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# JAINA ORIGINS FOR THE MAHĀBHĀRATA STORY OF DRAUPADĪ'S PAST LIFE

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## *Abstract*

Although the Indian epic Mahābhārata is commonly deemed a Hindu text, it has long been recognized by scholars that Jaina versions of this epic, or portions thereof, have been in existence in India at least since the early medieval period. While these Jaina versions have been studied by scholars in the wider context of the Jaina literary corpus, they are rarely considered important by Mahābhārata scholars; when they have been considered, they generally have been cursorily dismissed as relatively late “monkish corruptions” that played no significant role in the historical development of the “genuine” Mahābhārata. This paper seeks to demonstrate that such a view has been somewhat short-sighted. Specifically, I argue that an episode relating to one of the main characters in the epic, Draupadī, wife to the five Pāṇḍava brothers, has its origin in the Jaina Mahābhārata tradition and was adopted, adapted, and inserted into the Hindu version at a relatively early period (prior to 400 CE). The episode in question deals with events that occurred in a past life of Draupadī, events designed to explain how she came to be the wife of five men. The earliest Jaina version of this episode, found in the Śvetāmbara Jaina canonical text Nāyādharmakāhā, describes Draupadī's past life as a merchant girl named Sukumārikā. It is my contention that this Jaina story of Sukumārikā was recast by Hindu poets into a past-life story of Draupadī that I have dubbed “Śiva's Boon.” Through the course of this paper, it is demonstrated that the story of Śiva's Boon in the critical edition of the (Hindu) Mahābhārata (i) has a fundamentally identical plot structure to the Jaina story of Sukumārikā, (ii) displays the hallmarks of being an interpolated episode, and (iii) has one feature that makes it unusual, even extraordinary, in the context of the principal characters of the Hindu Mahābhārata: a clear reference to reincarnation.

## I.

In an oft-quoted, self-reflective passage, the Indian epic Mahābhārata claims for itself not merely the status of an important Hindu text, but rather of *the* Hindu text.<sup>1</sup> Yet, if we envision the Mahābhārata not as a single monolithic

1 While reciting Vyāsa's epic poem to King Janamejaya, the sage Vaiśampāyana states, “Arising everyday for three years, the sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana [i.e. Vyāsa] created this most excellent story [known as] The Mahābhārata. O Best of Bhāratas, that which is

text or collection of slightly variant texts but rather as a recognizable yet malleable story principally describing the lives of the Pāṇḍavas, their marriage to Draupadī, their association with Kṛṣṇa, and their struggles, intrigues, and eventual war with their cousins the Kauravas, then the Mahābhārata has not been the exclusive property of Hinduism. In this latter sense, Jainism too may be said to possess a long-standing Mahābhārata tradition.<sup>2</sup>

There is not, however, anything like a Jaina Mahābhārata on the Hindu model, if by that we mean a vulgate text of roughly 100,000 verses comprising a sort of encyclopedia of Jainism woven into the biography of the Pāṇḍavas.<sup>3</sup> Many of the Jaina texts that do include the Pāṇḍavas' story do not particularly dwell upon it; Jaina versions of the Pāṇḍavas' story are often found as modest, and at times almost tangential, episodes in much larger texts. Hemacandra's 12<sup>th</sup> century Śvetāmbara Jaina tome Triṣaṣṭiśālākāpuruṣacaritra, for example, includes a story of the Pāṇḍavas,<sup>4</sup> though this version scarcely occupies one five-hundredth of his entire text. Clearly, it would be misleading to refer to the entire Triṣaṣṭiśālākāpuruṣacaritra as a Jaina Mahābhārata merely because it devotes a very modest space to the story of the Pāṇḍavas. Nevertheless, we may safely assert that, at least since the early medieval period and possibly much earlier, the Jainas included in

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found herein regarding righteousness, material gain, pleasure, and liberation, is [likewise] found elsewhere. But that which is not here is nowhere." (*tribhir varṣaiḥ sadot-thāyī kṛṣṇadvaipāyano muniḥ | mahābhāratam ākhyānam kṛtavān idam uttamam || dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe bharatarṣabha | yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kvacit ||* [MBh I.56.32–33]).

- 2 In fact, Jainism possesses two long-standing Mahābhārata traditions: both the Śvetāmbara and Digambara sects have included this story in their respective texts, though their versions are often quite divergent from one another.
- 3 It might be argued that the story of the Pāṇḍavas and their associates, largely divorced from the mythological and dharmaśāstric material that surrounds it in the Hindu tradition, does not rightly deserve the title "Mahābhārata." Even the Jainas, who occasionally refer to their medieval texts as Jaina Mahābhāratas, generally use the titles Pāṇḍavacarit(r)a or Pāṇḍavapurāṇa rather than Mahābhārata. However, to define the Mahābhārata in strictly Hindu terms is exactly what I am attempting to avoid, and for that reason, have freely identified a Jaina Mahābhārata tradition even in cases where a brief version of, or even an episode from, the lives of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī are provided in a Jaina text.
- 4 The story is included in Book VIII of the Triṣaṣṭiśālākāpuruṣacaritra, entitled the Nemināthacarita. For an English translation, see JOHNSON, 1962.

their own texts various versions of the story of the Pāṇḍavas.<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that one can refer to a Jaina Mahābhārata tradition.<sup>6</sup>

The historical interactions between the Hindu and Jaina Mahābhārata traditions throughout the medieval period have been treated by me elsewhere, in the specific context of the story of Draupadī's marriage to the five Pāṇḍavas.<sup>7</sup> There, I argued that the evolution of Jaina versions of Draupadī's marriage was heavily and increasingly influenced by the Hindu version of the story. In this article, I intend to do something of the reverse: I propose to identify a probable case of the Hindu Mahābhārata tradition borrowing an episode from that of the Jinas. The episode in question deals with events that occurred in a past life of Draupadī, events used to explain why she was destined to have five husbands in her present life.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest Jaina text in which this episode appears is the Śvetāmbara canonical text Nāyādharmakāhāṇa,<sup>9</sup> wherein the episode takes the form of Draupadī's past life as a merchant girl named Sukumārikā.<sup>10</sup> Sukumārikā was unlucky in love, became a Jaina nun, and for reasons described below, made a vow (*nidāna*) that the harsh ascetic practices in her present life as a nun should result in her acquiring the amorous attentions of five men in her

5 E.g. the canonical *aṅga* Nāyādharmakāhāṇa, Punnāṭa Jinasena's Harivaṃśapurāṇa, Guṇabhadra's Uttarapurāṇa. There are several Śvetāmbara and Digambara texts that focus specifically on the Pāṇḍavas, such as Devaprabhasūri's (13<sup>th</sup> century) Pāṇḍavacarita, Śubhacandra's (16<sup>th</sup> century) Pāṇḍavapurāṇa, and Vādicandra's (16<sup>th</sup> century) Pāṇḍavapurāṇa, but these texts are all 13<sup>th</sup> century or later.

6 We can likewise speak of a Hindu Mahābhārata "tradition," as many non-epic texts (e.g. the *purāṇas*, the plays of Kālidāsa and Bhāsa) incorporate individual stories from the Mahābhārata.

7 See GEEN, 2001; 2005.

8 On the issue of Draupadī's polyandry, the Digambara and Śvetāmbara traditions are in complete disagreement. While Draupadī is said to have married all five Pāṇḍavas in every Śvetāmbara text I have encountered, the Digambara texts unanimously declare that Draupadī married Arjuna alone, and that the "rumour" of her polyandrous marriage amounted to little more than ignorant or wicked slander. Therefore, Digambara versions of Draupadī's marriage are obviously never in a position to have to "explain" Draupadī's polyandry.

9 The Nāyādharmakāhāṇa is the sixth *aṅga* of the Śvetāmbara Jaina canon. For a translation of the story of Draupadī from the Nāyādharmakāhāṇa, see VAIDYA, 1940:14–56.

10 Interestingly, the story of Sukumārikā is also found in the Digambara Uttarapurāṇa of Guṇabhadra; in this latter text, however, the story is not used to explain Draupadī's polyandry, as, in the Digambara tradition, Draupadī never commits polyandry (see GEEN, 2005).



next earthly life.<sup>11</sup> A similar episode, which appears twice in the critical edition of the (Hindu) Mahābhārata and which I shall refer to as “Śiva’s Boon,” includes a brief reference to a past life of Draupadī as the daughter of a noble sage. This unnamed girl, likewise unlucky in love, pleased Lord Śiva through her unrelenting practice of austerities. Having been offered a boon, she asked Śiva five times for a virtuous and excellent husband. This over-enthusiastic request was then twisted by Śiva into the boon of five separate husbands, although the boon was not to take effect until her next earthly incarnation. It is my contention that the Hindu story of Śiva’s Boon is actually a modified version of the Jaina story of Sukumārikā. While both the story of Sukumārikā and the episode of Śiva’s Boon often reappear in later, medieval texts of the Śvetāmbara Jains<sup>12</sup> and Hindus,<sup>13</sup> respectively, I will restrict the present discussion to our two earliest source texts for these stories: the Śvetāmbara Nāyādhammakahāo and the critical edition of the (Hindu) Mahābhārata.

