

Putrikā Interpretation of the Mahābhārata

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ब्राड्बेक्-महाभागः महाभारते “पुत्रिका”-पात्राण्यधिकृत्य विमृशन्, आदौ “पुत्रिका”-शब्दः राजवंशेषु राज्ञः एकमात्रस्त्र्यपत्यस्य वाचकः इति प्रतिपाद्य, पुत्रिकायाः विवाहसमये तस्यां जनिष्यमाणस्य पुत्रस्य आत्मनो वंशस्य समुद्गाररूपेण राजा वरस्य सकाशात् पणं स्वीकरोति इति धर्मशास्त्रसिद्धां व्यवस्थां प्रतिपाद्य, चित्राङ्गदा-ऋष्यशृङ्ग-विश्वामित्र-मनुदक्ष - सावित्री - परीक्षित - द्रौपदीनामाख्यानेषु “पुत्रिका” - प्रसङ्गं स्वकल्पनानुसारं निरूपयति। ब्राड्बेक्महाभागस्य मतेन वशिष्ठस्य गौः तस्य पुत्री एव नान्या। एवमेव मनोः चरित्रे मत्स्यः यः तावत् मनुं जलस्य पारं तारयति, सोऽपि पुत्रिकारूपिणी मत्स्यकन्यैव यस्याः कारणात् पुनः मनुवंशः प्रवर्धितः। दक्षकन्याः अपि पुत्रिकाः। सावित्री न केवलं पुत्रिका अपितु पतिव्रताऽपि यतः पितुः वंशेन सह सत्यवतः वंशमपि वर्धितवती। परीक्षिदुपाख्याने च परीक्षिता मारितो मृगः न मृगः अपि तु शमीकस्य पुत्रिका एव, अतः शमीकस्य पुत्रः शृङ्गी वस्तुतः परीक्षित एव पुत्र इति दिक्।

INTRODUCTION¹

A *putrikā* is a woman whose son is dedicated to his maternal grandfather's patriline in the context of ancestral ritual and inheritance. Such a woman can pose a danger to the patriline into which she marries. This paper introduces the figure of the *putrikā* as described in the Dharmasūtras and Dharmaśāstras and as exemplified by Arjuna's wife Citrāṅgada in the *Mahābhārata*, and then suggests the idea of the *putrikā* as a tool for the interpretation of several other stories within the *Mahābhārata*:

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Second International Indology Graduate Research Symposium, in Cambridge, on 23 September 2010. Some of the interpretations mentioned here are also suggested in Brodbeck 2009.

the stories of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Viśvāmitra, Manu, Dakṣa, Sāvitrī, Parikṣit, and Draupadī. The *Mahābhārata*'s royal-ancestral subject matter provides a fitting context for the exploration of a recurring gendered problematic. In the end, we can begin to understand why so much discursive weight has been mustered to establish and extol a woman's normative duty to be *pativrata* – that is, 'avowed to her husband' and to the prosperity and continuity of his patriline.

ŚRĀDDHA AND PUTRIKĀ IN THE DHARMA TEXTS

The *śrāddha* ceremony is described in old Sanskrit texts as a kind of cult of the ancestors. It is a regular offering to sustain those in the *pitṛloka*, the ancestral heaven. The ritual patron symbolically feeds father, grandfather, and great-grandfather with morsels of food. There are descriptions and discussions of the *śrāddha* in the *Mahābhārata* (13.23–4; 13.87–92; *Harivaṃśa* 11–13), and also in the *Dharmasūtras* and *Dharmaśāstras* (*Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 2.16–20; *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 15; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* 2.14–15; *Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 11:16–44; *Manusmṛti* 3:122–285). The *śrāddha* evokes the idea of a line of fathers stretching off into the distant past and, hopefully, continuing through into the future. It would evoke that idea in a different way for men and for women, since men can be in a line of fathers in a way that women cannot. In each generation a wife is involved, but in subsidiary fashion. Think of the way surnames work when women take their husbands' names in marriage.

