

The Logical Appropriation of Kinship as a Political Metaphor: An Indian Epic at the Civilizational and Regional Levels

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RÉSUMÉ

L'étude d'un poème épique contemporain de la région de Coimbatore au sud des Indes, nous démontre que les paysans de cette région établissent un rapport entre leurs propres traditions et les structures idéologiques pan-indiennes, tout particulièrement celles dont on fait description dans le texte bien connu *Mahābhārata*. Une version du poème épique est destinée aux nombreux paysans illettrés. D'autres versions furent imprimées à l'intention d'un public urbain plus instruit. Toutes les versions régionales, ainsi que le *Mahābhārata* réfèrent à un clan de frères autour d'une parente. Par cette femme, on voit s'introduire la possibilité de traduire les messages fondamentaux qui se trouvent dans une épopée classique. On se sert de cette femme dans la version écrite pour donner l'idée que plusieurs frères (local) devraient se joindre pour vénérer leur sœur sacrée (métaphore de civilisation). Au contraire, le texte oral, complètement positivement la sagesse passive d'un frère aîné (maintenant métaphore de civilisation) par un autre frère de personnalité plus agressive. Ici, la sœur devient leur alliée, une femme avec des dons magiques dérivant de ses liens territoriaux. Somme toute, la version orale (ou paysanne) utilise, d'une façon originale, certaines métaphores (de parenté) pour de puissants thèmes idéologiques. Les relations entre les mâles de même famille cherchent ici à exprimer le mécontentement envers les valeurs de Brahman par ceux dont le statut social est peu élevé au sens de la hiérarchie sociale de cette civilisation.

“il n'existe jamais de texte original: tout mythe est par nature une traduction... qu'un auditeur cherche à démarquer en le traduisant... tantôt pour se l'approprier et tantôt pour le démentir... Le mythe n'est donc jamais de sa langue, il est une perspective sur une langue autre...”

Lévi-Strauss 1971: 576-77

In this paper we will limit ourselves to considering some very basic propositions Lévi-Strauss has made about transformational processes. Furthermore, we will attempt to “test” these propositions by applying them in quite a different context, in a culture where we believe they can be rather rigorously examined. Specifically, we shall compare a great classical epic from India (the *Mahābhārata*) and several variants of a local or regional epic (*The Brothers' Story*). Instead of looking at transformations of a single mytheme, furthermore, we will focus on changes which are worked on relationships between the various central characters in the local story. We will also be concerned with what the *Mahābhārata* and variants of this local epic have to say at the level of political values.

The following essay will be concerned exclusively with transformations that have occurred within the pan-Indian cultural area, a context which exhibits many shared religious and social traditions. Specifically, we shall ask what bards in one local region have done with certain central elements of this pan-cultural heritage. How can a regional identity come to assert itself vis-à-vis a pan-Indian value framework: And how does a local social order deal with the status differences inherent in any linking of rural, peasant, folk legends to a classical epic known to be a cultural masterpiece?

Our material for this study will consist of three peasant texts, each of which recounts the same regional epic, *The Brothers' Story*, in variant ways. The first text (labeled “B” for bardic) consists of a tape recording (later transcribed) of a singer's forty-four hour performance of this story before a local audience. The bard of this version was a local, unlettered man of relatively low caste status. His impressive performance took nineteen nights to complete. The audience consisted of local, equally non-lettered peasants.

The second text (labeled "I" for itinerant) has long been available in the area as a paperback book. It can be purchased in local bazaars or from merchants who move from festival to festival. Although available in written form, this text maintains a strong rural flavor, both by its choice of words and by its lack of extensive literary references. Our third text (labeled "L" for literary), is more scholarly. It has also been published in a paperback format, but has clearly been addressed to a lettered audience. This text's choice of words requires a more extensive knowledge of literary Tamil, and more extensive didactic passages are contained within it.¹