## II.

The origin and development of the Jaina Mahābhārata tradition is not well understood. All of the extant Jaina texts that provide an extensive treatment of the Pāṇḍavas’ story date from the 13<sup>th</sup> century or later. On the basis of the Śvetāmbara canonical texts alone, there is little evidence to suggest the existence of a complete version of the Mahābhārata story in the early Jaina literary tradition. Nevertheless, stories featuring, or referring to, characters from the Mahābhārata such as Draupadī, the Pāṇḍavas, and Kṛṣṇa are sprinkled throughout the canonical story literature, suggesting that the Jains were aware of the larger story and considered the main characters to be proponents of the Jaina tradition. The Nāyādhammakahāo, for example, does not contain an extensive version of the story of the Pāṇḍavas; rather, it contains the biography of Draupadī together with two of her past lives. The Pāṇḍavas

11 A complete translation of this story from Devaprabhasūri’s 13<sup>th</sup> century Pāṇḍavacarita is included in an Appendix to this article. In all important particulars, his Sanskrit version of the story is identical to the Prākṛit version in the Nāyādhammakahāo.

12 See footnote 5.

13 E.g. Kṣemendra’s (11<sup>th</sup> century) Bhāratamañjarī, Amaraśāstrasūri’s (13<sup>th</sup> century) Balabhārata.

appear in the story, as does Kṛṣṇa, but their adventures are recounted mainly in the context of Draupadī's life.

Despite the inclusion of such characters in the Śvetāmbara canonical literature, scholarship on the Mahābhārata, as a rule, has entirely ignored Jaina versions of the story. Where Jaina versions have received passing attention, it has been mainly to dismiss them as relatively late corruptions of the "original."<sup>14</sup> That is, scholars tend to accuse the Jainas of simply borrowing the epic story wholesale from the Hindu tradition and adapting specific portions of it to suit their own purposes.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, however, many scholars<sup>16</sup> have suggested that the (Hindu) Mahābhārata has been subjected to considerable brahminizing influence over the centuries, implying that an ancient, less brahminically-slanted version of the epic must have existed at some point in time.<sup>17</sup> If so, it may not be unreasonable to suggest that certain episodes from this less-sectarian version entered the Jaina literary tradition at a time when they were not necessarily, in any strong sense, "Hindu" stories.<sup>18</sup> When we encounter in an ancient Jaina text variant versions of well-known stories from the Hindu Mahābhārata, we need not necessarily imagine that the Jainas "stole" the stories from the Hindus. On the contrary, it may be the case that, *like the Hindus themselves*, the Jainas adopted stories from an ancient version of the epic and self-consciously modified them according to their own doctrinal proclivities.

14 The Jaina Mahābhārata has received the attention of scholars (e.g. JAINI, 1984, 1993, 1997a, 1997b, 1999; SUMITRA BAI and ZYDENBOS 1991; CORT, 1993), though almost always in the context of Jaina literature as opposed to Mahābhārata studies.

15 See e.g. GLASENAPP, 1999:134 and WINTERNITZ, 1983:434,467. This attitude is due in part to the relative lateness of most of the Jaina texts that incorporate the story of the Pāṇḍavas. Nevertheless, Glasenapp and Winternitz were well aware of the story of Draupadī in the Nāyādhammakahāo, a text both were inclined to assign an early date (prior to the Common Era).

16 See e.g. VAN BUITENEN, 1973:xxiii.

17 There is not, however, any consensus on this issue. HILTEBEITEL (2001:18ff.), for example, suggests that the Hindu Mahābhārata was, in its inception, a production of a small community of Brahmins, and thus from its very beginning a brahminical text, even if not an entirely orthodox one.

18 A similar view has been expressed by John CORT (1993:190): "Neither [the Hindu nor Jaina] version has clear and logical priority over the other. The way in which the contents of the Jaina Rāmāyaṇas and Mahābhāratas were thoroughly Jainized by Jaina authors suggests the extent to which the Hindu Rāmāyaṇas and Mahābhāratas were Hinduized and Brahminized by their Hindu Brahmin authors and redactors."

Even if we were to grant that the Mahābhārata was, from its earliest beginnings, a sectarian Hindu epic later borrowed by Jaina authors, this in no way precludes the possibility that the epic developed certain distinctive characteristics and episodes within the Jaina tradition that subsequently worked their way back into the Hindu tradition. It has been repeatedly noted, by Alsdorf,<sup>19</sup> Dahlmann,<sup>20</sup> Upadhye,<sup>21</sup> Winternitz<sup>22</sup> and others, that the Hindu Mahābhārata shares a significant amount of didactic literature and ascetic poetry with renunciatory traditions such as Jainism and Buddhism, and it is nowhere suggested that the origins of such literature were exclusively Hindu. Nevertheless, so far as I am aware, no one has proposed that specific elements of an independent Jaina Mahābhārata tradition have ever crept into the main plot of the Hindu Mahābhārata. The appearance of the story of Śiva's Boon in the Hindu tradition may well represent such an occurrence.

### III.

Before proceeding, however, we must address the issue of the relative dates of the two stories. For the argument I am advancing, it would be enormously convenient to be able to date the story of Sukumārikā in the Nāyādharmakāhā to a time at least as ancient as, if not more ancient than, the story of Śiva's Boon in the Hindu Mahābhārata. Unfortunately, the task of assigning specific dates to Indian texts or individual stories therein, whether Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina, is notoriously difficult, and it should be acknowledged that there is no way in which to assign hard dates to either story.

Attempting to place a firm date on the Hindu Mahābhārata as a whole is hardly possible, as the dates of the distinct layers of content vary widely. J.A.B. van Buitenen has suggested that the contents included in the critical edition of the Mahābhārata can be placed roughly between 400 BCE and 400 CE.<sup>23</sup> He states:

19 ALSDORF, 1936:119–120.

20 See UPADHYE, 1983:75.

21 UPADHYE, 1983:12.

22 WINTERNITZ, 1983:450.

23 Even HILTEBEITEL (2001:18ff.), who dates the composition of the main story of the Mahābhārata between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and the year zero, can hardly deny that the epic

Such a dating, [...] , is of course absurd from the point of view of a single literary work. It makes sense when we look upon the text not so much as one opus but as a library of opera. Then we can say that 400 B.C. was the founding date of that library, and that A.D. 400 was the approximate date after which no more substantial additions were made to the text.<sup>24</sup>

Such inexactitude in dating the contents of the critical edition would be worrying indeed if we needed to locate the episode of Śiva's Boon within, say, a particular decade. Fortunately, this is hardly the case, and we may reasonably adopt van Buitenen's proposed *terminus ante quem* of 400 CE for the episode of Śiva's Boon.

Fixing an exact date for the Jaina episode of Sukumārikā is also problematic and in a practical sense depends almost entirely upon the *terminus ante quem* assigned to the Nāyādhammakahāo as a whole. According to Jaina tradition, the contents of the Nāyādhammakahāo, along with the other texts of the Śvetāmbara Jaina canon, are said to have been more or less fixed during the Council at Valabhi in Gujarāt under the leadership of Devarddhi Kṣamāśramaṇa, sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. As Dundas points out, however, the earliest extant reference to this Council at Valabhi in a Jaina text can be dated to the second half of the seventh century, and thus a *terminus ante quem* of the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE must be accepted with some caution.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, if Jaina tradition is to be granted any weight at all, the Nāyādhammakahāo, as a canonical *aṅga*, may belong to a considerably earlier period.<sup>26</sup> In short, and in the absence of solid evidence to the contrary, there is no good reason to suppose that the story of Sukumārikā as recorded in the Nāyādhammakahāo necessarily post-dates the story of Śiva's Boon found in the critical edition.

The argument for assigning a relatively early date to the Nāyādhammakahāo's account of Draupadī and her past lives is bolstered by the fact that another śramaṇic tradition, Buddhism, likewise took notice of Draupadī and her five husbands (in the Kuṇālajātaka), although in a very different

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as a whole, represented by the critical edition, contains elements that may date considerably earlier or later than this narrow window.

24 VAN BUITENEN, 1973:xxv.

25 DUNDAS, 1992:62.

26 Both WINTERNITZ (1983:418) and UPADHYE (1983:14) suggest that the oldest parts of the Ardhamāgadhī canon may be pushed as far back as the time of Mahāvīra or his immediate disciples, though there is little solid evidence to support this opinion.

context.<sup>27</sup> The reference to Draupadī is somewhat passing, but it certainly presupposes a general knowledge of her story on the part of the audience. As a rule, the Buddhist *jātakas* do not contain much material from the core stories of the Hindu epics; according to Jaini,<sup>28</sup> “only two short Jātaka tales about Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are known to have been written in the Buddhist tradition.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the fact that Draupadī appears in a Buddhist *jātaka* should not be viewed as commonplace or trivial.

In addition, the fact that this specific reference to Draupadī in a Buddhist *jātaka* is entirely isolated from the rest of the now familiar epic suggests that the story of Draupadī may have had some degree of popularity and independent currency across various Indian religious traditions including the *śramaṇas*. An ancient Buddhist text (i.e. the Kuṇālajātaka), an ancient Jaina text (i.e. the Nāyādhammakahāo), and an ancient Hindu text (i.e. as represented by the critical edition) all make specific reference to Draupadī. This pattern raises the possibility that, at this remote time, the character of Draupadī was not “owned” by any particular tradition.