If all men did the *śrāddha* and had children, the line would keep forking and form a tree structure, because men often have more than one son. But because of the inheritance of land and the necessity for communal representation, this tree pattern – which has already been stripped of one parent in every generation in order that it can be a pattern – is often seen stripped of its branches, as a sheer trunk; a bamboo, a *vaṃśa*. This is a regal paradigm, a line of singular inheritance and guardianship of an expanding people and place. Where there is no tie between line and land, the idea of a line into the past can come to emphasise biological and property inheritance much less, so that one may think in terms of a line not of fathers and sons, but of teachers and students. But where kingship is

concerned, on whatever scale it may be, one finds lists showing one preeminent male per generation, with younger brothers only occasionally mentioned, as emigrants, assistants, or handy spares.

The ancestral system places a massive existential pressure on any king to have a good son. The texts on *dharma* explain what to do if a man has no son:

*pitotsrjet putrikām anapatyo 'gñiṃ prajāpatiṃ
ceṣṭvāsmadartham apatyam iti saṃvadya ॥
abhisam̐dhimātrāt putrikety ekeṣām ॥
tatsaṃśayān nopayacched abhrāṭṛkām ॥*

A father who has no son should offer an oblation to Fire and Prajāpati, proclaim 'Your son is for my benefit', and appoint his daughter. According to some, he may appoint the daughter by his mere intention. Because of this uncertainty, a man should not marry a girl who has no brother.

(Gautama Dharmasūtra 28:18–20; tr. Olivelle 2000: 187)
*yasyās tu na bhaved bhrātā na vijñāyeta vā pitā |
nopayaccheta tāṃ prājñāḥ putrikādharmaśaṅkayā ॥*

A wise man must not marry a girl who has no brother or whose father is unknown, for fear that the law of 'female-son' may be in force.

(Manusmṛti 3:11; tr. Olivelle 2006: 108)

The appointed lineal daughter (Olivelle's 'female-son') is called a *putrikā*.

The point about whom not to marry is crucial; after having a son, a model man must make sure the son marries well, and has a grandson for the line. The daughter-in-law's natal line is a potential nuisance; one wants a girl whose family have been able to give her away properly and fully. In the standard old-fashioned British wedding, the bride is 'given away' by her father on behalf of his family – and so, by implication, is her future son.

The *Gautama Dharmasūtra* quotation suggests that a bride's father might have lineally appointed his daughter without telling

her husband's family. It is important for the two families to understand each other's intentions; but marriage in Indian texts is sometimes contracted by the couple on their own account, before they know much about or have told each other's families, and in situations where one of them is overcome by physical desire. In such situations, the other one may have some political advantage.

ARJUNA AND CITRĀṄGADĀ

In the *Mahābhārata*, Prince Arjuna, great hero of the victorious Pāṇḍava brotherhood in the war of Kurukṣetra and younger brother of King Yudhiṣṭhira, marries a *putrikā*. Citrāṅgadā is Arjuna's third wife, and she is a princess. He meets her when he is visiting the ruling house of Kaliṅga, on the east coast (*Mahābhārata* 1.207; van Buitenen 1973: 402). He wants her, but when he proposes the marriage to her father, her father explains that she is his only child and that her son must be his own successor as king:

putro mameyam iti me bhāvanā puruṣottama |
putrikā hetuvidhinā saṃjñitā bharataṣabha ||
etac chulkaṃ bhavatv asyāḥ kulakṛj jāyatām iha |

I think of her as my son, O best of men; she's a *putrikā*, and known as such in customary fashion, Bharata's bull. The price of marrying her must be this: that her child will continue the family line here.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.207:21–22b)

Arjuna marries her anyway, and fathers Babhruvāhana, a good son for her and her father, and then rambles on, and has other sons from other wives.

