In Europa ist der Raub der Federkleider schon im Wielandslied Eingang zu einem anderen Stoff.' D. Röth: *Kleines Typenverzeichnis der europäischen Zauber- und Novellenmärchen*, p. 57). Freyja, too, must originally have been a swan woman which becomes evident when Loki borrows Freyja's plumage in order to fly around in search of Thor's hammer (Thrymskvidha, vs. 3,5,9, in: *Die Götterlieder der älteren Edda. Auswahl*. Nach der Übersetzung von Karl Simrock neu bearbeitet und eingeleitet von Hans Kuhn. (Reclam Universal-Bibliothek no. 781) Stuttgart 1982, p. 73f. Remnants of the swan woman motif reach as far as the character of 'Frau Holle' (KHM 24) who shakes her linen bedding in order to create snow flakes.

wandes. Sie ist nun gezwungen, in menschlicher Gestalt zu bleiben und heiratet den Helden. ... Bezeichnenderweise ist das Märchen von den Schwanenjungfrauen auch einer der wenigen Typen, die ohne sichtbare Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse auf der ganzen Welt, in europäischen, asiatischen und in primitiven Traditionen auftauchen.' (L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen*, p. 247.)

'Die Erzählung von der Ehe eines menschlichen Mannes mit einer Schwanin, für die auch ein anderes Vogelweibchen eintreten kann, Gans, Kranich, Storch, Geier, ist weltweit verbreitet; bei den Burjaten erscheint sie als Mythos vom Ursprung eines mächtigen Schamanengeschlechts.' (H. Findeisen/ H. Gehrts: *Die Schamanen*, [1]1983, p. 268.)

Like all swan women, the *apsaras*, too, have the fundamental ability to change freely between the human and the animal form of existence. They can transform themselves into birds,[21] and are likewise apt to take off their plumage and become ravishingly beautiful young women again. In later times, when their primeval human-animal double nature was no longer understood, the swan women were integrated into the Hindu pantheon as *apsaras*. And also in Buddhist art, e.g. in the paintings in the Central Asian caves in Dūnhuàng 敦煌, the *apsaras* were depicted as winged genii.

The word *apsaras*, by the way, has not been 'convincingly interpreted'[22]. The suggestions concerning the etymology, dependent on word analysis and accentuation, reach from 'flowing in the water' *(ap-saras)*, or 'shameless' *(a-psaras)*, or 'shapeless' (*a-psàras*), to 'pleasant', 'pleasure-loving' (with intensifying prefix *a*). From the viewpoint of religious typology, swan women must be differentiated, despite their undoubted connection with water, from the mermaid (or water-nymph, German 'Nixe'); the mermaids belong to the water sprite (German 'Wassermann'). The Indian *apsaras*, though, appear to have inherited certain traits and characteristics from both, from swan women as well as female water sprites. I am con-

21 'Sie [*Apsaras*] können sich in Wasservögel verwandeln.' Gonda, Jan: *Die Religionen Indiens, I: Veda und älterer Hinduismus* (Die Religionen der Menschheit, Bd. 11), [2]1978, p. 100.

22 'Nicht überzeugend gedeutet', according to M. Mayrhofer: *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen*, Heidelberg 1992-, s.v. *apsaràs*; see also Dandekar: *Vedic Bibliography*, II, Poona 1961, p. 532f., no. 115, p. 552, no. 274).

cerned here exclusively with the aspects of the *apsaras* as the mythological heir of the swan woman.

In this connection, the Śakuntalā legend can be assigned to a certain type of the swan woman myth in which the following elements appear regularly:[23]

a) One or more birds settle at a stretch of water in the wilderness.
b) They take off their plumage and become young women of entrancing beauty.
c) These beauties hold an irresistible attraction for a human protagonist who feels bewitched by them (and is driven out of his mind).
d) The result is a matrimonial union between the swan woman and a human protagonist; the motif of the robbery of the plumage may, but must not, precede.[24]

23 Prof. Dr.Dr. Otto Böcher, Mainz, kindly drew my attention to a charming example of the swan woman in German folklore appearing in the folktale 'Der geraubte Schleier', see J.K.A. Musäus [1735-1787]: *Volksmärchen der Deutschen*, pp. 329-380. Not only does it contain all (except no. e) of the elements of our special type of the swan woman myth, it also makes use of the magic ring motif. This type of swan woman myth as found in the Śakuntalā legend has no exact analogue in A. Aarne/S. Thompson: *The Types of the Folktale*, but some of its elements can at least be found under the numbers 313, 400*, 465, 465A, and esp. no. 400 where the following motifs are mentioned: 'D361.1. Swan Maiden. A swan transforms herself at will into a maiden. She resumes her swan form by putting on her swan coat. K1335. Seduction (or wooing) by stealing clothes of bathing girl (swan maiden). D721.2. Disenchantment by hiding skin (covering). When the enchanted person has temporarily removed the covering, it is stolen and the victim remains disenchanted until it is found. B652.1. Marriage to swan maiden. (p. 129). Interestingly, the motif of 'magic ring causes woman to come to man' (cf. Kālidāsa's Śakuntalā) is mentioned here again. Cf. as well D. Röth: *Kleines Typenverzeichnis der europäischen Zauber- und Novellenmärchen*, no. 400C and 465.

24 A widespread feature of the swan woman narratives is to be found in the episode that a human man robs the swan woman's plumage, thus robbing her of her free will, cf. e.g. in the *Thousand and One Nights* the tale of Hasan of Basra (for the following Arabistic references I am grateful to PD Dr. Franz-Christoph Muth, Mainz), nights 789f. (trsl. Littmann, vol. 5, pp. 356ff.), for which Indian origins are generally assumed and which, on the other hand, seems to have influenced the above-mentioned German tale by Musäus (cf. Benfey: Pancatantra, I, p. 263; *Enzyklopädie des Islam*, vol. I, [1]1913, p. 267a; L. Alsdorf: *Zwei neue Belege zur 'indischen Herkunft' von 1001 Nacht*, in: ZDMG 89, 1935, pp. 279, 287, n.1; N. Elisséeff: *Thèmes et motifs des Mille et Une Nuits. Essai de classification*, Beyrouth 1949, p. 46). 'Im Nibelungenlied erzwingt Hagen von drei Meerfrauen (diu wilden merewip), die er in einem Quell badend trifft, durch Wegnahme ihrer Kleider eine Weissagung... über den Aus-

e) By a child from this primeval union the swan woman becomes a progenitrix.
f) The swan woman is indifferent towards the children begotten with the human man.
g) Therefore she leaves the human world and returns to the wilderness where she once came from.
h) To this may be added the unhappy abandoned man's quest for his vanished wife.