- 27 See BOLLEE, 1970. Of the 547 *jātakas* in the Pāli collection, the Kuṇāla is unique in that it is not a single story but is itself a collection of so-called “misogynous” tales designed to warn the monks of the evil of women and the perils involved in pursuing relationships with them. In a past life, we are told, the Buddha was a bird named Kuṇāla, and he instructed a spotted cuckoo named Puṇṇamukha on the perils of womankind. In this tale, reference is made to how Draupadī, though possessing five men, still cuckolded her husbands with a sixth, who was a crippled dwarf. Bollee identifies a possible Jaina connection to this *jātaka* tale in Hemavijaya’s Kathāratnākara (circa 1600 CE), story 27, verse 6, in which the following verse appears:

My five husbands, the Pāṇḍavas, are beautiful men and great fighters;  
yet my heart longs for a sixth man.

Bollee does not allow the possibility that Hemavijaya was acquainted with the Kuṇālajātaka, and thus concludes that this reference to Draupadī’s wantonness is either independent and coincidental or is representative of a very ancient, perhaps śramaṇic narrative that survived in the Jaina tradition into the 17<sup>th</sup> century (BOLLEE, 1970:134).

- 28 JAINI, 1993:243.

- 29 These are the *Dasaratha-jātaka* (no. 461) about Rāma and *Ghaṭa-jātaka* (no. 454) about Kaṇha [Skt. Kṛṣṇa].



## IV.

As a rule, neither the Jaina nor the Hindu tradition looks kindly upon polyandry. Nevertheless, despite the differences between the Hindu and Jaina versions of Draupadī marriage, the Hindu and Śvetāmbara Jaina traditions are unanimous with respect to one fact: Draupadī married all five Pāṇḍava brothers. It is not surprising, then, that the both Nāyādharmakahāṇo and the critical edition contain “explanatory” stories designed to explain, if not rationalize, the otherwise unacceptable polyandry. The specific episodes of interest here – the Jaina story of Sukumārikā and the Hindu story of Śiva’s Boon<sup>30</sup> – are both such explanatory stories.<sup>31</sup>

The narrative events leading to Draupadī’s polyandrous marriage in the critical edition differ from those in the Nāyādharmakahāṇo. In the Hindu version of the story, King Drupada holds a *svayamvara* for his daughter Draupadī, at which it is announced that any man who can perform a particular feat of archery would win Draupadī as his bride. This *svayamvara*-contest was won by Arjuna. Returning home with Draupadī, Arjuna called out to his mother to see the “alms” he had brought home. Without realizing that Arjuna was referring on this occasion to a woman and not food, his mother Kuntī told him that he must share it with his brothers. In the end, it was decided by the Pāṇḍavas that their mother’s word must be inviolate and that they must all share (i.e. marry) Draupadī. When they later confronted King Drupada with this news, he was shocked at the very notion that his daughter take more than one husband. Just then, a sage arrived on the scene to explain to King Drupada why Draupadī should and must marry all five Pāṇḍavas. This sage, none other than Vyāsa, the legendary author of the (Hindu) Mahābhārata, takes King Drupada aside and privately tells him two

30 There are actually two “explanatory” stories included in the critical edition (i.e. The Five Indras and Śiva’s Boon). Furthermore, in his appendix to Book One of the critical edition, Sukthankar includes other explanatory stories culled from Hindu manuscripts but rejected for inclusion in the critical edition. For translations and discussion of these latter stories, see GEEN, 2001.

31 In this context, it does not seem implausible that the Jaina story of Sukumārikā would have attracted the attention of the Hindu Mahābhārata tradition. Given the increasing importance of the Mahābhārata story in the Hindu tradition, it is not unlikely that Hindu poets and bards would take interest in any version of a story bearing upon so central a character as Draupadī. This is especially true in the case of an episode serving to explain her highly unusual and highly unorthodox polyandrous marriage.



stories to explain why Draupadī's impending polyandrous wedding is not only acceptable but even desired and designed by the gods.

Vyāsa first narrates to King Drupada the story known as the "Five Indras," which among other things, informs King Drupada that the five Pāṇḍavas are in fact five Indras who have incarnated on earth at the behest of Lord Śiva and that Draupadī is actually the goddess Śrī, incarnated for the very purpose of becoming wife to these five. Following the tale of the Five Indras, Vyāsa tells another story, which I have dubbed Śiva's Boon. In this tale, which seems entirely separate from and unconnected to the story of the Five Indras, Vyāsa explains that in the past, Lord Śiva granted a young girl (i.e. Draupadī in a past life) the boon of five husbands in a future birth.

In the critical edition, this was not the first time that the tale of Śiva's Boon had been narrated by Vyāsa: he had told more or less the same story to the Pāṇḍavas earlier in the story in order to induce them to attend Draupadī's *svayamvara* in the first place. For reasons to be explained below, I will focus upon the version of Śiva's Boon told by Vyāsa to the Pāṇḍavas in Ekacakrā, prior to Draupadī's *svayamvara*, though it is almost identical to the version later narrated to King Drupada. The story runs as follows:

[Vyāsa, speaking to the Pāṇḍavas, said:]

In a forest of asceticism, there was a certain daughter of a noble sage, slender-waisted with lovely hips and a beautiful brow, and possessing all desirable virtues. However, due to previous acts, which she herself had committed, she fell upon bad fortune; that girl, despite her beauty, did not obtain a husband. Thus, in order to obtain a husband, that unhappy girl took up the practice of austerities. By means of those harsh austerities, that very girl pleased Lord Śiva [Śaṁkara]. The Lord, being pleased by her, said to that ascetic girl: "O radiant one! Choose a boon, if you please; I am the Giver of Boons!" Hence, for her own welfare, she said to the Lord these words over and over: "I want a husband endowed with all good qualities." Lord Śiva [Īśāna Śaṁkara], the most eminent of speakers, then answered her this: "You shall have five husbands, O fortunate one!" To that girl, replying to him, "Give me [only] one husband," the God Śiva [Śaṁkara] once again spoke these final words: "Five times I was addressed by you, 'Give me a husband,' and so shall it be, just as you have spoken, when you have moved on to another body." That girl, who was born with the beauty of a goddess into the family of King Drupada as the irreproachable Draupadī [Kṛṣṇā Pārśatī], is destined to be the wife of you all. Therefore, great warriors, you must go forth into the Pāñcāla city. Having obtained her, you will, without doubt, be delighted.<sup>32</sup>

32 *āsīt tapovane kācid ṛṣeḥ kanyā mahātmanaḥ |*  
*vilagnamadyā suśroṇī subhrūḥ sarvaguṇānvitā ||*  
*karmabhiḥ svakṛtaiḥ sā tu durbhagā samapadyata |*

There is only one salient distinction between this version of the story and the one told later by Vyāsa to King Drupada: this first version is more explicit about the reason why the daughter of the noble sage was unable to acquire a husband: it was “due to previous acts, which she herself had committed.”<sup>33</sup> This statement, which is crucial to the argument I am making, does not appear in the second telling of the story. It is not specified whether these previous acts were performed in her present incarnation or in a past life. Yet, given the fact that Śiva’s boon of five husbands was not to take effect until a future birth, it may not be unreasonable to assume that these “previous acts” refer to acts she performed in a previous life. If so, we are given, however vaguely, some insight into at least two of Draupadī’s previous lives: one as the daughter of a noble sage and an earlier life in which she committed some sinful act that later resulted in the sage’s daughter being unlucky in love.

Interestingly, the Nāyādharmakahāo likewise presents us with two of Draupadī’s past lives: first, as a brahmin woman named Nāgaśrī and second, as the girl named Sukumārikā. In brief, Nāgaśrī commits the sin of poisoning a Jaina monk and is reviled by all. She dies a terrible death, and after many alternating rebirths in hell and among the lower orders of life, she is eventually reborn as Sukumārikā, the beautiful and charming daughter of a merchant. Due to the bad *karma* remaining from her previous sinful life as Nāgaśrī, Sukumārikā is unable to keep either of the two husbands her father

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*nādhyagacchat patim sā tu kanyā rūpavatī satī ||*  
*tapas taptum athārebhe patyartham asukhā tataḥ |*  
*toṣayām āsa tapasā sā kilogreṇa śaṃkaram ||*  
*tasyāḥ sa bhagavaṃs tuṣṭas tām uvāca tapasvinīm |*  
*varam varaya bhadram te varado ‘smṛti bhāmini ||*  
*atheśvaram uvācedam ātmanaḥ sā vaco hitam |*  
*patim sarvaguṇopetam icchāmīti punaḥ punaḥ ||*  
*tām atha pratyuvācedam īśāno vadatām varaḥ |*  
*pañca te patayo bhadre bhaviṣyantīti śaṃkaraḥ ||*  
*pratibruvantīm ekaṃ me patim dehīti śaṃkaram |*  
*punar evābravīd deva idaṃ vacanam uttamam ||*  
*pañcakṛtvā tvayā uktaḥ patim dehīty ahaṃ punaḥ |*  
*deham anyam gatāyās te yathoktam tad bhaviṣyati ||*  
*drupadasya kule jātā kanyā sā devarūpiṇī |*  
*nirdiṣṭā bhavatām patnī kṛṣṇā pārṣaty aninditā ||*  
*pāñcālanagaraṃ tasmāt praviśadhvaṃ mahābalāḥ |*  
*sukhinas tām anuprāpya bhaviṣyatha na saṃśayaḥ || [MBh I.157.6–15].*

33 Literally, *karmabhiḥ svakṛtaiḥ*.

procures for her.<sup>34</sup> Abandoning domestic life, she becomes a Jaina nun. One day, while practicing a harsh austerity in a park, she sees a courtesan enjoying the attention of five men. Recalling her own unhappy history with men, she forms a vow (*nidāna*) that the merit accumulated by her ascetic practices shall result in her too having the attention of five men in a future birth. Having died without confessing her sins, and spending some time as a heavenly courtesan, Sukumārikā was eventually reborn as Draupadī and acquired her five husbands.