These three texts (B, I and L) represent a kind of continuum which runs from a very local to a relatively literary version of *The Brothers' Story*. We will now examine all three versions with an eye to the kinds of transformations they have worked on India's great epic, the *Mahābhārata*. At a superficial glance no clear links between our regional epic and the pan-Indian *Mahābhārata* are visible. With closer scrutiny, however, it becomes clear that the story is indeed modeled after this civilizational classic in many ways. Each of the major figures in this regional work, for example, is understood to be a hero of the former epic, reincarnated. Secondly, many of the scenes and episodes described in this local story parallel those in the pan-Indian classic. Thirdly, a study of the structure of the main action sequences of *The Brothers' Story* show that they bear a striking resemblance to the *Mahābhārata*'s own internal organization. And fourthly, the main values which underlie our local work (barring exceptions soon to be discussed) match those contained in the *Mahābhārata* very closely. For all of these reasons, then, we feel justified in seeing this local story as performing certain transformations on this classical material.²

How do these different texts borrow upon and transform the basic kin relationships of the *Mahābhārata* on which they have been modeled to a considerable degree? To answer this question we shall study the use of several "deep" metaphors which can be found

¹ For the "B" text, see Beck 1978b. For the "I" text, see Anonymous 1965. For the "L" text, see Paranicāmi (ed.) 1971.

² These arguments have been presented in much greater detail elsewhere (Beck 1978a). A full translation of the "B" text is available (Beck 1978b).

embedded in our local texts. Lévi-Strauss' examination of native Indian mythologies of the Americas has special theoretical relevance for such a study because of its central concern with the question of how spatially or linguistically continuous traditions articulate with one another. Our local epic can be described quite nicely in these Lévi-Straussian terms: "Le mythe n'est donc jamais de sa langue, il est une perspective sur une langue autre..." (Lévi-Strauss 1971: 576-77). *The Brothers' Story* can also be taken as an example of such a perspective on another set of cultural traditions (in our case) that of India's pan-cultural, ancient *Mahābhārata*.

Lévi-Strauss limits his discussion to the nature of myth, but his central conclusion can easily be expanded to cover the epic texts to be discussed in this paper. Epics, like myths, are often concerned to define the social identity of a particular group. Both types of material tend to rework previously adopted cultural materials and assumptions by examining them from a fresh perspective. Now a classical piece of literature, composed roughly two millenium ago, the *Mahābhārata* has been described as a kind of founding library for Brahman-Indian civilization generally. It can be viewed as a kind of encyclopedic work on the core themes of that civilization (Van Buitenen 1974: 53). In Lévi-Straussian terms, however, this epic can equally be understood to provide a Brahmanical commentary on still earlier civilizational memories. Furthermore, the *Mahābhārata* is a story as well known in India as are the Gospels or as are key parts of the Old Testament in our own culture. And also, like these central episodes of biblical tradition, the stories contained in the *Mahābhārata* are treated as an actual historical record of facts. Although both texts contain mythological elements, each is primarily viewed as a sacred record of key events linked to the founding of one particular civilization.

Our regional *Brothers' Story* describes events that occurred at a much later period of Indian history (roughly the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries). The story itself may have been given its present epic form at an even more recent date. Since we have evidence for the early geographic spread of the *Mahābhārata* across South India, there can be no doubt that its outlines were known to local story tellers at the time when these events described by *The Brothers' Story* occurred. Furthermore, there can be no

