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WHEN TIME TURNS: YUGAS, IDEOLOGIES, SACRIFICES

The Indian idea of revolving and regenerating time includes the system of Yugas or four ages of progressive moral and physical deterioration.¹ The four eras of decreasing duration—*kr̥ta*², *tretā*, *dvāpara* and *kali*—bear the names of the four sides of dice, from the ideal throw down to the most miserable one for the player.³ The different natures of these periods also set varying obligations on the people living under the conditions of the time. Naturally as regards the four ages, stress is most often laid on the last and most notorious era, the *kaliyuga*, in the middle of which mankind is said to be living at the moment.

Creating the shape of time

In this gloomy situation Indian thinking often emphasizes the role of literary tradition, especially *smṛti* or the authorized human interpretation of Veda. It is considered that *smṛti* provides the essential code within the framework of the system of Yugas, because in our era the capability of people to understand the eternal Veda has been radically reduced. So, the first point to be highlighted is the moment of “invention” of the paradigms for the *kaliyuga*. Although these rules basically spring from the “eternal”, they are

¹ As for the general dimensions of Indian epic and Purāṇic cosmology, this article does not take into serious consideration the larger system of eons or days of Brahmā (*kalpa*) and its division into *manvantaras* or their relation to the four Yugas. According to the general Purāṇic view, *kalpas* of huge length follow each other as the blocks of four Yugas (*caturyuga* or *mahāyuga*) do, and each of these larger emanation-cycles consists of one thousand *caturyugas*. I am completely aware that the concentration on the system of Yugas necessarily ignores an important dimension of Purāṇic sources and their ideas on time. Anyway, I found it impossible to handle two (or three) different temporal frames of reference in one article. Similarly, I do not find any reason to speculate over numbers of years, simply because mythical numbers are rarely commensurable with the numbers of everyday reality. For a detailed description of different systems with numerical data, see Kirfel 1920: 91–92, 334–335; Rocher 1986: 124–125; Biardeau 1981: 8–9; see also Kane 1946: 885–896. I hope the next quote from John Brockington (1992: 146) will support my choice of ignoring the other systems: “Within this whole complex cosmology, with its enormous time-spans, the aspect of which there is *greatest popular awareness* is that of the four ages or *yugas*” [italics mine]. The emphasis on the Yuga system has also been considered as typical of the epics by Biardeau (see Hildebeitel 1976: 310).

² The first age is also commonly known by the name *satyayuga* (e.g. Rocher 1986: 124; Karve 1969: 183).

³ In early Vedic times these terms designated for the four possibilities in a game where the players grasped a number of *vibhidaka*-nuts. For a more detailed description, see Falk 1984: 99–133.

understood to have been materialized as text (written or spoken) before the age of *kali*. In this way, tradition gets its power precisely because it is said to be *not* of “our” time, but from earlier phases when people had better opportunities of understanding the basic questions. The other point to be kept in mind is that the need for a new interpretation of *dharma* actualizes especially at special moments of truth, at the liminal points when a new age is about to begin.

Within the framework of the system of Yugas, people gain information in more and more implicit or simple forms over the course of the round of the four ages. In the Purāṇas there are passages concerning the state of Veda in different ages. For example, Vāyupurāṇa (58.10–18) tells us how a single and unified Veda was split into four parts during the *tretāyuga* and into further subdivisions (Samhitās, Brāhmaṇas and Sūtras) during the *dvāparayuga* by the dividers of Veda (*vedavyāsaiḥ*) (see also Kūrmap. 1.29.44; Garuḍap. 1.223.11; Mbh. 3.148.19, 26; Matsyap. 142.47, 75 & 144.10–11). This disintegration is considered unfortunate but necessary, because of the more limited lifespan and lower mental abilities of the people of the later ages. After all the alterations and various distorted interpretations, the Veda will eventually perish during the late *kaliyuga*. The condition of the Vedas during the *kaliyuga* is defined in Purāṇic texts in the following, slightly mysterious, way: “All the Vedas are seen and not seen” (Brahmāṇḍap. 1.2.31.64: *drśyante ca na drśyante vedāḥ kaliyuge ’khalāḥ*; cf. Matsyap. 144.47; Vayup. 58.70; Mbh. 12.224.66).

Scriptures like Dharmaśāstras, epics and Purāṇas also set an ideal *dharma* for each Yuga. In several sources we find the following verse specifying the proper conduct for the age (*yugadharmā*) leading to beneficial results:

tapaḥ paraṃ kṛtayuge tretāyāṃ jñānam ucyate |
dvāpare yajñam evāhur dānam ekaṃ kalau yuge ||⁴

“It has been said that in the *kṛtayuga* the austerities are the highest, in *tretā* it is knowledge, in *dvāpara* sacrifices, and in the *kaliyuga* the giving alone.”

The purpose of these words is to give religious tools for people of each age—although the precept is, of course, aimed at the people of the present era. Every one of these tools is, however, used during the *kaliyuga*, too. So, we must read the actual message of the verse as follows: firstly, the way of austerities (*tapas*) and the way of knowledge (*jñāna*) are virtues for the more ideal ages, *kṛta* and *tretā*. Secondly, Vedic sacrifices (*yajña*) are a slightly more coarse way to deal with the ultimate powers of the universe and—this is the focus of interest in this paper—they are a tool for the previous age, *dvāpara*, the age which is not totally outside the memory of the *smṛti* literature. Thirdly, the verse says that during the present era people have to resort to giving (*dāna*). This idea of gift is of course found in the sacrifice, too, but only as one aspect of it. Thus, the ideological shift from the dominant sacrificial system to the ideal of generosity (among others) is an important idea concealed in the doctrine of the four ages and the nature of the *kaliyuga*.

⁴ Manu 1.86; Vāyup. 8.64; Nāradaḥ. 1.41.90; Mbh.12.224.27 (*ucyate > uttamam, ekaṃ > eva*); Kūrmap. 1.29.10 (*tapaḥ paraṃ > dhyānaṃ tapaḥ*: “meditation [and] austerities”). Also the preceding verse of the Mānavadharmasāstra (1.85) mentioning the four ages and the need for different duties can be found twice in Śāntiparvan of the Mahābhārata (Mbh. 12.224.26, 12.252.8).

The purpose of this paper is to find further illustrations of this ideological change in the Purāṇic and epic passages dealing with the transition to the *kaliyuga*. With the help of examples it is possible to discover an explanation on the mythical or cosmological level for the actual change in Indian ritual ideology from the Vedic to post-Vedic phase.