A tale[25] of the Siberian people of the Buryats recorded by Findeisen, a researcher on shamanism, may serve here as a non-Indic example of this type of the swan woman myth.

a) Five swans settle, as it is customary for migratory birds, at a lake near a Buryat settlement.

gang der Fahrt zu den Hunnen.' (HDA, s.v. *Wassergeister*, col. 178).—But the transformation of swans into young women also appears without the motif of the robbery of garments. Children, too, become swans: 'Etwas von dem ursprünglichen Verwandlungsgedanken hat sich offenbar auch in dem Grimmschen Märchen von den sechs Schwänen erhalten, wo die Hexenkönigin ihren Stiefkindern Hemden überwirft, worauf die Knaben als Schwäne davonfliegen. Ihre Schwanenhaut können sie nur eine Viertelstunde lang jeden Abend ablegen und haben dann menschliche Gestalt. Gebrochen wird der Zauber durch (Menschen)hemden, die die Schwester der Verwandelten ihren Schwanenbrüdern überwirft. (KHM 49) Hier tritt noch deutlich die alte Vorstellung von der Verwandlungsgestalt als einer Hülle hervor. Die Entwandlung ist dabei ein genaues Widerspiel der Verwandlung.' (L. Röhrich: *Mensch und Tier im Märchen*, p. 248.)—There is a world-wide belief that not only storks ('Der Storch hat sie ins Bein gebissen!' = 'She is expecting a little stranger!'), but also swans have something to do with children and fertility. E.g. in Pommern and on the island of Rügen there is a belief that it is the swan who brings the children (HDA, s.v. Schwan, col. 1404).

25 Its title is: *Die Schwanfrau als Stammutter der burjatischen Schamanen*, in: H. Findeisen/ H. Gehrts: *Die Schamanen*, [1]1983, pp. 170-173; first published in Findeisen, Hans: *Mensch und Tier als Liebespartner in der volksliterarischen Überlieferung Nordeurasiens und in der amerikanischen Arktis, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schwanfrauerzählung und ihrer Genese*. In: Abhandlungen und Aufsätze aus dem Institut für Menschen- und Menschheitskunde, no. 35, Augsburg 1956, pp. 37-64. Comparable to this is, among others, the Samoyed fairy tale of the 'Seven maidens' ('Sieben Mädchen'), in: Kunike, Hugo: *Märchen aus Sibirien*. Jena [1]1940, pp. 29-34. Further examples for water birds in Siberian shamanism are to be found in: Diószegi, V. / Hoppál, M. (eds.): *Shamanism in Siberia*. Budapest 1978, 'subject index' s.v. *birds*.

b) A young Buryat lad observes how these swans turn out to be five young women who take off their clothes in order to take a bath in the lake.
c) The young lad feels compelled to rob one of these girls of her plumage.
d) Having taken the swan plumage, he hides himself. The swan women return from their bath, the other four find their plumages and get dressed, thus becoming swans again who are able to fly away. The robbed girl however, helpless without her plumage, is forced to stay with the humans. The swan woman agrees to a matrimonial union with the Buryat lad.
e) She gives birth to five sons and five daughters, thus becoming the progenitrix of all shamans. 'And her children became shamans. Only then did shamans appear. Shamanism begins with them.'
f) Ten years later the swan woman lures her husband into drinking alcohol. Drunk, he gives her the swan plumage back. She puts it on and immediately becomes a swan again. When she is about to fly away through the smoke hole of the yurta, one of her daughters manages to briefly touch her legs with her mud-covered hands,—that is why swans do not have red, but muddy-yellow legs instead.
g) But despite this imploring gesture of her daughter the swan woman flies away for good.

In the Śakuntalā legend we rediscover the same above-mentioned elements[26] which are characteristic of the belief in swan women. They appear even twice, in the preceding episode concerning Śakuntalā's mother Menakā, as well as with regard to Śakuntalā herself. First to the mother, Menakā:

a) She wears a plumage which she can take off in order to assume human form. Her bird nature becomes manifest when Menakā 'departs together with the wind', which has to be understood in the sense that the

26 The same features appear unadulteratedly preserved, even in an unspoilt archaic form, in the Ṛgvedic hymn about Purūravas and the *apsaras* Urvaśī (ṚV 10.95). 'Die Vorstellung von Schwan- bzw. Vogeljungfrauen gilt weltweit, als ältester schriftlicher Beleg wird der altindische Mythos von Purūravas und Urvaśī angesehen.' D. Röth: *Kleines Typenverzeichnis der europäischen Zauber- und Novellenmärchen*, p. 57.

wind carries her, the swan woman, in her bird's shape through the air.[27]

b) Having arrived at the hermitage of the seer Viśvāmitra, Menakā greets the celibate whom she has been ordered to distract from his observances, and in front of him in his exercise of chastity she begins her dance of seduction (*prākrīḍat* 66.3), while 'the wind carried away her garment which was [radiant white] like the moon.'[28] And: 'Embracing her garment, she hurriedly stepped on the ground.'[29] This scene can only mean that Menakā takes off, together with her 'garment', i.e. the white swan plumage, her shape of a bird in which she has appeared, and transforms herself into a beautiful young woman.

c) We read that Viśvāmitra 'at that time saw her, undressed, in the indescribable beauty of her youth'[30]. The seer (who normally is dreaded by the gods because of his strict asceticism) forgets his observances, bewitched by the swan woman's charm.

d) Gripped by sexual desire, he actually breaks his vow of chastity, and they come together in mutual consent. Their desire endures 'for a rather long time, [which seemed to them only] like one day'[31]. 'Thus [the ascetic] begot in Menakā the [child] Śakuntalā, on the picturesque plateau of the Himālayas on [the bank of] the river Mālinī.'[32]

e) Menakā gives birth to Śakuntalā, thus becoming the progenitrix of the Bhāratas.

f) Like all swan women, she is indifferent to the child begotten with a human. She abandons the newborn child in the wilderness on the bank of the Mālinī river.

g) Thereupon she hurries back into the celestial world.

