BACK TO ŚUNAḤŚEPA: REMARKS ON THE GESTATION OF THE INDIAN LITERARY NARRATIVE

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The legend of Śunaḥśepa, as it is presented in the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* (7.13–18), has been called the earliest example of an *ākhyāna* in India.[1] Consequently it has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention.[2] But like all well-spun yarns, the story is so rich in resonances that it will perhaps lend itself to still another discussion.[3]

What has struck me in the Śunaḥśepa story, apart from its extreme allusiveness, is the intricate nature of the methodological and even ideological issues that lay buried in its various interpretations. In the following I shall try to probe into the reasons why this narrative should be examined (and evaluated) primarily as a coherent whole, and why this approach also involves recognizing the various influences and constituents that have gone into its making. That is to say that these two aims need not be contradictory.[4] The other question that I take up concerns the origin of

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1 Gonda 1975: 394. The text itself (i.e. the AB) calls the story an *ākhyāna*. The early classification of literary genres is shown in the *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā* (15.6.3.), which mentions *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, *gāthā* and *nārāśaṃsī*. The word *ākhyāna* is most commonly used to describe a form of narrative text that became very popular in later Indian literature, i.e. the mixture of prose and verse. According to Horsch, the Śunaḥśepa story as a whole is the most definite example of an early *ākhyāna*, whereas its prose portions represent the *itihāsa* genre (Horsch 1966: 314). About the differences between *itihāsa*, *purāṇa*, *ākhyāna* and *kathā*, see Warder 1989: 181–191.

2 The story has been commented upon by e.g. A. Weber (1893: 47ff.), R. Roth (in Weber's *Indische Studien*, II: 457ff. and II: 112ff.), H. Oldenberg (1911; 1917b) and A. B. Keith (1920, in his translation of the *Ṛgveda Brāhmaṇas*; see also Keith 1925). More recent studies include Weller (1956), who calls the subject already a "well-picked field", Lommel (1962), Horsch (1966), Falk (1984), White (1986) and Shulman (1993).

3 This article is a humble tribute to Professor Parpola, whose inspiring seminars (on the Śunaḥśepa story as well as the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā* cycle) in the 80s prompted the present writer to go in for the Indian narrative.

4 Essentially I am of the opinion that the kind of organic view that H. Oldenberg had of the Indian narratives is more viable (in spirit at least, if not in detail) than the habit of dis-

the frame story, or the device of embedding, that is so prominent in the Indian narrative tradition. My main interest here lies in the theories proposed by Witzel (1987) and Minkowski (1989) which trace the device to the evolution of the ritual procedure. In the light of the evidence provided by the Śunaḥśepa story, as well as my work on the textual history of the *Pañcatantra*,[5] I would like to suggest modifications to this view.

In the following, the "story"[6] (in the AB version) is presented as a succession of narrative units. The use of verse is indicated by italics. It must be noted that the division into macro-sequences A, B, and C is, to suit the purposes of the present study, basically formal and synchronic (even though it may roughly correspond to certain historical facts, as will be seen further on), and in several points the units could well be demarcated and arranged in a different way. By purely stylistic criteria C.1. would belong to the end of section B.

Frame: the rājasūya[7]

A. "Hariścandra promises his son to Varuṇa"

1. King Hariścandra has no son
   1.1. and he asks Nārada *(1 gāthā)*[8]
   why men want to have sons.

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secting the texts into secondary, tertiary, etc. layers in search of the "original version". The danger of the latter approach (which as such may be completely sound) is that the particular text that we have at hand, with such adjectives as "corrupted" and "*unecht*" piled upon it, starts to look deficient to all intents and purposes. About the interdependence of historical and literary study of texts, see e.g. Olivelle 1999: 47.

5 Hämeen-Anttila 1996: especially 79–103, 108–116, 168–185. A more detailed discussion of the evolvement of Indian narrative (as well as of the device of the frame-story) shall be included in my Ph.D. thesis, *The Textual Strategies of the Indian Narrative: A Study of the Main Sanskrit Versions of the Pañcatantra* (forthcoming).

6 Here I make use of the structuralist distinction between "story" (*histoire*, *fabula* = the narrative content) and "discourse" (*discours*, *sjužet* = the means by which the story is communicated). See Chatman 1980: 19–22. Some theorists postulate three components: "story", "text" (*récit* = what we hear or read) and "narration" (all levels of narration presented or implied in the text, see Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 2–3; Genette 1972: 71–76). I have found the Propp-Chatman bipartition more workable.

7 Here "the *rājasūya*" refers to the AB text describing the ritual procedure. The actual performance is a frame on another level. The system of outer frames is discussed in more detail below.

8 *Gāthās* ('songs') are stanzas, from outside the corpus of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, that appear in the prose portions of the Vedic literature in the *brāhmaṇas* that come after the *Taittirīya*. The word goes back to the Indo-Iranian past (cf. the Avestan *gāthā*). *Gāthās* (or *ślokas*; the two words are synonymous in the Vedic context) represent the older, non-Vedic traditions and also the lost bardic literature of the period that precedes the compilation of the Great Epic. The seminal study on this material is Horsch 1966.

1.2. Nārada answers (*10 gāthās*):
they pay their debt (ṛṇa);
men live forever, being reborn as their sons;
for this purpose even incest is permitted.

2. Nārada says that Hariścandra must take recourse to Varuṇa
and promise to offer the son to him.
3. This is done
3.1. and the boy Rohita is born
3.2. but the killing is delayed 5 times
3.3. until Rohita is 16 years old.
4. Varuṇa asks for the sixth time, Hariścandra tells his son that now he must be offered;
4.1. Rohita escapes
4.2. and Varuṇa seizes Hariścandra (i.e. strikes him with dropsy).
5. Rohita wanders in the forest and every year tries to return
but Indra turns him back 5 times
by telling him to wander (5 gāthās).
6. In the sixth year, Rohita buys, with 100 cows, a substitute victim,
6.1. Śunaḥśepa,
6.2. who is the middle son
6.3. of Ajīgarta Sauyavasi, an Āṅgirasa.

B. "Śunaḥśepa unbound"

1. Varuṇa accepts the substitution: a brahmin is better than a kṣatriya.
2. Śunaḥśepa is taken to be offered in a rājasūya
in which the priests are Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Vasiṣṭha and Ayāsya.
3. Nobody is willing
3.1.1. to bind Śunaḥśepa;
3.1.2. for 100 cows his father Ajīgarta is willing;
3.2.1. to kill Śunaḥśepa;
3.2.2. for 100 cows his father Ajīgarta is willing.
4. Ajīgarta approaches to kill the victim with a knife.
5. Śunaḥśepa turns to the gods (Prajāpati, Agni, Savitṛ, Varuṇa, Agni, Indra, the Aśvins and Uṣas) for rescue
with ṛc-verses (85) that are attributed to him in the RV (except 1.28).
6. Śunaḥśepa is freed by the afore-mentioned gods (ultimately by Uṣas)
and Hariścandra becomes free of disease.
7. Śunaḥśepa is made the officiating priest; he has a vision of the rapid soma pressing, and he performs the ritual with
further ṛc-verses (12 = RV 1.28., 4.1.4–5 and 5.2.7).

C. "The adoption"

1. Having concluded the ritual, Śunaḥśepa sits on Viśvāmitra's lap;
   1.1. Ajīgarta claims him back
   1.2. but Viśvāmitra says that Śunaḥśepa is now Devarāta ('god-given');
   1.3. Devarāta Vaiśvāmitra is presented as the forefather of the Kāpileyas and the Bābhravas.
2. The dialogue of Ajīgarta and Śunaḥśepa:
   Ajīgarta pleads, Śunaḥśepa rejects him (4 gāthās).
3. The dialogue of Viśvāmitra and Śunaḥśepa
   concerning the terms of the adoption (3 gāthās).
4. Viśvāmitra
   asks his sons to accept Ś.'s primogeniture (1 gāthā);
   4.1.1. the older sons decline and
   4.1.2. Viśvāmitra curses them to be the Andhras, Puṇḍras, Śabaras, Pulindas and Mūtibas;
   4.2. the middle one Madhucchandas and the younger ones say
   we accept (1 gāthā).
5. The outcome: Viśvāmitra
   blesses his younger sons and Devarāta (3 gāthās);
   the younger sons
   accept joyously D.'s privileged position (1 gāthā)
   and Devarāta
   gets the double inheritance (1 gāthā).

Frame: the rājasūya

The story is told in an austere manner typical of the *brāhmaṇas*.[9] Sentences are simple and paratactic, descriptive adjectives are avoided (except in the verses) and the kind of built-in editorial commentary that latter-day readers are used to is conspicuously lacking. There is a sharp contrast to the purāṇic versions where the implied author[10] rushes in, uttering indignant shrieks. The style may evoke an atmosphere of brutality and selfishness;[11] yet the archaic spareness of the prose sections, though without doubt serving mainly other than aesthetic ends, tones pre-eminently in with the content. Not only the diction but the organization of the

9 See Oldenberg 1917a: 15–28; Gonda 1975: 410–422.

10 The implied author is the source of the norms embodied in the work (see Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 86–87). The notion goes back to W. Booth's influential classic *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961, 1983).

11 See e.g. Oldenberg 1917a: 60–61. Shulman, on the other hand, finds high emotions behind the bleak matter-of-factness of the narration, and in his paraphrase of the story Śunaḥśepa is "shocked and traumatized" by the behaviour of his father (Shulman 1993: 90).

narrative elements gives an impression of unity unparalleled by the other long narratives of the same age. The legend of Cyavana in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.120–128)[12], remarkable as it is, does not succeed in amalgamating the two motifs into a totally satisfactory whole.

In the Śunaḥśepa story there are also discrepancies, but to me it seems that they are of a different order. In their painstaking studies Weller (1956) and Lommel (1964) have drawn attention to the grammatical variation and the disparity between the prose and the verse, as well as the spurious nature of certain *gāthās*. While their observations may for the most part be accurate, the strong emphasis on the heterogeneity of what I would like to call the surface of the narrative makes one lose sight of the structural and thematic coherence beneath the surface.[13] This kind of bias is partly due to the fact that neither of the two scholars can see any connection between the story and the ritual in which it is embedded, i.e. the *rājasūya*,[14] and partly to their preoccupation with what the story is not, instead of what it is. The multi-levelled interplay of frames and allusions, by which the story operates, appears as a bewildering chaos.

To get some order into the chaos, the text must first of all be placed within the network of tradition that has produced it. It is a part of a *brāhmaṇa*, so it belongs to a type of texts the aim of which is to explain the origin and deeper meaning of the ritual acts and, at the same time, to justify their existence by proving their universal significance.[15] This has to be kept in mind in a literary analysis of any section of these texts. The last three books of the AB are considerably later than the first five, and the location is also different. AB 6–8 appears to be an eastern text, composed in the land of Videha (northern Bihar) somewhere round 500 BC,[16] which brings it close to such texts as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upani-*

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12 Also in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (4.1.5, 14.1.1.17–24). The structure of the Cyavana legend is analysed at length by Witzel (1987).

13 In this vein Weller ends his article: "In dieser Erzählung von Śunaḥśepa stehen wir einem Trümmerfelde erster Ordnung gegenüber ..." (Weller 1956: 91). Lommel recognizes a number of cohesive elements in the story, e.g. the linking of the "sacrifice" sequence and the "adoption" sequence by the motif of the cows (Lommel 1964: 156), but as he ignores the dimension of the ritual context, he inevitably passes over many of the cohesive strategies that are employed in the narration.

14 See Weller 1956: 28–32; Lommel 1964: 132–133. Both are of the opinion that the *rājasūya*, which the text presents as the occasion of the sacrifice of Śunaḥśepa, has been slipped in without too much thinking (supposedly by some muddle-headed brahmin), for Hariścandra has sat on his throne for God knows how many years (25, according to Weller) and the idea of a *rājasūya* at this point in his career would be absurd. Quite so, if the ritual were that of enthronement.