Sacrifices in revolving time

In the Purāṇic explanations concerning the system of Yugas, Vedic sacrifices are taken up in different contexts. Besides connecting the *dvāparayuga* with sacrifices, many texts talk of unsuccessful or unqualified sacrificing during the *kaliyuga*. This is often presented in relation to the overall degradation of the Vedic heritage.⁵ During the last era even specialists are liable to false interpretation of the Veda, and therefore the Brāhmaṇic rites are often performed defectively or even out of hypocrisy (Nāradaḥ. 1.41.45; cf. Bhāgavatap. 12.2.6). There are also many “heretical” teachings⁶ and non-Vedic rituals in the world, and people of low intellectual capacity are said to perform sacrifices (Kūrmap. 1.30.4–5, 10; Viṣṇup. 6.1.50–51; cf. Biardeau 1981: 150; Hazra 1940: 207, 235–236). As the *kaliyuga* is understood to be the age of *śūdras*, even such blasphemies as *śūdras* performing the horse sacrifice are said to take place (Brahmāṇḍap. 1.2.31.67; Matsyap. 144.43). Furthermore, there are remarks of how the performance of *yajñas* and *homas* will end as the *kaliyuga* goes on (Nāradaḥ. 1.41.87; Matsyap. 144.47). The Mahābhārata, too, describes the barbarized world without rites and sacrifices (Mbh. 3.188.29). The following verse from the epic paints a picture of the miserable state of brāhmaṇahood during the *kaliyuga*:

na vratāni cariṣyanti brāhmaṇā vedanindakāḥ |

na yakṣyanti na hoṣyanti hetuvādavilobhitāḥ || (Mbh. 3.188.29)

“The brahmins shall find fault with the *Veda* and abandon their vows;

seduced by argumentations, they will offer neither worship nor sacrifices.”⁷

(Transl. van Buitenen 1975: 596)

Thus, the principal antithesis of the wretched *kaliyuga* is the past. Although the earlier three ages are not free from progressive degeneration, they are in some cases described as one ideal time in relation to the *kaliyuga*. For example, several virtues like truthfulness and faithfulness to *dharma* are said to be common to people of all the previous three eras (Kūrmap. 1.29.4)⁸. Correspondingly, sacrifices are described as having been more per-

⁵ Matsyapurāṇa (144.12–24) gives a description of quite serious confusion of Vedic texts and rituals already during the *dvāparayuga*. This passage is, however, more or less connected with the age of Svāyambhuva Manu at the beginning of the *kalpa* (cf. below, note 9).

⁶ Obvious references to Buddhists or Jains can be found: e.g. Kūrmap. 1.30.13, 16; Brahmanḍap. 1.2.31.60, 65; Vāyup. 58.59; Matsyap. 144.40.

⁷ There is a slight difference between the general Purāṇic and the epic viewpoint of Mbh. 3.188. While Purāṇas find the situation of unsuccessful sacrificing appropriate or natural for the Age of Kali, the Mahābhārata passage puts more emphasis on how tragic it is that the sacrificial know-how will be forgotten. In a way, the Purāṇic perspective is more comprehensive and also more fatalistic. The Purāṇas want to show that they know the “great screenplay” of the revolving ages, whereas the Mahābhārata is more sympathetic: although the Mārkaṇḍeya session of the Āraṇyakaparvan also includes a Purāṇic style description of eons or *kalpas* (Mbh. 3.186), as a whole, the standpoint of the epic is more closely connected with the actual context at the end of the *dvāparayuga*.

fect during the earlier Yugas. According to the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (3.1.4–5, 3.92; see Jaiswal 1967: 152), gods took part in sacrifices in their physical form in the early ages, whereas in our age they are present only in shape of pictures. Although the verse cited above (Manu 1.86) defines the *dvāparayuga* as the specific age of sacrifices, we can find other Purāṇic statements with the concept of *yajña* connected to *tretāyuga*. Sometimes this second Yuga is explained to have laid the foundation of *yajñas*. For example, in the Kūrmapurāṇa (1.29.42) there is a description of how Brahmā established the institution of sacrifice *without* animal slaughter (*yajñapravarttanam paśuhimsā-vivarjitam*) in the *tretāyuga*. Similarly, in the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa (48.31–34; 49.70–72) the creation of Vedic metres and hymns as well as plants for use in sacrifices takes place in the *tretāyuga*.

On the other hand, many Purāṇic or epic passages even give the idea of *tretāyuga* as the principal era of sacrifices. This kind of emphasis is, for example, found in the Viṣṇupurāṇa (6.2.17), Garuḍapurāṇa (1.223.8), Nārada-purāṇa (1.41.15, 92), Bhāgavatapurāṇa (12.3.52), Brahma-purāṇa (230.64) and the so-called Bhīmagītā of the Mahābhārata (Mbh. 3.148.22–25).⁹ This variant view about the nature of Yugas is characteristic of those Purāṇic texts which lay stress on worship consisting of the recitation of the names of God during the *kaliyuga*.¹⁰ According to this tradition, the *dvāparayuga* is more clearly a prelude to the last age, because it is characterized as an era of *pūjā*-like cult (Viṣṇup. 6.2; Nārada-p. 1.41.20, 92). In a way, these texts take the chronology one pace back, because they list the four steps as follows: austerities (*kr̥ta*)—sacrifices (*tretā*)—worship (*dvāpara*)—reciting the names of God (*kali*). So, the transition from *yajña* to *bhakti* is included, but according to these Purāṇas the basic change has happened earlier, between the *tretā* and *dvāpara*. In any case, from the general epic/Purāṇic standpoint in every four Yugas there is at least one age during which the Vedic rituals are successfully

⁸ *Kṛtam tretā dvāparaś ca sarveṣv eteṣu te narāḥ | bhaviṣyanti mahātmano dharmikāḥ satyavādināḥ* || (“In all the three Yugas, i.e. *kr̥ta*, *tretā* and *dvāpara*, men will be noble-minded, virtuous and truthful”).

⁹ Of these texts the Nārada-purāṇa and the Bhāgavatapurāṇa mix the two principal Purāṇic explanations, because some verses also take up the sacrificial aspect of the *dvāpara* (Bhāgavatap. 12.3.23) or meditational aspect of the *tretā* (Nārada-p. 1.41.15). In the Garuḍapurāṇa (1.223.36) even the *kr̥tayuga* is connected with sacrifices. The description of the four ages (Mbh. 3.148) in the Bhīmagītā, told by Hanūmān to Bhīma, clarifies the situation between the two different explanations when it gives a picture of the *tretāyuga* as a more ideal time of sacrifices connected with other means of maintaining *dharma* (i.e. austerities and gifts). Moreover, the passage describes the *dvāparayuga* as a quite corrupted age including the expanded sacrificial system. At last it is stated that during the *kaliyuga* all kinds of Vedic tradition will perish (Mbh. 3.148.33: *vedācārāḥ praśāmyanti dharmayajñakriyās*).—Also the Matsyapurāṇa (ch. 143) gives an interesting description of the initiation of animal sacrifices along with Indra’s *aśvamedha* (cf. Vāyup. 57.86–125). This is said to have happened in the very beginning of the *first tretāyuga*, i.e. at the time of Manu Svāyambhuva in the earliest *caturyuga* of the current *kalpa*. The story includes an important debate on pros and cons of the Vedic sacrificial system, but because it has its temporal background in the system of *kalpas*, Indra’s first sacrifice is actually beyond the fourfold scheme of Yugas.

¹⁰ Thus it is natural that the opinion of the *tretā* as an age of sacrifices is also mentioned in the Rāmācaritamānasa of Tulasīdāsa (7.103, see Whaling 1980: 293). We also have to remember that the life of Rāma is connected with the *tretāyuga* or the end of it when he was born due to his father Daśaratha’s son-producing horse sacrifice (Rāmāy. 1.11–13).

performed in their ordinary form—also including the questionable practice of killing animals. And now this era belongs to history.

During the *kaliyuga* there are also many acts specifically prohibited by Dharmaśāstras and Purāṇas. These so-called *kalivarjya* prescriptions (see Kane 1946: 926–968) include many Vedic sacrifices, especially the more massive rituals. It is worth noting that the Brāhmanic animal sacrifices are not allowed during the miserable Age of Kali (Kane 1946: 945–946, 964); accordingly, the *aśvamedha* or royal horse sacrifice should not be performed (Kane 1946: 928–929, 962), and the *rājasūya* is also mentioned as a *kalivarjya* (Kane 1946: 962). These prohibitions can be understood as a way of protecting both the people of the *kaliyuga* and the Vedic ritual heritage. The former point is emphasized by Jan Heesterman (1985: 87) when he writes: “men of our era are no longer deemed strong enough to cope with the heady excitement and terror of sacrifice.” But if we think of the desolate picture of the *kaliyuga* painted in Purāṇas, we have to add that the idea behind the prohibitions might as well be meant for preserving and securing the power of the tradition. Rituals should not be used in vain, because better ages are to come, in any case.