And the same events reoccur in a very similar way with regard to her daughter Śakuntalā, the half-swan woman:

27 Urvaśī too remarks about herself: 'I am difficult to seize, like the wind.' (*durāpaná váta ivāhám asmi*, ṚV10.95.2).

28 *apovāha ca vāso 'syā mārutaḥ śaśisaṃnibham*, 66.3cd.

29 *sāgacchat tvaritā bhūmiṃ vāsas tad abhiliṅgatī* (seems to be the lectio difficilior as opposed to vv.ll. *abhilipsatī, avalambatī, abhilāṣitī*), 66.4ab.

30 *anirdeśyavayorūpām apaśyad vivṛtāṃ tadā*, 66.6ab.

31 *suciraṃ kālaṃ... yathaikadivasaṃ tathā*, 66.7.

32 *prasthe himavato ramye mālinīm abhito nadīm*, 66.8cd.

a) Śakuntalā, the swan woman's daughter, has a bird's nature herself. Of course we have to cite her name in this connection first of all: the Mhbh reports that in order to deter the predators of the wilderness from devouring the newborn child, birds surround the baby protectively. Kaṇva finds it thus surrounded by birds when he descends to the riverbank to do his oblations, and he adopts her as his daughter. Kaṇva names the child Śakuntalā, i.e. 'Little Bird', 'because it had been protected by birds (*śakunta*) in the deserted jungle'[33].
Later on Śakuntalā remarks that the king walked on the ground, but she herself—like her mother—moved in the air (*antarikṣe carāmy aham*/ 69.3b).

b) Because Śakuntalā grows up among humans, she drops her bird nature and appears as an exceptionally beautiful girl.

c) In the Śakuntalā legend the conflict between town and forest, between civilization and wilderness, between the world of man and the world of animal plays an important role which is emphasized in the text of the Mhbh at several places. This conflict is elaborated by the anonymous poet already at the very beginning of our episode. King Duṣyanta leaves a couple of women in his capital who wave goodbye to him from the merlons of his palace (*prāsādavaraśṛṅgasthāḥ... striyas*, 63.5) and who obviously are meant to be the noble ladies and legal wives of the royal harem. The swan women, on the other hand, belong to the forest. The king rides out with a large entourage, from his capital Hastināpura (*gajasāhvaya* 68.12) into the forest (*vana* 63.1,9), and this destination is repeatedly accentuated: in a far extending (*bahuyojanam āyatam*) jungle (again *vana*, 63.12,14, *mahāraṇyaṃ,* 63.19),[34] a deserted wilderness without water or population (*nirjalaṃ nirmanuṣyaṃ ca*, 63.13c), the king indulges in hunting. The wilderness—as opposed to the civilization of the royal capital—is characterized, among other things, by mentioning that king Duṣyanta boldly proceeds as far as a region where there are 'men [as savage] as

33 *nirjane ca vane yasmāc chakuntaiḥ parirakṣitā*, 66.14ab.

34 As to the difference between *vana* '(harmless) forest' and *araṇya* '(alien) wilderness, desert' see Joachim Friedrich Sprockhoff: *Āraṇyaka und Vānaprastha in der vedischen Literatur. Neue Erwägungen zu einer alten Legende und ihren Problemen*. In: WZKS 25, 1981, pp. 19-90; 28, 1984, pp. 5-43; 35, 1991, pp. 5-46; esp. in the epos loc.cit, 1984, p. 36. At the relevant places of the Śakuntalā episode both terms, complemented by *kānana* and *īriṇa*, are apparently used synonymously.

tigers' (*naravyāghra*) who devour the game raw the king hounded to exhaustion; other 'roamers in the forest' (*vanecarāḥ*) at least roast their beef first (63.22f). Pursuing the game Duṣyanta penetrates another forest, this time on his own (*eka eva*, 64.2a), without his retinue. Having reached the end of this forest he comes across a huge wasteland (*mahad īriṇam*, 64.2). It is in that kind of wilderness situated so far away from urban civilization that swan women live, so it is not at all improbable for the king to chance upon one of their kind.

Because *apsaras* are renowned for their irresistible, even magical skills of seduction, one is not astound to read that the wood or rather the grove (*kānana* 64.6) in which the king now finds himself has an immediate eroticizing effect upon the intruder: the king becomes aware of the lianas being swarmed around by bumble-bees (*ṣaṭpadāghūr-ṇitalataṃ* 64.5), a common metaphor for lovers (the bee) wooing beautiful women (liana), there is no plant in this forest which is not crawling with bees (*ṣaṭpadair vāpy anākīrṇas*, 64.6). Deeper and deeper the king penetrates into this forest of lust. It seems to him as if the wind which is fragrant with pollen approaches the trees out of sheer desire (*riraṃsayā*)[35]. Duṣyanta notices that this forest is situated along a river bank (*nadīkacchodbhavaṃ,* 64.14), along the Mālinī (64.18a). This river is related with begetting and fertility in the text itself when it is said: 'And he saw a river with merit [giving] waters which clung to the hermitage; it (the river, *nadī*, which is fem. in Sanskrit) was lying there spread out like a mother (jananī, lit. generatrix) bearing all life (or: all creatures).'[36] And on the banks of this river the king sees *cakravāka* birds (a cliché metaphor for lover couples, 64.21). At last he reaches the hermitage which appeals to him not least because of the numerous game (*vyālamṛga*) to be met therein. I take the motif of hunting and the passion for hunting here as a metaphor for the king's wooing,—in the same way as in the introductory scene of Kālidāsa's drama the deer hunted by the king must be understood as a metaphor for Śakuntalā. When the king meets Śakuntalā then for the first time, seeing her exceptional beauty, her hips, her lovely smile and that she has reached a marriageable age, he immedi-