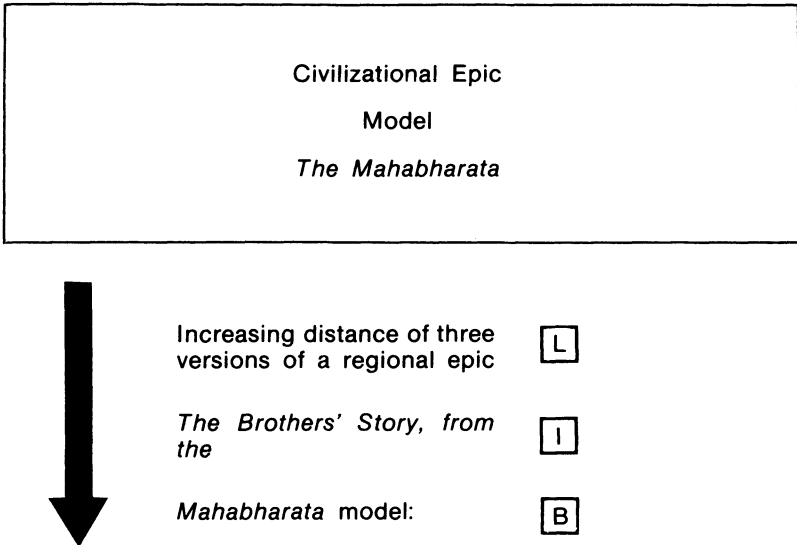
question about the superior contemporary status of the *Mahābhārata* text vis-à-vis this or any other set of local folk materials. The former epic embodies a tradition with a wide geographic spread. It was also commonly transmitted via a ritually superior language (Sanskrit) and preserved largely by members of India's highest ranking caste group (the Brahmins). The local story we are about to consider, by contrast, is a non-Brahman work, composed in a local and secular language (Tamil), and preserved mainly by low-status peasants.

These hierarchical contrasts between *The Brothers' Story* and the *Mahābhārata*, then, lend a particular framework to our analysis. Unlike the myths of native North and South America, with which Lévi-Strauss has mainly worked, we here have information on the historical priority of a particular text. And we also have clear evidence of the differing degrees of cultural status accorded these contrastive materials. Although we cannot claim that our local epic is an actual local "version" of the *Mahābhārata*, we have shown elsewhere that the former borrows a wide variety of materials from this great classical text, reworking many of its details to its own advantage (footnote one). Our ensuing argument will therefore rest on the idea that regional bards or poets find ways to manipulate and to transform material found in the *Mahābhārata* in such a way as to make it serve to heighten the status of their own local traditions. Such transformations become the vehicle for the assertion of a local self identity, by creating a folk epic that contrasts with this over-arching and dominant ideological frame. Our story thus provides evidence for a kind of regional, politically motivated appropriation of a more widely known corpus of cultural imagery. What is "borrowed" becomes transformed to suit local borrowers' rather special concerns.

We shall soon discuss certain details contained in our three versions of this particular local epic in more depth. First, however, we must explain the sense in which we understand each of these versions to stand at a different distance from the civilizational model in question. Our "L" or literary version, for example, is the "closest" to the *Mahābhārata* in all respects. It draws on proportionally more of the former's imagery, and works the least radical transformations upon these materials. It is more like this

FIGURE 1

Three Versions of a Regional Epic,
Showing their Variable Distance from a Pan-Civilization Epic Model



classical epic in its style than is any other version of the regional story. The “L” version shares the former’s didactic tone as well as containing the greatest proportion of explicit references to this great work. Our “B” or bardic version, by contrast, stands furthest from this civilization-wide story frame. It contains the fewest explicit references to the *Mahābhārata* and also stands the furthest from this model in terms of its perspective on principles or moral action. It is also the lowest of the three texts in terms of its social status. This third version represents an oral text, sung by a semi-illiterate bard to an unschooled audience. Our “I” itinerant version stands roughly in-between the other two texts on all of the dimensions just described.

Given this framework for the examination of our data, we must now introduce the basic themes we will trace across versions. In very abstract terms, we perceive all of these stories to be exploring dilemmas created by a desire to rank different kinds of people, or more specifically, the diverse moral codes they represent.