In the Kurukṣetra war, Babhruvāhana is one of the few sons of the Pāṇḍavas who does not fight; and all of the sons who do fight are killed, so after the war it is not clear that the Pāṇḍavas have anyone to appoint as Yudhiṣṭhira's heir in the next generation. At this tense juncture, in Kaliṅga, there is a scene between Arjuna – out travelling again in connection with Yudhiṣṭhira's *aśvamedha* – and Babhruvāhana (*Mahābhārata* 14.78–

82; Ganguli 1970: 135–41) is induced to fight against Arjuna; he does so, and fells him for dead. This act of paricide has a clear symbolic meaning in terms of the fact that Babhruvāhana, as the son of a *putrikā*, is necessarily indifferent to his father's line.¹ Arjuna only survives thanks to a miracle cure effected by Ulūpī, one of his other wives (that seems to be her precise significance here); he is revived and returns to Hāstinapura, where it turns out that the widowed wife of his son Abhimanyu has produced a grandson for the Pāṇḍava line. And when he grows up, Parikṣit, that grandson, is king after Yudhiṣṭhira. So in the end it does not matter that one of Arjuna's wives was a *putrikā*.

Arjuna has several wives. But what if a man has only one wife, and she is a *putrikā*? Here we see the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga (*Mahābhārata* 3.110–13; Smith 2009: 180–87).

ṚŚYAŚṚṄGA

Ṛśyaśṛṅga, a country boy, son of a brahmin and a deer, has a single horn on his head. In a nearby city, King Lomapāda has no sons, only a daughter; and drought sets in across his kingdom. This is a standard motif indicating regal failure of some kind; in this case, there is failure in getting an heir (which is, after all, the primary regal duty). The king consults his advisors, who recommend that Ṛśyaśṛṅga be fetched.

The technique used to procure Ṛśyaśṛṅga is as follows. Ṛśyaśṛṅga is a complete sexual innocent. The king sends an experienced courtesan to his part of the country. She waylays Ṛśyaśṛṅga and, since he has never seen a sexually mature human female before, she bewitches him most effectively. Very soon, despite his father's warnings, he follows her to the city, where he is introduced to Princess Śāntā. He cannot resist her either, and they are married, and soon the king has a grandson and heir from her, and the drought ends.

Then Ṛśyaśṛṅga's father comes looking for his only son, and scolds the king, and says he wants his son back. And so, now that the king's problem is solved, Ṛśyaśṛṅga takes the princess away

1. For a different, psychoanalytic interpretation of the scene, see Goldman 1978: 329–37; Fitzgerald 2007: 194–202.

with him and goes home to his father's house. And presumably the couple also produce a son for Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's patriline.

And everyone lives happily ever after. This is because one and the same couple, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and the princess, with one horn between them, have produced heirs for two different patriline, one in the city and one in the country. That happened because Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's father insisted that Ṛṣyaśṛṅga discharge his natal lineal duties, and because the king, once he had got what he needed from his daughter, was willing to dispose of her.

One salient theme in this story is evident elsewhere: a young man who does not have his senses under control and has not mastered his desire can be taken advantage of by a woman, and can make a marriage that is not necessarily beneficial to his own family. No doubt about it, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was vulnerable to seduction; and although things worked out for his line in the end, they might not have done.

In this story, Lomapāda's good daughter Śāntā is a separate character from the courtesan. The princess did not seduce Ṛṣyaśṛṅga; she just gave him what he was already desperate for. But we can imagine that in other stories, the characters of the *putrikā* and the seductress might be combined.

VIŚVĀMITRA

Our next story is a story of Viśvāmitra (*Mahābhārata* 1.165; van Buitenen 1973: 331–3). Viśvāmitra, a prince from a great lineage, is out hunting, and visits Vasiṣṭha, and falls in love with Vasiṣṭha's cow, and tries to take her away with him when he leaves. Vasiṣṭha says he cannot spare her; he needs her, among other things, to assist in the matter of his ancestral offerings. Viśvāmitra says that he and his army are going to take her anyway, and there is nothing Vasiṣṭha can do about it.