## V.

On the surface, the Hindu episode of Śiva's Boon<sup>35</sup> and the Jaina story of Sukumārikā do not appear to be particularly similar, let alone intimately related. Whereas the story of Sukumārikā is rather long and detailed, the tale of Śiva's Boon is exceedingly brief. Nevertheless, let us now consider these stories at the level of their fundamental plot. The two stories are very similar with respect to the following six points: (i) both stories are used to narrate events in a past life of Draupadī that serve to describe how her polyandry is to be explained; (ii) in both stories, we are presented with a young girl who, despite being beautiful and possessed of all virtues, is either unable to obtain (Hindu) or keep (Jaina) a husband; (iii) in both stories, past actions which she herself had committed are identified as the cause of her present difficulties; (iv) in both stories, these difficulties incite the young girl to the practice of harsh austerities; (v) in both stories, the ultimate consequence of these austerities is the obtaining of five husbands; and (vi) in both stories, the acquisition of these five husbands is postponed until the girl's next earthly life.

Now, if the story of Śiva's Boon was originally a Jaina story that was adopted, adapted and inserted into a pre-existing Hindu text, it might be supposed that the story would show some signs of being an interpolation. For example, one might expect some peculiarities with respect to metre or general style of language. In this regard, the story of Śiva's Boon in the criti-

34 Both of her husbands experienced a terrible burning sensation from the touch of her skin, and both abandoned her. I can thank Leslie Orr for pointing out that, in a difference sense, Sukumārikā too experienced a sort of polyandry with her two husbands.

35 Henceforth, I will consider only the earlier and longer version of "Śiva's Boon" from the critical edition.

cal edition is composed in typical Sanskrit epic *ślokas*, and does not in any obvious way stand out from the text as a whole. In the present circumstances, however, there is no very compelling reason to believe that it would stand out, as Śiva's Boon is clearly not taken verbatim from the story of Sukumārikā. It is not my contention that this episode was lifted wholesale from a Jaina text and deposited into a Hindu text. Rather, I suggest only that Śiva's Boon is a highly modified, rewritten and interpolated version of the story of Sukumārikā, the composition of which would be a simple task for any Hindu poet familiar with epic versification. Furthermore, there is no evidence prior to 400 CE<sup>36</sup> that a Sanskrit version of the story of Sukumārikā was even in existence.<sup>37</sup> Since many Jaina tales originally composed in Prākṛit were subsequently recast in Sanskrit by later Jaina poets, it is certainly plausible that the tale of Sukumārikā could have been modified and recast into unremarkable Sanskrit epic *ślokas*.

Another sign of interpolation might be that the episode in question appears at different points in the story from one manuscript to the next. In this regard, it has already been noted that the story of Śiva's Boon appears twice in almost identical form in the text of the critical edition. This immediately suggests two possibilities: (i) the story was inserted into different places in the text by different redactors, and when these versions were conflated, the editor chose to include the story at both locations; or (ii) the story was originally inserted in the earlier location,<sup>38</sup> and only secondarily moved to the later point in the story<sup>39</sup> in order to bundle it with the Five Indras story.

A further sign of interpolation might be that the episode in question does not mesh smoothly with the surrounding text; if removed, the overall plot of the story would not suffer significant diminishment. The extent to which the story of Śiva's Boon flows smoothly with the rest of the main plot of the Hindu Mahābhārata is, of course, somewhat subjective. It is a well-established fact that the core story of the Mahābhārata served for hundreds

36 That is, van Buitenen's proposed *terminus ante quem* of the contents of the critical edition, which is at least a reasonable guideline.

37 Like all Jaina canonical texts, the Nāyādharmakāhā is composed in Ardhamāgadhī. As far as I know, the earliest Sanskrit text that includes a similar version of the story of Sukumārikā is Hemacandra's 12<sup>th</sup> century Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra.

38 That is, at the point in the story when the Pāṇḍavas met Vyāsa at Ekacakrā, prior to attending Draupadī's *svayamvara*.

39 That is, at the point in the story when Vyāsa's has just completed his narration of the Five Indras tale to King Drupada.

of years as a sort of literary magnet onto which originally-independent stories of all shapes and sizes adhered.<sup>40</sup> Because of this composite nature, there are any number of stories that do not exactly mesh seamlessly with the main plot. In the present case, however, I am proposing that a story in the Jaina tradition that was *already intended* to explain Draupadī's polyandry has been specifically adapted by a Hindu redactor to serve the same general purpose in the Hindu version of Draupadī's story. To that extent, the story already ought to be well suited to the plot into which it was inserted.

When the story of Śiva's Boon first appears in the critical edition, it ostensibly serves the purpose of impelling the Pāṇḍavas towards the Pāñcāla capital where they would attend Draupadī's *svayamvara*. At the point in the main plot where this episode appears,<sup>41</sup> however, the Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī were *already* planning to travel to the Pāñcāla capital because of the description of it, and of Draupadī's upcoming *svayamvara*, they had received from a wandering brahmin.<sup>42</sup> Thus, if this first telling of Śiva's Boon were to be removed from the story in the critical edition, nothing seemingly essential to the plot would be lost. There is, moreover, further evidence that this episode is out of place. Another potential purpose of relating this episode at this particular point in the plot (i.e. before the Pāṇḍavas had departed for Pāñcāla) could have been to prepare the Pāṇḍavas for their impending polyandrous marriage to Draupadī. If so, it was a miserable failure, as the Pāṇḍavas seem to have forgotten this fact as soon as they had heard it and were themselves taken entirely by surprise when circumstances led to their polyandrous arrangement.<sup>43</sup>

It is certainly true that Draupadī's highly unorthodox polyandry appears to cry out for some explanation and that the story of Śiva's Boon serves this purpose well. The same, however, could be said for the other explanatory story, i.e. the Five Indras, narrated by Vyāsa to King Drupada. For this reason, and assuming that the story of the Five Indras was already included in the text into which Śiva's Boon was inserted, the removal of the

40 This is clear from the number of "regional" stories rejected from the critical edition.

41 I.157.6ff.

42 I.153–155.

43 We are, however, informed in the critical edition (*MBh* I.182.14–15) that Yudhiṣṭhira, while he was pondering whether or not to obey Kuntī's injunction to share Draupadī equally among themselves, remembered (finally!) what Vyāsa had told them back in Ekacakrā.



episode of Śiva's Boon would once again leave the plot essentially undiminished.

Despite the separate and self-sufficient natures of both Śiva's Boon and the story of the Five Indras, it must be acknowledged that Vyāsa does make a rather cryptic and half-hearted attempt to relate these two seemingly unrelated stories. While speaking to King Drupada in private, Vyāsa first tells the story of the Five Indras (in *triṣṭubh* metre), followed immediately by the (second) telling of Śiva's Boon (in epic *ślokas*), followed immediately by this short passage presumably designed to reconcile the two:

[Vyāsa said:]

O Drupada, that [ascetic girl] has become this very daughter born to you, with the beauty of a goddess. The irreproachable Draupadī [Kṛṣṇā Pārśatī] was ordained as the wife of five. Heavenly Śrī, having practiced frightful austerities, arose, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, amidst the great sacrifice and became your daughter. She is that very goddess, radiant and loved by the gods, a single [wife] to the five [Pāṇḍavas] due to the act which she herself had committed, the wife of a god herself dispatched by Śiva [Svayāmbhū]. Having heard this, King Drupada, you must proceed as you see fit.<sup>44</sup>

The statement that "Heavenly Śrī, having practiced frightful austerities, arose, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, amidst the great sacrifice and became your daughter" may perhaps be taken to imply the following: after the incidents related in the story of the Five Indras (where it was decided that the goddess Śrī would be born on earth as the wife of the five incarnated Indras), Śrī did not come to earth directly as Draupadī but first as the noble sage's daughter who pleased Śiva with her austerities, and only then as Draupadī who "arose, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, amidst the great sacrifice." In that case, her "frightful austerities" would be a description of the austerities performed by Śrī in her incarnation as the noble sage's daughter in the episode of Śiva's Boon. This might also be confirmed by the statement, "a single [wife] to the five [Pāṇḍavas] due to the act which she herself had committed." But, as discussed above, there is some indication in the

44 *drupadaiṣā hi sā jajñe sutā te devarūpiṇī |*  
*pañcānām vihitā patnī kṛṣṇā pārśaty aninditā ||*  
*svargaśrīḥ pāṇḍavārthāya samutpannā mahāmakhe |*  
*seha taptvā tapo ghoram duhitṛtvam tavāgatā ||*  
*saiṣā devī rucirā devajusṭā pañcānām ekā svakṛtena karmaṇā |*  
*sṛṣṭā svayam devapatnī svayāmbhuvā śrutvā rājan drupadeṣṭam kuruṣva || [MBh*  
*I.189.47–49].*



story of Śiva's Boon that the daughter of the noble sage was herself suffering due to actions performed in yet another previous incarnation.