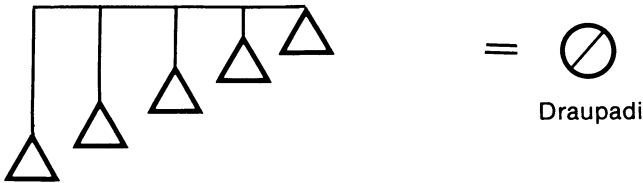
On the other hand, each version is also concerned to balance out such opposing principles or complementary viewpoints. In a nutshell that oversimplifies the matter, a contemplative, self-restrained, patient and non-violent way of life is opposed, in all of these stories, to an active, impassioned, honour-focused, and physically assertive social style. The pan-civilizational view expressed in the *Mahābhārata* treats these two perspectives on correct behaviour as ranked complementaries. The former, linked to the Brahman way of life, is thought to supercede the latter, just as it is linked to a Brahman (rather than to a somewhat inferior, Kshatriya) life-style. In this great epic one can find the principles of hierarchy and complementarity blended in a formula that allows for something of both. Nonetheless, a greater rank is nearly always given to the first half of the pair.³

It is important to note, nonetheless, that the *Mahābhārata* is itself not entirely unified in terms of the treatment of this delicate balance. There are several places in this large work where the Kshatriya values of a warrior are given full recognition and not subordinated to encompassing Brahmanical principles. Given the fact that many regional traditions in India (including the one we shall study) are relatively anti-Brahmanical in their dominant local values and sentiments, this great epic thus makes a perfect reference library for local borrowing. There is plenty of room to manipulate the balance between these two perspectives while still remaining "in contact" with the basic imagery used by this pan-civilizational frame.

In order to consider how such borrowings and transformations occur when *Mahābhārata* materials become incorporated into a local epic account, however, we must first consider two abstract

³ These concepts of hierarchy and complementarity are not invoked here in an arbitrary fashion. On the contrary several authors, each of whom has devoted years to the study of key Indian values, have stressed the importance of these themes. They also insist upon their repeated expression in the medium of key family relationships. Dumont (1966), for example, not only stresses the importance of both themes in a general way (pp. 244-45) but also illustrates their concretization in the age ranking of a set of brothers on the one hand (p. 233), and in the complementing of marital by consanguinal ties on the other (pp. 146-47). More specifically, in relation to the *Mahābhārata* itself, Biardeau (1972) stresses the ranked opposition of the first two Pāṇḍava value styles respectively (pp. 88-90) but also the complementarity of the first brother (as leader of the entire set) to his wife in terms of the same contrast (p. 187).

terms: armature and code. As Lévi-Strauss defines these terms in the first volume of *Mythologiques*: armature [pertains to] a combination of properties that remain invariant in two or several myths, code [pertains to] the pattern of functions ascribed by each myth to those properties; and message [pertains to] the subject matter of an individual myth” (1970 translation, p. 199). In our data we will illustrate all three concepts with reference to a few basic kinship principles. As a starting point let us take the structure of the *Mahābhārata* itself. There we have a group of five brothers, ranked according to their relative ages, but united as one by their marriage to a single wife.



The Paṇḍavas

This structure expresses very nicely a balance between hierarchy and complementarity. The five Pāṇḍavas, for example, are ranked according to age. The most senior of them, furthermore, is also clearly the most contemplative, self-restrained and Brahmanically oriented of the total set. (The later brothers are not so neatly ranked. Predictably, perhaps, this fact is taken advantage of in regional borrowings). In the *Mahābhārata* these five brothers seem to stand for some kind of ranked hierarchy of contemplative and assertive life styles.⁴ Furthermore, all five men stand in the same

⁴ There are several ways in which these five Pāṇḍava brothers have been interpreted as expressing or standing for a higher order set of ranked, collective concepts. The most well known, perhaps, is that proposed by Wikander (1947) and Dumézil (1968). These authors associate the first born Pāṇḍava with the ideals of a priestly stratum of society and with the concept of sovereignty. The second and third brothers, in this interpretation, are linked to a secondary set of warrior values and to the concept of force. The last two Pāṇḍavas, finally, are said to be representatives of a herder-cultivator stratum of society and are linked to the concept of nourishment, a tertiary but still important principle in the overall scheme. While Kuiper (1961) has proposed a slightly different interpretation of this sibling group, each of these authors accepts the metaphoric importance of the five brothers for ranking key concepts or civilizational principles.

complementary relationship with the one major female of the epic, their wife. This woman holds a position of very great moral status. She can in no way be ranked vis-à-vis her multiple husbands. She is an equal and a complement to them, a balancing principle in a universe that tends towards hierarchization (Biardeau 1972: 187).