So, the second antithesis of the present age is the future or the re-establishment of the ideal *ṛtayuga*. Surprisingly, the idea of performing the Vedic sacrifices is not out of the question even in this promising future, at the advent of the new first Yuga. According to some Purāṇic texts, the transition from the *kaliyuga* to the ideal age—or from one *caturyuga* to another—happens after all without more ado. For example, Vāyupurāṇa (58.99–101), after describing the misery of the last times and giving a kind of “survival-of-the-fittest” explanation, states that the final enlightenment comes in a single day and night and the Yuga is transformed.¹¹ Usually a saviour is needed, however. At the end of the *kaliyuga* he will be an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu called Kalkin. He will ride on a white horse¹², conquer the evil-doers and barbarians and will restore *dharma* to the ideal state. This is the new beginning of the *ṛtayuga*.

An interesting passage stressing the role of Vedic sacrifices in the transition of the Yugas can be found in the Mahābhārata’s Āraṇyakaparvan (Mbh. 3.189.1–2). There ṛṣi Mārkaṇḍeya tells Yudhiṣṭhira how Kalkin will re-establish the *ṛtayuga* with the help of *aśvamedha*.¹³ This passage reads:

tataś corakṣayaṃ kṛtvā dvijebhyaḥ pṛthivīm imām |
vājimedhe mahāyajñe vidhivat kalpayiṣyati ||
sthāpayitvā sa maryādāḥ svayaṃbhuvihitāḥ śubhāḥ |
vanaṃ puṇyayaśaḥkarmā jarāvān saṃśrayiṣyati ||

¹¹ There are also totally different Purāṇic descriptions: e.g. according to Brahma-purāṇa (232.80–88) the transition happens through a gradual enlightenment of people during the generations. In these explanations the turning point is just the moment when the lowest level has been reached and the slow deterioration only changes to a slow progress.

¹² The Bhāgavatapurāṇa (12.2.20) even mentions the name of the horse: Devadatta.

¹³ In the same chapter it is also told that many ceremonies (*yajñakriyāḥ*) reappear after *ṛtayuga* has begun and Brāhmaṇas are again prone to “prayer and sacrifices” (*japayajñaparāḥ*) (Mbh. 3.189.8, 11).

“After destroying the robbers he will ritually make over this earth to the twice-born at a grand celebration of the Horse Sacrifice. He will reestablish the sacred limits that the self-existent one has ordained, and, when he has grown old in works of holy fame, he will retire to the forest.” (Transl. van Buitenen 1975: 597.)

This is a special example of a sacrifice concluding a Yuga, because it closes the last era, *kaliyuga*.¹⁴ In other cases, too, sacrifice as a marker of the final point of a Yuga or as an important means in making the transition possible is a relatively common idea in the post-Vedic literature. In Purāṇic texts there are statements about blessed people and excellent brāhmaṇas performing rites at the end of a Yuga (e.g. Vāyup. 58.71). The most famous case is, of course, the Mahābhārata in which the whole war has sometimes been understood as a kind of “ritual of battle” (especially Hildebeitel 1976). Furthermore, the horse sacrifice performed by Yudhiṣṭhira after the war is a good example of a sacrifice located in the liminal time between the Yugas.

The end as a beginning

The epic concept of time is, in a way, adjusted to the general human experience of time: it is a triple one, including the idea of past, present and future. The epic past is a mythical one, the age of gods lurking behind the more human heroes of the epic. The present time of the epic events is a heroic time situated in the liminal period¹⁵ between the Yugas. The epic future is the time of the listener or reader of the epic itself: it is the *kaliyuga*, a kind of mythical time partly overlapping with our historical time. And between the heroic and historical time there is a dark period essential for the authority of the epic which has itself created this neglected time.

Alf Hildebeitel who has deliberated the concept of the heroic time of the two Indian epics (Hildebeitel 1976: 48–59) proposes that the events of the Mahābhārata located between the *dvāpara* and *kali* are basically a reflection of eschatological ideas (ibid.: 358–360). He distinguishes two kinds of crises behind the Mahābhārata story: the one is the epic crisis concerning the end of the heroic time and the other is the mythic one proposed by Madeleine Biardeau (1976) and based on mainly Purāṇic ideas of the end of the world (*pralaya*). Here I shall not go deeply into the problem of the eschatological nature of the Mahābhārata. Anyway, I agree that the ideology in performing the rituals in the Mahābhārata is closely related to eschatological themes. This is confirmed, e.g. by Christopher Minkowski, who has studied the relation between the Vedic *sarpasattra* and the epic frame story of the Janamejaya’s snake sacrifice (Minkowski 1991).

When pondering the question of the epic concept of time, we must also face the difficulties arising from the different nature of the two epics, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa. Often the reconstructions of the heroic past appear somewhat contrived, if we have to fit two epics—and two, to some extent successive, heroic times—within the same

¹⁴ Besides this example, the important theme of Dakṣa’s sacrifice is connected with the end of an age called *devayuga* (= *caturyuga* or *kṛtayuga*) in Mbh. 10.18.1 (see Hildebeitel 1976: 334–335).

¹⁵ Cf. Hildebeitel 1976: 52: “the ‘age of heroes’ stands out at a pivotal juncture between a past that is essentially mythic and one that is purportedly historical”.

model. The problem is also compounded by the opposing nature of the two epics. As, for example, Irawati Karve (1969: 80) has pointed out, the main contrast between these texts is found in the level ideal vs. human. The characteristic feature of the Rāmāyaṇa is a tendency to paint a picture of an idealized world, of idealized epic figures who are either ideal heroes or ideal villains. But in the Mahābhārata the situation is different: although the main characters are said to be ideals in person, they are also human or at least ambiguous characters. They are not portrayals of *dharma* but of *dharma-sūkṣmatā* “the subtle nature of *dharma*” (Sullivan 1990: 55–56; Ramanujan 1991: 435; Schomer 1989: 153).

On account of this fundamental difference, it is justified that the temporal background of the Rāmāyaṇa is usually said to be the end of *tretāyuga*, i.e. the more ideal age, whereas the Mahābhārata concludes the more degraded *dvāparayuga*. This background of the epic events in a time between the Yugas has also a plausible connection with the system of *avatāras*, because several forms of Viṣṇu are said to have manifested during the liminal points of the Yuga system.¹⁶ Narasiṃha is the first of these situated at the junction of the *krta* and *tretā* (Brockington 1992: 26). The epic *avatāras* find their places at the next pivotal moments, Rāma between the *tretā* and *dvāpara*¹⁷ and Kṛṣṇa between the *dvāpara* and *kali*. Ultimately, Kalkin will perfect this system with his appearance at the moment of the great return.¹⁸

Besides the cyclical basis of time, the concept of liminal periods between longer timespans like Yugas, is characteristic of Purāṇic and epic texts. In some Purāṇas the role of these junctions and their connection with the cyclic structure of time is illustrated with the allegory of grass. The Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa (1.2.31.110) and the Vāyupurāṇa (58.109-110) explain how the new Yuga grows out of the old one like grass after the forest fire. Also the Matsyapurāṇa’s description of the advent of *krtayuga* includes this grass metaphor (Matsyap. 144.98-99), but the idea of continuity is here explained further: the first children of the new era are born from the poor last people of the *kaliyuga*, who have all passed away at the turn of eras (Matsyap. 144.86-87).