35 The commentator Nīlakaṇṭha explains this by *ramayitum icchayā*.

36 *nadīm āśramasaṃśliṣṭāṃ puṇyatoyāṃ dadarśa saḥ/ sarvaprāṇabhṛtāṃ tatra jananīm iva viṣṭhitām//* 64.20.

ately falls in love with her. In fact he looses his mind, as if a spell was cast over him. Duṣyanta says about himself that her sight had robbed him of his mind.[37]

d) What follows eventually is the union of the king and Śakuntalā, and later Hindu tradition tried, as we have seen above, its best to evaluate this union not as just one of the king's love adventures but rather to sanction it as a legal marriage.

e) By giving birth to the future universal monarch Bharata the swan woman Śakuntalā becomes progenitrix.

f) Just like once her own mother, Śakuntalā too, in accordance with her swan woman nature, is prepared to give up the child conceived in her of the king. She herself, upon being denied by the king, would rather return to the wilderness, but the king must not disown his flesh and blood (68.17).

g) and h). Admittedly not in the Mhbh version, but remarkably in Kālidāsa's play the points g) and f) of the swan woman myth have their striking parallel. There Śakuntalā, denied by the king, takes refuge in the heavenly world of her mother Menakā. And it is just there where the king finds her again thus completing his quest which he had started longing for his son.

Before concluding this exposition of Śakuntalā's swan woman nature we have to highlight certain features of her son Bharata (as depicted again in the Mhbh version). Bharata seems to have inherited certain traits from his mother which make him act rather like a child of the wilderness than like a scion of civilized noble court culture. 'After the completion of three years'[38], a non-human duration of pregnancy, Śakuntalā is delivered of this son. He is described as possessing white pointed teeth[39], an enormous head (*mahāmūrdhan*), great bodily strength, so great that already at the age of six years he is stronger than the predators of the jungle, tigers, lions, boars, elephants, buffaloes, which he playfully ties to the trees of the hermitage.

37 *darśanād eva hi śubhe tvayā me 'pahṛtaṃ manaḥ* 65.13ab. Compare the madness, *unmatta*, of Purūravas following his contact with an *apsaras* (Hoffmann: *Injunktiv*, p. 198f.), and the amnesia of Kālidāsa's Duṣyanta. There is, by the way, a belief that fever is caused by female well-ghosts ('wird Fieber auch durch weibliche Brunnengeister erzeugt', HDA, s.v. Wassergeister, col. 175).

38 *triṣu varṣeṣu pūrṇeṣu*, 68.2.

39 *dantaiḥ śuklaiḥ śikharibhiḥ*, 68.4a.

That is why the hermits call him Sarvadamana, 'all-tamer', 'tamer of everything'. All that means that the young lad resembles a wild predator in his outlook and behaviour. The boy grows up remarkably fast (*sa tatrāśu vyavardhata*) which again points at his non-human, supernatural origins. As soon as he has reached the age of six years, his foster-father Kaṇva, noticing his strength (*bala*), considers him old enough for succession to the throne (*yauvarājya*, 68.9,15).

According to our textcritical assessment the child's following features belong to the epic-mythological layer, when the extraordinary boy is said to possess infinite capacity of shining (*ojas*), to radiate like a burning fire (*dīptānalasamadyuti*), to glow (this can be one of the meanings of *śrīmat*) like the morning sun (*taruṇādityavarcas*, 68.14); it is explicitly stated that the boy resembled (or: shone like, *-ābha*) a celestial baby (*devagarbha* and *amaragarbha*, 68.13), that he was like a god (*suropama*, 68.14b). In connection with the fiery heavenly nature of Śakuntalā's son one has to recall that the gandharvas, the male companions of the *apsaras*, live in the heaven of fire.[40] Thus Sarvadamana, the future Bharata, being the son of a half *apsaras*, undoubtedly shows features also of a gandharva on the epic-mythological layer of the Mhbh version.

6) The socio-historical nucleus

I have arrived at the sixth stratum, the nucleus of our text. In order to interpret the Śakuntalā legend properly we have to take into account some fundamental peculiarities of the source situation of Old Indian literature. The Mhbh, which is, as mentioned in the introduction, our most ancient source for the Śakuntalā subject matter, belongs to the literature of the Indo-āryan or Vedic social stratum of conquerors who invaded Northern

40 Though according to other examples they also have their abode in the water. Concerning this, and also their lustfulness and their relation to marriage and pregnancy cf. Gonda, Jan: *Die Religionen Indiens, I: Veda und älterer Hinduismus* (Die Religionen der Menschheit, Bd. 11), 2. überarb. und erg. Aufl., Stuttgart... 1978, p. 101. 'Der himmlische Gandharva... durchmisst den Raum (ṚV10, 139, 5), (gleich der Sonne) zum Himmel fliegend (10, 123,6); gewöhnlich erscheint er mit dem Wasser verbunden... auch vogelgestaltig vorgestellt', quoted from Moeller, Volker: *Die Mythologie der vedischen Religion und des Hinduismus*. In: *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H.W. Haussig, I. Abteilung: Die alten Kulturvölker, 8. Lieferung. Klett: Stuttgart [1974-82, preface 1966], s.v. gandharva (p. 73).

India from the middle of the second millennium B.C. on. In its more ancient layers, the heroic epic Mhbh is based on the Vedic warrior religion, but it was handed down almost exclusively by the class of priests, the brahmins. During this process of tradition which lasted many centuries the text of the Mhbh was again and again reworked and extended according to brahmanical conceptions. During this process all information about the original inhabitants of India, about the autochthonous or pre-āryan population, were systematically suppressed or, worse, falsified. It is due to this extremely efficient *damnatio memoriae brahmanica*, this 'brahmanical eradication of memory', that our knowledge of the pre- āryan aborigines or *ādivāsins* of India is deplorably scarce so that we are compelled to arduously collect, and sometimes in fact reconstruct, the scant and sporadic traces which are conserved in the invaders' literature. The Śakuntalā legend is a prime example for this source situation. It may serve as a paradigm for the whole of the Old Indian literary tradition.