Thus, in order to reconcile these two Hindu explanatory stories, we must assume a chronology such as the following: During the incidents described in the Five Indras, the decision was made (ordained by Śiva) for the goddess Śrī to incarnate on earth to be the sole wife of the five incarnated Indras. When Śrī incarnated on earth, she did not immediately take the form of Draupadī, but rather of some unnamed person who performed some sinful act;<sup>45</sup> this unnamed person died, and Śrī was then incarnated as the daughter of the noble sage. Due to acts performed in her past life, the sage's daughter was unable to procure a husband and consequently practiced harsh asceticism to propitiate Śiva. Śiva, in an interaction that on the surface can only be considered mischievous, then granted her the boon of five husbands, even though it was clear that she only wanted one.<sup>46</sup> Yet the effect of this boon was not to take place until a future incarnation, and thus it is not until her incarnation as Draupadī that the goddess Śrī finally fulfils her original purpose: becoming the wife of the five Indras incarnated as the five Pāṇḍavas. This chronology may seem a bit much to derive from the single sentence, "Heavenly Śrī, having practiced frightful austerities, arose, for the sake of the Pāṇḍavas, amidst the great sacrifice and became your daughter." Yet, unless the situation is intended to be taken as I have outlined, the stories of Śiva's Boon and the Five Indras cannot really be reconciled.

I suspect the situation is much simpler: the two stories are not easily reconciled because they are in no way related to one another. Rather, they appear to be two complete and self-sufficient explanatory stories stacked one upon the other. The fact that Lord Śiva plays a central role in each story may lend them a superficial connection, but there is little else to suggest that these stories belong together. Furthermore, I believe it is likely that the Five Indras

45 This complication is removed from the second telling of Śiva's Boon (*MBh* I.189.41ff.) by omitting to mention the cause of her being unlucky in love, i.e. "due to previous acts, which she herself had committed."

46 In *MBh* I.190.3, King Drupada, having just heard the stories of the Five Indras and Śiva's Boon from the lips of Vyāsa, makes an interesting statement, which would have been a more appropriate response to the story of Sukumārikā than Śiva's Boon: he restates the situation by declaring that Draupadī said, "in the days of yore, 'May the blessed Lord give me many a husband,'" which she never did. The daughter of the noble sage was clear with Śiva that she wanted only one husband, and presumably, in her present rather than next life.

story was also originally an independent story, likewise inserted into the epic to serve as an explanatory story, although to demonstrate this would be a whole other project.

Winternitz expressed a very definite view of Draupadī's polyandry and the stories used to explain it. He states:

although polyandry or rather group-marriage, of which the marriage of the Pāṇḍavas affords an example, is found even today in some isolated parts of India, still it has not been testified to be the legal form of marriage in ancient India and is even quite contrary to the Brahminical views. [...] If in spite of this the five chief heroes in the epic have only one wife then this is proof of the fact that this feature was so intimately entwined with the whole legend and the ancient epic that even in later times when the Mahābhārata received a more and more Brahminical character and became a textbook of religion nobody could think of removing this feature. One simply strove to justify this marriage with five men by means of many rather unskillfully inserted stories. Once Vyāsa tells the foolish story of a virgin who could not get a husband and implored Lord Śiva to procure a husband for her. Now because she had cried out five times, 'Give me a husband', Śiva promises her five husbands – in a later birth. [...] It is funny that some European researchers also have tried to interpret and justify the five-husbands-marriage mythologically, allegorically and symbolically instead of accepting it as an ethnological fact.<sup>47</sup>

Whether or not we ought to accept Draupadī's marriage as a simple, ethnological fact is not for me to say, even as it is difficult entirely to disagree with Winternitz when he suggests that, in the context of Hindu version of Draupadī's marriage, the story Śiva's Boon seems to be somewhat foolish. If Winternitz would have recognized the Jaina story of Sukumārikā as the inspiration for Śiva's Boon, however, the latter may have made more sense to him. But Winternitz is equally dismissive of the Jaina explanatory stories. Commenting upon the Nāyādhammakahāo, he states: "Chapter 16 [of Book I] contains the legend of Dovaī, i.e., Draupadī, in the form of a story of re-birth. This is a monkish corruption of the legend from the Mahābhārata of Draupadī's marriage to the five brothers."<sup>48</sup> In other words, according to Winternitz, the Jainas took this "foolish story" from the Hindus and corrupted it further for their own purpose. I have seen this statement of Winternitz quoted again and again, and even Vaidya quotes it in the introduction to

47 WINTERNITZ, 1981:317n.

48 WINTERNITZ, 1983:431.

his translation of Draupadī's biography from the Nāyādharmakahāo.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Winternitz does rightly point out that "it is a favourite theme in Jinist legends in general, [...] to follow up the fate of persons through various rebirths."<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, I believe he missed the significance of this statement for the answer to the question, "Who stole the story from whom?"

## VI.

Before finally discussing the main reason for supposing that the Hindus borrowed the story from the Jainas, we must make some attempt to suggest how, from the many distinctive details of the Jaina story of Sukumārikā, we arrive at the Hindu story of Śiva's Boon. First, consider how the Hindu poet-redactors likely would have originally encountered the story of Sukumārikā. It is unlikely that Hindus were reading Jaina canonical texts, and I do not suppose that the Hindus would have adopted and adapted the story of Sukumārikā from the Nāyādharmakahāo directly. If the story of Mahāvīra's conversion of the 11 *gaṇadharas* and the biographies of many important Jaina monks<sup>51</sup> are to be given any credence, however, we can assume that even in its earliest history Jainism was successful in converting educated Hindu brahmins. Such brahmin converts, while functioning as a conduit for Hindu elements into the Jaina tradition, may also, through their interactions with other Hindu brahmins, have served as a conduit for the flow of Jaina material back into the Hindu tradition.

Apart from the length of the episodes, the first notable difference between the stories of Sukumārikā and Śiva's Boon is the caste of the girl in the story. In the Jaina story she is the daughter of merchant, while in the Hindu version she is the daughter of a sage (i.e. a brahmin girl). It would, however, be perfectly natural for a Hindu poet to change the girl's caste from merchant to brahmin. The Jainas certainly have many stories about brahmins and sages, but they have even more about merchant caste folk, as it is the merchant classes that have since the beginning populated the Jaina lay community. Hindu stories, and especially Hindu epic and purāṇic literature, do not

49 VAIDYA 1940:v.

50 WINTERNITZ, 1983:431.

51 E.g. Haribhadra, Siddhasena.

on the whole have major characters come from the merchant classes. In the Hindu Mahābhārata, virtually all of the main characters are from the priestly or ruling caste, and even though Karṇa is ridiculed for being a low-caste son of a charioteer, the omniscient audience knows that he is in fact the offspring of Kuntī and the sun-god Sūrya. For a Hindu author, it very likely would be considered degrading to Draupadī, a high-caste *kṣatriya*, to imply that she was a common *vaiśya* in her most recent past-life.

In the story of Śiva's Boon, we are told that the noble sage's daughter was suffering due to previous actions that she herself had committed. Yet, being brief in the extreme, the story of Śiva's Boon does not provide any details about what these past actions might have been. In the Śvetāmbara version of Draupadī's biography, by contrast, we know exactly which previous actions resulted in Sukumārikā's unlucky predicament, because we know the story of her past life as Nāgaśrī.<sup>52</sup> Of course, the extremely unflattering nature of the story of Nāgaśrī hardly makes it a serious candidate for whole-sale adoption by the Hindus; it is unlikely that a Hindu redactor would insert a story about Draupadī's past life that described her as being downright wicked. Nevertheless, I would argue that the Hindu story of Śiva's Boon does adopt the story of Nāgaśrī to the extent that it implies that the noble sage's daughter must have done something wicked in a past life to be unable to obtain a husband in her present life.