In addition to the picture of the beginning Yuga having its roots deeply in the preceding one, this explanation implies the idea of the necessary annihilation or “fire” at the advent of the new age. Here we again find the theme of destruction in the liminal time, which is common to both Purāṇas (e.g. Vāyup. 58.38) and the epics. Correspondingly, in

¹⁶ Sometimes all the *avatāras* are planted in the system of Yugas so that the first four manifestations (Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha and Narasiṃha) are the *avatāras* of the *krtayuga*, followed by three of the *tretāyuga* (Vāmana, Paraśurāma and Rāma), one of the *dvāparayuga* (Kṛṣṇa) and two of the *kaliyuga* (Buddha—the marginal *avatāra*—and finally Kalkin) (Rocher 1986: 107-111; cf. Brockington 1992: 24-27 with a slightly different order). If Buddha were replaced by Balarāma the system would be more pleasing to the Indian—or scholarly—eye with the symmetry of decreasing numbers (4-3-2-1) and decreasing duration of the Yugas proper (4000-3000-2000-1000 “years”, cf. note 20).— Besides the traditional *avatāras*, also Vālmīki and Vyāsa are sometimes understood as forms of Viṣṇu. For example, the Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa (1.74; see Hazra 1958: 161) dates these “*avatāras*” to the end of *tretā* and *dvāpara* respectively.

¹⁷ In some schemes the situation between the *tretā* and *dvāpara* of Rāma, son of Daśaratha, is assumed by another Rāma, son of Jamadagni, i.e. Paraśurāma (Brockington 1992: 26–27).

¹⁸ Also Śaiva texts have their own system of *avatāras* including, for example, 28 manifestations in the successive *kaliyugas* (e.g. Matsyap. 142.19–22; Rocher 1986: 112), but as a whole this system does not have so prominent a part in the mythology of Śiva.

the Mahābhārata the devastation of the great war culminates in the events of the Sauptika-parvan, in which Aśvatthāman, also called “the fire at the end of the Yuga” (*yugāntāgni*)¹⁹, brutally kills all the progeny of the Pāṇḍava heroes (Hiltebeitel 1976: 312-335). And later Kṛṣṇa, the *avatāra*, commences the new age by saving the Kuru line with the miraculous revivification of Arjuna’s grandson Parikṣit, whose father Abhimanyu was a kind of assemblage of the virtues of both the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa (ibid.: 336-353). So, I am inclined to agree with Hiltebeitel’s general view when he understands the liminal phases between the four Yugas as a reflection of the final eschatological fire at the end of the *caturyuga* or *kalpa*.

Chaos or darkness as a fundamental feature of the liminal time between the Yugas is further illustrated by the Purāṇic terminology about the closing and opening phases of Yugas. The terms are *saṃdhyāṃśa* (“twilight”) and *saṃdhyā* (“dawn”).²⁰ With these words the turning point of the Yuga is made somehow more indistinct or, literally, hidden in the darkness. These two concepts are also used in explanations which approach the allegory of grass mentioned above. For example, the Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa (1.2.31.31) and the Matsyapurāṇa (144.29) are saying that it is possible to understand the nature of the *kaliyuga* on the basis of the twilight of the *dvāparayuga* (*dvāparasyāṃśaśeṣeṇa pratipattiḥ kaler api*)²¹.

If we take a closer look at these dark phases between the Yugas by concentrating on the example offered by the Mahābhārata War, we can better understand the exceptional nature of the liminal time. Alf Hiltebeitel has already proposed that the metaphor of earth or dirt covering everything is often used in the battle descriptions of the Mahābhārata to characterize the end of a Yuga (Hiltebeitel 1976: 278–279). He compares this picture of impurity and chaos in the dark phase between the Yugas to the primeval ocean at the end of the *kalpa*. Although I feel sceptical towards Hiltebeitel’s endeavour to see all the epic heroes in the frame of Dumézilian triads, I think he makes a fruitful conclusion as, after analyzing the roles of the four Kaurava marshals, he writes:

¹⁹ I think Hiltebeitel makes a hasty conclusion when he stresses Aśvatthāman’s role as *yugāntāgni*. If we take a more general look on the epic metaphor of fire at the end of the “Yuga” by using electronic texts (Tokunaga 1993; 1994), we can find this motif connected with a wide range of characters. Both the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa use the metaphor while describing their heroes as well as their opponents, various *asuras* or *rākṣasas*. Usually the theme is used in battle descriptions and, as a whole, the Rāmāyaṇa uses more idiomatic expressions, whereas in the Mahābhārata the metaphor has more variation. The word *yugāntāgni* can be found in: Mbh. 5.164.11, 6.81.26, 7.64.15, 7.67.15, 7.90.21, 8.17.118, 11.21.8, 12.145.9, 13.127.34; Rāmāy. 3.23.26, 4.15.15, 6.14.14, 6.55.71, 6.58.47, 6.64.10, 6.66.29, 6.91.21, 7.15.9, 7.61.31. Other expressions: *yugāntānala* (Mbh. 10.14.7); *yugāntavaiśvānara* (Rāmāy. 7.6.55); *yugānta iva pāvakaḥ* (Rāmāy. 6.88.37, 7.32.38), *yugante pāvako yathā* (Mbh. 6.59.12); *yugāntajvalana* (Mbh. 3.84.10); *yugāntolkeva* (Rāmāy. 6.91.25); *yugāntāgnicaya* (!) (Rāmāy. 6.91.11). Sometimes the fire has been specified further as the sun: *yugāntārakah* (Mbh. 7.31.44); *yugāntāditya* (Mbh. 6.80.12, 7.66.20; Rāmāy. 6.83.10, 6.92.8); *yugānta iva bhāskaraḥ* (Rāmāy. 4.11.2). Moreover, the variant “wind at the end of the Yuga” is used: *yugāntavātā* (Rāmāy. 6.31.86), *vātā iva yugakṣaye* (Rāmāy. 6.88.4); *yugānta-samaye vāyuh* (Rāmāy. 6.84.10); *yugāntānila* (Mbh. 1.125.5). And, finally, the cloud metaphor: *yugāntameghogha* (Mbh. 6.76.19). See also below, note 31.

²⁰ The length of both of these liminal periods is quite excessive: one tenth of the Yuga proper (Rocher 1986: 124).

²¹ Matsyap.: *aṃśaśeṣeṇa > aṃśaśeṣe tu, api > atha*.

In terms of time, all epic's events occur at the end of a yuga (*yugānta*), a sort of "liminal" period in which these four figures and their *parvans* (literally "knots, joints") seem to represent the sum of the yugas, as if all four yugas were potentially present at the point of transition. In terms of space, representatives of all the lands of the known world are present within the land of the "Center". (Ibid.: 286.)