15 Gonda 1975: 339. Gonda states that "to understand these works, a general knowledge of the complicated sacrificial ritual is, for the modern reader also, an indispensable requirement".

16 Horsch (1966: 472, n. 1) is of the opinion that the section probably does not predate Buddhism.

ṣad.[17] In addition, the eastern location connects the text with the eastward movement of the *vrātyas*, the "brotherhood" of mysterious wandering outsiders beyond the pale of the brāhmaṇic culture,[18] and of the Ikṣvākus,[19] the kingly family whose name Hariścandra, the hapless monarch of our story, also bears. Videha and Magadha were on the margin of the Vedic influence, regions where *asuras* were still worshipped. On the whole, easterners (*prācyāḥ*) were a notorious lot.[20]

All texts are situated at the centre of a web formed by other texts. One possibility would be to examine the stories that are embedded in other *brāhmaṇas* side by side with the Śunaḥśepa legend. That is, however, beyond the scope of this study. Then there are the texts that are more directly related to the Śunaḥśepa legend: sources, parallels, other versions that have been preserved. Figure 1 shows some of these affinities, the ones that I consider most relevant, for a complete mapping of the cognates would be impossible.[21] The items are arranged into a loose schema. The position of the stories of the Great Epic, the Pāli *jātakas* and the literary tales included in story cycles such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara* is not to be taken as a definite statement about their chronological order; the motifs that they use are older than the "end-products", and the continuous exchange between this group and the bulk of oral folktales has blurred the boundaries. I have not wanted to depict influence as a direct and one-sided process, so there are no arrows or lines that would conjure up an idea of a genealogical tree. The image that is sought is that of a network or a gravitational field, something that reflects "unity in variance"[22].

The "discourse" that AB presents of the "story" of Śunaḥśepa occupies a central place in Figure 1. This discourse is a focal point also in another sense than as the subject of this article. It has brought separate motifs together to form a synthesis, in which each element is given a new meaning, or rather multiple meanings that suit the brāhmaṇic ideology of the supreme importance of correspondences

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17 As well as the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*. See Witzel 1989: 114–115, 224–225, 228–229, 251.

18 See e.g. Heesterman 1962: 6–7; Falk 1986: 17–30; Parpola 1988: 251–256.

19 See Witzel 1989: 236–237. According to the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Śākyas (allegedly the clan of Siddhārtha Gautama) were descendants of an Ikṣvāku king.

20 Cf. Parpola 1983: 54–55; 1988: 254–255.

21 From the enticing array of threads that had to be abandoned, I might mention the mythology involving Viśvāmitra on his own and as one of the seven *ṛṣis*; the Ikṣvākus; the person of Nārada and the shadowy fellowship of Parvata and Nārada, *Parvatanāradau*; finally, a detailed analysis of the later versions of the Śunaḥśepa legend.

22 See Parpola 1992: 300–301. I also subscribe to A. K. Ramanujan's view that, for native commentators and readers, the various oral and written texts that Indian traditions have produced "do not come in historical stages but form 'a simultaneous order', where every new text within a series confirms yet alters the whole order ever so slightly, and not always so slightly" (Ramanujan 1989: 190).

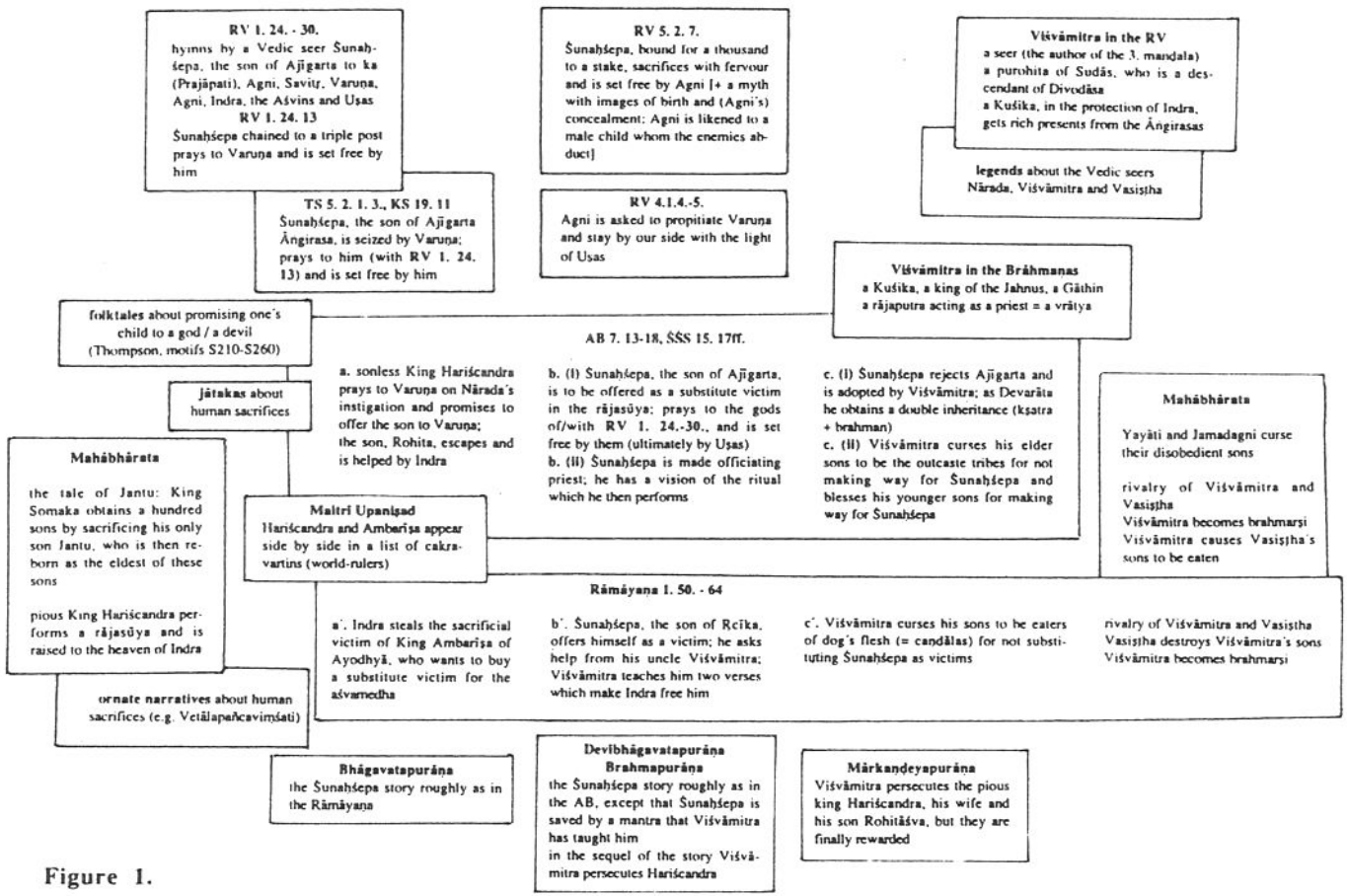
RV 1. 24. - 30.
hymns by a Vedic seer Śunaḥśepa, the son of Ajīgarta to ka (Prajāpati), Agni, Savitṛ, Varuṇa, Agni, Indra, the Aśvins and Uṣas
RV 1. 24. 13
Śunaḥśepa chained to a triple post prays to Varuṇa and is set free by him
RV 5. 2. 7.
Śunaḥśepa, bound for a thousand to a stake, sacrifices with fervour and is set free by Agni [+ a myth with images of birth and (Agni's) concealment: Agni is likened to a male child whom the enemies abduct]
Viśvāmitra in the RV
a seer (the author of the 3. maṇḍala)
a purohita of Sudās, who is a descendant of Divodāsa
a Kuśika, in the protection of Indra, gets rich presents from the Āṅgirasas
legends about the Vedic seers Nārada, Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha
TS 5. 2. 1. 3., KS 19. 11
Śunaḥśepa, the son of Ajīgarta Āṅgirasa, is seized by Varuṇa; prays to him (with RV 1. 24. 13) and is set free by him
RV 4.1.4.-5.
Agni is asked to propitiate Varuṇa and stay by our side with the light of Uṣas
Viśvāmitra in the Brāhmaṇas
a Kuśika, a king of the Jahnus, a Gāthin
a rājaputra acting as a priest = a vrātya
folktales about promising one's child to a god / a devil (Thompson, motifs S210-S260)
AB 7. 13-18, ŚŚS 15. 17ff.
Jātakas about human sacrifices
a. sonless King Hariścandra prays to Varuṇa on Nārada's instigation and promises to offer the son to Varuṇa; the son, Rohita, escapes and is helped by Indra
b. (I) Śunaḥśepa, the son of Ajīgarta, is to be offered as a substitute victim in the rājasūya; prays to the gods of/with RV 1. 24.-30., and is set free by them (ultimately by Uṣas)
b. (II) Śunaḥśepa is made officiating priest; he has a vision of the ritual which he then performs
c. (I) Śunaḥśepa rejects Ajīgarta and is adopted by Viśvāmitra; as Devarāta he obtains a double inheritance (kṣatra + brahman)
c. (II) Viśvāmitra curses his elder sons to be the outcaste tribes for not making way for Śunaḥśepa and blesses his younger sons for making way for Śunaḥśepa
Mahābhārata
Yayāti and Jamadagni curse their disobedient sons
rivalry of Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha
Viśvāmitra becomes brahmarṣi
Viśvāmitra causes Vasiṣṭha's sons to be eaten
Mahābhārata
the tale of Jantu: King Somaka obtains a hundred sons by sacrificing his only son Jantu, who is then reborn as the eldest of these sons
pious King Hariścandra performs a rājasūya and is raised to the heaven of Indra
Maitri Upaniṣad
Hariścandra and Ambarīṣa appear side by side in a list of cakravartins (world-rulers)
Rāmāyaṇa 1. 50. - 64
a'. Indra steals the sacrificial victim of King Ambarīṣa of Ayodhyā, who wants to buy a substitute victim for the aśvamedha
b'. Śunaḥśepa, the son of Ṛcīka, offers himself as a victim; he asks help from his uncle Viśvāmitra; Viśvāmitra teaches him two verses which make Indra free him
c'. Viśvāmitra curses his sons to be eaters of dog's flesh (= caṇḍālas) for not substituting Śunaḥśepa as victims
rivalry of Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha
Vasiṣṭha destroys Viśvāmitra's sons
Viśvāmitra becomes brahmarṣi
ornate narratives about human sacrifices (e.g. Vetālapañcaviṃśati)
Bhāgavatapurāṇa
the Śunaḥśepa story roughly as in the Rāmāyaṇa
Devībhāgavatapurāṇa
Brahmapurāṇa
the Śunaḥśepa story roughly as in the AB, except that Śunaḥśepa is saved by a mantra that Viśvāmitra has taught him
in the sequel of the story Viśvāmitra persecutes Hariścandra
Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa
Viśvāmitra persecutes the pious king Hariścandra, his wife and his son Rohitāśva, but they are finally rewarded

Figure 1.

(*bandhu*, *nidāna*). In the subsequent versions we see, as it were, the process being inverted, the one becoming again many: there is a dispersion of these elements, which are taken up to suit new contexts, to fashion different kinds of narratives.