But the cow, who knows that Vasiṣṭha needs her, fights back against Viśvāmitra herself, and refuses to leave, and produces jungley armies of various ethnicities, who defeat Viśvāmitra's armies; and Viśvāmitra cannot take the cow home. Viśvāmitra soon decides not to be a *kṣatriya* any more, and to become a brahmin, in which quest he succeeds.

We could say that Viśvāmitra's decision to become a brahmin would coincide with his royal patrilineal failure. In this way, we can interpret the cow as Vasiṣṭha's lineal daughter or niece. This is the description:

*ṣaḍāyatām supārśvoruṃ triprthuṃ pañca saṃvṛtām |
maṇḍūkanetrām svākārām pīnodhasam aninditām ||
suvāladhiṃ śaṅkukarṇām cāruśṛṅgām manoramām |
puṣṭāyataśirogrīvām ...*

She was six units in length, three units across, and five units around. She had nice flanks and thighs, froggy eyes, a lovely figure, perfect swollen udders, a pretty tail, pointy ears, splendid horns, a strong head, and a long neck – the mind's delight!

(*Mahābhārata* 1.165:13–14c)

The jungle forces repelling Viśvāmitra in his attempt to get a good-heir-producing wife are interesting: Pahlavas, Śabaras, Śakas, Yavanas, Puṇḍras, Kirātas, Dramiḍas, Siṃhalas, Barbaras, Daradas, and *mlecchas* (*Mahābhārata* 1.165:35–6). There is a discourse of othering here, in connection with peoples who seem to defend the *putrikā* method. Yet they are assisting the cause of Vasiṣṭha, a brahmin of peerless repute!

MANU

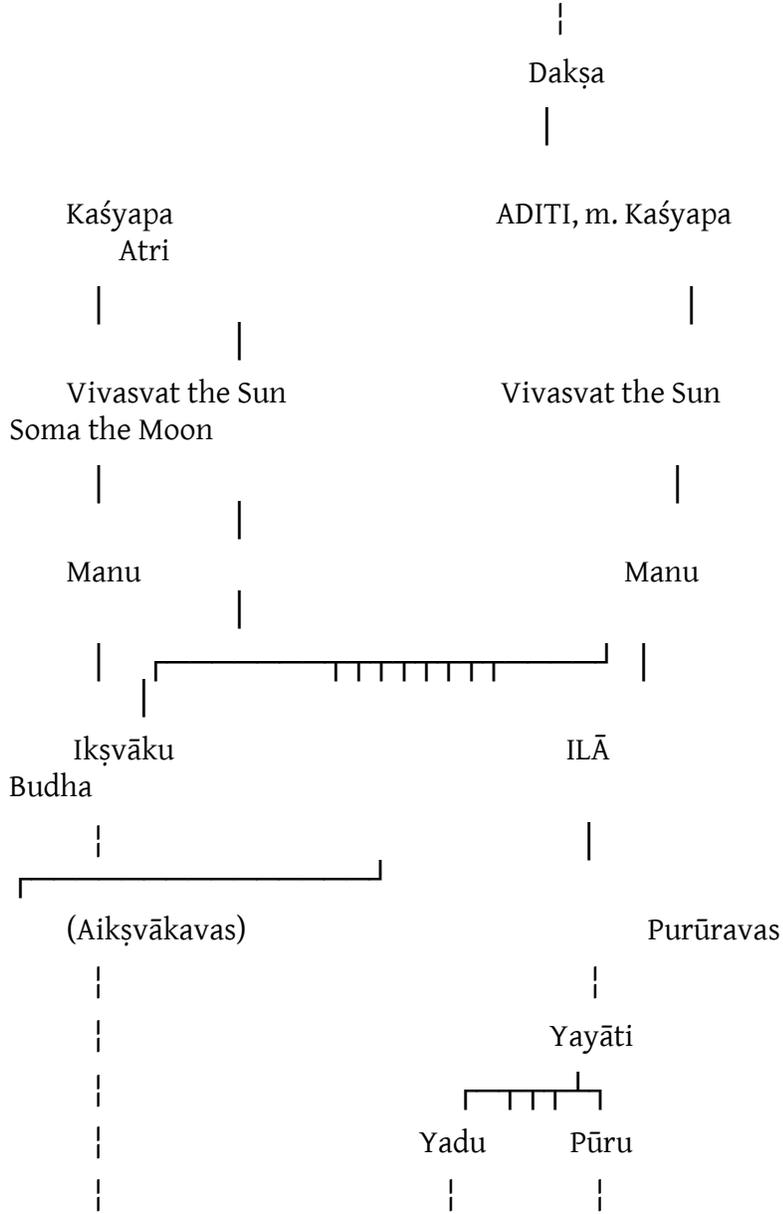
Manu is the cosmic king, the son of the sun, and the ancestor of any number of lineages. Manu's most famous royal son was Ikṣvāku, ancestor of Rāma. At the end of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Ikṣvāku's great solar line in Ayodhyā looks doomed: King Rāma has banished his wife Sītā, never takes another wife, and leads his people to drown in the River Sarayū. Ikṣvāku was ancestor also of the Buddha; but in a slightly similar fashion to Rāma, the Buddha deserts his royal ancestral line and supervises its destruction (Strong in press).