According to this train of thought it is possible to see the dark liminal period as a simultaneous condensation of the four Yugas, a kind of paradoxical moment of both chaos and cosmos, when everything is centred in one place-time but simultaneously everything is in a state of entropy.²² Thus, the dirt of the Mahābhārata War is not only a sign of the future black Age of Kali, but it also symbolizes the overlapping colours of the four Yugas. Similarly, the state of devastating war is a more or less temporary mixture of classes (*varṇas*)²³ and lapse of order (*dharma*).²⁴ By more or less I mean that the liminal darkness is temporary, but—because the twilight of *dvāparayuga* lays the basis for the *kaliyuga*—the darkness between the Yugas simultaneously anticipates the future dark era with its terribly confused class structure.²⁵

Legacy for the wretched era

We can take it for granted that the events of the Mahābhārata are generally felt as something which happened at a special time. The teachings of the epic take on a universal level, something which is applicable to times outside the actual context of the storyline. This idea has been taken so far that the Mahābhārata has even been characterized as the fifth Veda.²⁶ When James Fitzgerald interpreted this concept, he maintained that the

²² The Vedic ontological opposition of differentiated (*pṛthak*) and undifferentiated (*jāmi*) is an interesting point of comparison here (see Smith 1989: 52–53, 85). Seen through the Vedic model, it is possible to find also in the Mahābhārata "the same movement from emitted formlessness to ritually created structure" (ibid.: 63). In the epic the great war is a kind of incomplete "creation" needed after the closing Yuga and Yudhiṣṭhira's horse sacrifice is the symbol of necessary "construction" for maintaining the world which is going towards the new age.

²³ The four Yugas are often connected with the four classes of society and especially their respective colours which are: white (*kṛta/brāhmaṇa*), red (*tretā/kṣatriya*), yellow (*dvāpara/vaiśya*) and black (*kali/śūdra*). Usually the colour of a Yuga is said to be the colour which the Godhead (different names of Viṣṇu mentioned) takes during the age (e.g. Mbh. 3.148.16, 23, 26, 33 & 3.187.31; Nāradaḥ. 1.41.13–14, 16, 22; Garuḍap. 1.223.9–10, 22; see also Hildebeitel 1976: 283). Furthermore, the three qualities (*guṇa*) are connected to the system of Yugas according to the following scheme: *kṛta/sattva*, *tretā/rajas*, *dvāpara/rajas-tamas*, *kali/tamas* (Bhāgavatap. 12.3.26–30; Vāyup. 8.65; Garuḍap. 1.223.24–27). The Brahmanḍapurāṇa (1.2.31.4) gives an interesting explanation to the mixed age of *rajas* and *tamas*: the *dvāparayuga* is a combination of "activity" and "darkness" just because it is the age of sacrifices (cf. Kūrmāp. 1.29.50). After the example of epic battle it is also worth noting that one meaning of *rajas* is "dirt".

²⁴ Correspondingly, the game of dice at the beginning of the Mahābhārata is a chaotic moment in miniature form, and the hidden symbolism of the game even refers to the change of ages: as Bruce Sullivan (1990: 68, note 27) has discovered, the main antagonists of Yudhiṣṭhira embody the demons named after the closing and the opening era (Śakuni = Dvāpara, Duryodhana = Kali).

²⁵ In the *kaliyuga* all people are like *śūdras* (Bhāgavatap. 12.2.14); also the restoration of the *varṇāśramadharmā* at the end of *kali* is mentioned in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa (12.2.38).

²⁶ Also the Rāmāyaṇa has been understood as a Veda-like text without any specific time of invention. The notions "eternal Rāmāyaṇa" and "empirical Rāmāyaṇa" following the ideology of Tulasīdāsa are explained by Frank Whaling (1980: 274–289).

addition of an extra frame story with the god Brahmā together with an echo of the Veda was an important means to expand the Indian audience of epic (Fitzgerald 1991: 169–170). He further explains that after additions the Mahābhārata could present “a continuous new ethic set within new understanding of the cosmos” (ibid.: 166). The central feature of this new ethic set is the figure of Kṛṣṇa by whom the instructions are offered “as a textual resource for people in the new age” (ibid.). The origin of the connection between Kṛṣṇa and the idea of Yugas has already been explained by Alf Hiltebeitel (1976: 118–119), who emphasized the role of the Bhagavadgītā in this process. According to Hiltebeitel, Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu was connected with the *avatāra* doctrine and the Yuga structure especially by the Bhagavadgītā (Bhg. 4.8), an integral part²⁷ of the Mahābhārata. In this way, Kṛṣṇa plays an important role in the ideology which considers the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas as the main guidelines for people of the *kaliyuga*.

Both the idea about teachings for the *kaliyuga* and the central position of the Godhead (most often Kṛṣṇa) is revealed even more clearly in the later retellings of the epics. These works are often—but not necessarily—more heavily flavoured by bhakti ideology in comparison with their models, the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa. The Rāmacaritamānasa of Tulasīdāsa is a good example of an epic text revitalizing the message—and tradition—of the old epic in the context of the *kaliyuga*, and also adding some new emphasis to the story. These new ideological lines are usually said to be justified by the needs of the Age of Kali. For example, Tulasīdāsa’s version of the Rāmāyaṇa presents itself as a work for the wretched era, because it gives the tools needed for salvation—sing the praise of Rāma!—and even restores the authority of the ignored Veda²⁸ (Whaling 1980: 261, 270). It is a kind of epic, or Veda, born again in the middle of the *kaliyuga*. Correspondingly, the Rāmacaritamānasa tends to prove that Tulasīdāsa is the Vālmīki of the *tretāyuga* reborn in the *kaliyuga* (ibid.: 223).

A similar example from the sphere of the Mahābhārata is a work called Jaiminibhārata, a retelling of the Āśvamedhikaparvan with much stress laid on the figure of Kṛṣṇa and the importance of bhakti during the Age of Kali. The temporal background of the Jaiminibhārata is similar to the Mahābhārata, but because it concentrates on the events after the war, it brings out even more explicitly its own role as a text giving the paradigms for the age which is about to begin. Also the legacy of the Vedic sacrificial system is utilized when the Jaiminibhārata presents Yudhiṣṭhira’s horse sacrifice as a miraculous sacrifice without bloodshed. This exemplary ritual manipulated by jesting Kṛṣṇa is meant to be a point marking the transition to the age of bhakti. The modelling aspect is made very explicit as the ritual miracle is immediately followed by a chapter explaining the *dharma* for the new age (Jbh. 65, called *kalidharmavarṇana*).²⁹

Both the Rāmacaritamānasa and the Jaiminibhārata emphasize the exemplary role of the epic events, but they also explain the need for a new set of ideologies within the reality of the revolving system of time and the *kaliyuga* being present. As we have seen, the

²⁷ See especially Deshpande 1991. I am referring here to written versions of the Mahābhārata at our disposal; the question of the “original core” of the epic is outside the scope of this article.

²⁸ The notion of traditionalization in the change of Indian ideologies is thoroughly explained by Brian K. Smith (1989: 20–29, 202).

²⁹ Further introduction to the Jaiminibhārata in Koskikallio 1993 and Karmarkar 1960: xxiv–xlvi.

idea of the epics as a legacy for the people of the *kaliyuga*, usually connected with bhakti tendencies, was already clearly in germ in the Mahābhārata.³⁰ For the continuation of this ideological turn reflected in the epics, we have also third example of “post-epic” texts connected with the theme of Yugas: that is the North Indian oral epic called Ālhā. It is not a literary retelling with oral dimensions like the aforementioned ones, but just the opposite: an oral epic taken down in writing. Because Karine Schomer (1989) has already studied the Ālhā epic with the paradigms for the *kaliyuga* in mind, I confine myself to mentioning only a few points on the basis of her article.