Then again, the middle sequence (B in the synopsis, b in the Figure 1) is the structural core of the AB version. This does not mean that the two sequences framing it would be less important or less interesting. The middle sequence introduces the person that has given the narrative its traditional name, and his action here represents, for the AB version, both the culmination in the narrative and its most charged point on the symbolic level.[23] This is underlined by the setting, the place of sacrifice which is the stage of creation, and its centre, the sacrificial post (*yūpa*) which stands for the *axis mundi*.[24] Section B contains, embedded, extracts from the most potent texts that the author(s) of this text knew: the mantras of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*. The *ṛc*-verses used consist of seven hymns, addressed to various gods, that are ascribed to Śunaḥśepa (RV 1.24–30), a verse, from a hymn to Agni (RV 5.2.7), which refers to Śunaḥśepa, and two verses, also from a hymn to Agni (RV 4.1.4–5), which, as far as I know, are in no way connected to Śunaḥśepa but are nevertheless relevant in the context of the AB discourse, as we shall see.

It seems to me that the meaning of these *ṛc*-verses has been hitherto overlooked, or worse still, their use has been seriously misunderstood. Those who have criticized the section have seen no logic behind the fact that Śunaḥśepa turns to the same succession of gods that feature in the RV 1.24–30, when he should appeal to the root of the trouble, Varuṇa; or why he should make himself guilty of gross anachronism by quoting hymns that tell of his own liberation (RV 1.24.13; 5.2.7); or why the embarrassing piece of news that two different gods, Agni and Varuṇa (who appear respectively in these hymns as agents of the liberation), should be spotlighted.[25] But it surely does not pay off to try to interpret this kind of a story in terms of realistic fiction. What we have here is an example of a stratagem that has shaped the Indian narrative from the very beginning: metatextuality. By the embedding of the earlier discourse of the story (or a part of it), the text moves one level higher and views itself from outside. In the first of the hymns ascribed to Śunaḥśepa, a latent metatextual dimension can already be detected, for the seer acts as a third-person character, an object of narration, inside a hymn which he "sees" as a

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23 This is emphasized also by White (1986: 257–259), who notes that before this point in the story all is ambiguous and pervert, after it all is defined and the order is restored; chaos is replaced by cosmos and night by day.

24 On the symbolism of the sacrificial post, see Parpola 1985: 105–115.

25 Weller 1956: 8–22; Lommel 1964: 138–152. These scholars are also bothered about the golden chariot that Indra gives to Śunaḥśepa, as (unlike the famous Chekhovian gun) it is not needed in the story, and Lommel is of the opinion that the reciting of the *ṛc*-verses takes so much time that the laws of realistic (?) narration are seriously violated.

subject, and which – as *śruti* – is really eternal, something that has always existed. These leaps from a narrative level to another are quite natural in a context where equations and substitutions between the various aspects of psychological, phenomenal and supernatural worlds are constantly scanned and established.[26]

As it forfeits the possible gains acquired by realistic narration, the Indian narrative gets compensation in another direction. A text can enclose within its frame an alternative set of events and, by power of implication, multiply the meanings in both of these texts.[27] By the use of embedded *ṛc*-verses, the AB discourse very likely suggests that we must look out for connections. There is the alternative "story" of Śunaḥśepa, whom Varuṇa has "chained to a triple post" (RV 1.24.12–13).[28] This version reiterates the motif of Varuṇa's habit of punishing sinners with threefold fetters (*pāśāḥ*), which first appears in connection with King Hariścandra's swollen belly in the first part of the discourse. In the embedded verse, Śunaḥśepa prays to Varuṇa and is set free by him. The other embedded "story" (RV 5.2.7) tells that Agni has redeemed Śunaḥśepa from a sacrificial post (*yūpāt*). Here the motif of the human sacrifice is foregrounded. The liberator is Agni, but the binder has apparently been Varuṇa. The significance of Agni is emphasized by the use, a little later, of two verses (RV 4.1.4–5), in which Agni is asked to act as an intermediary between human beings and Varuṇa. Besides being the divine *hotṛ* and the sacrificial fire, Agni is *garbha āsuraḥ* (RV 3.29.11), the son of King Varuṇa[29], and he is also the sun that is reborn in the spring. The context of the verse 5.2.7 is also interesting: it tells about a hidden child who is associated with Agni. The *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2.6.6.1 describes how Agni fled, fearing for his life, after his two brothers had disappeared in the sacrifice (which connects him with both Rohita and Śunaḥśepa), and hid himself in water (which is Varuṇa's realm). The verse 4.1.5 mentions Uṣas, the dawn, who in the AB discourse is the ultimate agent for both Śunaḥśepa's and Hariścandra's liberation. Like Agni, Uṣas is Varuṇa's child

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26 An instance of metatextuality that is often referred to is the scene in the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* where Sītā says: "Many Rāmāyaṇas have been heard many times by many Brahmins. Tell me, does Rāma ever go to the forest without Sītā in any of them?" (Dimock 1974: 74; O'Flaherty 1984: 128).

27 The Indian literary theory came ultimately to the conclusion that the power of suggestion (*dhvani*) is the one defining feature of literary language.

28 The verses tell that Śunaḥśepa is both seized (*gṛbhītaḥ*) and bound (*baddhaḥ*) to three "blocks" (*triṣu drupadeṣu*). The word *varuṇagṛhīta* ('seized by Varuṇa') appears also in the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* (5.2.1.3.) and the *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā* (19.11) which enclose the verse 1.24.13.

29 In the *brāhmaṇas* Agni is the first-born of Prajāpati, Varuṇa's alter ego (see e.g. Parpola 1992: 299). The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (2.2.4.1.) tells how Agni was born from the mouth of Prajāpati who had been practising asceticism (after which Agni turns to him with *his* mouth open and tries to devour him).

(as the daughter of Prajāpati[30]) and the herald of the new day (and the new year). To sum up, the embedding of the *ṛc*-verses serves the purpose of highlighting the central themes and images of the AB discourse: Varuṇa's fetter, the human sacrifice, the relationship of the father to his children, the deathly darkness concealing the light, and the rebirth, both as a release from the fetters of sin and as the birth of a new day and a new year.

There is still one central theme left, that of substitution, and the prose portion of the middle sequence deals with it very thoroughly, so that in the end we actually have a long chain of substitutions.[31] But to understand how this chain works one must turn to the two sequences A and C that provide the frame of reference to the middle sequence, and begin at the beginning.

The first macro-sequence (A) is characterized with happenings of a remarkably archaic and sinister nature, beside which the corresponding sequence in the discourse of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reads like a nursery tale. Here again the thematic nucleus of the sequence is presented by the verses, namely the *gāthās* of Nārada.[32] This is a story about regeneration, and initially the emphasis is on the first syllable: *re*-generation, life-in-death. The self is born from the self, this is the message of the *gāthās*. Deep darkness is crossed over by means of a son, immortality is attained by engendering. The ideas that became commonplaces in the *dharmaśāstras*, the debt (*ṛṇa*) paid by having a son and the futility of renunciation, are mentioned briefly; then the interest shifts to the strange equations between fathers and sons, mothers and wives. Like the embedded *ṛc*-verses in the middle sequence, the *gāthās* function here as signposts. They point towards the two creation myths that dominate the ritual thinking of the *brāhmaṇas*. Both are linked to Prajāpati, who is the central deity in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. The first, implied by the idea of the self born from the self, is the creation as a self-sacrifice of the creator god and his ritual dismemberment, reflected in the *puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90). The second concerns the primeval incest between the father and the daughter, which is also found in the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*[33]. In the *brāhmaṇas* the father is Prajāpati and the daughter Uṣas, and Rudra (who is born at the same time) pierces the sinful father with his arrow (AB 3.33–34). In the *gāthās* of Nārada, however, daughters are not mentioned; the

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30 Cf. the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33 (where it is said that the daughter is either the sky or the dawn); and the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* 6.1. See Parpola 1998: 228–230, 241–242.

31 See Shulman 1993: 92–93, as well as the introduction of O'Flaherty to her translation of the AB text (O'Flaherty 1988: 19).

32 Nārada is a Vedic seer (he is mentioned in the *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā*). From an early time he was connected with *śloka*-literature and appears often in the role of a counsellor (see e.g. Horsch 1966: 368).

33 RV 1.71, 1.164, 10.61. The father and the daughter are not named, but these hymns mention Rudra being born at the same time, a hunter shooting his arrow at some male, and Agni as a perpetrator of birth.

incestuous bond involves a mother and a son on the other hand, and a brother and a sister on the other.

This is an intriguing fact, all the more because the AB discourse does not develop the theme but rather plays it down. There are no women in the story, except as props.[34] As we know that this is an eastern text, and that the inserted *gāthās* were taken from the floating corpus in which the Vedic and non-Vedic traditions were mixed, it can be assumed that these verses represent the "heretic" beliefs and customs of the outsiders (which can with reason be identified as the *vrātyas*)[35] that have persisted in the doctrine and cult of the Śākta tantrism in eastern India.[36] If we suppose that these particular *gāthās* were the last ones to be added to Nārada's speech, as most scholars do,[37] the question remains why such subversive material came to be added to the AB discourse only after its ideological content – the fusion of the essence of macro-sequences A and B with a new interpretation for the new whole – was consolidated. It could be that these *gāthās* (or some others like them), which (if the exclusion of women is not counted) suit well the ideology of the action that follows, were attached to sequence A before this consolidation took place. A plausible alternative is that the author(s) of the AB discourse wanted to attach controversial *gāthās* to a type of sacrifice that was reprehensible in the contemporary context and to a speaker (Nārada) who recommended it.[38]

For next comes Nārada's advice to sonless Hariścandra: ask King Varuṇa that a son would be born to you and promise to sacrifice the son to him. Hardly a

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34 Unless the role of Uṣas as the deity who ultimately takes off the three fetters of Śunaḥśepa and heals Hariścandra is meant to be taken as a sign of her importance in the discourse.

35 See e.g. Heesterman 1962: 1–4, 30–31; Falk 1986: 17ff.; Parpola 1983: 46–53.

36 Cf. Parpola 1994: 256; 1998: 216, 304. The incestuous bond between a brother and a sister is somewhat better attested than that of a mother and a son in Vedic literature. We have Yama and Yamī (RV 10.10; but there is no mention of illicit love between them in later texts) and the sons of Prajāpati (among whom are Agni and Sūrya), who are presented as lovers of their sister Uṣas in the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* 6.1. For other examples, see Horsch 1966: 84–85 (see also Parpola 1998: 243–244). Commenting on the last but one *gāthā*, Horsch suspects a connection with non-Aryan culture and later Tantrism. – It is to be noted that Sūrya (RV 1.115.2), Agni and the "pastoral" (and solar) deity Pūṣan (RV 6.55.4–5) are all said to be both lovers of their sister (Uṣas) and suitors of their mother. Things are complicated by the possibility that the mother and sister are the same person. Pūṣan is associated with Soma (moon) in the dual in RV 2.40, and like the dogs of Yama (see below) he is said to guide the dead (10.17.3–5). As both Soma as moon and Yama can be identified with Varuṇa-Prajāpati (see e.g. Parpola 1985: 64–66), we are eventually led back to the same basic duality (and rivalry) of sun/day/fire and moon/night/water.

37 According to Weller (1956: 88) and Lommel (1964: 124ff.), the Nārada-*gāthās* are interpolations (presumably to the whole AB discourse); the stanzas 5–7 (or 5–8) have been added first and then the remaining 6 (or 5) stanzas. Horsch (1966: 86, 291–292) appears to be of the same opinion. See also Oldenberg 1917a: 59, n. 1.

38 In any case I do not agree with Horsch when he says that all the *gāthās* of Nārada reflect the typical patriarchal and brahmanical worldview (Horsch 1966: 291–292).

bargain, but this is exactly what Hariścandra does. Why should the prized son be killed the moment he is born? The motif as such is common. In western folklore the child is usually promised to a sprite or the devil, not to a god (Yahveh being an exception)[39]. In India, gods may well demand a child to be sacrificed. The nearest parallels for the AB discourse are found in the *Mahābhārata*, the Buddhist *jātakas* and the *kathā* literature.