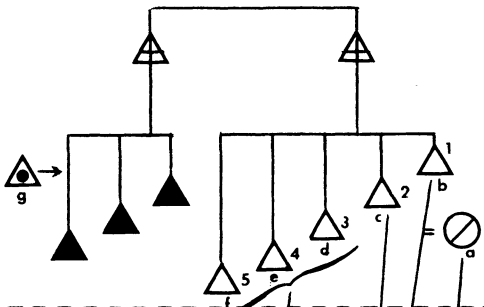
Now let us consider the interesting transformations worked on this kinship structure by the three versions of our regional epic. In all cases the transformations to be discussed are textually confirmed by a terminology that speaks of reincarnation. The characters of the great epic are literally said to be "reborn" in the local *Brothers' Story*. But the mechanisms and patterns emphasized in this rebirth process differ from version to version. In the diagram below we have mapped these rebirths as they are separately described by each account. By looking carefully at the diagram, one can see that there is a kinship armature which has certain invariant properties across all versions of the local epic. More specifically, in each case we have a sibling set consisting of two brothers and a sister. A set of male cousins is also present in each version, though the specific type of cousin (cross or parallel) varies. Where there are parallel cousins these men are treated as rivals and enemies, where there are cross-cousins they are treated as allies. There is also a set of invariant properties that link all of these versions of our local story equally with the *Mahābhārata*. In each case a specific pattern or rebirth links two of the heroic male *Pāṇḍavas* of the great epic to local counterparts via a process of rebirth. Furthermore, both the *Mahābhārata* and the local epic have as a core feature a set of male siblings who live in association with a nuclear kinswoman. Male cousins are also featured in both. This underlying armature pattern (in part or in full) is also common to many other folk stories popular on the sub-continent. It can be called a kind of basic framework on which individual modifications are then worked for specific purposes.

The code or concrete form that this framework takes in these separate versions of our local epic is what is of interest to us here. Concretely, we can distinguish the "L" and the "I" texts from our "B" account in terms of their differing specific codes. These several versions exhibit significant contrasts in their core kin frameworks. In the first two, for example, we have a set of cross-cousin allies,

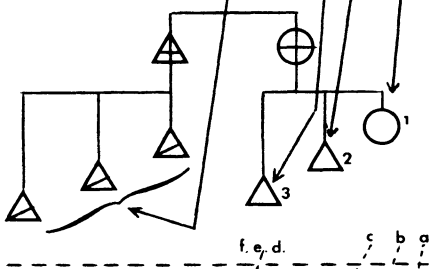
FIGURE 2

Rebirth Patterns in Three Versions of the Brothers' Story

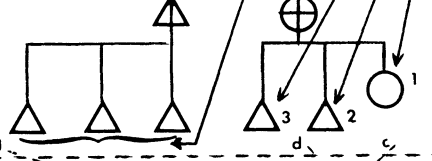
Mahābhārata



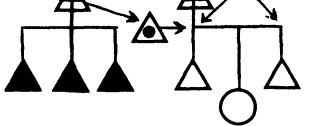
"L" Version










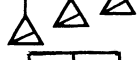


"I" Version



"B" Version



KEY

-  = senior generational links
-  = central set of brothers
-  = agnatic cousins (enemy)
-  = cross cousins (ally)
-  = wife
-  = sister
-  = teacher, minister. (allied with sibling group.)
-  = clear rank & respect hierarchy within a set of siblings.
-  = complementarity and balance (without clear rank) between brothers
-  = path of rebirth
- 1. 2. 3. = birth order
- a. b. c. = individual character who undergoes rebirth