The characters of the Ālhā epic are not the same as in the Mahābhārata. Furthermore, the time of the events is more explicitly the Age of Kali, or, as Schomer puts it, the text is “a latter-day Mahābhārata”. These differences do not, however, eliminate the connection of the Ālhā with the liminal time at the end of *dvāparayuga*, fundamental to the Bhārata epics. According to Schomer (1989: 145) “the perspective shifts back and forth from the Kali Yuga characters to those of the Dvāpara, the two realities are practically conflated into one”. This means that the liminal time which was originally a product of the transition phase between the Yugas is created again in the frame of the Ālhā epic. There is once more a need for the “eternal Mahābhārata”, and the reason for this need is not just the *kaliyuga* flowing down steadily, as in the case of Rāmacaritamānas, but, as Schomer has pointed out, it is a question of the minor liminal phase inside the *kaliyuga*: “the great war at the end of Ālhā marks the end of the first stage of the Kali Yuga and the start of a second stage, a stage in which there will be further deterioration of the human condition” (ibid.: 145). As the full swing of *kali* (*kaliyuddhi*) was about to begin, the epic had to be regenerated.

Somewhere between twilight and dawn

When the epics and Purāṇas are seen as the precept of people living in the *kaliyuga*, it is natural that the theme of transition into “our” age has an important role in them, and as far as the Mahābhārata is concerned, it is the principal frame of reference for the text. Yet, it is not possible to find any straightforward information on the question of what is understood to have been the actual moment of change from *dvāpara* to *kali*. Similarly, the concept *yugānta*, or the end of an era, is much in use in the Mahābhārata, but the word for the beginning of the Yuga (*yugādi*) is found much more rarely.³¹

³⁰ Some scholars are even willing to make value judgements and understand this ideological turn as a sign of an ideological decline. For example, Irvati Karve defends the “original” uncompromising ideology of the Mahābhārata in her book entitled *Yugānta*. She writes: “the idea of kind-hearted gods, devotion, monotheism, escape from reality, all these are not found in the Mahābhārata; they all came later. In this sense the Mahābhārata marks the end of an era.” (Karve 1969: 199.)

³¹ But even in the epic texts both the words *yugādi* and *yugānta* (for the latter also *yugakṣaya* or *yugasamkṣaya*) are used in the “Purāṇic” sense, i.e. referring to the beginning and the end of *kalpa* or *caturyuga*. As I searched the word *yugādi* and related expressions from the epics (Tokunaga 1993; 1994), I could find only about a dozen references in the Mahābhārata, and none in the Rāmāyaṇa. In every case, except one, the word refers to the “beginning of the world” (*lokādi*) as the new *kalpa* or *caturyuga* sets in. See Mbh. 1.1.37, 1.19.13, 3.188.4, 12.47.20, 12.203.14, 12.203.16, 12.327.89, 12.336.45, 12.336.47, 13.16.46. Similar expressions: *yugasyādau* (1.1.28); *yugāgre* (6.61.52); *ādiyugāgame* (13.135.11); *yugādikṛdyugāvarta* (13.135.46); *ādir yugānām*

In the darkness of the transitional period there are, however, some significant events that are linked with the actual change of Yugas. P. V. Kane mentions three possibilities in his *History of Dharmasāstra*. These are the end of the Mahābhārata War, the death of Kṛṣṇa and—according to the Yugapurāṇa—the death of Draupadī.³² Besides these, Arjuna's grandson, the ideal king Parikṣit, is often mentioned as a kind of pivotal character between the heroic and historical ages (Hiltebeitel 1976: 351). Through him the Kuru line could continue to this side of the temporal divide, and the period of Parikṣit and his successors has been seen as the first memories from the *kaliyuga*. Among these turning points, both Kṛṣṇa's death and the story of the revivification of Parikṣit by Kṛṣṇa are important components in the later bhakti ideology and its views of the *kaliyuga*.

Some additional hints for determining the start of the *kaliyuga* can be found in the Jaiminībhārata. The description of Yudhiṣṭhira's horse sacrifice includes two explicit statements about the Age of Kali to come. Firstly, there is an exact determination of the transition, as the beginning of the *kaliyuga* is said to take place three months after the end of the *aśvamedha* performed by the Pāṇḍavas.³³ Secondly, during the ritual Indra is asked to come down and enjoy his share of the sacrifice with the following verse:

grhāṇendra mahāyajñe dhanasārāhutiṃ vibho |
ehi rājñārpitām enām durlabhām agrataḥ kalau || (Jbh. 64.31)

“Come, O Indra, to the great sacrifice and receive the outpouring of the essence of wealth; O Lord, accept this gift which was difficult to obtain, given to you by the king at the beginning of *kali*”

The share of the splendid sacrifice mentioned does not consist of the flesh, but is part of the horse which had already been miraculously transformed into milk and camphor by Kṛṣṇa. So, at the climax of the old Vedic sacrifice a change occurred and suddenly the *yajña* was a new kind of ritual anticipating the age of bhakti.

The black age and light of devotion

The contrast between the past as an age of rituals and the present as an age of bhakti (*bhaktikāla*) is especially favoured by sources in which epic themes go together with devotional ideas. This is partly a comment on ritual tendencies, as the old ritualism, which included actual killing, was in irreconcilable conflict with the later ideology supporting devotional and non-violent ideas. From the bhakti point of view, the importance of the epic themes lies partly in the idea of their relative temporal proximity: the epics are under-

ca sarveṣāṃ (14.44.8). Cf. above, note 19. The only explicit reference to the beginning of any of the four Yugas is in Mbh. 6.62.39: *dvāparasya yugasyānte ādau kaliyugasya ca*. The context of these lines is very revealing: the reference to latest phases of the *dvāpara* and the beginning of *kali* situates at the end of a bhakti-flavoured eulogy to Vāsudeva. So, it is possible to take this as an indication of the tendency in some devotional circles to stress the four-Yuga-system at the expense of the Purāṇic/eschatological emphasis.

³² Kane 1946: 896–897 (Kṛṣṇa's death as the beginning of the *kaliyuga*: Viṣṇu. 4.24.35–36, 40; Vāyup. 99.428; also Hiltebeitel 1976: 62; Brockington 1992: 146). After that Kane enters into speculations of the “actual” starting point of the *kaliyuga* (see also Patil 1946: 77). Traditionally the question of the historical chronology is solved by dating the transition to *kaliyuga* to 3102 BC.

³³ Jbh. 65.38: *māse ṛtīye ghoras tu bhaviṣyati kali*.

stood as the latest reminiscences of better times, from the era when Rāma or Kṛṣṇa lived amidst the people. And the basic plan was simply to transform those reminiscences into the normative legacy for the present age, *kaliyuga*.

The idea of the god who will soon depart from the midst of people, or turn from present to omnipresent, is already found in the Mahābhārata. The Bhagavadgītā, explaining the nature of the ultimate reality, was in the epic context told for a single soldier hesitating to kill his relatives, but on the ideological level it was designed for the people living in a time without God incarnate. And to be on the safe side, Kṛṣṇa repeated the code for the future in the Anugītā (Mbh. 14.16–50); this happened, as the Mahābhārata puts it, because Arjuna had simply forgotten the valuable ontological truths in the tumults of war.

The above-mentioned texts are important for outlining the intellectual bhakti. But the intellectual tendency is only one part of Indian devotionism; the other strand of tradition concentrates on the more emotional aspect. One central theme of this emotional bhakti is the idea of separation from God (during the *kaliyuga*). Friedhelm Hardy calls this feature *viraha-bhakti*, the devotion in which the sentiment of separation is cultivated (Hardy 1983: 9). In a way, the complicated relationship between a worshipper (*bhakta*) and the Godhead is “electrified” by the idea of two poles, separation and union. This basic tension between the reality of separation and the ideal of union gets its realization also in the pictures of present “black age” and possible “white age”. By using the imagery of *kaliyuga*, sentiments bouncing between resignation and hope are just interpreted through temporal symbols. But the extreme solution of the *viraha-bhakti* goes one step further: it sublimates the sentiment of separation—if you are destined to separation you can only make it art of separation! Similarly, the cultivation of the sentiment of separation is often felt the only possibility for the people living in the *kaliyuga*. Or as Hardy puts it: “the *bhakta*'s emotions are a particular manner of coming to terms with the world” (ibid.: 579).