Now my working hypothesis (which if we consider the source situation is, I think, feasible) is that at the bottom of the Śakuntalā legend we find traces of the real social conditions of Vedic times. This hypothesis is quite in accordance with the literary scientific definition of the typological genre 'saga' (German 'Sage') and which is relevant to the Śakuntalā 'saga' too. For sagas are characterized by their historical or rather semi-historical approach, their relation to reality. They interpret 'events of regional or local history inexplicable on the basis of normal experience by using traditional magic-mythic explanation patterns... Thus sagas reflect the respective state of folk belief and therefore provide religio-historical and socio-historical evidence' (*Metzler Literatur Lexikon*, pp. 405f).[41]

41 There does not seem to exist an equivalent literary scientific genre designation in English. What is called 'Sage' in German, is usually translated by myth or legend into English ('unauthenticated narrative, folk-embroidered from historical material, sometimes popularly deemed historical', J.T. Shipley: *Dictionary of World Literary Terms*, p. 249, s.v. 'legend'). Both of these terms, however, must be differentiated from the 'Sage'. English saga, on the other hand, usually means either the particular Nordic saga or a long novel-like description of a family history. Therefore I translate by 'legend' or, more generally, by 'narrative' what I term 'Sage' in the German version of this lecture. Be this as it may, according to the *Metzler Literatur Lexikon*, p. 405f, 'Sagen' are: '...volkstümliche, knappe Erzählungen, die bestimmte Örtlichkeiten, Personen, Ereignisse, ...Erscheinungen usw. meist mit magischen, numinosen oder mythischen Elementen verknüpfen, gleichwohl aber Anspruch auf Glaubwürdigkeit erheben... Sagen schöpfen damit aus demselben Stoffbereich (Hexen, Zwerge, Riesen

Part of these reminiscences of actual social conditions was that women belonging to the autochthonous population which had been forced back by the Indo-āryan invaders into remote retreats in the wilderness or mountains occasionally entered into relationships, marital or other, with men from the immigrated upper class. To the women of the immigrants these exotic mistresses who pinched their husbands must have appeared as nymphomaniac seductresses, or to use the Indian term: as veritable *apsaras*.

This hypothesis is corroborated first of all by the fact that Duṣyanta who is described as the king of the Indo-āryan upper class chances upon Śakuntalā in the wilderness, in the great forest (*mahad vanam*, 64.3, as discussed above). The meeting place, Kaṇva's hermitage in the Himālayas, is several hundred miles away from the king's capital Hastināpura which was situated in the region of present day Delhi, and even today some valleys of the Himālayas are the retreat areas of the Indian ādivāsins, the original inhabitants.

The women of the autochthonous clans, this is my suggestion, live on in Old Indian mythology as *apsaras*,—a fact that connects them with the

usw.) und Motivschatz (Erlösungsmotiv u.a.) wie das Märchen, sind auch wie dieses anonym und mündlich tradiert; unterscheiden sich aber von ihm durch genaue Lokalisierung und Datierung, d.h. durch höheren Realitätsanspruch (wobei die Fixierung des Übernatürlichen an real Vertrautes als Wahrheitsbeweis gilt), ferner durch die strenge Scheidung von numinos- jenseitiger und diesseitiger Welt. Ansätze zur Sagenentstehung werden ... gesehen in ... [u.a.] 'objektivem Geschehen' (Ereignisse der Regional- oder Lokalgeschichte...), die mit normaler Realitätserfahrung nicht erklärbar sind, ferner in 'gegenständlicher Realität' (d.h. in seltsamen Namen..., sog. 'Objektivationen'). Diese singulären Geschehnisse oder Gegebenheiten werden mit traditionell vorgegebenen zaubrisch-mythischen Erklärungsmustern gedeutet und damit in allgemeinere Sinnzusammenhänge eingegliedert und durch den narrativen Prozess überformt, erweitert, stilisiert, vom Memorat zum *Fabulat*, der Sage, verfestigt. Sagen spiegeln somit den jeweiligen Stand volkstümlicher Glaubensvorstellungen wider, besitzen daher auch religions- und sozialgeschichtlichen Aussagewert... Die neuere Sagenforschung ... interpretiert die sehr vielfältigen und heterogenen Sagenstoffe, Sagengestalten und -motive...'. (*Metzler Literatur Lexikon*, S. 405f.)—From the point of view of genre typology, the saga is clearly different from the legend. A legend is the 'description of a holy, exemplary life or of some of its exemplary events' ('Darstellung einer heiligmässigen, vorbildhaften Lebensgeschichte oder einzelner exemplarischer Geschehnisse daraus', Metzler, p. 261), as handed down e.g. in the Sāvitrī episode of the Mhbh. I have dealt with this Sāvitrī episode in my inaugural 'habilitation' lecture at the University of Cologne, see Meisig, K.: *Sāvitrī or: Why Man is Superior to the Gods. On the Interpretation of a Legend from the Mhbh.* In: Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte, Ugarit-Verlag, Münster, vol. 8, 1994, pp. 65-81.

swan women. Accordingly Śakuntalā, the half *apsaras*, may be regarded as the child of the union of the indigenous Menakā with a man of the Indo-āryan invaders, the sage Viśvāmitra.[42]

Our initial question why the king refuses to accept Śakuntalā's son as his own can in this socio-historical perspective now be answered: Śakuntalā, the (black-eyed, *asitekṣaṇā*, 65.4) autochthonous, does not have by birth the required class affiliation and is therefore not acceptable to the king's court—that is what Duṣyanta had not considered (*avicārayan*, 67.18b) in his ecstasy of passion! He, the king, the highest representative of upper class nobility—and Old Indian society was status conscious in a way that we today would unhesitatingly call racist—had not only got involved with a strange girl from the forest, a savage, an exotic from the Himālayas, in his lechery he had also promised her son the succession to the throne.