and in the last a set of parallel cousin rivals. This suggests, already, that the first two texts will set out a more amicable and harmonious perspective on various issues. Its kin framework almost demands this. The third version, by contrast, will exhibit a more disharmonic or contentious set of attitudes. In addition, one can see that the rebirth of the five Pāṇḍava brothers in the “L” and the “I” versions nowhere alters their previous ranks. The two eldest brothers are reborn as the two local heroes. The eldest remains the eldest in his next life, furthermore. Meanwhile, the three youngest brothers reappear as cross-cousins. Given the South Indian preference for cross-cousin marriage this makes the latter three men into potential brothers-in-law. Furthermore, relations between cross-cousins are generally assumed to be “friendly” and “supportive.” Note the implicit smile: the recoding of a set of initial kin relationships through rebirth suggests that younger brothers are somehow equatable with in-laws. As used in this code, then, younger brothers do not represent a potential challenge. Instead they are associated with ties of alliance and mutuality. This interpretation is further reinforced by information provided about the one prominent female in the story. She was the Pāṇḍava’s wife, who is now reborn as the local heroes’ elder sister. Again we find a horizontal shift in kin bonds that suggests some kind of underlying equation of in-laws or potential in-laws with siblings.⁵ This whole set of transformations, furthermore, suggests an underlying concern with complementarities. Note that no violence is done to the social hierarchy of persons that was exhibited by the original text, during this re-patterning process.

The third version of our local *Brothers’ Story* provides a real contrast in these abstract terms. In the “B” account we find that a number of more radical transformations are worked on the source materials. First of all, the eldest Pāṇḍava brother is now ignored and the second and third siblings are reborn instead. Furthermore, the elder brother now becomes the younger sibling in the local birth hierarchy. Given that birth order is of fundamental importance for ranking siblings in this culture, the recoding procedures used

⁵ Note that a female is present in each equation and that a cross-sex sibling bond seems essential to the transformational process. In the case of the heroes’ cross-cousins this female-male sibling link is present in the parental generation that serves to link the two cousin sets.

in this version convey a very different feel for the whole. Here we have a version that is disharmonic, vis-à-vis its classical source materials. Instead of horizontal shifts in relationships we now are dealing with vertical transpositions. What was primary in terms of rank now becomes secondary and vice versa. The ignoring of the first Pāṇḍava brother altogether in this new rebirth scheme seems particularly significant in these terms. The most “prestigious” choice, in classical terms, for a local hero’s spiritual ancestry is here ignored altogether.

This new and more radical code contrasts strikingly with the “gentler” rebirth format contained in the “L” and “I” versions. Furthermore, the “B” text is the only account that mentions reincarnation for the military advisor to the cousin enemies. This man now becomes transformed from Brahman to untouchable, at the same time that he is shifted from the enemy camp to play the role of the heroes’ First Minister. Simultaneously, however, the wife of the Pāṇḍavas is now ignored as a possible ancestor for the local heroine. Instead, the key sister is now described as a manifestation of a local goddess. Also significant is the fact that this woman is spiritually younger than her brothers in this version. She is now described as a girl with magical visions who lies in a cradle. The final contrast is that the cousins in our “B” text are like their *Mahābhārata* originals. Now they are depicted as parallel cousins and scheming rivals, not as cross-cousins or allies reborn from brothers, as in the “L” and “I” accounts.

These contrasts between the two more educated versions of our local epic and one truly oral one suggest the presence, in them, of two very different coding systems. In the first two accounts the armature of kinship is used to depict how various kinds of sibling relationships can be seen as potential or transformed marital alliances. What we have, then, is a kind of deep metaphor. In addition to a transformation of a framework per se, we have a hidden commentary on the relationship of classical Brahmanical values to local cultural traditions more generally. In the eyes of the two more literate texts (both the “L” and the “I” versions are printed and are intended to be read) the relationship that holds with this pan-Indian high culture is seen as a harmonic one. The two are either siblings to one another, or marital allies. In the oral text, performed by a partially illiterate bard to an equally illiterate

audience, the attitudes expressed towards India's great traditional culture are quite different. Here this relationship to the classical epic source materials is depicted in terms that employ metaphors of rank reversal and of hierarchical challenge. Various inversions are worked on the relationships of characters in the original so as to achieve the lowering of what was once high and the raising of those who were once low. The pattern of functions ascribed to this armature of kinship thus varies significantly, depending on whether or not the version in question has been addressed to a literate audience.