In the Great Epic and the *jātakas*, human sacrifice is depicted quite realistically, although it is condemned. The closest cognate to the AB discourse is the tale of Jantu in the *Mahābhārata* (Vanaparvan 127–128). King Somaka has a hundred wives but only one son Jantu who causes him too much worry. To obtain more sons he sacrifices Jantu. He gets a hundred sons, and Jantu is reborn as the eldest of these. The purohita who is responsible for the sacrifice goes to boiling hell, but as the sacrifice is a complete success (even Jantu does not really die), the condemnation looks somewhat like a sham.[40] Here the logic behind the sacrifice of one's first-born son is made clear: the aim is to promote the fertility of the king in general. Among the *jātakas* there are several types of stories that seem to be based on the same rationale. Evil counsellors or priests persuade kings to perform human (or animal) sacrifice to attain heaven or avoid hell,[41] or the king is forced to send human victims to a *yakkha* to save his own life.[42] Often the king and his growing

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39 The most famous examples being the *aqedah* and Jephtah's daughter. For parallels in folklore and other literatures, see e.g. Lommel 1964: 157–160 and Horsch 1966: 287, n. 3 & 288 n. 1–2. Shulman divides the tales of a child sacrifice into two types: one which "proceeds out of a divine command or from a demand made on the father, implicitly or otherwise, by the metaphysical ultimate" and does not have any "utilitarian explanation or rationale"; and the one which has a utilitarian purpose (Shulman 1993: 6). Shulman is of the opinion that the AB discourse of the Śunaḥśepa story falls into the first category, which he calls the proper *aqedah* type. This is not quite accurate, for there *is* a rationale, even though it is not explicitly expressed. The South Indian tales which he analyses are more true to the type.

40 Somaka (a lunar name like Hariścandra) proposes to share the priest's fate, and finally both of them enter heaven. The tale of Jantu is included also in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, where it is a part of the story of Devasmitā (KSS 13.8). Brahmans tell the tale to the childless merchant Dhanadatta and explain that he too can obtain a son by a burnt-offering. Unlike in the MBh, the sacrifice or its performers are in no way condemned. Also the version of the Namuci myth that appears in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (46.62b, embedded in the story of Sūryaprabha) comments favourably on Namuci's giving his body to be sacrificed and chopped to pieces; Namuci is reborn as Prabhāsa in the world of men. On the other hand the offering of one son to get another is ridiculed in the KSS 61.116, where a witch is the instigator of the offering.

41 Thus e.g. in the *Lohakumbhijātaka*, the king hears alarming sounds of four beings in Hell and is told by brahmins that the same fate will meet him. He orders a fourfold sacrifice to avert the danger and a great crowd of victims is captured and fastened to the stakes. The victims are released as the bodhisattva explains the real reason for the cries.

42 Thus in the *Sutanojātaka*, which is related to the 20th story of the *Vetalapañcavimśatikā* (see Parpola 1998: 287–290). In the *Mahāsutasomajātaka* the king eats up his subjects because he has been a *yakkha* in a former life.

son are presented as deadly rivals; a crisis follows when the boy turns sixteen.[43] But even younger children are looked upon as threats, like in the grisly *Culladhammapālajātaka*, where the murderous father of the Indian version of the oedipal nexus is shown at his worst.[44] In the *Khaṇḍahālajātaka*, the king (who is "not versed in religious matters") is told that, in order to attain the world of gods, he must kill his sons, his queens, his merchant princes and his best bulls and steeds. His noble son Candakumāra offers to sacrifice himself for all the others, and the narration rambles on at length before happy ending is reached: as the young prince is to be beheaded with a sword, Sakka, the king of gods, responds to a vow of truth pronounced by Candakumāra's mother, Queen Candā.[45] The *gāthās*, which are the backbone of the story, are of special interest, for they contain older material in which the atmosphere of this kind of a kingly offering is vividly brought to life.

The common denominator of these tales is the need to secure the inviolability, prosperity and fertility of the king, in other words his immortality, by a human sacrifice (the victim being preferably the king's son). The *jātakas* emphasize the aspect of oedipal rivalry between the king and his son that is inherent in the sacrifice. This rivalry which is, as Goldman (1978: 341) has noted, transformed in India into the struggle of the brahmin (as the father) and the kṣatriya (as the son) is visible in the many stories of the Great Epic. In the AB discourse it serves to tie the sequences A (Hariścandra and Rohita), B (Śunaḥśepa and Ajīgarta) and C (Viśvāmitra and his elder sons) together. To this, too, we will return.

Horsch has connected Hariścandra's sacrifice to the offering of first fruits, including one's first-born son.[46] What is more prominent in the AB discourse, however, is the principle of substitution. René Girard's thesis about the ritual as a double substitution applies here particularly well; in fact there is a chain of surro-

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43 E.g. the *Tayodhammajātaka*, in which the (monkey) son defeats the father, and the *Thusajātaka* and the *Mūsikajātaka* in which the king is predicted to be killed by his 16-year-old son, but he saves himself by reciting mantras. It may be noted that the age of sixteen (when a kṣatriya may bear arms) marks the breach between Rohita and Hariścandra in the AB discourse.

44 The king of Benares is jealous of his baby son (the ever patient bodhisattva) whom his wife pets and pampers, and he commands the boy to be mutilated. The baby's hands, feet and head are chopped off and even the torso is sliced to bits. The lamenting mother gathers the bloody pieces into her lap and dies of a broken heart, and the king is cast into the Avīci hell.

45 Candā ('moon') is also the name of the unhappy mother in the *Culladhammapālajātaka*. The queen Candā of *Khaṇḍahālajātaka* is said to be the daughter of the Pañcāla king. Her son is called Canda, Candakumāra or Canda-Suriya ('moon-sun'; the prose narrative talks about one prince but the *gāthās* are ambiguous; the *samodhāna* says that there are two princes, Canda and Suriya).

46 Horsch 1966: 286–287. Horsch bases his argument mostly on Frazer's *Golden Bough*. The offering of first fruits (which refers also to first-born animals) to secure the continuity of fertility is included in the series of *iṣṭis* which open the *rājasūya* (see Heesterman 1957: 15–25).

gates.[47] This is quite natural when one thinks about the Indian obsession with analogy[48] and the preoccupation of the *brāhmaṇas* with all kinds of correspondences. First there is the idea of the equivalence between the sacrifice, the sacrificer and the sacrificial victim. In primeval sacrifice, the victim, the cosmic *puruṣa*, is also the sacrificer, Prajāpati, and as the creator he is also the creation. He is reborn out of the sacrifice. In the AB discourse, Prajāpati/Varuṇa is substituted by King Hariścandra, whose name – 'yellow moon' – and royal title connects him with Varuṇa.[49] It is to be noted that, in the text, Hariścandra is called a *rājaputra* and Varuṇa a *rāja*. Rohita is the next ring in the chain.[50] He is substituted by Śunaḥśepa, who is substituted by the soma sacrifice. The discourse of the AB cuts the chain here, but the *upaniṣads* add one ring more: the *prāṇāgnihotra*.[51]

Moreover, the relation of Hariścandra and Rohita ('the red one') is a replica of the relation of Varuṇa/Prajāpati and Rudra, the young archer who killed "the father" because of primeval incest, just as Rohita, by escaping to the forest with his bow, symbolically kills his father. The first delay (Hariścandra putting off the sacrifice) takes six units of time (Varuṇa claims the boy six times, after birth and then after each milestone on the way to maturity), the second delay (Rohita wandering in the woods) takes another six (in the sixth year Rohita finds Śunaḥśepa). The reference is surely to the two halves of the year. This would seem to correspond to the idea of the ritual cycle of the year which is divided into an "old" and a "young" half, the "old" half (autumn-winter, the time of cultivation) being the *dakṣināyaṇa* associated with the Manes (*pitaraḥ*), and the "young" half (spring-summer, the time of "wandering", i.e. the raids), which begins with the birth of the sun in spring, being the *uttarāyaṇa* associated with the gods.[52] In the AB discourse, the growing-up of

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47 According to Girard the violence that is inevitably present in any community is channelled to somebody who, as the representative of the group (the sacred king), must pay its price (1st substitution); this person is then substituted by a ritual victim who is both similar and strange and who belongs to some marginal group (a "monstrous double"). See Girard 1977: 1–4, 269–273. Girard supports his theory mostly by classical material. About sacrificial substitution in India, see Smith & Doniger 1989.

48 See e.g. O'Flaherty 1984: 260ff.

49 Varuṇa is a *samrāj*, and in the brāhmaṇic age he was connected with Soma as the moon and with the nocturnal heaven.

50 Rohita *is* his father in the light of the *gāthās* of Nārada. The interchange of the names of the king and his son that follows the unction in the *rājasūya* implicates also the interchange of identities (Heesterman 1957: 124–125).

51 The principle of substitution applies not only to the sacrificial substance but also to the *yajamāna*. According to Heesterman, the king, Prajāpati's counterpart on earth, identifies himself with the creator and the universe in the ritual of *rājasūya*, which leads to his rebirth, and later the common *yajamāna* in the *śrauta* rites does the same thing, with the king as his model. See Heesterman 1957: 66–67, 224–226.

52 Parpola 1984: 50–53; 1994: 201–207. According to the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* (6.14), for instance, Agni represents the *uttarāyaṇa* half of the year and Varuṇa the *dakṣināyaṇa*. The idea

Rohita appears to correspond to the "old", dying half (Rohita is a marked man, theoretically dead all the time), while his *Wanderjahre* signify the "young" half.[53] Hariścandra's dropsy, "Varuṇa's disease" is a sign of being *varuṇaghrīta*, 'seized by Varuṇa', like Śunaḥśepa in the *ṛc*-verses. Hariścandra has not kept his word and Varuṇa punishes breakers of oath, but "being seized" means other things too: Varuṇa's fetters were equated with *pāpman* ('evil'), and the greatest evil in the Vedic age was death. Prajāpati-Varuṇa is both a giver and a taker: he gives life to take it away. Water, Varuṇa's element, can mean death (drowning, suffocation) but also life (fertility, purification).[54] So Hariścandra is dying to be reborn.[55]

Rohita's flight is a signifier on many levels. It represents a parricide, but also the dispossession and exile of the first-born that is a leitmotif of epic literature.[56] In this episode the socio-religious spheres of *grāma* (village, cultivated land) and *araṇya* (wilderness) are contrasted.[57] *Grāma* is the place of sacrifice, where brahmins and *gṛhasthas* live in the precarious protection of the priest-king Varuṇa; *araṇya* is the sphere of nomadic warriors (as the role of Indra suggests in this passage),[58] strange tribes and wandering ascetics, *saṃnyāsins* and *atharvans* with dubious reputation, such as Ajīgarta, a *ṛṣi* whose father 'has good pastures' (Suyavas) but who himself is 'hungry'. His famished state, i.e. his being an ascetic, is implicitly presented as the reason for his heartless, "*śūdra*-like" greed. Then

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of the cyclical nature of the original ritual and the *vrātyas* as the group that was responsible for the fact that traces of the old system survived within the Vedic ritual was first put forth by Heesterman (1957; 1962). Of the religious dimensions of the Rohita episode and the symbolism of Rohita/Rudra/Agni/Skanda/sun, see Parpola 1998: 293–298.

53 Considering the ritual connection, it is crucial that Hariścandra is "dead" – *varuṇaghrīta* and *dīkṣita* – after Rohita's flight, to be reborn as a *yajamāna* in the *rājasūya* where Śunaḥśepa is to be sacrificed (cf. Heesterman 1957: 6–7). But the action could also be interpreted the other way round, so that Rohita's birth (like the birth of the sun) would begin the "young" bright half of the year, and his flight (like Agni's flight) would begin the "old", dark half. If Rohita's exile is to be taken as *brahmacarya* (Parpola 1998: 295), he too is ritually dead until his rebirth in the new year feast (see Parpola 1977: 159–163).

