

yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ

A. Harindranath and A. Purushothaman

yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ: where-night-falls-is-my-home Muni. That is what we all are.

– P. Lal [1]

aśraddhā paramaṃ pāpaṃ śraddhā pāpaprāmocanī

(12.264.15) (Birds to the ascetic Jājali)

I. PROLOGUE

In the *Mahābhārata* the phrase *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ* occurs in three significant places and the phrase *yatra sāyam* by itself occurs in two significant places.

Occurrence of *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ*

1. Ādi Parva: Jaratkāru

etasminnevakāle tu jaratkārumahātapāḥ

cacāra pṛthivīm̄ kṛtsnām̄ yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ (1.45.1)

2. Vana Parva: Kṛṣṇa

arjuna uvāca

daśa varṣasahasrāṇi yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ

vyacarastvaṃ purā kṛṣṇa parvate gandhamādane (3.12.11)

3. Śānti Parva: Jājali

so 'marṣavaśamāpannastulādhāradidr̥kṣayā

pṛthivīm̄ caradrājan yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ (12.261.44)

Occurrence of *yatra sāyam*

1. Vana Parva: Damayanti

sairandhrīm jātisampannām bhujīṣyām kāmavāsinīm (3.65.55b)

phalamūlāśanām ekām yatrasāyaṃ pratiśrayām (3.65.56a)

2. Virāṭa Parva (Southern Recension): Sairandhrī (Draupadī)

bharṭṛśokaparītāṅgi bhartṛsabrahmācāriṇī

vicarāmi mahīm durgāṃ yatra sāyaṃniveśanā

II. NARRATORS AND LISTENERS

Let us consider the narrators and listeners of the phrase *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ*.

In Ādi Parva, the narrator Ugraśravas (Sauti), the son of Lomahaṛṣaṇa uses the phrase to describe Jaratkāru, while describing the circumstances of Āstīka's birth to Śaunaka, the listener. In Vana Parva, Arjuna uses the phrase to remind Kṛṣṇa that he was a *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ* in his former lives in days of old. Here the narrator is using the phrase to describe the listener.

In Śānti Parva, Bhīṣma uses the phrase to describe Jājali who was on his way to meet Tulādhāra.

A. Time and Space

Let us arrange these situations with reference to time and space. Let us denote as level one the situation where the narrator refers to the first person's current condition.

Arjuna uses the phrase *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ* referring to the past of Kṛṣṇa, the listener. This reference is to the past of the second person, which may be denoted as level two. However, viewing Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as *two-in-one*, this also qualifies as level one.

The phrase *yatrasāyaṃgrho muniḥ* is used by Ugraśravas to describe Jaratkāru to Śaunaka and by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira to describe Jājali. In both situations the phrase is used to denote a past condition of a third person, which may be considered as level three.

Note that Level three is far away from level two in time and space.

B. Forest related Subsistence

In all the three contexts, forest related subsistence is implied.

Jaratkāru was *having air alone for his food* when he saw the spirits of his ancestors heads down in a hole in a forest.

Kṛṣṇa was wandering on the Gandhamādana mountains for ten thousand years when he was a *yatrasāyaṃgr̥ho muniḥ*. Even though it is not explicitly stated what Kṛṣṇa subsisted on during this time, we may presume that he lived on air alone (as he had in Badari).

Jājali was standing in the forest like a post of wood, abstaining entirely from food living upon air only.

These are strikingly similar: Jaratkāru, Kṛṣṇa and Jājali on air only. All refer to forest.

C. Appearances

Jaratkāru *became daily emaciated and grew lean fleshed. ... Sauti said: Jara is said to mean waste and kāru implies huge. This rishi's body had been huge and he gradually reduced it by severe ascetic penances.*

No doubt, living like a wood, Jājali's appearance must be similar.

Nothing is stated about Kṛṣṇa's appearance.

D. Lack of Companions

No doubt, Jaratkāru and Jājali must be alone when they were *yatrasāyaṃgr̥ho muniḥ*. Again, Kṛṣṇa's case call for a possible exception since Nara and Nārāyaṇa are usually paired together.

E. Compassion

Compassion is revealed in Jaratkāru in his future act:

Jaratkāru, free from desire of worldly enjoyment, agrees to marry to produce a son only out of compassion to the spirits of his ancestors. This compassion is due to grandson-grandfathers relation.