Also the Purāṇas, which keep reiterating the moral, environmental and physical degradation of the world during the present era, provide the listener/reader with the remedy of devotion. We have already seen that the main Purāṇic recommendations for the *kaliyuga* are giving (*dāna*) and devotional cult (*pūjā*), i.e. serving various forms of Viṣṇu or Śiva (e.g. Nāradaḥ. 1.41.92–115). Because bhakti is the simplest way, it has also been seen as the only possible method for the people whose “moral or religious abilities” have been greatly reduced by the time in which they are living. To summarize: the limits set by the nature of time is one of the main prerequisites for the justification of bhakti ideology.

But Indian devotionism is not just a last resort for the helpless or weak-willed people of the wretched era. The ideology has its active aspect, too: with the help of bhakti it is possible to create a break in the corrupted time, to bring a glimpse of good time amidst the black age. But even the intellectual bhakti does not trust in the abilities of human philosophical analysis to pierce the predestined darkness; the weapons for breaking the time have to be taken from the emotional side. The savior or the power able to overcome time must come from the outside of (present) time, and in this situation the

only way to create contact with that power is devotion. Thus, the joy shared by the *bhaktas* springs ultimately from the idea that the *kaliyuga* can be broken. The stories about previous Yugas are seen as models, evidence and reinforcement for this quest. Similarly, the joyful processions and feasts appealing to all senses are symbolizing the victory over demon Kali (Carman 1987: 130). The breaking of black colour of the Age of Kali is understood as a temporary return of white colour, the colour of the *ṛtayuga*.³⁴

In addition to being the age of devotion, the *kaliyuga* is an age of easy merits compared to earlier periods. The ratio of credits resulting in fruitful deeds—austerities (*tapas*), continence (*brahmācārya*) or prayers (*japa*)—during each Yuga is mentioned in a Purāṇic saying (e.g. Viṣṇup. 6.2.15–16; Nāradaḥ. 1.41.91; Brahmaḥ. 230.62–63). According to it, obtaining the same amount of merits takes a time of unequal length during different Yugas. Thus, the fruits of ten year's effort during the *ṛtayuga* can be obtained in one year (*tretā*), in one month (*dvāpara*) or in one day and night (*kaliyuga*).³⁵ This idea of “deflation” of deeds in proportion as time degenerates is on the background of the idea of the *kaliyuga* as an age of bhakti, but it has also given reason for critical approaches towards the easy means of collecting credits.

For example, in the Mahābhārata we can find descriptions such as: *yugakṣayakṛtā dharmāḥ prārthanāni vikurvate* (Mbh. 3.148.36: “the Laws produced by the decline of the world are perverted into prayers”, transl. van Buitenen). Also the Brahmaḥ. (231.1–2) presents interesting verses which almost lay the easyness of *kaliyuga* open to ridicule: those lines tell us how sages, while listening to Vyāsa's description of the Age of Kali (during the *dvāparayuga*), were eager to see the new time of easy merits as soon as possible. More controversial is the passage of Viṣṇupurāṇa (6.2), where the ṛṣis wanted to know which of the Yugas is the most “efficient”, if efforts and fruits are weighed against each other.³⁶ Thus they went to Vyāsa, who was just finishing his ablutions half immersed in the water of Ganges, for an answer. While plunging down into water he praised the *kaliyuga* and proclaimed that it gives a possibility for easy merits, open to *sūdras* and women as well (cf. above, notes 23 & 25). This episode can be read as an ironical presentation³⁷ of the cheapness and social equality of the *kaliyuga*. But a literal interpretation, according to which *kaliyuga* can be seen as an age open to new methods (i.e. bhakti), is also possible.

The end of sacrifices through a splendid sacrifice

In this article I have tried to collect some textual material in which three elements of the Indian religio-ideological world are overlapping. These spheres are: 1) Vedic ritualism, 2)

³⁴ The power of the epic reminiscences of the “good white times” is further intensified by the actual meanings of the names Arjuna (“white”) and Pāṇḍava (“descending from the pale”); see also Hiltelbeitel 1976: 183. A historical explanation for these names is proposed by Parpola 1984.

³⁵ A verse with proportions different from this is found in the Vāyupurāṇa (58.47, 72) and Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa (1.2.31.72–73). These texts make a comparison only between the three last Yugas and the ratio is the following: 1 year's efforts in *tretā* = 1 month's efforts in *dvāpara* = 1 day's efforts in *kali*. The absence of *ṛtayuga* probably derives from the idea that during the first era there was no need for special means of collecting merits.

³⁶ A similar discussion can be found in Brahmaḥ. (230.60–82).

³⁷ This might as well be an example of some kind of “*vyāsa-līlā*”.

the system of Yugas and 3) ideological tendencies classified as bhakti. We have seen that the memory of old sacrifices has been taken up as an important instrument in transition to new era. Especially epics (and pseudo-epics) use the symbolical potentiality, or flexibility, of the sacrificial system as they present their own version of the change of (ritual) ideology in the liminal setting of the turning Yugas. Brian K. Smith puts forth the same idea from the Vedic perspective as he states that "Vedism never died but merely transmigrated into new bodies" (Smith 1989: 193). Thus it was possible to translate the classical Vedic ritual into the symbolical language of bhakti and set it into the eve of *kaliyuga*. This example, which is most clearly found in the Jaiminibhārata, describes how the ideologists aimed at a replacement of the old system with a new system and how they chose the most logical liminal time as the mytho-temporal background. Our central theme, however, has thus far been how this ideological change was made to happen; the question, I have not yet answered properly, is about the continuation: if the end of the *dvāparayuga* sets the model, how was this model supposed to be applied during the *kaliyuga*? And especially: what is the change like in the fundamental idea of sacrifice designed for the *kaliyuga*, the period of easy merits?

The starting point is again the opposition in which the Godhead is either present or absent/omnipresent. The Māhābhārata, and especially later bhakti texts, tell about the time when Kṛṣṇa lived in this world amongst his *bhaktas*. At the end of the Bharata story, there is a great horse sacrifice after the great war (which was itself a great sacrifice, too). According to Jaiminibhārata's ideological solution, this sacrifice has an important role in setting the paradigms for the future religion. It was the last sacrifice before the *kaliyuga* began and it was the last sacrifice in which Kṛṣṇa was present on this (= the sacrificers') side. It was a pivotal ritual between the old and new age/ideology, the last sacrifice setting the model for the time without Kṛṣṇa and without animal sacrifices.

A similar idea of the epic sacrifice as "a sacrifice to end all sacrifices" can be found in J. C. Heesterman's writings. Yet, Heesterman with his theory moves in another time: he is writing about the earlier major change of Indian sacrificial ideology as follows:

Sacrifice in the epic is a fatal doom, not a just and ultimately promising enterprise. The epic raises the numinous ambivalence of sacrifice to an unbearable pitch. Its sacrifice is a sacrifice to end all sacrifices. (Heesterman 1985: 87.)

Here the epic is, of course, the Mahābhārata; the sacrifice is the Great Bharata War; and the earlier major change in ideology is the transition from pre-Vedic ("fatal") to Vedic ("just") ritualism. So, by using the epic material describing the situation at the end of the *dvāparayuga*, Heesterman has found evidence for his theory explaining the change from pre-classical to classical. Correspondingly, but with a slightly different viewpoint and with somewhat later textual material, it has been here possible to concentrate on the next main shift: from classical to post-classical ritual ideology.