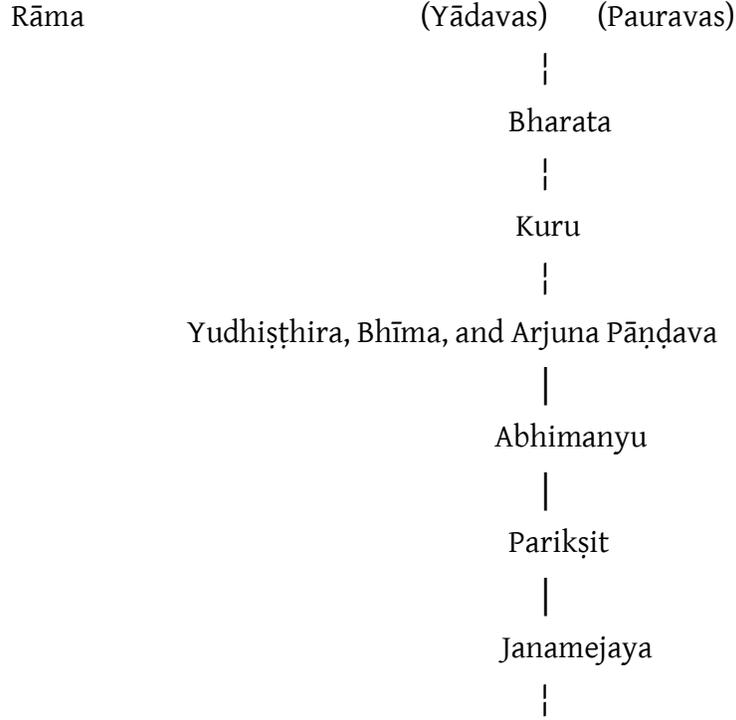
The Rāma finale to the days of the old solar line of Ayodhyā is history at the time of the Pāṇḍavas; and a few generations after the Kurukṣetra war, when Janamejaya, great-grandson of Arjuna, is told his royal line at *Mahābhārata* 1.70–90, it is told to him as a solar line descended from Manu, as if to replace the old Ayodhyā

line by adapting and solarising the old lunar line told in the *Harivaṃśa* (Brodbeck in press; see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. THE SOLARISATION OF THE OLD LUNAR LINE

(*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.69; 2.102) (*Mahābhārata* 1.70–90)
(*Harivaṃśa* 20–23)





In the story of Manu – the story of the great flood, which is told in the *Mahābhārata* by Mārkaṇḍeya (*Mahābhārata* 3.185; van Buitenen 1975: 583–5) – Manu finds and nurtures a little fish, and before it leaves home the fish promises to help him, and then later, when the flood comes, the fish comes and tows Manu across the flood to safety in a more northerly land, and through its assistance Manu has new descendants there.