54 In the *rājasūya*, Varuṇa's water is represented by the unction and the *avabhṛtha* bath, which regenerate and purify from sin. The bath combines death and birth. See Heesterman 1957: 118–120, 169; Parpola 1985: 92–94.

55 Heesterman (1957: 161) suggests that Hariścandra's swollen belly may symbolize pregnancy.

56 Cf. Goldman 1978: 344–348, 382–383. About Rohita's parricide, see Falk 1984: 129, n. 44.

57 See Malamoud 1989: 93–114 in particular. Malamoud brings up the etymology that has been suggested for the word *araṇya* (deriving from *araṇa*, 'strange' > IE **al-*, *ol-*, 'other').

58 The *gāthās* of Indra are a homogenous whole and do not present such problems as the Nārada-*gāthās* (see Horsch 1966: 87–90, 292). Indra's role as the rival of Varuṇa is not very active; the structural similarity to the earlier suspense (with the number six) suggests that Indra, like Hariścandra, is only gaining time to avoid that which is unavoidable. The dichotomy between Indra and Varuṇa is nevertheless obvious. See e.g. Shulman (1985) who investigates the relation of the king and the brahmin in the South Indian context and sees the dichotomy repeated in the relations of Indra and Varuṇa, the *nāyaka* and the *vidūṣaka*, the patron and the client, and the notions of power and purity.

we have Śunaḥśepa, whose name, 'dog's penis', has been interpreted in various ways.[59] The phallus in the name suggests virility and a connection with the sacrifice as a ritual that promotes fertility (cf. Parpola 1985: 112) and possibly includes *hierós gámos*.[60] The 'dog' is even more significant. In brāhmaṇic culture, dogs were associated with various things: *vrātyas*, *caṇḍālas*, dicing and *pāpman*/death. Like *vrātyas*, dogs were sacred and impure. In later times the sacredness was lost, and when *caṇḍālas* are called *śvapākas* (dog-cookers), both are reviled.[61] The connection with dicing is more complex.[62] There is the term *śvaghnin*, 'a professional gambler', popularly translated as the 'killer of/by a dog'. This seems to be related to the killing of the 'four-eyed dog' (*catur-akṣa śvan*) in the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice).[63] In this ritual the dog is representing evil (*pāpman*). A dog could seize one just like Varuṇa: an attack of epilepsy was called *śvagraha*, 'seizure by the dog'. Dogs are also associated with Yama; his two dogs (*sārameyau*, the sons of Saramā) devour a badly timed *agnihotra* sacrifice and guard the path of the dead, eating up those who stray.[64]

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59 For more esoteric interpretations see Horsch 1966: 290, n. 2.

60 See Parpola 1983: 48–53; 1985: 132–135; Horsch 1966: 289, n. 1.

61 See White 1986: 238–244. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Viśvāmitra's sons say, after their father has commanded them to take the place of Śunaḥśepa as sacrificial victims: "How it is, lord, that you would abandon your own sons to save the son of another? We regard this as a forbidden act, like the eating of dog's flesh." (Translation by R. P. Goldman.) Accordingly their father curses them to be eaters of dog's flesh for a thousand years. It may also be noted that in the purāṇic versions of the story, Hariścandra is relegated to the status of a *caṇḍāla*.

62 According to the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra*, in the *rājasūya* ritual the tale of Śunaḥśepa is told immediately after the game of dice (Heesterman 1957: 158). It is also curious that the last but one of the *gāthās* of Indra refers to dicing. About the dice game in the *rājasūya*, see Handelman and Shulman (1997: 61–68), who stress the absolute elimination of risks in this part of the ritual: the king / the god does not enter the game and so cannot lose.

63 See Falk 1986: 100–101, 108–111. White calls attention to the two meanings of the word *akṣa*, 'eye' and 'die' in dice, and translates *catur-akṣa śvan* as 'four-dice dog'. He is of the opinion that the dog in the dice game means the *kṛta* (four) throw of one's opponent, and in the *aśvamedha* the king must slay the "four-dice" dog which represents the success of his opponents: *pāpman* (evil) and *bhrātṛvya* (rivalry). In this game, too, every possible risk was neutralized in advance (see White 1989). A "four-eyed dog" appears also in the Avestan ritual of *Sag-dīd* (the 'dog's gaze'). The *Dharmasūtras* order certain sinners (e.g. murderers) to wear the skin of a dog or an ass (another impure animal) as a part of the propitiatory rite (see Oldenberg 1917b: 327–328, and also p. 327, n. 5 and p. 328, n. 4; Keith 1925: 266–268). On the other hand, a *brahmacārin* who has broken his vow of chastity must make an offering of an ass to the goddess Nirṛti and wear the victim's skin, and his portion of the victim is cut from the penis. The obvious purpose of this rite is to restore the virile power that the sinner has lost (Oldenberg 1917b: 333; Keith 1925: 267). Thus, both the dog and the ass epitomize the same mixture of impurity, marginality, virility and a special type of sacredness that is typical of a *vrātya*.

64 About Yama's dogs and other hellhounds, see White 1989: 285–286. The *Mānava Śrautasūtra* (3.14.21) states that a black dog (the typical representative of dark forces in European folklore) is to be offered to the Rākṣasas (see e.g. Keith 1925: 324).

The name Śunaḥśepa already appears in the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, and it must have been affixed to the legend for a long time, but this was obviously not the only reason for the fact that the author(s) of the AB discourse preserved it. It is of prime importance that the name of the protagonist should be associated with *pāpman* and pollution to begin with. These could be cast aside in the last sequence along with the name and the identity of a son of the *śūdra*-like Ajīgarta.

Another remarkable detail is that in the AB discourse, Śunaḥśepa is *madhyama*, the middle son. White (1986: 236) talks about "radical middleness", meaning the condition of falling outside the usual categorization. Thus, *vrātyas* were not kṣatriyas nor brahmins but something in between (Heesterman 1962: 8). Viśvāmitra also falls in between: according to traditional sources he was born a kṣatriya with the potential of brahminhood.[65] In the AB discourse he is called a *rājaputra*, which in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (2.223) is said to denote a *vrātya*, and he is a *hotṛ* in the *rājasūya* of King Hariścandra. To these we must add Madhucchandas, the middle son of Viśvāmitra, who is the key figure deciding who shall be cursed and who shall be blessed. *Madhyama* is both in between and in the centre.

This brings us back to the middle sequence. Varuṇa has accepted the substitution by saying that a brahmin is "worth more" than a kṣatriya. In the AB the word is *bhūyān*, 'worth more'; the *Śānkhāyana Śrautasūtra* has *śreyān*, 'better'. In the Vedic context *śrī* was conceived as the exact opposite of *pāpman*. The boy comes from the wilderness and is called 'dog's penis', but because he is a brahmin he is pure and sinless unlike Hariścandra, who has been born fettered.[66] Only now "Śunaḥśepa" becomes the essential Śunaḥśepa, the one who is *varuṇaghrīta*, impure and polluted. Being a brahmin, he can take the *pāpman* of Hariścandra to himself and get rid of it, something that is not possible for Hariścandra or Rohita.

At this point the ideological master-plan of the AB discourse begins to emerge. Varuṇa orders that a *rājasūya* is to be the occasion of the sacrifice, and "the man [Śunaḥśepa] was taken for the anointing like a sacrificial animal" (*tam etam abhiṣecanīye puruṣam paśum ālebhe*). Looking back to the possible reasons for the original sacrifice of Rohita, it is plain that the purpose of this mythical *rājasūya* is to secure the immortality of the king by sacrificing his surrogate. For the first time the discourse – by bluntly stating that nobody is willing to bind or kill the victim – suggests that this is not the way to do things. The denial, on the other hand, suggests that this may *have been* the way to do things. This notion gets support from the archaic method of killing, i.e. cutting off the head of the victim with a knife.[67]

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65 Śunaḥśepa is an Āṅgirasa, which means that he is a brahmin with kṣatriya qualities (White 1986: 251)

66 When Hariścandra becomes *varuṇaghrīta* after Rohita's flight, this means only that the *pāpman* (i.e. mortality) that has always been present as a potential has become actualized on a physical level. About the fettered condition of the *rājanya*, see Heesterman 1957: 160.

(One must remember that *within* the discourse of the AB, this *rājasūya*, with its mythical officiants, is to be taken as the first of its kind, the model for the future *rājasūyas*.) The most impressive feature of this passage, apart from the skilful development of rising action, is the manoeuvring of the material by which the text, without any overt assessment of the action, persuades the listener to draw certain conclusions. The guilt of manslaughter (the *pāpman* on the narrative level) is passed smoothly from Varuṇa, Hariścandra and Rohita to Ajīgarta, an outsider, who has already become the villain of the piece.[68]

At the climax of the AB discourse, Śunaḥśepa saves himself with a splendid confirmation of the brāhmaṇic ideology: immortality is achieved by him 'who knows thus' (*ya evaṃ veda*). He "sees" the *ṛc*-verses because he, unlike Hariścandra or Rohita, sees the analogies and the ultimate logic behind the sacrifice. The liberating truth of the *upaniṣads* is not far off. The three fetters drop one by one, after each of the three verses (RV 1.30.20–22) with which he addresses Uṣas, the dawn of a new day and the agent of regeneration. This is accompanied by the gradual disappearance of the physical signs of Varuṇa's fetter which plague Hariścandra. A new ritual ideology is also born, and its claims are confirmed and strengthened by the action that follows. The eminent priests summon Śunaḥśepa to perform the sacrifice. He gets another vision, this time of the proper procedure of the *rājasūya* ritual: he sees the immediate soma pressing (*añjaḥsava*) and its continuation, with the appropriate mantras.[69] The final bath of the royal resurrection is performed with mantras (RV 4.1.4–5) that name both Varuṇa, the lord of life and death, and the forces that propitiate, protect and regenerate: Agni and Uṣas.[70]

Then follows the most human gesture so far: Śunaḥśepa sits on Viśvāmitra's lap, and the listener is reminded of the fact that this Vedic seer is a child. The in-

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67 About ritual decapitation and severed heads in ancient India, see e.g. Heesterman 1967; Parpola 1985: 68, 118–121; 1998: 298–300.

68 The image of the haggard Ajīgarta who, after binding his son, is drawing near and whetting his knife, combines the vicious aspects of the persons who in the 20th story of the *Vetāla-pañcaviṃśatikā* prepare to kill the surrogate victim (see note 42 above). The Brahmin boy of the story laughs because all to whom he would appeal, in turn, for protection, forsake him: his greedy parents hold him down, and the king who is fearing for his own life wants to slay him with his sword, and the Brahmin demon (*brāhmarākṣasa*), who should be the boy's tutelary deity, is licking his lips to devour him. The laugh corresponds to Śunaḥśepa's words: *amānuṣam iva vai mā visaṣisyanti* ('they shall slaughter me as if I were not a human being').