In the story of Śiva's Boon, we are given no details about any attempt by the sage's daughter to procure a husband; we are merely told that she was not able to acquire one. In the Jaina story, we know a great deal about poor Sukumārikā's unsuccessful attempts to keep a husband. If the author of Śiva's Boon was aiming at brevity we can perhaps forgive the omission of all these details. After all, to summarize Sukumārikā's situation in a single sentence, we could reasonably borrow the following sentence from the episode of Śiva's Boon: "However, due to previous acts, which she herself had committed, she fell upon bad fortune; that girl, despite her beauty, did not obtain a husband."<sup>53</sup>

As a result of the unfortunate situation in which the girls in both stories found themselves, they took up lives of austerities. The austerities performed by the girls were appropriate to their respective traditions: Sukumārikā became a Jaina nun, and the seer's daughter performed austerities to please

52 Nāgaśrī poisoned a Jaina monk and died an ignominious death.

53 MBh I.157.7.

Lord Śiva. Yet, given the strongly *vaiṣṇava* character of the Hindu Mahābhārata as a whole, it is interesting that Lord Śiva is made the object of the girl's austerities. One very simple explanation would be that the choice of Śiva was designed to dovetail with the story of the Five Indras, where Śiva is clearly the dominant personality. In fact, in the Five Indras, it is by the command of Śiva that the five Indras and goddess Śrī incarnate on earth as the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī.

We do not have any evidence that the Five Indras story was, at least in the historical development of the Hindu Mahābhārata tradition, chronologically antecedent to the story of Śiva's Boon, let alone a determining factor in its development. I suspect that there is an even better explanation for Śiva's role in Draupadī's predicament: the marriage of a Hindu woman to five men must be considered outside the normal realm of *dharma* and without question sexually deviant. Furthermore, it was the practice of austerities that led to this sexually deviant circumstance. The admixture of asceticism and eroticism has been convincingly assigned to Śiva by Wendy O'Flaherty,<sup>54</sup> and Śiva himself has a history of sexual deviance. If, keeping in mind the impending polyandry, a Hindu poet were to change this girl's mode of asceticism from that of a Jaina nun to the performing of austerities directed at a particular Hindu god, Śiva would be a fairly obvious choice.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting difference between the two stories is the exact manner in which the girl gets herself into the position of gaining five husbands in a future birth. In the story of Śiva's Boon, it is made very clear that the noble sage's daughter at no time wanted or intended for Lord Śiva to grant her five husbands, let alone five husbands in a future birth. Rather, it is clear that she desired a single husband in her present life. How is it, then, that things develop as they do?

When I first read the story of Śiva's Boon, I interpreted Śiva's decree that the sage's daughter would acquire five husbands as a somewhat humorous and mischievous and, as Winternitz would have it, a not altogether shrewd, device to explain the polyandry. Upon further reflection,<sup>56</sup> it struck

54 See O'FLAHERTY, 1973.

55 Like many issues in this paper, this topic deserves much more attention. It has been suggested to me (by Phyllis Granoff) that this argument might be anachronistic, as purāṇic stories of Śiva's seductions tend to be relatively late. Nevertheless, the association between Śiva and socially ambiguous or even deviant behavior pre-dates even the earliest purāṇic texts.

56 This line of reasoning was suggested to me Douglas R. Brooks.



me that the fact that the girl obtains five husbands because she asked for a single husband five times may well reflect the pan-Indian belief in the power of *mantra*, or efficacious speech. The notion that speech, once spoken, has certain and unavoidable consequences is a theme that runs throughout the Hindu Mahābhārata. For example, as a general rule, a curse, once uttered, can never be revoked but only modified. Similarly, when Kuntī first got her secret *mantra* from Durvāsas that allowed her to call upon any god of her choosing to father a child for her, she naively decided to test it. And despite being unmarried and a virgin, she was forced to procreate with Sūrya.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Kuntī's (mis)spoken injunction to her sons that they should all share equally in the "alms" brought home by Arjuna, despite the fact that the "alms" were actually Draupadī, seemed inviolate.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, once the ascetically-charged sage's daughter had uttered the "Grant me a husband" *mantra* five times, even Śiva was powerless to reverse the consequences; the most he could do was delay it until a future birth. In the end, even though we may reasonably hold the sage's daughter responsible for her unrestrained speech, there was clearly no intentionality behind her obtaining five husbands. Rather, the girl simply and naively failed to understand the power of her speech when combined with her harsh ascetic practices. Sukumārikā, by contrast, understood very well the power of her *nidāna* when combined with harsh ascetic practice: Sukumārikā unambiguously desired five men and, in her next birth, she got them. Thus, the modifications made in the Hindu story of Śiva's Boon removed this sinful intentionality and thus relieved Draupadī of the shame that her polyandrous situation arose as a consequence of her own wanton desires.

57 See MBh I.104.

58 It is unclear whether or not Kuntī's speech is to be seen as exuding the power of *mantra*, though during the discussion (MBh I.188.6ff.) of the lawfulness of polyandry that ensued at Vyāsa's request, Yudhiṣṭhira does remark, "they say, O Best of the Righteous, that the speech of a guru is law, and indeed, that the mother is the supreme guru of all gurus." (*gurośca vacanaṁ prāhur dharmam dharmajñasattama | gurūṇām caiva sarveṣāṁ janitrī paramo guruḥ* || [MBh I.188.15]).



## VII.

Elsewhere, I have demonstrated that the evolution of Śvetāmbara versions of Draupadī's marriage during the medieval period was heavily influenced by the Hindu version of the story, while the Hindu version remained remarkably consistent.<sup>59</sup> Thus, even if we were to grant the fact that there is an historical connection between the Jaina story of Sukumārikā and the Hindu story of Śiva's Boon, why should we suppose that the Hindus borrowed from the Jainas, and not the other way around?

If we were to characterize the narrative device used in each of the two Hindu explanatory stories to connect past events to Draupadī's "current" polyandrous situation, we might say that the story of Śiva's Boon uses the device of reincarnation (Draupadī as the reincarnation of the noble sage's daughter),<sup>60</sup> whereas the Five Indras uses the device of incarnation (Draupadī as the incarnation of Śrī). The use of the latter is very common in the Hindu Mahābhārata in particular, and the Hindu epic and purāṇic literature in general, while the former is not. In Jaina narrative literature, we see the reverse: the phenomenon of reincarnation is absolutely commonplace, while the phenomenon of incarnation is rare.

A belief in the phenomenon of reincarnation is common to most of the religious traditions that sprang from India soil, including Classical (post-vedic period) Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly, the impact of this phenomenon on the narrative structure of the Hindu Mahābhārata is, for all practical purposes, negligible. The lives of the characters in the Mahābhārata are influenced by the power of the gods, by the power of sages, by the power of fate, by the power of curses, and by their own actions performed earlier in the same lifetime; they are rarely if ever influenced by actions said to have been committed in a past life. On the contrary, the earthly careers of the main characters seem to be confined to a single lifetime: they often have their beginnings in unusual or miraculous births and are frequently said to be incarnations or partial incar-

59 GEEN, 2001; 2005.

60 While it is true that the appearance of Draupadī from the fire-altar is not a typical "re-birth," this further shows the gap between the incarnation of Śrī (a goddess appearing fully formed in the altar) and the statement in Śiva's Boon, where the girl is told she will get her five husbands when she has "moved on to another body." In other words, the reincarnation of the seer's daughter on the one hand, and Draupadī's appearance from the altar on the other, do not quite fit.

nations of gods or goddesses; they end their lives, if we are even informed of their ultimate fate, by arriving in heaven or hell.

There is no indication, for example, that Arjuna or Yudhiṣṭhira or Bhīma have arrived at their “present” circumstances in the story as a result of actions in a past life, and there is no significant hint as to what their future lives, if any, might be. It is not even clear that we are to conceive of them having anything like a soul that transmigrates from birth to birth. In one instance, they are said to be a product of a divine father and earthly mother and as such, are partial incarnations of their fathers. In another instance, the Five Indras story, it is said that the five Pāṇḍavas are the earthly incarnations of five Indras. Moreover, Arjuna is frequently said to be an earthly incarnation of the seer-god Nara.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it may be generally stated that the phenomenon of incarnation, and not reincarnation, takes center stage in the Hindu Mahābhārata; it is not that the idea of reincarnation is entirely absent but rather that the process of reincarnation seems to play no practical role in the main plot.<sup>62</sup>

Let us look, for example, at what we know about the origins of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī from the critical edition. Due to the curse of a powerful sage, Pāṇḍu was not able to father children of his own, and thus he implored his wife Kuntī: “Together with a Brahmin, superior by means of his austerities, you must conceive sons endowed with good virtues. For your sake, O wide-hipped woman, I ought to travel along the path of those with sons.”<sup>63</sup> This was not such an outrageous suggestion, since Pāṇḍu’s own biological father was not really his mother’s husband but a brahmin surrogate (i.e. Vyāsa). However, Kuntī then confessed to her husband Pāṇḍu that the sage Durvāsas imparted to her a secret *mantra* by which she could call down from heaven whichever god she chose and procreate with him. Pāṇḍu gave his assent to this plan, and three times Kuntī called a god from heaven for the sake of procreation. As Pāṇḍu wanted yet more sons, and Kuntī did not want to give birth again, she taught the secret *mantra* to her co-wife Mādrī who conceived a set of twins by the twin Aśvins gods. That the five

61 I will return to this issue later.

62 Although we have been discussing the Hindu Mahābhārata in particular, this statement is also, in varying degrees, true of the Rāmāyaṇa and much of the Hindu purāṇic literature.