Allusions to Śakuntalā's low cast affiliation are scattered all over the text of the legend, albeit in screeching dissonance to the already mentioned later attempts at rehabilitation by stressing her celestial lineage from an *apsaras*. The girl's descend is not discussed openly and freely, she had been informed about it only 'by hearsay'[43] herself; she once overheard a conversation between her foster-father Kaṇva and a visitor (a sage himself who inquired about it in the same way as the king does now).

As Śakuntalā's conception took place without witnesses and Kaṇva does not reveal the source of his knowledge, one wonders where Kaṇva got his information from. Was he, after all, himself her father (!), and is he now attributing the fatherhood to Viśvāmitra who has a bad reputation anyway? That this supposition could be more than pure guesswork is substantiated by a tradition preserved in the Kathāsaritsāgara according to which Kaṇva is said to have had a daughter with the *apsaras* Menakā.[44] Has

42 Like Urvaśī who was raped by Purūravas.

43 *kila*, 65.20; 'thus I have reported to you, oh king, what I have heard how it happened', *iti te kathitaṃ rājan yathāvṛttaṃ śrutaṃ mayā*, 66.17cd.

44 Somadeva: *Kathāsaritsāgara*, ed. Jagadīśalāla Śāstrī, Dillī [1]1970, śaśāṅkavatī = 12th Laṃbaka, Taraṅga 27, vs. 33 (p. 454 = trsl. Tawney, vol. 7, chap. 94, p. 89). It is part of the story of King Candrāvaloka who, like king Duṣyanta, after being separated from his hunting party comes to a lake near the hermitage of sage Kaṇva, where he meets and eventually marries the holy man's daughter, the half *apsaras* Indīvaraprabhā who is said to be Kaṇva's and Menakā's daughter: *eṣā maharṣeḥ kaṇvasya duhitā vardhitāśrame/ menakāsaṃbhavā kanyā nāmnā cendīvaraprabhā //*.– Cf. V. Mani: *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia*, 1975, p. 385, col. 2: 'Kaṇva had a daughter named Indīvaraprabhā by Menakā.' See also loc. cit., p. 176, s.v. Candrāvaloka. In the

the detailed enumeration of Viśvāmitra's heroic or rather evil deeds (65.30-42, see above stratum 1) perhaps been introduced in this connection?

Śakuntalā's descend on her father's side from a kṣatriya clan is not beyond all doubt. Legend has it that her physical father Viśvāmitra abandoned the kṣatriyas for the brahmins. Of course this action has consequences for his grandson's right of inheritance because it means a stain on Śakuntalā's birth which the king indeed holds against her during the concluding scene at his court.

This perhaps is the reason why Śakuntalā urges the king to consider Kaṇva, her foster-father, as her real father. Because Kaṇva had given her the name Śakuntalā he must be considered as her father, and actually she herself considers him as such. According to the *Dharmaśāstras* the physical father (*śarīrakṛt*), the rescuer (*prāṇadātā*) and the provider (*yasya cānnāni bhuñjate*), in descending order, may be regarded as father (66.13). This means that Śakuntalā has three fathers: Viśvāmitra as physical father, the birds (=autochthonous people) as rescuers and Kaṇva in double respect, as a rescuer and bread-winner. Śakuntalā concludes her report explicitly with a request to the king to regard her as Kaṇva's daughter (66.16, and 66.1-17). But Kaṇva's paternity does not solve all the problems either. In the Agnipurāṇa there is a tradition according to which Kaṇva (usually considered a brahmin) stems from a kṣatriya clan.[45] Thus we find heterogeneous traditions concerning Śakuntalā's lineage. Even on her father's side her descend does not seem to be all too respectable.

When Kaṇva returns to his hermitage he finds Śakuntalā ashamed. The reader does not learn the cause of her shame, but a possible reason is that she, an *ādivāsinī*, has got involved with a member of the immigrant class and that she cannot know yet whether she will actually give birth to a son. Kaṇva, however, is already informed about the future events because of his 'heavenly knowledge' (*divyajñāno*, 67.24b) and 'heavenly eye' (*divyena cakṣuṣā*, 67.24d), and he shows himself pleased (*prītaḥ*) with what has happened. After all, he is about to get none inferior than the king of the Vedic upper class as his son-in-law, despite his (foster-?) daughter's handicap of having an indigenous mother.

text there is no hint at all that Indīvaraprabhā might possibly be only the *ṛṣi*'s foster-child.

45 Cf. V. Mani: *Purāṇic Encyclopaedia*, 1975, S. 398, Sp. 2.

The reservations concerning Śakuntalā's origin are however expressed very clearly during the central scene at the royal court, when Śakuntalā urges the king to accept her son as heir to the throne. The king's reaction is outrageous: 'Although he remembers' (*smarann api* 68.18)—which is expressly stated, so the king's moral guilt is beyond doubt—the king denies any acquaintance with Śakuntalā and hence refuses to recognise paternity. Moreover he indulges in abuses and insults: women, in his opinion, are not only notorious liars anyway (*asatyavacanā nāryaḥ*, 68.72c), Menakā, Śakuntalā's mother, was also a whore (*bandhakī,* 68.73) who had mercilessly thrown away her newborn child like a withered garland (*nirmālyā*, 68.73). Śakuntalā's father, a kṣatriya by birth, ignominiously denied his noble birth, wished to become a brahmin and was a lecher (*kāmaparāyaṇa*, 68.74), presumably because he, in neglect of his vow of chastity, had got involved with an *apsaras* which means, according to our interpretation, with an indigenous woman. Though if, on the other hand, Śakuntalā claimed descend from the best of all *apsaras* and the best of all *maharṣis* ('great sages'), she appeared to him like a tart (*puṃścalī*, 68.75); she, the 'miserable (*kṛpaṇā*) evil ascetic' (*duṣṭatāpasī*), should get lost.[46] The king's insults culminate in sentences which in the original Sanskrit sound not only colloquial but vulgar: 'The womb [you came from] is quite low. You seem like a tart to me because you were born by chance by Menakā, out of lust and passion.'[47] This clearly means that the descend from an *apsaras* is considered lowcast.