69 Of "seeing" in the Vedic context and the afterlife of the concept in the later Hinduism and Buddhism, see Gonda 1963.

70 Here I would like to suggest that the *añjaḥsava* that Śunaḥśepa sees may correspond not only to the original human sacrifice but to the sacred marriage (*hierós gámos*) as well. See e.g. Olivelle (1999: 47–52), who investigates the theological and literary strategies that the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* uses to establish an equivalence between the soma pressing with sex (especially 6.4.2–3).

cident marks the transition to macro-sequence C. Formally, as I noted above, the prose section preceding the *gāthās* belongs to macro-sequence B. The villain now wants the prodigy back; Viśvāmitra declines, saying that the gods have given the boy to him. After this comes a summarizing sentence – thus far the only one in the AB discourse – which says that "he [Śunaḥśepa] was Devarāta ['god-given', a name that echoes Viśvāmitra's words] Vaiśvāmitra [Viśvāmitra's son], and his descendants are the Kāpileyas and the Bābhravas".[71] This kind of anticipation of future generations, which as such is untypical of the AB discourse which otherwise moves only in the present, seems to form a closure in the discourse,[72] and indeed the verses that follow strike a different note. The "adoption" episode has been generally considered secondary.[73] Falk, however, regards the adoption as the original core of what became the AB discourse. He grounds his argument on the description of the *rājasūya* in the *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* (12.2.85–118), which he interprets as a ritual of adoption.[74] It is difficult to say when sequence C was made a part of the AB discourse, but despite the changes in the mood, style and expression, it is a natural continuation of the themes that dominate the first two sequences. Against Falk's theory it could be said that the symbolical dimensions of the adoption are far more pronounced in the sequence than any idea of adoption *per se*. The very central idea of rebirth is realized by Śunaḥśepa who, after liberating himself and Hariścandra of the *pāpman*, takes another name and another identity. The tension between the temporary power and bloody martial code of the kṣatriyas and the idealistic, order-loving world-view of the brahmins is reconciled by the double inheritance (*rikthayor ubhayor*) of *kṣatra* and *brahman* that Devarāta obtains.[75] It is perhaps only fitting that after a shift from one world to another the

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71 *sa ha devarāto vaiśvāmitra āsa | tasyaite kāpileyabābhravāḥ ||*

72 In the end of section C, after the *saṃvāda-gāthās*, there are two *gāthās* in the third person narrative that summarize the situation and act indeed as a closure (though they do not refer to the future, only to the present).

73 See e.g. Weller 1956: 34–49 (Weller discerns three different layers in the episode); Lommel 1964: 155–156; Horsch 1966: 293.

74 Falk 1984. To me it seems that the argument is based too exclusively on the meaning of the word *pratihita* in BŚS text. Even if the meaning 'surrogate' would be accepted, it could well imply to another kind of a person than an adopted son. The idea that the prince in the ritual cannot be the natural son, because the ritual belongs to Varuṇa's sphere, is not convincing. Although Varuṇa's element is water, horses are connected with Varuṇa and they are said to be "born from water, without any progenitor", this does not add up to making Varuṇa a patron deity of "unnatural" birth. The horse and the water buffalo are Varuṇa's animals because they are paragons of *vīrya*, and the strong link between water and fertility cannot be ignored. A similar connection exists between banyan trees, fertility and Varuṇa (see Parpola 1998).

75 It appears that the alternative of renunciation, represented by Ajīgarta, is the only one that is rejected. In spite of all that has been said, the discourse retains a certain degree of ambiguity.

tenor of the narrative should change too, and the *gāthās* should reflect the more personal and emotional atmosphere that paves the way for the narrative mode of the dramas and the epics.

The motif of the rivalry between the father and the son again comes to the surface, within a slice of dry, pitiless prose that is thrust in the middle of the soft-toned *gāthās*. Viśvāmitra has a hundred and one sons[76] and he expects them to accept the superiority of Devarāta. Those who are older than the middle one, Madhucchandas, decline and their father curses them: their offspring shall "enjoy the ends" and live "in large number beyond the borders" as Andhras, Puṇḍras, Śabaras, Pulindas and Mūtibas. These were the people who inhabited the areas just outside the eastern limits of the Vedic culture, and with this "mythic explanation for a socioreligious reality" (White 1986: 235), the first of its kind, they are defined as the ones who have belonged to "us" but, like Adam and Eve, have been driven out of paradise because of their bad behaviour. Viśvāmitra's elder sons share here the fate of the *śūdra*-like Ajīgarta: both are excluded from the circle of proper society, from the ritual and thus also from the prospect of immortality.

The motif of a father's curse that is directed at a disobedient son is encountered frequently in epic literature. It is part of the theme of the "killer-fathers" that inspires the action of sequences A and B, and it is also related to the stories about the irascible *ṛṣis* whose curses play such a large part in later Sanskrit literature. The epic tales of Yayāti and Jamadagni (MBh Ādiparvan 70–89 and Vanaparvan 116.2–16 respectively) show that the curse is motivated by the father's desire to keep the status of the virile male exclusively to himself. Yayāti asks his sons to give him their youth and virility and take his old age to themselves for a thousand years. Here the urge of the father to gain eternal youth (immortality) by sacrificing the youth (and the life) of his sons is quite explicit. Yayāti's four elder sons decline, and through their father's curse they are dispossessed and their offspring shall die out. Jamadagni commands his sons to kill their mother, who has had impure thoughts, and again the older sons who do not obey are cursed: they are reduced to beasts. The submissive younger sons are rewarded.[77] The same happens in the AB discourse: Madhucchandas and his younger brothers are blessed with cattle and heroic

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It is interesting that the union of *brahman* and *kṣatra* is achieved by Śunaḥśepa and Viśvāmitra, who are far from typical representatives of their *varṇas*.

76 The verses mention Ṛṣabha, Reṇu and Aṣṭaka in addition to Madhucchandas, but only the last one is named in the prose. In the brāhmaṇic narratives the persons that are not relevant to the story or have ceased to be so are ignored, like Rohita in this discourse. See Gonda 1975: 420.

77 Goldman (1978: 351–354) sees the recurrent tales of the hostility and rivalry between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha as an oedipal conflict involving an ambitious son and a father-figure. In epic literature, their rivalry costs the lives of their sons. White (1986) analyses the Śunaḥśepa story largely in terms of the spiritual struggle between Viśvāmitra and Vasiṣṭha (who, according to White, appears here in the guise of Nārada).

offspring. With the positive answer of Madhucchandas, the narration resumes the form of poetic dialogue/monologue, and the discourse ends on a happy and reassuring note.

We have seen, I hope, that the AB discourse shows a remarkable thematic unity, which is matched by unity as concerns the line of the plot. The latter moves within the two polarities of immortality and death, and the father-son-relationship is central in the development of action. These features are summarized in Figure 2.

Let us now look at the use of frames in this discourse. Unlike in the tale of Cyavana,[78] there are no flashbacks or embedded myths, but all the sections in verse are, in a way, embedded within the frame of the main narrative that is in prose. The verse sections form long, fairly independent units that are different in each macro-sequence. In sequence A, the embedding is divided into two parts, the Nārada-*gāthās* and the Indra-*gāthās*, both of which are strings of gnomic verses. In sequence B, the embedded section consists of *ṛc*-verses (mantras). In sequence C, the *gāthās* are not gnomic but, except for the last two *gāthās*, constitute a dialogue (*saṃvāda*), like the *gāthās* in some of the longer *jātakas*. In fact, in this last sequence, the verses function as the main narrative, and the prose is relegated to the status of a commentary (except for the section that contains the curse). Thus when the short sentences in between the verses are not counted, the discourse can be formalized as follows (v = verse):

A [v(1)] A [v(2)] A + B [v(3)] B + C [v(4)] C [v(4)][79]

As I have said above, these embedded sections are an important part of the AB discourse of the Śunaḥśepa story. They are taken from heterogeneous sources, but within the discourse they are used in a way that serves the purposes of the AB discourse almost to perfection. The *gāthās* of Nārada introduce the central theme (immortality) and its application on the level of the plot (the relation of fathers and sons). The *ṛc*-verses connect the discourse with the most authoritative of contemporary Indian texts, the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*, so that the ideology of the discourse is "sanctified" by this authority. The *ṛc*-verses also lend force to the myths that have been referred to so far and elaborate on them. The *saṃvāda-gāthās* of sequence C mark a shift of world-view and also connect the discourse with the bardic tradition that would soon find large-scale expression in the two epics, as well as with the nascent Indian drama.

If we then take a look at the mutual relations of the three macro-sequences and the sources of the discourse (fig. 1), it is obvious that sequence B is central for what I called the ideological master-plan of the AB discourse. Its importance is under-

78 See Witzel 1987: 385–386.

79 The last sequence could also be [C] v(4) [C] v(4).

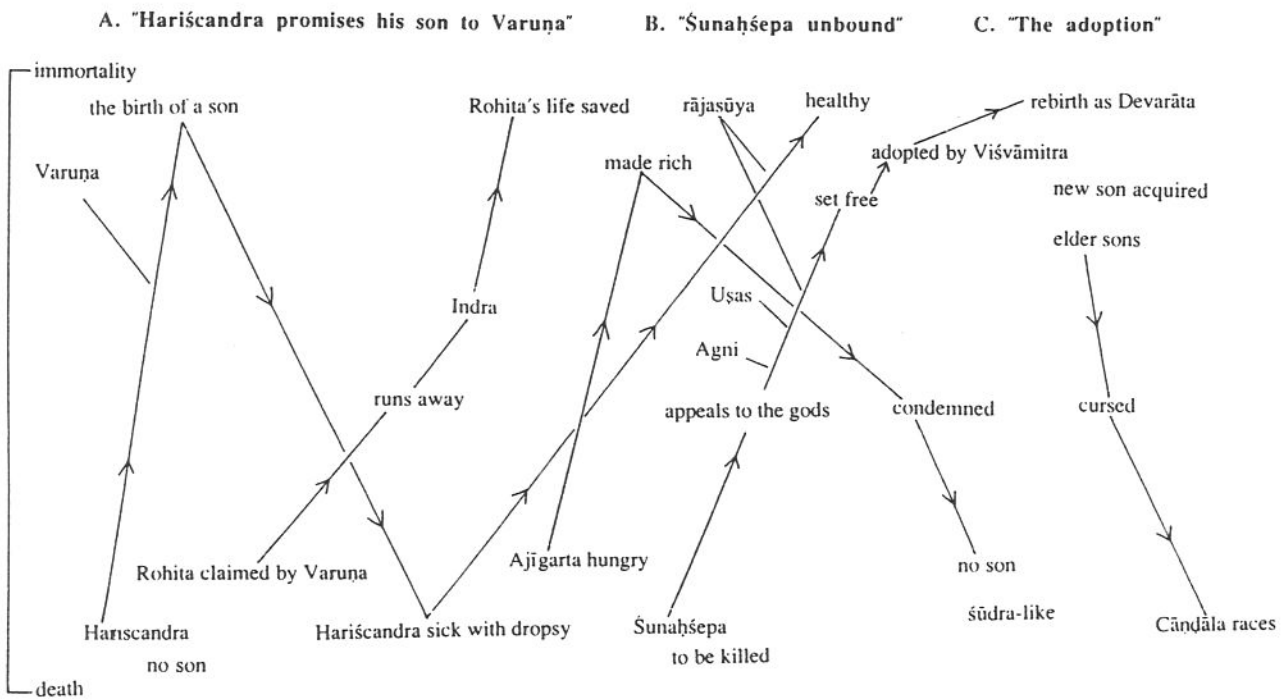
A. "Hariścandra promises his son to Varuṇa"
B. "Śunaḥśepa unbound"
C. "The adoption"
immortality
the birth of a son
Varuṇa
Rohita's life saved
Indra
runs away
Rohita claimed by Varuṇa
Hariścandra
no son
Hariścandra sick with dropsy
Ajīgarta hungry
made rich
rājasūya
healthy
Uṣas
Agni
appeals to the gods
Śunaḥśepa
to be killed
set free
adopted by Viśvāmitra
rebirth as Devarāta
condemned
no son
śūdra-like
new son acquired
elder sons
cursed
Cāṇḍāla races
death

Figure 2.