Compassion is revealed in Jājali in his past act:

Jājali did not move from the spot in the forest where he *stood like a wood*, out of compassion to the birds. Jājali's case may appear strange at first sight, since there is no apparent

relation between him and the birds. However, later Tulādhāra points out that the young birds are *his children* indeed!

Compassion appears to be the driving force of Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa is (acting ?) angry due to the wrongs done by Duryodhana to Pṛtha's sons. Kṛṣṇa's compassion is due to his relation as a cousin brother of Pāṇḍavas and due to his relation as a friend to Arjuna (Nārāyaṇa - Nara). The present context appears to be the only episode in the Itihāsa where Arjuna remembers the past lives and not Kṛṣṇa. Vyāsa seems very much aware of this special situation since at the end of the eulogy by Arjuna, Vaiśampāyana says: *evam uktvā tadātmānam ātmā kṛṣṇasya pāṇḍavaḥ*

In Jājali's case, an act of compassion generates a relation while in the other cases, the relation causes compassion! *Then Jājali wondered much and thought that he had achieved ascetic success. Then pride entered his heart.* Note that among the three, only Jājali has to meet someone else who is not equal to him (actually above him) to eliminate the pride which entered his heart. In the cases of Jaratkāru and Kṛṣṇa, pride is not mentioned, neither there are any discussions on righteousness. Jājali episode is the last place where the phrase *yatrasāyaṃgrho munih* is used. It is as though the hints given earlier (Jaratkāru, and Kṛṣṇa) are elaborated and the topic is explored through the discussions between Jājali and Tulādhāra. General theme seems to be: While compassion is required to sustain life (spanned by ancestors-friend-husband-children respectively in the four episodes), a balanced view towards life seems essential to attain the ultimate aim of life.

This brings us to the question: What is this ultimate aim ?

In the words of the spirits of Jaratkāru's pitṛs (desiring salvation), Jaratkāru (the only thread that remains in the line of his ancestors) is free from greed for the merits or asceticism. The rat is the Time of infinite strength which is gradually weakening the wretch Jaratkāru engaged in ascetic penances tempted by merits thereof, but wanting in prudence and heart. But, as the subsequent incidents indicate, we know that Jaratkāru has both prudence and heart. When Jaratkāru leaves his wife (after Āstīka is conceived), Ugraśravas says: *The great Rishi Jaratkāru of virtuous soul went away, his heart firmly fixed on practising again the severest penances.* We are once more reminded that Jaratkāru's heart is fixed on severest penances. (At the same time, we cannot ignore the faint indication that this act of Jaratkāru was a deviation.)

The sequence in which these instances are presented appears to have significance: The

cases of Kṛṣṇa is enveloped by the cases of Jaratkāru and Jājali. Jaratkāru leaves his life of severe penances to father Āstīka (who paves the way for Vaiśampāyana's recital of *Mahābhārata* to Janamejaya). After facilitating the life of the young birds, the proud brāhmin Jājali has to learn his last lessons from Tulādhāra, the merchant so that he can return to his life of great vows. This sequencing can imply that life (represented by Āstīka and the young birds) which is created by penances performed by life generating agents (Jaratkāru and Jājali) is sustained by penances (Kṛṣṇa) and has to end in penances (Jaratkāru and Jājali).

III. RESTORING BALANCE TO LIFE

In the case of Jaratkāru and Jājali, *Where-night-falls-is-my-home Muni* signifies mind fixed on a single goal. But this can easily degenerate into a life out of balance. This is what Jaratkāru is reminded of by his forefathers. In the case of Jājali, he of course has to learn from Tulādhāra how to lead a balanced life. The merchant Tulādhāra richly deserves his name:

samo'haṃ sarvabhūteṣu paśya me jājale vratam
tulā me sarvabhūteṣu samā tiṣṭhati jājale (12.262.10)

I cast equal eyes upon all things and all creatures. Behold, O Jājali, this is my vow! My scales are perfectly even, O Jājali, with respect to all creatures.

Here is an advise for all of us (where-night-falls-is-my-home Muni. That is what we all are. - P. Lal):

kāraṇāddharmaṃ anvicchenna lokacaritaṃ caret (12.262.53)

One should practise what one considers to be one's duty, guided by reasons, instead of blindly following the practices of the world.