63 *dvijātes tapasādhikāt ||  
putrān guṇasamāyuktān utpādayitum arhasi |  
tvaṅkṛte ‘haṁ pṛthuśroṇi gaccheyam putriṇām gatim || [MBh I.113.29d–30].*

Pāṇḍavas (lit. “sons of Pāṇḍu”), Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, are not biologically “sons of Pāṇḍu” but rather have the gods Dharma, Vāyu, Indra and the Aśvin twins, respectively, as their fathers is either implied or explicitly stated in several places in the epic.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, each Pāṇḍava is also said to be a partial incarnation of their father-god.<sup>65</sup>

The origin of one of the Pāṇḍavas, Arjuna, is somewhat complicated by the introduction of the notion that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are some form of the seers Nara and Nārāyaṇa. The sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa are mentioned in the opening benedictory verse, “Having paid homage to Nārāyaṇa, to Nara, best among men, and to the goddess Sarasvatī, he should cry out, ‘Victory’.”<sup>66</sup> And Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, on at least three occasions, are said to have been the seers Nara and Nārāyaṇa.<sup>67</sup> It is not entirely clear what such a statement is meant to imply. If we view this in the context of reincarnation of individual souls, it could mean that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa were Nara and Nārāyaṇa in a past life. But in the context of the epic as a whole, and of the origins of the main characters in particular, especially that of Kṛṣṇa, it is more likely that we are intended to take this as a reference to divine incarnation rather than garden-variety reincarnation. Yet this point is uncertain. It is possible that the tradition that has Arjuna somehow related to Nara is distinct from the “partial incarnation of his father-god” tradition. And, for that matter, the story identifying the five Pāṇḍavas as the incarnations of five Indras is likely also a separate tradition.

With respect to the origins of Draupadī, we are told that she too had an unusual “birth,” arising out of a sacrificial altar: “Likewise, amidst the altar, Draupadī [Kṛṣṇā] too appeared, radiant and bright, glittering with beauty, and possessing the finest form.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, she apparently had no biological earthly father or mother. In the Book of the Partial Incarnations,<sup>69</sup> we are told that, as the Pāṇḍavas are partial incarnations of their respective father-gods, Draupadī is a part of the Goddess Śrī: “For the sake of enjoyment, a part of Śrī was born on earth, from the midst of an altar, as an irre-

64 MBh I.1.67–9; I.57.96ff.; I.113.30–115.16.

65 MBh I.61.85ff.; I.109.1–4.

66 *nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya naram caiva narottamam |  
devīm sarasvatīm caiva tato jayam udīrayet ||* [MBh Opening Benedictory Verse]

67 MBh I.1.117; I.210.4–5; I.219.12ff.

68 *tathaiva vedyām kṛṣṇāpi jajñe tejasvinī śubhā |  
vibhrājamānā vapuṣā bibhratī rūpam uttamam ||* [MBh I.57.92].

69 MBh I.61.

proachable daughter in the family of King Drupada.”<sup>70</sup> In this context, I believe we are to take Draupadī as a partial incarnation, and not a reincarnation, of the goddess Śrī. This idea is maintained in the Five Indras story, where Draupadī is again said to be an incarnation of Śrī.

The situation is significantly different when we consider Jaina narrative literature. Following a soul (*jīva*) as it passes through various lives on earth or in one of the many Jaina heavens or hells, is one of the most common narrative devices used in Jaina didactic (*dharmakathā*) story literature and can be found from the earliest extant genre of Jaina literature<sup>71</sup> onwards. The Jaina tradition is replete with stories of important individuals and the events which occurred in their past lives or which are predicted to occur in their future births (especially their future enlightenment) as a result of actions done in the present existence. As P.S. Jaini rightly states, “It is customary for Jaina authors to begin the life story of a major character with a significant event in one of his or her past lives that may hold the seed that bears fruit in the events of the present life of that person.”<sup>72</sup> For example, in the eighth book of Hemacandra’s *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacaritra*, which narrates the life of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Jaina *tīrthaṅkara* Nemi, we are first presented with no less than his eight most recent past lives. Upadhye, commenting upon the characters of Jaina narrative literature, states,

excepting some of the semi-historical Prabandhas, certain traits specially attract our attention, because they are not quite normal and not found in such abundance in other branches of India literature. Pages after pages are devoted to the past and future lives; and the vigilant and omnipotent law of Karman meticulously records their pious and impious deeds whose consequences no one can escape.<sup>73</sup>

It is also common in the Jaina stories for a sage to appear at a crucial point in a character’s life and to narrate the past-life events that have led up to the pivotal moment. Glasenapp states:

At the end of many stories, a wise man or a Kevalī appears who explains to the hero, why he experienced in his present life just this amount of happiness or unhappiness,

70 *śriyas tu bhāgaḥ saṃjajñe ratyartham pṛthivītale |  
drupadasya kule kanyā vedimadhyād aninditā ||* [MBh I.61.95].

71 That is, the *aṅgas*, including the *Nāyādharmakāhā*.

72 JAINI, 1993:225.

73 UPADHYE, 1983:32.

and traces back all the enjoyable experiences to rewards earned in an earlier form of existence and all the sufferings to the lapses in an earlier life.<sup>74</sup>

In the Hindu version of Draupadī's marriage, it is Vyāsa who, like a Jaina *kevalin*, arrives on the scene just in time to explain to King Drupada why the proposed marriage of Draupadī to the five Pāṇḍavas is to be allowed. One would be tempted to see in this arrival of Vyāsa another influence of Jainism on the Hindu version if not for the fact that Vyāsa "arrives on the scene" to interpret events or proffer advice on a fairly regular basis in the Hindu *Mahābhārata*.<sup>75</sup>

In the context of this paper, the relevance of the above discussion should be obvious: the use of past-life stories to explain the present circumstances of a main character in a story would be hardly surprising if we came across it in a Jaina version of the *Mahābhārata*. It would be, by contrast, almost unprecedented in a Hindu version of the story. The presence of such a past-life story in the Hindu version, taken together with the existence of a strikingly similar ancient Jaina version of the story from which to draw, points to the possibility that the Hindu version of Draupadī's marriage has been influenced by the Jaina tradition.<sup>76</sup>

## VIII.

I shall be the first to admit that my argument in this paper is hardly ironclad. The case for the Hindu episode of Śiva's Boon being a modified version of the Jaina story of Sukumārikā is not absolutely conclusive. But the evidence is, I believe, both reasonable and compelling. If my interpretation is accurate, this case tells us something interesting about the historical development of the *Mahābhārata*, especially with respect to issues of religious ownership of the epic. More importantly, I hope that it will demonstrate to scholars of the *Mahābhārata* that our understanding of the historical development of the

74 GLASENAPP, 1999:138–9.

75 Nevertheless, Vyāsa's arrival at the wedding is remarkably Jaina-like, especially as he includes a past-life story of Draupadī to explain her present circumstances.

76 The regular use of past-life stories is also found in Buddhist texts, though to a lesser extent than in Jaina texts.



epic will only be complete when Jaina versions are brought in from the cold and investigated in full.

Here, however, we are less concerned with the epic as a whole than with the story of Draupadī. Even if there never was, in antiquity, any extensive Jaina Mahābhārata per se, there was almost certainly an ancient Jaina biography of Draupadī, and it is very likely, moreover, that remnants of it still survive in the Hindu Mahābhārata.

## Appendix

### The Story of Draupadī's past life as Sukumārikā from Devaprabhasūri's Pāṇḍavacarita (4.352–386)

Then, due to the lightness of her *karma*, she [who had once been the sinful *brāhmaṇī* Nāgaśrī] was born [once again] in the city of Campā as Sukumārikā, daughter of [the merchant] Sāgaradatta, born from the womb of Subhadrā. In that city was [a boy named] Sāgara, son of Jinadatta, born from Bhadrā. One day [Sāgara's] father observed Sukumārikā while she was in her house. Thinking [to himself], "This girl is suitable for my son," and having, accompanied by his kinsmen, approached her father, [Jinadatta] asked for her in marriage [for his son]. [Her father] said, "This girl is exceedingly precious to me; I cannot live without her. Thus, your son Sāgara must become my resident-son-in-law." Saying, "I will put it to my son," Jinadatta went home and communicated this to Sāgara.

[Sāgara merely] stood there, remaining silent. His father, according to the axiom that, "A lack of opposition equals assent," now considered his son to be Sāgaradatta's resident-son-in-law. The marvelous marriage ceremony of those two [youths] was brought about; at night, they resorted to their bed in the bed chamber. Even though having experienced her touch, which was [as painful] as that of burning charcoal due to the power of previous [wicked] deeds, Sāgara somehow managed to stay there for a short time. While she was happily sleeping, he, having bowed down, went home.

When she awoke and did not see her husband, [Sukumārikā] wept violently. Then, at dawn, a female servant was instructed by Subhadrā [to go to their bedroom] for the purpose of cleaning their teeth, and she saw that girl weeping, abandoned by her husband. Having left [Sukumārikā], she reported to Subhadrā, who likewise immediately told her own husband [Sāgaradatta]. [Sāgaradatta] himself reproached [Jinadatta], the father of his son-in-law. [In turn, Jinadatta] then said to his son, "My child, what you have done is not proper. So go there again now – let not my promise be violated." Sāgara said, "I would sooner jump into fire! O father, never again will I go to her home!"