I suggest that the fish is female: a mermaid, a *putrikā* used by Manu to restart his line after the Ayodhyā disaster. This is suggested by the ancestry presented to Janamejaya at *Mahābhārata* 1.70–90. There are two female names in the list of Janamejaya’s direct ancestors. Janamejaya is descended from the sun, through Manu and Manu’s son-cum-daughter Ilā. Her son was Purūravas, who elsewhere is, on his father’s side, a descendant of the moon (see e.g. *Harivaṃśa* 20:28–21:1). Purūravas’s descendant was Yayāti, his anointed son was Pūru, and Arjuna and all the Bhāratas are descendants of Pūru. The top of the line has been changed, to make it a solar line via Manu’s retrospective *putrikā* Ilā.

DAKṢA

The other female name in Janamejaya's direct ancestry as told at *Mahābhārata* 1.70–90 is that of Aditi, also called Dākṣāyaṇī, daughter of Dakṣa. In the line, she comes before Ilā. She is the mother of the sun.

In the *Manusmṛti*, Dakṣa is known to have extended his line by the *putrikā* method:

aputro 'nena vidhinā sutāṃ kurvīt putrikām |
yad apatyam bhaved asyām tan mama syāt svadhākaram ||
anena tu vidhānena purā cakre 'tha putrikāḥ |
vivṛddhyartham svavaṃśasya svayam dakṣaḥ prajāpatiḥ ||

A man with no son may make his female child an appointed daughter by means of this formula: 'Whatever children are born in her will offer the refreshment for the dead for me.' In this way in ancient times Dakṣa himself, a Lord of Creatures, created appointed daughters in order to increase his dynastic line.

(*Manusmṛti* 9:127–128; tr. Doniger and Smith 1991: 212–213)

So Dakṣa is the paradigm of the father who uses a *putrikā*.

In the *Mahābhārata* there is a common and famous story of Dakṣa (*Mahābhārata* 7.173; 10.17–18; 12.274; 12.330; 13.76; 13.145). Dakṣa was hosting a great ritual sacrifice, and Śiva was not invited. But Śiva turned up anyway, and wrecked Dakṣa's sacrifice, and the sacrifice fled into the sky in the form of a deer, and never came back. It is now a constellation.

This story of the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice is a representation of a story that appears in the *Brāhmaṇas*, whereby Prajāpati, the Lord of Creatures, took a fancy to his own daughter, who was in the form of a deer; Prajāpati became a stag, and was mounting his own daughter. So Śiva, on behalf of the gods, shot him with an arrow, and the gods achieved a great victory (*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33, amongst other versions; for the development, see Sircar 1973: 5–6, 70–73; Kramrisch 1981: 326–8; Anand 2007: 199–200).

Dakṣa is in the very early generations of Janamejaya's ancestry. It looks like the wrecking of his sacrifice would be a

metaphor for a successful stand against the *putrikā* method, stopping the *putrikā*'s father from using her as if she were his wife, and from taking her son for his line. Śiva would thus represent her inseminator's family. Dakṣa is in the upper reaches of Janamejaya's line, with his daughter; but this is exceptional. In Manu's case the story is told obliquely, with flood and fish, and in the *vaṃśa* at *Mahābhārata* 1.70 Ilā is presented as if she were, in many ways, a son of Manu:

*purūravās tato vidvān ilāyāṃ samapadyata |
sā vai tasyābhavan mātā pitā ceti hi naḥ śrutam ||*

Purūravas the sapient was born from Ilā; indeed, she was his mother and his father too – or that's what we've heard.

(*Mahābhārata* 1.70:16)

SĀVITRĪ

Sāvitrī is famous as a paradigm of the *pativratā* wife; she is loyal to her husband Satyavat to a vital degree. In the famous story (*Mahābhārata* 3.277–83; Smith 2009: 215–33), Yama comes for Satyavat, and Sāvitrī rescues him by not letting Yama take him. She impresses Yama so much with her statements of wifely devotion that he lets her have her husband back.