Śakuntalā replies to these insults, among other things, with pride by mentioning her celestial lineage as the daughter of an *apsaras*. This positive assessment of the status of an *apsaras* must be ascribed however only to the younger epic-mythological text level (as we have seen above), it is a justification and appreciation only after the admission of the *apsaras* to the Hindu pantheon. We therefore cannot accept Śakuntalā's self-importance as the original reply. It was interpolated only later by pious Hindus.

We rather assign to the nucleus of the original text that reply which we find as the conclusion and effective climax of Śakuntalā's monologue, a

46 *menakāpsarasāṃ śreṣṭhā maharṣīṇāṃ ca te pitā / tayor apatyaṃ kasmāt tvaṃ puṃścalīvābhidhāsyasi // aśraddheyam idaṃ vākyaṃ kathayantī na lajjase / viśeṣato mat sakāśe duṣṭatāpasi gamyatām // kva maharṣiḥ sadaivograḥ sāpsarā kva ca menakā / kva ca tvam evaṃ kṛpaṇā tāpasīveṣadhāriṇī //* 68.75-77.

47 *sunikṛṣṭā ca yonis te puṃścalī pratibhāsi me/ yad ṛcchayā kāmarāgāj jātā menakayā hy asi//* 68.79.

threat which confers to our (semi-historical!) 'saga' an enormously political dimension. For Śakuntalā claims that her son, even without the king's acceptance, would become a world ruler and universal king: 'Even without you, oh Duṣyanta, my son will rule this earth which is crowned by the king of mountains (the Himālayas) up to her four corners.'[48]

This argument of plain power politics seems to me much more convincing and persuasive than the rather forced ending by which—a twist in the tail—the voice from heaven was introduced. For if we take the wording of our text in this point seriously and grant it a certain degree of historicity, we see that Duṣyanta, the leader of the Indo-āryan invaders, cannot but be concerned about Śakuntalā's threat. Śakuntalā's prognostication amounts to a military conflict, a war against the indigenous population for supremacy. And Śakuntalā's self-assured remark that her son would become a ruler of the world, be it with or without his father's acceptance, proves that we have to revise and maybe qualify our well-loved conception of the ostensible superiority of the Vedic invaders. Śakuntalā at least does not seem to see any military superiority of the Vedic immigrants. Otherwise the king would of course not have to yield to her. Duṣyanta is forced to make his decision whether he wishes to have a share of his son's power as the future ruler of the world, or if he prefers to sink into oblivion as the defeated opponent. That is why he must give in and legalize the half-breed son who has sprung from the union with an indigenous woman.

Compared to this the belated blessings by the voice from heaven (on the mythic-epic layer) and the legalization as *gāndharva* marriage (following the tendency of Hindu canon law) appear hackneyed, unimaginative, implausible. No, it is only the socio-historical interpretation which does justice to the originality and impact of the Śakuntalā legend with its eminently political content. In its nucleus it realistically and representatively reflects the struggle for political power in ancient India between the Indo-āryan invaders and the autochthonous population. According to this interpretation Śakuntalā actually emerges as the progenitrix of all Indians, not only of the Vedic upper class, but also of the original peoples who claim their rights up to the present day.

48 *ṛte 'pi tvayi duṣyanta śailarājāvataṃsakām / caturantām imām urvīṃ putro me pālayiṣyati* // 69.27.

A historical parallel

The subject matter of the Śakuntalā narrative has a striking parallel in ancient European/-North-African history: I mean Cleopatra[49] and her relationship to Caesar which produced their mutual son Ptolemy XV Caesar. In certain respects one might perhaps call Śakuntalā the Indian Cleopatra. In Egyptian eyes Caesar, as compared with Duṣyanta, was nothing but the ruler of the invaders, and for the Romans Cleopatra was the queen of the autochthonous population. Their son Ptolemy XV was and remained Caesar's only physical son, and in this point he might be compared with Bharata.

There is a long series of remarkable correspondences on both sides. To mention only a few: Śakuntalā was a celestial nymph;—Cleopatra as the Egyptian ruler had a godlike position, too. Similar to Śakuntalā she followed political aims with her love affair: in October of the year 45, when Cleopatra came to Rome accompanied by the little Ptolemy XV, Caesar accepted the child as his physical son, 'what however had no consequences according to Roman law because according to the law of inheritance only children from a legitimate marriage could be taken into consideration'[50]. Nevertheless Caesar's son remained a danger for the Roman Empire because of Cleopatra's endeavours at power politics. How this danger was banned is known from history: the murder on the 15th March 44 B.C. in the Roman senate prevented not only Caesar's autocracy.[51] A few days after the bloody deed Cleopatra fled from Rome to Alexandria together with Caesar's physical son. And after Cleopatra's suicide on the 10th August 30 Octavian, the future Augustus, ordered the seventeen year old Ptolemy Caesar, the incumbent Egyptian king, to be brought from the Red Sea back 'again to Alexandria and to be murdered immediately. Now he had the certainty of being Caesar's only son[52],' if only an adopted one.

49 See the recent biography by M. Clauss: *Kleopatra*. As to Caesar's paternity cf. loc.cit. pp. 33, 121.

50 '...was allerdings nach römischem Recht ohne Bedeutung blieb, weil im römischen Erbrecht nur Kinder aus einer legitimen Ehe bedacht werden konnten' (Clauss, 35).

51 '...möglicherweise beeinflussten solche Gedankenspiele die Entscheidungen der Mörder, die Caesar an den Iden des März 44 erstachen.' (Clauss, 36)

52 '...wieder nach Alexandria holen und sofort ermorden. Nun hatte er die Gewissheit, der einzige ‚Sohn' Caesars zu sein' (Clauss, 103).