Now, Sāgaradatta, who was hiding outside, heard this, and having gone home without any hope, said to Sukumārikā: "For some reason or other, my child, Sāgara is en-



tirely without interest in you. [But] you must not be depressed about it; some other husband shall be procured for you." Sometime later, standing by a window, [Sāgaradatta] spied a certain beggar who wore merely a loin cloth, had a single bowl, and was surrounded by flies. Having invited him in, bathed him with sweet-smelling water, smeared him with sandal paste, and clothed him in heavenly garments, [Sāgaradatta] said to that [beggar]: "This young maiden, Sukumārikā, is given by me to you. You must remain here together with her, happily delighting in my wealth."

Thus addressed, he entered the bedroom together with her at night and thought, "To me, the embrace of her body is like the burning of fire." Having quickly gotten up, and taking along his own clothes, he fled. Her father, having seen her weeping once again, said: "My child, this simply must be the ripening of past deeds – there is no other explanation. Thus, you must calmly remain here in my house dispensing charity." Doing just this, and devoted solely to *dharma*, she stayed.

One day, a Jaina nun called Gopālikā came to her house. Having furnished [the nun] with such things as pure food and drink, and having heard the *dharma* from her mouth, [Sukumārikā] had an awakening, and took the vow. Now, constantly performing austerities, beginning with the 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> fasts, she wandered with that nun. One day, she said to that worthy woman, "I will complete the Ātāpanā [vow], standing in Subhūmibhāga park, staring into the sun." [Gopālikā] replied with these words: "The words of the Āgamas are indeed, 'Ātāpanā is not to be performed by nuns outside of the monastery.'"

Not heeding [the nun's] words, having gone into that [Subhūmibhāga] park, and just as she was about to commence the Ātāpanā with eyes directed at the sun, [Sukumārikā] noticed that the courtesan Devadattā had arrived there, reposing in the lap of one man, her foot resting upon the chest of another man, a garland being applied by another, a parasol being held over her by another, and being fanned by yet another. Having spied [Devadattā], and with her own desire for sexual passion unfulfilled [in this life], she made the following *nidāna*: "As a result of this austerity, may I, like that [Devadattā], become the lover of five men."

Though the Āryā [Gopālikā] tried to restrain her, [Sukumārikā], devoting herself to [improper] activities such as the cleansing of her body, sprinkling [water upon herself] over and over, fixed this in her mind: "In the past, I was a laywoman, highly esteemed by the Āryikā, but now that I am a nun, this one despises me." Having reflected upon this, and having left [the monastery], she remained in a separate dwelling. For a long time, she kept her vow, [though] practicing the way she wanted to. Having completed eight months of strict fasting, [Sukumārikā] passed away without ever repenting; she became a goddess in [the heaven] Saudharma with a life-span of nine *palyopamas*. On account of her former *nidāna*, this one, fallen from a divine existence, became Draupadī (Kṛṣṇā), and these five eminent [Pāṇḍavas] are known to be her husbands. What is surprising in this?

(*campāyām atha sā karmalāghavāt sukumārikā |*  
*sutā sāgaradattasya subhadrākuṣibhūr abhūt || 352*  
*jinadattātmaṃ tatra bhadrājaś cāsti sāgarah |*  
*veśmāsthām tatpitānyedyur dadarśa sukumārikām || 353*

tanayasya madīyasya yogyeyam iti cintayan |  
 saha bandhubhir abhyetya pitaram tām ayācata || 354  
 so 'py ūce 'tipriyā me 'sau na bhavāmy anayā vinā |  
 mamāstu gṛhajāmātā sāgaras tattavātmajāḥ || 355  
 sutam ālocayāmīti jinadatto 'gamad gṛham |  
 sāgarasya tadākyac ca maunam ālambya sa sthitaḥ || 356  
 anīśiddham hy anumataṁ iti nyāyena tatpitā |  
 mene sāgaradattāya gṛhajāmātaram sutam || 357  
 āścaryakṛt tayor jajñe pāṇigrahamahotsavaḥ |  
 naktaṁ śīśriyatus tau ca palyaṅkaṁ vāsaveśmani || 358  
 pūrvakarmavaśāt tasyāḥ sparśam aṅgārasodaram |  
 āsādyā sāgaras tastau kṣaṇam tatra kathamcana || 359  
 tasyām sukhaprasuptāyām sa praṇamya gṛham yayau |  
 nidrātyaye 'rudat kāntam apaśyantī ca sā bhṛśam || 360  
 athādiṣṭā tayor dantaśaucahetoḥ subhadrāyā |  
 prātaraiḥkṣiṣṭa tām ceṭī rudantīm vallabhojjhitām || 361  
 sā gatvākhyat subhadrāyai sāpi svapreyase kṣaṇāt |  
 pitur eṣo 'pi jāmātur upālambham dadau svayam || 362  
 so 'py āha tanayam vatsa na yuktaṁ vidadhe tvayā |  
 gacchādhunāpi tat tatra mānyathā madvacāḥ kṛthāḥ || 363  
 sāgare 'py ūcivān agnau varam jhampām tanomy aham |  
 na punas tāta gantāsmi veśma tasyāḥ kadācana || 364  
 idaṁ sāgaradatto 'pi tatkuḍyāntarito 'śṛṇot |  
 jagāda ca gṛham gatvā nirāśaḥ sukumārikām || 365  
 kathamcit sarvathā vatse viraktaḥ sāgaras tvayi |  
 tan mā khidyasva ko 'py anyāḥ patis tava vidhāsyate || 366  
 kaupīnāmbaramātraikakarparam makṣikāvṛtam |  
 bhikṣukaṁ kaṁcid adrākṣīt sa gavākṣasthito 'nyadā || 367  
 āhūya tena so 'mbhobhiḥ snāpayitvā sugandhibhiḥ |  
 vilipyā candanair divyavāsāmsi paridhāpya ca || 368  
 ūce tubhyam mayā dattā putrīyam sukumārikā |  
 madīyam vilasan lakṣmīm sukhamaśva sahānayā || 369  
 ity uktaḥ so 'viśad vāsaveśma sākaṁ tayā niśi |  
 mene ca tadvapuḥśleṣam agniploṣam ivātmanaḥ || 370  
 sahasotthāya veśam svamādāya sa palāyitaḥ |  
 tathaiva rudatīm tām ca vilokya janako 'bravīt || 371  
 so 'yam prākkarmaṇām vatse vipāko 'nyan na kāraṇam |  
 tadāsva dadatī dānam śāntātmā mama veśmani || 372  
 tathaiva kurvatīstathau sā dharmāikaparāyaṇā |  
 prāpus tadgeham anyedyuḥ sādhyo gopālikā iti || 373  
 śuddhair aśanapānādyaiḥ sā bhaktyā pratilābhya ca |  
 tanmukhād dharmam ākarṇya viraktā vratam agrahīt || 374  
 tapo 'tha kurvatī nityam turyaśāṣṭhāṣṭam ādikam |  
 āryikābhiḥ sahaitābhir vihāram akarod iyam || 375

āryās tāḥ sā kadāpy ūce tanomy ātāpanām aham |  
 subhūbhibhāgodyānasthā dattadṛṣṭir vivasvati || 376  
 sā pratyabhidadhe tābhir iti ha smāgamoktayaḥ |  
 ātāpanā na sādhvīnām kalpate vasater bahiḥ || 377  
 anākarma ca tadvācam vane tasmīn upetya sā |  
 yāvād ārabhate kṣiptacakṣur ātāpanām ravau || 378  
 tāvad utsaṅgam ekasya śrayantīm aparasya |  
 anke nyastānghrim anyena badhyamānāvataṁsakām || 379  
 pareṇāvadhyatcchannām vījitām itareṇa ca |  
 gaṇikām āgatām tatra devadattām dadarśa sā || 380  
 tām vīkṣyāpūrṇabhogecchā nidānam iti sākarot |  
 bhavyam tapasānena pañcapreyasyasāv iva || 381  
 tanvatī dehaśaucādyam abhyukṣantī kṣaṇe kāṇe |  
 vāryamāṇeyam āryābhiḥ manasīdam adhārayat || 382  
 purā bahumatābhūvam āryikāṇām agāriṇī |  
 tiraskurvanti māmētā bhikṣukīm adhunā punaḥ || 383  
 ity ālocya vinirgatya vibhinnavasatiḥ sthitā |  
 vrataṁ sā pālayām āsa ciram svacchandavartinī || 384  
 māsān samlekhanām aṣṭau kṛtvānālocya samsthitā |  
 navapalyopamāyuskā saudharṁ devyabhūdiyam || 385  
 cyutābhavac ca kṣṇeyam prācīnāc ca nidānataḥ |  
 bhartāro jajñire mukhyāḥ pañcaite ko 'tra vismayaḥ || 386 [4.352–386].)

## Abbreviations

- BSOAS Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies  
 GOS Gaekwad's Oriental Series  
 HIL A History of Indian Literature  
 JIP Journal of Indian Philosophy  
 MBh Mahābhārata, crit. ed. V.S. Sukthankar u.a., Poona 1933–41 (BORI)  
 SBB Sacred Books of the Buddhists

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