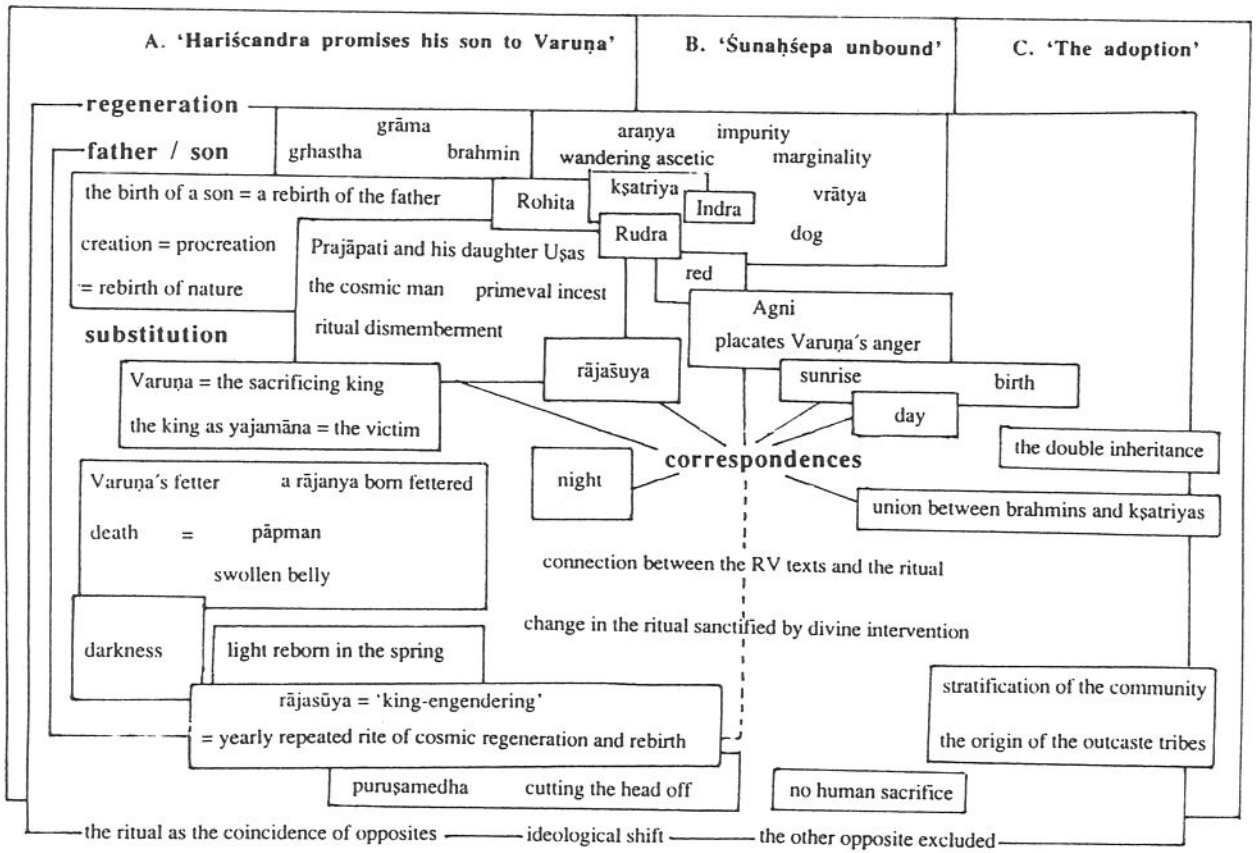
A. 'Hariścandra promises his son to Varuṇa'
B. 'Śunaḥśepa unbound'
C. 'The adoption'
regeneration
father / son
grāma
grhastha
brahmin
araṇya
impurity
wandering ascetic
marginality
the birth of a son = a rebirth of the father
Rohita
kṣatriya
Indra
vrātya
Rudra
dog
creation = procreation
= rebirth of nature
Prajāpati and his daughter Uṣas
the cosmic man
primeval incest
red
substitution
ritual dismemberment
Agni
placates Varuṇa's anger
rājasūya
Varuṇa = the sacrificing king
the king as yajamāna = the victim
sunrise
birth
day
correspondences
the double inheritance
night
Varuṇa's fetter
a rājanya born fettered
death = pāpman
swollen belly
union between brahmins and kṣatriyas
connection between the RV texts and the ritual
change in the ritual sanctified by divine intervention
darkness
light reborn in the spring
stratification of the community
the origin of the outcaste tribes
rājasūya = 'king-engendering'
= yearly repeated rite of cosmic regeneration and rebirth
puruṣamedha
cutting the head off
no human sacrifice
the ritual as the coincidence of opposites
ideological shift
the other opposite excluded

Figure 3.

lined by the fact that the story it uses is derived from the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*. Sequence A is, on the other hand, essential as the introduction of the themes and also as a model of an earlier, contrasting ideology against which the AB discourse is aimed at. For this end, a story was taken from bardic literature or folktale material.[80] The material for macrosequence C was probably borrowed from bardic literature and from the myths and tales that were connected with Viśvāmitra.[81] We can express these relations as follows (AB = the AB discourse, "A" = the material for macro-sequence A and so on):

AB > "A" < AB > "B' < AB > "C" < AB

As there are no earlier extant versions of macro-sequences A and C, these could be said to form a frame for the middle sequence which contains "the Śunaḥ-śepa story proper". However, I have chosen to put the three macro-sequences on equal standing and treat the AB discourse as a frame, because that is simply the way this narrative works.

Next there is the overall context of the discourse which works as its outer frame. This is the section dealing with the *rājasūya* ritual in the seventh book of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. The Śunaḥśepa story is a part of the actual ritual that the *brāhmaṇa* describes: the *hotṛ*, seated on a golden cushion, tells it to the king after the unction.[82] Therefore the discourse has a double frame: it is embedded in a text describing a ritual, and it is embedded in the performance of the ritual. In the text there are other instructions: the *adhvaryu* answers to each *ṛc*-verse with "*oṃ*" and each *gāthā* with "*tathā*"; thus, the frame tells us, the king is freed from evil (*pāp-man*) and sin (*enas*). A rather sumptuous *śravanaphala* is guaranteed: the king is recommended to have the tale read to him even if he is not sacrificing (*ayajamāna*), and he shall be free of *pāpman*; and the tale should also be told to those who desire sons (*putrakāmāḥ*), and they shall have sons. The textual frame confirms the central themes of the discourse, fertility and *pāpman*, and suggests that they are closely related: the failure to have progeny is caused by *pāpman*, and the other way round.

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80 To me it seems that it is well nigh impossible to trace the original or try to reconstruct it in any detail. Something about its nature can be deducted by comparing the discourse to the parallels in the epics and the *jātakas*. The names in the AB discourse indicate that the story must have been mythic; the other alternative is that the author(s) of the AB invented the names to forge a mythical connection. It is to be presumed that all the sources were modified and elaborated for the AB discourse.

81 Viśvāmitra is connected with the proto-epic *gāthā* tradition. In the discourse it is said that Viśvāmitra's family are *gāthinaḥ*, and "in possession of the divine Veda of the *gāthinaḥ*". In the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in Buddhist texts he is also reciting *gāthās* (see Horsch 1966: 376–380).

82 The *Baudhāyana ŚS* says it is to be told after the dice game. The *Kātyāyana ŚS* places it within the unction, the *Mānava ŚS* after the libations connected with the unharnessing of the horses. See Heesterman 1957: 158.

The content of the *rājasūya* ritual as a whole is also relevant to the interpretation of the AB discourse of the story of Śunaḥśepa. According to Heesterman, whose theory on the nature of this ritual is the most credible and comprehensive, the *rājasūya* was not an inauguration of the king but an annual ceremony, which consisted of rites the purpose of which was cosmic regeneration and the rebirth of the king. Each complex of rites was modelled to embrace the cosmos, with which the king identified himself, and both were reborn through the ritual (like the cosmic man / Prajāpati in creation).[83] Referring to the alternative meanings of the verb *su-/sū-* that is behind the word *-sūya*, Heesterman translates *rājasūya* as 'king-engendering'.[84] Originally the ritual seems to have included ecstatic and "impure" practices such as sexual intercourse and human sacrifice, which came to be discarded after a shift of ritual thinking and a new, more abstract system, in which the impure was allowed to be present only in symbolical forms.[85] It appears that the AB discourse of the Śunaḥśepa story reflects this shift quite accurately. Figure 3 displays the main themes and their symbolic and ritual background within the discourse, approximately in the order in which they are introduced in the text.[86]

When we consider all these inner and outer frames of the AB discourse, we find ourselves to be inside a veritable house of mirrors. First there is the actual *rājasūya* ritual, then there is a description of it, which encloses a story, which must be told to the king in the *rājasūya*, and in this story there is a *rājasūya*, in which there is a person who recites verses in which he tells a story of an earlier sacrifice (perhaps a *rājasūya*, perhaps not), in which he was to be sacrificed but was set free, and then he is set free, just like it happened in his "story", and he concludes the *rājasūya* he is presently in, and so on and so on. The device became common enough in Indian literatures later on[87], but it is enlightening to find this kind of technical virtuosity in such an early narrative as this. Another typical feature of Indian literatures is also present in the AB discourse, namely the recycling of old

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83 Heesterman 1957: 7, 67, 224. Heesterman says that the *rājasūya* "seems to be an abridgement of what originally must have been an unremitting series of yearly ceremonies with the object of regenerating the universe" (Heesterman 1957: 10).

84 Heesterman 1957: 86. The verb *su-*, *sunoti* means 'to press [soma]'; *sū-*, *suvati* 'to impel, to consecrate'; *sū-*, *sūte* 'to precreate'. All meanings may be involved in the *rājasūya*.

85 Heesterman 1962: 19–21. The fact that Śunaḥśepa as the sacrificial priest seems to be the central person of the *rājasūya*, instead of Hariścandra and Rohita, can be taken as a symptom of the ideological shift. The change was visible also in the way of killing the sacrificial victims; cutting off the head of the victim (as in the Śunaḥśepa story) was replaced by suffocation, which involved no bloodshed.

86 The frame concerning the ritual background is based mainly on Heesterman (1957; 1962) and Parpola (1983; 1998).

87 Fascinating examples of narratives that consciously (and continuously) switch from one level of reality to another can be found in the Kashmirian 10th-century *Yogavāsiṣṭha* (see e.g. O'Flaherty 1984: 127–259).

material. A. K. Ramanujan has talked about two tendencies that govern Indian traditions, context-sensitivity and reflexility, "both of which constantly generate new forms of old ones" (Ramanujan 1989: 189). Indian texts are not sharp-edged and autonomous but more like continuous processes of story-telling or "members of a series with a family resemblance" (Ramanujan 1989: 203). But still they are not the same: in each context they become a part of a new system and in this way come to signify different things. If one, for example, compares the AB discourse of the Śunaḥśepa story with the discourse of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the "story" is superficially similar, but the context is totally different and so are the meanings within it. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Śunaḥśepa story has been embedded in a narrative which tells about Viśvāmitra and his rivalry with Vasiṣṭha. Since there is no ritual context, Śunaḥśepa is no seer but only a trembling boy, and his uncle Viśvāmitra teaches him two verses which he then repeats at the stake like a parrot. The mythic and cosmic resonances are gone: immortality and regeneration are no issues here. Of the three father-son-relations of the AB discourse, the only one left is the one between Viśvāmitra and his sons. Perhaps for this reason Viśvāmitra has now developed into a "killer-father": he curses his sons to be *caṇḍālas* because they do not all offer themselves to be sacrificed instead of Śunaḥśepa. In the *purāṇas* the story undergoes further transformations.

All in all, the Śunaḥśepa story as it is told in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* is a technically accomplished narrative, which makes use of devices that were to become generic in Indian literature. As it is fairly old (before 500 BC), actually the first of its kind to have survived, we could expect it to shed some light on the early history of the Indian narrative.[88] Since I have talked quite a lot about the use of frames and embeddings in the discourse, I will finish off by discussing in brief the possible development of this device.