As the story begins, Sāvitrī is the only daughter of a sonless man. Seeking a son, he pleases the gods for eighteen years, and after that, they give him a daughter. Her husband's ancestors, whoever they might be, had better watch out. Despite the fact that she is gorgeous, no one wants to marry Sāvitrī. Though this is not stated explicitly in the story, it seems she is suspected as a *putrikā* (Jamison 1996: 305 n. 96). Eventually she goes off travelling and finds a man, and then her father takes her to that man's parents and arranges the marriage.

Sāvitrī's husband Satyavat is an only son. His father is blind, and destitute. When, one year later, Yama comes for Satyavat, this can be interpreted as the *putrikā* chicken coming to his home to roost. Sāvitrī's father wants Sāvitrī's son for his line, so it looks like it must be the end for Satyavat and his line. But Sāvitrī saves her husband; by impressing Yama with her dharmic speeches, she frees Satyavat from death, saves *his* father from ruin, and has

a hundred sons for their line. Thus Sāvitrī seems singlemindedly and singlehandedly to rebel against the *putrikā* method. She crosses the spectrum of motherhood, from *putrikā* to *pativratā*. And she is revered for it.

Among the boons that Sāvitrī wins from Yama is the boon that her father will have a hundred sons. This is an appropriate boon, since if Satyavat's line is to be saved it is not clear what would happen to Sāvitrī's father's line.

This story is not like the story of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, in which one couple produces sons for two different lines. Instead, late in the day, Sāvitrī's mother has a hundred sons. This is the same woman with whom Sāvitrī's father spent more than eighteen years not getting a son. But then we hear that Sāvitrī's new brothers were the Mālavas, named after their mother Mālavī, who was named after her father and his people. So although Sāvitrī's father gets a hundred sons, it seems unlikely that they are his in anything more than a seminal sense.

This makes us wonder if the reason why Sāvitrī's father spent eighteen years not getting a son is because he himself married a *putrikā*; and hence his sons are otherwise engaged, so if he is to service his ancestral line he needs a *putrikā* daughter of his own. Thus *putrikā* usage would be infectious and self-perpetuating unless concertedly challenged. If we imagine Sāvitrī's natal environment, we might try to imagine a context in which the idea of a woman and her people donating her sons to the line of some husband would be locally a new idea, with no immediate role models to demonstrate it; a context in which, from the standpoint of patrilineal family values, there would be no proper male role models for sons. Although in the *dharma* texts the *putrikā* method is presented as something one should only resort to in situations of dire extremity, and is presented in terms of the *putrikā*'s father and his patriline (thus reckoning it as patrilineally as possible), we can try to imagine contexts where the idea of patriliney would be revolutionary. But speaking for myself, given that my surname nominally comprises fifty percent of my personal identity I feel that there is little chance of my reliably imagining what might precede such a revolution.

In the *dharma* texts we read that a girl should be married young (as young as seven or eight; *Mahābhārata* 13.44:13; *Manusmṛti* 9:94), and we can imagine corrective treatment sometimes being given to her in her new home, where her role model is her mother-in-law, who was likewise imported from some other family and then corrected by her own imported mother-in-law. In this system each mother-in-law is a woman whose own daughters have simply been given away, whether she or they like it or not.

PARIKṢIT

Janamejaya's father Parikṣit was cursed, to die, by Śṛṅgin, the son of Śamīka, a *muni* whom Parikṣit had – in Śṛṅgin's opinion, at least – insulted. Parikṣit, out hunting, had shot a deer and was chasing it, but lost it. He asked Śamīka about the deer but Śamīka said nothing, so Parikṣit hung a dead snake around Śamīka's neck, and that was what so angered Śṛṅgin. The curse was for Parikṣit to die by the venom of the snake-king Takṣaka; and Takṣaka was keen to discharge the duty, and did so despite monetary inducements not to, and despite Parikṣit's apparent precautions; and when Janamejaya heard about all this, that was when he decided to kill all snakes (*Mahābhārata* 1.36–40, 45–7; van Buitenen 1973: 97–103, 109–14).