And more:

sarvā nadyaḥ sarasvatyaḥ sarve puṇyāḥ śiloccayāḥ
jājale tīrthaṃ ātmaiva mā sma deśātithirbhava (12.263.40)

All rivers are as sacred as the Sarasvati, and all mountains are sacred. O Jājali, the Soul is itself a *tīrtha*. Do not wander about on the earth for visiting sacred places.

A. Sounds of Birds

At the end of the conversation, Tulādhāra tells Jājali to summon the birds:

saṃbhāvayanti pitaraṃ tvayā saṃbhāvitāḥ khagāḥ
asaṃśayaṃ pitā ca tvaṃ putrān āhvaya jājale (12.264.4)

bhīṣma uvāca

tato jājalīnā tena samāhūtāḥ patatṛiṇaḥ
vācaṃ uccārayanti sma dharmasya vacanāt kila (12.264.5)
ahiṃsādikṛtaṃ karma iha caiva paratra ca

Summon them, O regenerate one! There those birds, treated with affection by thee, are displaying their love for thee that art their father. Without doubt, thou art their father, O Jājali! Do thou summon thy children.

“Bhīṣma continued, ‘Then those birds, summoned by Jājali, made answer agreeably to the dictates of that religion which is not fraught with injury to any creature. ...’

Birds eulogise śhraddhā. In their discourse we find the following advice to Jājali:

śraddhāṃ kuru mahāprājñā tataḥ prāpsyasi yatparam (12.264.19)

O thou of great wisdom, betake thyself to Faith, for thou shalt then obtain that which is superior.

It is enlightening to recall the role of the sounds of birds in Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata [2].

IV. YATRA SĀYAM: MIRRORING DAMAYANTĪ AND DRAUPADĪ

A. Damayantī

Damayantī says: *I live wherever I like subsisting on fruit and root.* She is referring to her life in the forest where fruit and root are readily available.

Damayantī was *lean, melancholy, her hair disheveled and soiled with dirt and maniac like.* To the queen mother she was *looking like a maniac,* but *seemed a very Śrī* with her *large eyes.*

Damayantī states this clearly: *I live without a companion.*

Devoted to her husband, Damayantī's only desire is to find Naḷa. This intensely personal desire arises out of compassion. She is only half way (yatrasāyaṃ). Note that she alone depends on fruit and root while others manage with air. Her compassion is due to the wife-husband relation.

Recall that Damayantī is described as *deśakālajñā* (one who knows place and time). Damayantī uses the phrase yatrasāyaṃ to describe her own condition to the nurse. In Vana Parva, Damayantī tells the nurse of the queen mother of Cedi king Subāhu: *I stay where evening overtaketh me (yatrasāyaṃ pratiśrayām)*.

Jaratkāru's aim appears to be salvation. Jājali is also apparently aiming at the same. What about Damayantī?

Damayantī is searching for Naḷa. This is on a human plane viewing Naḷa-Damayantī story as a great love story. If we look at the philosophical implications of the story Naḷa-Damayantī, following Hildebeitel, we get the answer. Damayantī (Jīvātman) is searching for Naḷa (ātman) [3].

B. Draupadī in Virāṭa Parva

In Virāṭa Parva, according to the BORI critical edition of *Mahābhārata*, after the lines
 04008019a mālinītyeva me nāma svayaṃ devī cakāra sā
 04008019c sāhaṃ abhyāgatā devī sudeṣṇe tvanniveśanam
 Southern recension has

...

bhartṛśokaparītāṅgī bhartṛsabrahmacāriṇī
 vicarāmi mahīṃ durgāṃ yatra sāyaṃniveśanā
 vīrapatnī yadā devī caramāṇeṣu bhartṛṣu
 sāhaṃ vivatsā vidhinā gandhamādanaparvatāt
 śṛṇomi tava sauśālyam bhartur madhurabhāṣiṇi
 mähātmyam ca tataḥ śrutvā brāhmaṇānām samīpataḥ

...