As an epilogue and a partial answer for the question of change in the fundamental idea of sacrifice, I dare to make a comment on a more universal level. In 1979³⁸, Olivier Herrens Schmidt published an interesting article in which he compared the basic sacrificial ideas of the Vedic and Judaeo-Christian traditions. The reason for this choice was his conception that these two, the "Brahmanic" and the "testamentary" system, as he labelled them, can be schematically opposed (Herrens Schmidt 1982: 28–30). He clarified this idea by using the following simplified schemes:

| | |
|---------------|------------------------------|
| Brahmanic: | order > divinities > mankind |
| testamentary: | divinity > order > mankind |

Thus Herrens Schmidt begins with the idea that in Brahmanism "the divinities are mediators between man and the world order" and man has an eminent place "due to his unique power to control and maintain the order of the universe through sacrifice". In the testamentary system, on the other hand, "there is no world order—no 'natural law'—except insofar as a god has willed it" and "man can know what tomorrow will bring only because there is a contract agreed to by both parties. This contract is called the Covenant." (Ibid.: 28.) The result is that the ideology of Brahmanism is based on "effective" sacrifice, while in the testamentary system "there are two parallel representations of sacrifice, one effective and one symbolic." (Ibid.: 39.) And in this case the effective one precedes the symbolic one.³⁹

When Herrens Schmidt describes the two sacrificial ideas of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the transition from the ideology of the Old Covenant (Testament) to the one of the New Covenant (Testament), he proposes that in the given historical context it was important for Christianity to make sacrifice symbolic rather than effective (ibid. 34). Furthermore, from the sacrificer's point of view with the New Covenant "the whole sacrificial process is carried to a higher level of effectiveness." (Ibid.: 36.) According to the Christian ideology, the foundation of the New Covenant happens in a unique last sacrifice (by/of Christ) *at the end of time*, and after the Last Supper and the atoning death on the cross there is no need for their *actual* repetition, because all the sins are wiped out with them. (Ibid.: 36, where the Jerusalem Bible 9.12–14 is quoted.) Only the symbolic re-enactment⁴⁰ is possible, and so an effective sacrifice has been changed into a symbolic one.⁴¹

³⁸ The English version to which I am referring here was published in 1982.

³⁹ There are, of course some differences between the "effective" sacrifices of Brahmanism and the Old Testament. We can say that sacrifice had a more central role in Vedism than in Judaism, but according to Herrens Schmidt there is a similar basic idea behind both of them. I would like to express this similarity with two sentences: 1) Brahmanism: if you want x, sacrifice y and you get x; 2) testamentary: if you have made x (sin), sacrifice y and you are forgiven.

⁴⁰ In the Council of Trent (1545–63) it was declared that the Eucharist is not "just a remembrance... but a reconciling offering" (Brockington 1992: 62).

⁴¹ Herrens Schmidt gives also a more detailed scheme for this transition. In the Old Covenant the components of sacrifice were: sacrificer-priest (or sacrificer + sacrificer-priest) + victim + god, while the sacrifice sealing the New Covenant consisted of: sacrificer + priest-victim-god. This reminds of the Jaiminibhārata's arrangement, where Kṛṣṇa, not Yudhiṣṭhira, was finally declared to be the real sacrificer (Jbh. 64.55). Ultimately, it is possible to understand this as a logical identification of Kṛṣṇa

Now we can return to the threshold of *kaliyuga* again. We have seen that a “totally new religio-ideological solution” situated in the critical juncture of time is a feature common to Christianity as well as to some Indian explanations, setting the transition to a new ideology in the liminal phase of Yugas. This also leads to a radical change in the notion of history as a gulf is created between the time before and after the essential point. Actually, the words “at the end of time”, including both Christian⁴² and Indian explanations, mean that the time before the vital moment can now be “bundled up” as an indefinite period of the past which thus gets a definite end. But this “old time” is time of little importance, because the creation of the new foundation for human existence gives birth to a new concept of history⁴³, and only time after laying this foundation is the real time that can be dealt with.

I have wanted to point out the obvious similarities that can be found in the two-covenant-system of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as sketched by Herrenschildt and in the transition from the classical to post-classical sacrificial ideology⁴⁴, especially in the light of the example provided by the *Jaiminibhārata*. The heart of these resemblances is the idea of the last sacrifice in the liminal moment of time. With this sacrifice a new ideological solution is created out of mythical bricks, and the whole project is carried to a higher level of effectiveness. The result is a sacrifice so total that it makes the end of sacrifices.

Finally, I have to underline that this comparison is made by using only one trend of Indian post-Vedic reality. And this solution, based on the mixture of *bhakti* tendencies, epic tradition and the notion of Yugas, is most clearly seen through a text that has been only of marginal importance in Western Indological studies thus far. So, my main purpose is to remind that Indian religious ideologists and Christian ideologists have sometimes used analogical courses of thought⁴⁵ while creating answers under the pressure of “worn-out” traditions, traditions which could no more give satisfactory tools for their quest.⁴⁶ Sometimes these “totally new” solutions prove to be not at all unparalleled if we widen our perspective. And after all such questions as, who was the first, who borrowed from whom or who invented it independently, are not always the most important questions. Or, as the Vedic ritualists already thought: resemblances and seeing behind them is all that matters—and besides that, the resemblances are so captivating!

with *Prajāpati*, the Vedic sacrificer-victim-god.

- 42 The idea of the Christ inaugurating the “last time” and the characterization according to which he came in the “fullness of time” are also connected with the eschatological expectation of his second coming (Brockington 1992: 41).
- 43 The theologian Jürgen Moltmann has expressed a related viewpoint: his idea is that the crucifixion can be understood as something in which God opens “his being to include within himself the whole of human history” (Brockington 1992: 10).
- 44 As Herrenschildt (1982: 40) duly adds, this does not mean that there is some kind of universal evolution from effective to symbolic sacrifice.
- 45 Duncan Derrett (1970) was inclined to see the *Jaiminibhārata* as a work heavily influenced by Christian sources. Also Albrecht Weber (1870: 34–48) considered this possibility. My understanding of the matter is that most of these “Christian” elements can be explained with a closer look at *bhakti* tradition (Koskikallio 1993: 113–114; see also Renou & Filliozat 1953: 402).
- 46 Brian K. Smith (1989: 210–212) has underlined the tendency to understand the changes in Indian ritual system as an expression of a continuing search for the “true sacrifice”. Before Smith the viewpoint has been expressed by Heesterman (1985: 42).

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bhāgavatap. = Bhāgavatapurāṇa
 Bhg. = Bhagavadgītā
 Brahmāṇḍap. = Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa
 Brahmap. = Brahmap. (see references: Screiner & Söhnen 1987, Söhnen & Schreiner 1989)
 Garuḍap. = Garuḍapurāṇa
 Jbh. = Jaiminibhārata (see references)
 Kūrmap. = Kūrmapurāṇa
 Manu = Mānavadharmasāstra
 Mārkaṇḍeyap. = Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa
 Matsyap. = Matsyapurāṇa
 Mbh. = Mahābhārata (see references, also Tokunaga 1994)
 Nāradap. = Nāradapurāṇa
 Rāmāy. = Rāmāyaṇa (see references, also Tokunaga 1993)
 Vāyup. = Vāyupurāṇa
 Viṣṇudharmottarap. = Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa
 Viṣṇup. = Viṣṇupurāṇa
 (The Purāṇa editions used are the latest reprints of the Nag Publishers.)

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