In his analysis of the Cyavana legend of the *Jaiminīya Brahmaṇa*, M. Witzel (1987: 412–413) has proposed that the composition of the soma ritual from many separate sections within a framework (as well the incorporation of the soma ritual into larger rituals such as *agnicayana* and *rājasūya*) has provided "the model and the instigation" for the literary technique of the frame story. C. Z. Minkowski (1989) has come to the same conclusion by examining the frame stories of the *Mahābhārata*. He bases his argument on the narrative situation in the frame stories of Śaunaka and Janamejaya: both of them are set in *sattras*, extended ritual sessions. According to Minkowski, "in the ritual and the ritual literature embedding constitutes a crucial organizational principle that manifests itself in hierarchical,

88 It is surprising that this subject has been all but ignored in recent research. For example, in spite of the promising title of the book, the articles included in *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns* (ed. by C. Shackle and R. Snell, Wiesbaden 1992) do not touch any central issues about the development or general nature of Indian narrative.

symmetrical and episodic structures." And as "*sattras* represent the most elaborate products of ritual embedding" and the frame-stories of the Great Epic take place during *sattras*, the model for framing must have come from the ritual (Minkowski 1989: 401). In addition to the model of the organizational principle ("hierarchy by inclusion"), there is also Vedic precedent for storytelling within the ritual: intervals in the ritual action were suited for telling stories, and narratives were embedded in the ritual, like the Śunaḥśepa story and the elaborate *pāriplavas* that were recited in the *aśvamedha* (Minkowski 1989: 417).

Especially the arguments which Minkowski has put forward sound persuasive,[89] and it would be very convenient if the knotty problems concerning the evolvement of typically Indian literary narrative could be solved as neatly as that. But I still think that Minkowski's theory has flaws; and it appears to be too formalistic and too reductionist. It can be said for sure that there is certain parallelism, but I am of the opinion that, for the first thing, the governing principle exists on a higher level than on that of the organization of the rituals, and for the second, the earliest examples that we have of Indian narratives (the *brāhmaṇa* stories and the *jātaka* verses)[90] do not fit particularly well into the "ritual" pattern. Moreover, the structures of the frame stories in the *Mahābhārata* do not seem to hark back to the structures of the ritual, except on a very elementary level. Naturally the brahmin authors made use of the situations and surroundings that were familiar to them, as anyone who is composing a text does, but this does not mean that they had any need for the analogue provided by the organization of the *rituals*. As concerns the ritual *texts*, the matter is quite different. I would suggest that the strongest link is to other texts, whether oral or literary, and the extraordinary way in which they were preserved and transmitted in early India. Thus, I would say that the model for the framing device has been taken from other texts, whereas the narrative situation of the two outer frame-stories in the *Mahābhārata* is motivated, firstly, by the existing model of the actual situations in which the compilers of the Epic told these

89 Witzel presents the ritual hypothesis in the end of his article as an afterthought, without any major evidence. Witzel's analysis of the Cyavana legend is illuminating, but I would say that his definition of the frame story is too wide (in contrast to Minkowski's definition which, on the other hand, is too narrow). There is some confusion between embedding and such devices as addition, enlargement, embellishment, etc. A ring composition is a different thing altogether than a frame, and the books in the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* which are linked together paratactically without any kind of a frame (except the status of a *Saṃhitā*) do not qualify as an example of a frame story. As Minkowski points out, embedding presupposes subordination – at least some kind of subordination, I would say – and the embedded section should be independent. It should also be long enough. One may ask whether the short explanation about Indra's threat which Dadhyañc gives to the Aśvins in the Cyavana narrative really is an inserted story ("Not so", said he [Dandhyañc]; "Indra likewise saw that; he said to me: 'If you were to tell this to any one else, I should cut off your head;' that is what I am afraid of."). If it were, *all* references to the past should be classed as embeddings.

90 Possibly also the *saṃvāda* hymns of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* (see below).

stories,[91] and secondly, by the inclination of the brahmins to preserve and give a stamp of sanctity to all traditional tales that they laid their hands on.[92]

Minkowski says that there is "no sustained embedding in the narrative literature that predates the *Mahābhārata*" (Minkowski 1989: 412). He dismisses the Cyavana legend as an example of a frame story, because "there is ... no story about the telling of stories". The story involving a situation of story-telling is certainly one of the most self-conscious framing techniques, but it is not the only one. If we cut out all other variants of the device, it means that we turn our back on the actual history of the Indian narrative. There are several types of embeddings, and it is not the late full-fledged (and sometimes overblown) prototype but the early "half-baked" and hybrid variants that we should study if we want to know anything about the development of the device.[93]

To me it is clear that the Cyavana legend contains at least one section that can be called an extensive embedding (the story about Dadhyañc, the Aśvins and Indra). The AB discourse of the Śunaḥśepa story is somewhat later, and it is far more complicated. It is metatextual and self-reflexive, and it employs frames and correspondences on many levels. As I mentioned earlier, the middle sequence could be treated as an embedding, even though I have not done so. The AB discourse works as a frame to which three "stories" of different origin have been embedded. Then there are the verse sections which I regard as special kinds of embeddings. They are used in three different ways. The middle sequence is an example of the ritualistic use of verses (which nevertheless play a pivotal role in the interpretation of the discourse, as we have seen). The use of gnomic *gāthās* in the first sequence link it with the later *ākhyānas*, such as the stories of the *Pañcatantra*, while the *saṃvāda-gāthās* in the last sequence have cognates both in the past (the *saṃvāda-*

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91 One could note, in passing, that the classical Sanskrit drama has, at least from the time of Bhāsa, contained a similar frame: the prologue (*prastāvanā* or *āmukha*), in which the *sūtra-dhāra* (the stage manager) and the leading actress address the audience as "themselves" (i.e. as actors, not as characters in the play), introducing the play and its writer, before the actual play begins. Since this metatextual prologue is fixed and written in the literary languages, it belongs to the play as a frame; it does not represent the level of "reality" but the level of "realistic fiction", while the play proper belongs to the level of "stylized fiction".

92 See e.g. van Buitenen 1973: xxi–xxii, 2–4. The composers of epic literature throughout the world have been aware of the impression of authenticity achieved by a frame-story in which the narrator tells what he has seen or heard. Thus, in the *Odyssey* there is a long flashback (Books 9–12) in which Ulysses relates his adventures to King Alcinous at the Phaecian court. The model for this embedding was hardly taken from the organization of rituals. See e.g. Todorov 1971: 66–77.

93 The outer frame-stories of the *Mahābhārata* belong to the youngest strata of the work, and both the Cyavana legend and the Śunaḥśepa story can well be some eight or nine hundred years older. It is far from certain that the earliest versions of the *Pañcatantra* cycle (which could be dated between 2nd and 5th centuries AD) got the device of the frame story from the Great Epic, as Minkowski states (1989: 412–413). See Hämeen-Anttila, forthcoming.

hymns of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*) and in the future (dramas and epic literature). The last two types have formal and stylistic parallels in the Buddhist *jātakas*. In most of the *jātakas*, the *gāthās* (after 500 BC) form the core of the narrative, and the prose (c. 400 AD) has been woven around it. Here we have early narratives using various kinds of "hierarchical, symmetrical and episodic structures", but surely they do not pay homage to any abstract ritualistic system but *build upon other texts.*[94] It hardly does justice to the creativity (or Indian-ness) of the Indian storytellers to presume that to find out about the joys of juggling with the different levels of narrative they needed a special ritual model, apart from the vast mass of oral and literary models that – knowing the fact that elaborate literary genres such as the drama emerged in the last century BC in an almost perfected form – must have been there in brāhmaṇic times, either codified, free-floating or in the making.

If we look at the way in which the AB discourse uses the "raw material" that has been at hand, some things may be discovered. It is evident that the objective of the author(s) has been a symmetrical composition, and to a great extent this is achieved, but it is to be noted that the symmetry does not copy any external model. The discourse pursues all the time its own, independent ends. As in many later Indian stories, these ends are partly ideological – in this case the mythologizing of the present ritual theory and practice – and partly narrative: how to tell a good story.[95] The material for the macro-sequences A, B and C is taken from other,

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94 There is no space here for a detailed discussion of the subject, but to me it seems that this early material gives support to the *ākhyāna* theory of Hermann Oldenberg, that he put first forward in 1883. (According to it, the *saṃvāda* (dialogue) hymns of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* are parts of old *ākhyānas* (poetic-prosaic tales) where the fixed verse portions have been preserved but the prose portions have not, because they were supplied by each narrator.). The literary category of *miśra* ('mixed'; i.e. prosaic-poetic), to which the AB discourse also belongs, has been very persistent and long-lived in Indian culture; it has dominated narrative literature and the drama, and it lives on in classical dance and popular theatre, as well as in Indian popular films with their inserted song and dance sequences. – It is an interesting coincidence that the hymn that Alsdorf (1964), among others, quotes to defend the *ākhyāna* theory of Oldenberg is RV 3.33, the tale of Viśvāmitra and the Rivers.

95 Peter Gaeffke is undoubtedly right when he says that "the general impression seems to be that the major Indian traditions did not think a good story by itself worth committing to memory. It had to serve another purpose ..." (Gaeffke 1995: 350). However, this general impression has done much harm as regards the understanding and evaluation of Indian narrative. Even though the preservation of narrative texts, in the pre-classical times in particular, was mostly taken up by the priestly class, this does not mean that these texts were consequently deprived of their aesthetic value; education and entertainment can exist side by side. The Indian theorists (most notably Bhāmaha, Vāmana and Abhinavagupta, as well as the author(s) of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*) stated that *kāvya* (belles lettres) had two aims: firstly, joy (*harṣa*) or delight (*prīti*) or diversion (*vinoda*) and solace from life's unhappiness (*viśrāma*), and secondly, instruction (*upadeśa*) or the possibility of developing one's understanding of the world (*vaicakṣanya*). See Hämeen-Anttila 1996: 49–50. The relative grades of these two tendencies vary from one text to another. The sheer bulk of narrative texts easily surpasses the quantity of narrative texts in most other cultures, which means that the number of works

earlier texts (oral or literary) to serve the purposes of the present discourse. The subject is both complex and eminent, as we have seen, and there is the ritual context, in which it is natural to turn to the mantras of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*. Indeed, as a whole the AB discourse is conditioned by the general principle that was mentioned earlier, the principle of recycling. When you have a good old text, don't throw it away. The older, the better. The more authoritative, the better. Never mind that it belongs to a completely different tradition. Recycle, enclose, frame it with a commentary.

It is hard to say where this principle of recycling (and recurrence) comes from. It seems to have been there from the very beginning. The last books of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* are already acting upon it, with their speculations about macrocosm and microcosm, equations and substitutions and worlds within worlds. The idea of *saṃsāra*, the notion of cyclical time, the theory that considers all sacrifices to be replicas of the first, primeval sacrifice, the philosophy that sees the transcendent inside a little seed: all these spring from the same source. The construction of the ritual from older pieces is only one facet of this principle. Therefore it is not necessary or even plausible to maintain that the device of the frame-story has been copied from the structure of the ritual. This becomes all the more evident when we view the development of the device in the light of all its variants and manifestations.

Witzel has formulated the central problem concerning the "raw material" used in texts such as the AB discourse:

> whether the fragments of Ṛgvedic myths were re-composed as YV-Saṃhitā /Brāhmaṇa time stories or whether there was a living mythological tradition, in which Ṛgvedic myths gradually changed until they reached the form they have in later Brāhmaṇa literature (Witzel 1987: 386).

After examining the AB discourse, I would say that it must have been both ways, that there was the canonical text, to be used as such when a ritual connection, authority and/or special symbolic or stylistic effects were required, and the mythological tradition that was mixed with the oral traditions which could be traced to pre-Vedic times, to be used more freely, as an inventory of motifs and suitable sequences of *gāthās*.

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that concentrate on the *vinoda* aspect is also great. Naturally it must be kept in mind that different cultures and different cultural phases find diversion in different things.

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