By invoking *yatra sāyaṃ* in Mālinī's (Draupadī) speech to Sudeṣṇā, many inner connections are brought to light. There is a mirroring of Damayantī and Draupadī as Naḷa story mirrors *Mahābhārata*. In addition there is a mirroring of Draupadī in Draupadī in disguise talking

about herself in third person. Lastly the connection between Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇā Draupadī is illuminated by common reference to Gandhamādana mountain.

V. ASTI ITI

It appears that by using the same phrase *yatrasāyamṛho muniḥ* at three crucial places (Ādi, Vana and Śānti Parvas) and the phrase *yatrasāyam* in two crucial places (Vana and Virāṭa Parvas), Vyāsa teaches us something more. Note that Jaratkāru proclaims *asti iti* before leaving Jaratkāru. This proclamation reminds the reader of *yadihāsti tadanyatra yannehāsti na kutra cit*, which as Alf Hiltebeitel has explained, *is not an Encyclopedic slogan but an āstika proclamation or affirmation that the epic is about what is and is not*. Āstika who arises from the union of Jaratkāru with Jaratkāru is indeed the paragon of a yogi who might be termed *sarvabhūtahiterata*. And thus begins the unfolding of *Mahābhārata* which concerns *asti*. Hiltebeitel has already drawn parallel with Kaṭha Upaniṣad. It is worthwhile to remember that a major issue of Kaṭha Upaniṣad is *astītyeke nāyamastīticaike*.

The second occurrence is with reference to Kṛṣṇa who after all is the *sūtradhāra* of *Mahābhārata* on whom the entire life is strung as pearls on a string (*sūtre maṇigaṇā iva*). Devakīputra Kṛṣṇa who learned from Ghora Aṅgiras (Chāndogya Upaniṣad) that *puruṣo vāva yajñah*.

The third occurrence brings Jājali to Tulādhāra who teaches the code of conduct for life.

By the specific use of *yatrasāyamṛho muniḥ* in three crucial contexts, Vyāsa illuminates one of the myriad central themes of *Mahābhārata*: life itself, the source of life and the code of conduct for life.

namostute vyāsa viśālabuddhe!

Notes:

(1) The śloka numbers follow Śrīmanmahābhāratam with the Bhāratabhāvadīpa of Nīlakaṇṭha, (Poona: Citrashala Press). Reprinted by Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, Delhi (1979) and Nag Publishers, Delhi, (1988-1991).

(2) All translated passages are from the *Mahābhārata* translation of Kisari Mohan Ganguli,

available online at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m01/>.

[1] *In one of the monasteries built in a medieval forest a monk asks: "What are the tasks of the elect in the Heaven?" The answer is: "None. They contemplate the Lord in Heaven. For all eternity they contemplate the Lord." He says: "Eternity must be very long.". The Father Superior does not answer. The monk goes back to a clearing in the forest. Above his head, a beautiful bird comes and perches on a tree. He is meditating. This is the concept of sādhanā referred to earlier by Sri Uma Shankar Joshi, but raised to an extraordinary poetic intensity. This is Western sādhanā. The monk meditates; a lovely bird comes and perches. Soon it flies away to a tree, not far off, taking its time for it flies badly. The monk follows it, the bird flies off again, and the monk finds it so beautiful, and so mysterious, that he follows the bird, and so the chase continues until evening. The bird disappears and the monk hurries to get back to his monastery before night falls. Guess what happens? Guess what happens to all of us when we hurry back to a monastery before night falls. yatraśāyamṅrho munih: where-night-falls-is-my-home Muni. That is what we all are. The monk hardly recognizes it. The buildings are much larger. The old fathers are dead. The Superior has become an old man. The monk thinks: If it takes only a bird to make 20 years seem to you like a few hours, then what must the eternity of the elect be like?"*

From the Valedictory Address, P. Lal, *The Mahābhārata Revisited*, Sahitya Akademi (1990), page 297. Available on the internet at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/valedict.html>

[2] *The sounds of birds thus both inspire the poets and penetrate the poetics of both of the Sanskrit epics. ...* Alf Hiltebeitel, Vyāsa and Śuka: An Allegory of Writing, chapter 8 of the book *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*, The University of Chicago Press, (2001).

[3] Alf Hiltebeitel, Listening to Nala and Damayantī, chapter 6 of the book in Ref. [2], page 215-239.

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