Before completing the above analysis of codes and deep metaphors, however, we must also consider the question of message. The term message pertains to the subject matter of an individual version. Thus we must also ask: what differences in the use of this kinship armature separate the "L" from the "I" text? Now we shall explain why the preceding diagram represented the sibling sets in question on a diagonal axis:



These unusual axes are intended to represent the rank order of the members of a sibling group in terms of their mutual deference patterns. Each pattern has been deduced from the specific actions of the characters towards one another in an individual version. Note that the diagonal orders portrayed do not correlate perfectly with sibling birth order (also marked).

We have already commented that the classical *Mahābhārata* story achieves a nice balance between the principle of (male) sibling hierarchy and marital or sexual complementarity. Here the Pāṇḍava's joint wife, Draupadi cannot be spoken of as having a clearly ranked position vis-à-vis the five males in her polyandrous household. When the "L" and "I" versions transform this wife into the heroes's sister, however, then some kind of solution to the ranking issue is required. In the "L" version that resolution is fairly straightforward. The transformed female is treated as an elder sister by her male siblings, even though she is physically thought to be younger. Here she is given the role of a kind of sage, a woman who is mature

in her thoughts, and full of wise and learned advice. This sister is most often the one to cite Brahmanical values, using the *Mahābhārata* as her main reference text. In these terms she can be seen to serve as a kind of metaphorical embodiment of classical traditions. She is this tradition's "local representative." Her brothers, rank ordered themselves, maintain a clear hierarchy of deference towards one another as well as towards her. The whole family structure thus remains harmonious by virtue of an acquiescence to the principles of a sex-linked hierarchy. The same principle holds up well when also viewed as a metaphor for relations between local and classical cultural traditions in general. The *Mahābhārata* and the values it stands for are very old compared with the region's own indigenous folk materials. It is "natural," therefore, that the former be seen to deserve the respect and deference due a cherished female ally.

When we come to consider the "I" version, however, these same sibling relations now become subtly changed. The overall kinship code in this version remains the same as for the one just discussed, while the specific message shifts. The formal structure of the kin group, and the rebirth linkages to classical tradition, clearly remain unchanged. But the deferential behaviour described to exist between members of the kin group is now rather different. The sister of the heroes still remains, spiritually and behaviorally speaking, the eldest sibling of the set. She still serves as a kind of local mouthpiece for classical, Brahmanical values. The main change, then, lies with interaction between the male members of the set. They are now depicted as having complementary personalities. They can agree about the respect due to their sister, but not about deference roles vis-à-vis one another. In the sketch provided of the kinship structure for version "I", then, all five men are shown to lie within the same horizontal plane. Pan-Indian Brahmanical values are here still associated with a senior female, but the major respect patterns follow the principles of sexual contrast alone. Male birth order is now ignored. Utilizing the same metaphoric principles the message thus becomes altered: while classical, Brahmanic culture is accorded a role similar to that of a sagacious and respected female, local traditions can be likened to a set of warring brothers. The latter can agree on only one thing, their sacred duty to safeguard their female ally.

The third local account of the *Brothers' Story*, as one might expect, takes this regard of formal hierarchies one step further. Here we have a positive inversion of the above (sexual) complementarity. In the "B" version of the local epic, the heroes' sister becomes spiritually as well as physically, the youngest sibling. Here the two brothers do not think of themselves as deferring to her (though they do try to please her with gifts). The sister's role in this version is rather that of a kind of childlike but magical female being. Her visions, which come to her while she lies in a cradle, help her brothers to determine their actions, but do not have a tone of authority about them at all. It is now the elder of the two male siblings, on the contrary, who takes on the role of representing Brahmanical values in the local setting. The younger brother, moreover, does not defer to the contemplative style of his older brother for a moment. Instead he constantly challenges it, often accusing his elder sibling of being an indecisive coward and a weakling.