And the following last sentence of this lecture is valid only as far as we are willing to grant the nucleus of the Śakuntalā legend any socio- historical relevance at all: compared with the historical Cleopatra our legendary Śakuntalā who at any rate achieved the legalization of her son Bharata and saw his ascent of the throne as the universal monarch might perhaps be looked upon as the more successful politician.[53]

53 *Further parallels between Śakuntalā and Cleopatra*:
• Śakuntalā is regarded as the daughter of Viśvāmitra and the *apsaras* (=autochthonous, see above) Menakā, begotten in a non- marital and illegitimate union by which Viśvāmitra broke his vow of chastity.—Cleopatra was (may be) the child of an (from the Greek point of view) illegitimate union between the dynasty of the Ptolemaeans (founded by one of Alexander's generals) and the high priest's family in Memphis.
• Bharata's grandmother on his mother's side was a swan woman.—The Egyptian crocodile god was considered the great-grandfather of Ptolemy XV Caesar (Clauss, p. 41) who thus had mixed human-animal ancestors too. Moreover we discern here the bird and snake motif, cf. Cleopatra's suicide by snakebite.
• Śakuntalā belonged to the autochthonous population, alien to the Indo-āryan invaders.—Similarly Cleopatra appeared to the Romans as a strange Oriental female.
• Śakuntalā was half *apsaras* and therefore she was imagined as a seductress of supernatural beauty.—Part of the Roman patriarchal image of Cleopatra was the misogynic fear of the demonic, nymphomaniac seductress who made the Roman generals love-crazy and harmed the interests of the Roman Empire. Cleopatra's influence upon Caesar and Antony was explained by enchantment (Cassius Dio 50,5,3-4). 'Durch die Zauberkünste der Ägypterin habe Antonius den Verstand verloren.' (Clauss, p. 81). That, quite contrary to this, Cleopatra as a matter of fact allowed her features to be remodelled to the harsh, even ugly looks of Antony on a certain type of her coins was recently shown by Robert Fleischer: *Kleopatra Philantonius*, in: Istanbuler Mitteilungen, vol. 46, 1996, pp. 237-242.
• Duṣyanta insults Śakuntalā twice as *puṃścalī* 'tart' (68.75,79), her mother Menakā as *bandhakī,* 'whore'.—Plinius calls Cleopatra *regina meretrix*, 'queen of whores' (Clauss, p. 66): 'The triple pillar of the world transformed/Into a strumpet's fool.' (Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*).
• On the other hand Śakuntalā is described as a highly educated woman having at her disposal a rich treasure of Vedic-brahmanical knowledge.—Cleopatra was also regarded as a cultured, polyglot lady with refined literary interests (Plutarch, *Antony* 27,4).
• In Kālidāsa's play Śakuntalā after being refused by Duṣyanta appears as a careworn fasting ascetic.—Cleopatra too is reported to have at least twice resorted to the means of fasting in order to exercise political and moral pressure (Plutarch, *Antony* 53, according to Clauss, p. 63, and 101).
• Śakuntalā is regarded as the daughter of Menakā, the preeminent *apsaras* who ranks even above the gods because she was god Brahmā's daughter.—Cleopatra was identified with the goddesses Isis and Aphrodite and bore the title 'goddess' ('father- loving goddess', *thea philopatōr*, Clauss, p. 24). To quote an Isis prayer: 'I am Isis... I am

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Kronos' eldest daughter... I have forced the women to accept the men's love... I have designed the marriage contracts... (*samaya*, [marriage] contract is an often-repeated argument in Śakuntalā's negotiations with the king, cf. 67.15, 68.9.16.17, 69.25bc.) I am the queen of the thunderbolt... I am inside the rays of the sun.' (Clauss, 71f.). Isis is often depicted wearing a plumage and is regarded as an ancestress too.

• Bharata, the son of Duṣyanta, belonged to the 'lunar race', the *raghuvaṃśa*.—On a relief in Hermontis in upper Egypt, the 'birth temple' of the pharaos, Cleopatra is called 'mother of Re', i.e. the sun god, her son Kaisar thus being identified with the god of the rising sun.

• Although the Indo-āryan invaders had conquered the land along the Gaṅgā and Yamunā, Śakuntalā was able to assert her son's claims to succession of the throne against the Indo-āryan king.—Similarly Egypt was virtually a Roman province at Cleopatra's times. Cleopatra, however, could uphold, at least for a certain span of time, the independence of Egypt against the Roman generals (Clauss, p. 23).

• From the beginning Śakuntalā's purpose was her son's succession to the throne, an aim which she eventually accomplished.—After the death of her brother Ptolemy XIV Cleopatra raised, on the 1st September 38, Caesar's and her own son Ptolemy XV Caesar to the throne, making him her co-regent. He was given the title 'king of kings'.

• Śakuntalā conjured the political trick of letting the Indian indigenous population have half of the political power by means of her son, and at least according to legend she became the mother of an universal monarch.—In the year 36 Cleopatra received from Antony power over several territories: Phoenicia (Palestine), a part of Kilikia (South Turkey), a part of Judaea around Jericho and a corridor of Nabataic Arabia. Herod had to pay 200 talents annual 'lease' to Cleopatra. Thus Egypt temporarily became a super power, in accordance with Cleopatra's ''Vision eines ägyptisch-ostmediterranen Grossreichs' (Clauss, 72), with the help of a Roman triumvir, namely Antony who was at the same time Cleopatra's 'lover and father of two of her children, if not her husband' (Clauss, p. 60). 'Eben dieser Ptolemaios Kaisar war, sein Name hielt dies permanent in Erinnerung, der Nachkomme jenes Caesar, um dessen Erbe Antonius und Octavian nun schon Jahre stritten, und wenn Antonius in diesem Kampf siegen sollte, dann würde Ptolemaios einmal das Erbe Caesars antreten. Der Sohn Kleopatras würde dann Herrscher nicht nur über das Reich Alexanders, sondern auch über das Caesars sein. Dies waren Dimensionen, die alle antiken Vorstellungen über Grossreiche sprengten: Von den Säulen des Herakles bis zum Indischen Ozean. Innerhalb dieses unvorstellbaren Machtgebildes würde Alexandria, Sitz des Welthandels wie der Weltliteratur, aufgrund seiner zentralen Lage die Rolle der Welthauptstadt zufallen.' (Clauss, p. 72).

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