Encouraged by the interpretations presented above, we can read Parikṣit's shot deer as his wife, Śamīka's daughter (Brodbeck 2009b); and we can read Śṛṅgin as Parikṣit's son by her, and Takṣaka as Śamīka's ancestor, the threatened dead snake, and Parikṣit's death by snakebite as his implied lineal death through the *putrikā* operation triggered by Śṛṅgin and Takṣaka, which is solved for both lines at the *sarpasatra*, by Janamejaya, Parikṣit's considerably later son and heir (by a different wife). Janamejaya, as a result of what he is told at that *sarpasatra* (i.e. his solar ancestry and the Pāṇḍava story, including the substories mentioned above, amongst others), decides to let the dharmic snakes, including Takṣaka, stay alive.

CONCLUSION

Most of the stories mentioned in this paper occur in other texts besides the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, in different versions, and

sometimes in different versions within the *Mahābhārata*. I have been talking only of the *Mahābhārata* versions, and thinking of them in the context of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. I have tried not to take liberties with the text; but in reading literature we are empowered to be interpretive, and it seems to me that there is a common theme running through a good deal of the *Mahābhārata*'s discourse. Other stories, in addition to the ones I have discussed here, are susceptible to this kind of interpretation; and its widespread applicability suggests that the *putrikā* problem is a central concern of the text, and provides a rationale for the inclusion within it of many stories which at first glance might seem to be rather tangential.

In a way, the text sketches a continuum of femininity, from *putrikā* to *pativrata*, with the *putrikā* being practically a man in some respects. That continuum would be connected with sexuality in ways that can be caricatured, but which nonetheless are complex and subtle and in many ways ill-served by the crude digital lineal-theoretical perspective I have essayed. If the *Mahābhārata* sketches a continuum of femininity it also has a corresponding continuum of masculinity, from eunuch to *uber-kṣatriya*, with in the latter case a caricatured sexualised masculinity that can sometimes seem parodic. Nonetheless, as I have tried to show, the text does place gender politics at the hub of the wider politics of lineage, kingdom, and the vehicle through time. There is also the distinct possibility of opting out of the whole sick business, forsaking the bondage of action and the way of the fathers. But for *kṣatriya* men at least, and in the *Mahābhārata* at least, such opting out is generally presented as irresponsible.

By concentrating on a reproductive-structural idea in some of the *Mahābhārata*'s apparently incidental stories, in this paper I have held off discussion of the story of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. Their story seems peculiarly complicated because it is overdetermined by the divine Kṛṣṇa-led *avatāra* plan to rescue the earth through them and through the Kurukṣetra war. This plan is announced by a disembodied voice at Kṛṣṇā Draupadī's birth:

sarvayoṣidvarā kṛṣṇā kṣayaṃ kṣatram niniṣati ||

*surakāryam iyaṃ kāle kariṣyati sumadhyamā |
asyā hetoḥ kṣatriyāṅṅaṃ mahad utpatsyate bhayam ||*

Kṛṣṇā, the best of all women, wants to lead the military order to destruction. In time, she of the fine waist will perform this duty for the gods. Because of her, a great danger will arise for the kṣatriyas.

(Mahābhārata 1.155:44c–45)

Draupadī is apparently a *pativratā*, but she is dishonoured in the dicing scene because of her diverse sexuality, and she excoriates her husbands and then goads them to the war; and in it all the men in her natal family are killed, and then so are her own sons, the Draupadeyas (known as such after their maternal grandfather). And so the Pāṇḍava line continues, with Kṛṣṇa's assistance, through Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son by Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadrā (a one-man wife). Once the divine work is done, Pāṇḍu gets his patrilineal heir; and this happens because Draupadī is replaced by a more conventional woman, in a manner somewhat resembling Sāvitrī's switch-over.

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