This unorthodox behaviour on the part of the younger brother in the "B" version is especially popular with local audiences who listen to this story. In watching performances of this epic in a village setting it was always clear that this secondary male was the heroic favourite. The altered message of this third version of our local epic, then, provides a direct challenge to Brahmanical standards of behaviour. Now two competitive males are seen to occupy the key prestige positions. Their sister is redefined as a simple magical helpmate. Classical, pan-Indian values are thus challenged in local tradition by placing an unusually high value on male assertiveness. The key female figure in the story, meanwhile, undergoes a key transformation in this version. Whereas previously the heroes' sister represented high culture, she now becomes a locale-specific symbol lending her blessings to a male-oriented definition of pan-Indian traditions. This new definition, furthermore, is the most competitive or struggle oriented of the entire set. In this version these metaphors serve as a kind of political challenge.

* * *

Our analysis of varying codes, metaphors and messages embedded in these several versions of our local story ends here. Note that the increasing "social distance" from India's prestigious classical literature, which these three local texts represent, correlates

well with their increasing tendency to challenge those traditions. Furthermore, the discussion of inverted relationships and rank orders was made possible by the discovery of a common armature.⁶ The most literate version of our regional *Brothers' Story* contains a code and a message that suggest a set of harmonic linkages within that armature. These were constructed so as to concede the importance of hierarchical deference patterns. A less sophisticated text, sold by itinerant merchants to educated peasants, was seen to adopt a kind of compromise position. It shared the same fundamentally harmonic code, but bore an altered message. This time the issue of how to rank two contrasting moral codes became couched exclusively in terms of a sexual complementarity. It was only in the third version, however, where a reversal of rank order for the partners to that complementarity allowed a genuinely different value perspective to emerge.

What Lévi-Strauss has himself written in his analysis of the myth of Asdiwal very aptly describes this result: "When a mythical schema is transmitted from one population to another... it begins to become impoverished... But one can find a limiting situation in which... the myth is inverted and regains a part of its precision" (1967: 42). Lévi-Strauss compares this situation to the striking pin-hole phenomena in optics. There, when an image formed by light rays passes through a very small aperture, it will be received "upside down" if it strikes a distant surface on the other side. This is similar to the transformations we have just outlined. In our examination of three versions of a local Indian epic, each of which stands at a different distance from India's classical cultural heritage, each text was shown to provide its own unique perspective on "another language." It was that version which was most "dis-

⁶ These transformations in terms of code and message, between texts, are to be distinguished from other kinds of differences (use of metre, vocabulary, tense, the narrative voice, enjambment patterns, etc.) which also distinguish these versions due to their differences in genre (one performed text versus two composed documents). These latter contrasts are discussed at length in Beck 1978a.

⁷ The self-assertive tone and non-Brahmanical value preferences evident in the "B" text also find expression in the local life style of the dominant agricultural community of the area (Beck 1972). However, to date, these attitudes have rarely been transformed into visible political actions. One recent example of a nascent political expression of these themes, perhaps, was contained in a protest movement against official agricultural policies which farmers of this area directed against the state government during 1972.

tant" from the *Mahābhārata*, however, that provided the sharpest and most fully inverted set of images pertaining to a key dilemma in that heritage.

In sum, we have seen how one ideological structure, when cast in a metaphoric code, became readily susceptible to logical manipulations by some who used it. By studying the new perspectives provided by such users we can learn much about what rich and variant reinterpretations lie as a hidden potentiality in such a shared value frame. This type of semantic manipulation, furthermore, appears to be essential to everyday social dynamics as well as to basic processes of culture change. We must learn to understand social codes, through studying the tactics used to manipulate common cultural armatures, particularly where such armatures stretch through wide sets of materials. We stand to significantly advance our understanding of how basic ideological principles come to develop political overtones in this way.

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