

The Story of Saṃjñā, Mother of Manu: Shadow and Light in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*

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The Sanskrit narrative text *Devī Māhātmya*, “The Greatness of The Goddess” (henceforth DM), extols the triumphs of an all-powerful Goddess, Durgā, over universe-imperiling demons. The exploits of this formidable figure constitute the first known Sanskrit articulation of a Great Goddess within the Indian subcontinent, indeed the first occasion where the ultimate divine principle is accorded femininity. Believed to have emerged somewhere along the Narmada River c fifth century CE (Kinsley, 1982: 153), the DM is preserved in thousands of manuscripts across India, in remarkably stable fashion. It is recited as liturgy to Durgā in temples, during individual daily spiritual practice, and at temples and homes during the autumnal *Navarātri* (nine nights) Hindu festival. While the DM equates supreme reality with the feminine Hindu concepts of *māyā*, *śakti*, and *prakṛti*, it posits no systematic theory; instead, it masterfully interweaves these philosophical strands—as only narrative can—into the visage of a Feminine Divine whose power surpasses that of the Vedic pantheon, and even that of the cosmic *trimūrti* comprised of the great gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Hindu narrative literature is enormously didactic in nature, functioning to preserve philosophical principles and religious ideology across the centuries. Therefore, the overwhelming scholarly emphasis on philosophical texts over narrative literature has proven problematic. Recent scholars have argued in favor of locating religious authority within narrative text,¹ hence the enterprise at hand culling “philosophy” from “mythology.” But how exactly *should* we go about reading narrative texts?

Western scholarship on the Purāṇas has been riddled with misgivings about the trustworthiness of these texts as we have them. The first wave of colonial scholarship on the Purāṇas condemned them as disorganized, debased,

“corrupted” texts, coopting them for philological agendas. The second wave of Romantic Era scholars too mined these tales in search for historical and mythic data. The first approach was based on the assumption that the “real” text no longer exists (and probably never did), and the second resorted to dissecting the text that we have in hand. What about more modern scholarship on the Purāṇas? Inaugurated by the twin auspices of literary criticism and structuralism, the third, modern wave of scholarship has nevertheless been somewhat preoccupied with mining the Purāṇas for mythological motifs. The most significant figure in this enterprise is Wendy Doniger, who has spent nearly half a century plucking mythic moments from across vast spans of time and boundaries of genre and region to bring them into conversation within the rubric of structuralist discourse. However, in this essay, I take a different hermeneutic approach, carefully analyzing the text itself, taking cue from its own narrative content in order to ascertain its deeper philosophical meaning, and broader cultural significance.

The story of Saṃjñā that we find in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (MkP) is as significant as it is mesmerizing, especially in light of its role as the backstory for the *Devī Māhātmya* (DM), immediately following it in the MkP. It indeed “stands at the threshold of another tradition, the beginning of the incorporation of the worship of the Goddess into Sanskrit texts” (Doniger 1999: 55). Wendy Doniger, the most prolific voice in interpreting this myth, further remarks that “since the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* tells the tale of Saṃjñā not once but twice and regards her as the mother of the Manu who rules in our age, the whole *Devī Māhātmya* is, in a sense, a footnote to the story of the shadow of Saranyu” (Doniger 1999: 55).² However, the fact that the Saṃjñā myth is told twice is not necessarily indicative of its double importance (as compared to the DM), but rather, of its framing function of the DM: it is told immediately before and after the DM, serving to thematically contextualize the exploits of the Goddess. From the perspective of the DM—which glorifies the great goddess whose might surpasses even the creator’s, and whose grace is responsible for installing the next Manu—it is the story of Saṃjñā which ornaments, and echoes, the Goddess’s grandeur. But why would this be? What is it about the story of Saṃjñā that warrants its use as a foyer into the grandeur of the Great Goddess? How does the story of Saṃjñā—entailing an exchange between Sūrya, the Sun, and his wives Saṃjñā and Chāyā—orient us in broaching the Goddess of the DM?

Implicit in asking *what* the story of Saṃjñā tells us are the pre-suppositions (1) *that* it tells us anything at all and (2) that we may intelligently go about deciphering that meaning. Harkening to Umberto Eco’s notion that texts are

essentially machines designed for interpretation, positing a “model reader” by virtue of their very contents, this chapter bases its conclusions on a close synchronic reading of the world within the text, countering two centuries of Indological scholarship. Only in safeguarding the text from historicism, philological and structuralist reductions, may we begin to hear what it is trying to say. This approach demonstrates the agency of the text to serve as its own hermeneutic guide, prioritizing material through cues comprising its inherent structure. It therefore contributes not only to *what* we see in the text but also *how* we go about seeing it. In doing so, I moreover demonstrate that the story of Saṃjñā is purposefully wedded to the visage of the feminine we see in the DM because it is no mere tale of an ill-treated goddess who abandons her children and whose actions are the source of the evil of death. Rather, Saṃjñā’s tale bespeaks monumental feminine resourcefulness, faith, and tenacity of spirit.

Structuralist Sleight of Hand

Frame narratives function as guides to interpretation. A frame of course cannot function as a strict, dogmatic fail-safe against dynamic, ongoing mythic exegesis, or else the fluidity of the *Purāṇic* genre freezes into cultural obsolescence. They are more like irrigational guides, designed to channel the narrative flow into fertile grounds for embellishment and interpretation. While much might be gained by plucking a given myth out of its narrative context so as to compare it to myths of similar content, affording purvey of the structural functions of elements of the myth, too much is lost in the process. Furthermore, this approach implicitly holds subsequent articulations accountable to earlier versions (consciously or unconsciously), operating under the premise that earlier articulations are “more authentic” in some way or another. Of course, both diachronic and synchronic methodologies constitute viable means of gaining insight into the “meaning” of a given narrative. However, I contend that if one is interested in grappling with a specific articulation of a narrative, one needs to commence with fully unpacking it within the narrative content proper to its articulation before (rather than instead of) proceeding to compare it to others of its kind. An individual mythic articulation need not be held accountable to its previous or subsequent incarnations. Yet, when we compare mythic articulations from different historical horizons (which, to be sure, is a useful and important exercise), the process itself often constitutes a “sleight of hand” of sorts, causing us to perceive

contortions and occlusions that are very much functions of our methodological lens and not necessarily proper to their articulations themselves.

Wendy Doniger addresses the story of Saṃjñā at seven junctures throughout her work, in publications spanning 40 years (1976, 1980: 174–85; 1996, 1999: chapter One; 2000: chapters One and Nine; 2004: 60–2, 65–70; O’Flaherty 1973: 276, 292). She does so largely through the lens of earlier Vedic articulations of the myth and thus against the grain of the mythology of the Sun found in the MkP. In her 1976 publication, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Wendy Doniger writes that “an important Vedic myth of two mothers is the story of Saṃjñā, the wife of the sun” (1980: 349). It is important for our purposes to unpack her methodological approach. While she uses a modified structuralist technique in her first publication (O’Flaherty, 1973), Doniger writes that “the problem of evil does not easily lend itself to a structuralist approach, perhaps because so many of its jagged facets prove stubbornly irreducible . . . I have therefore used any tool that would do the job – a bit of philology, a measure of theology, lashings of comparative religion, a soupcon of anthropology, even a dash of psychoanalysis” (Doniger 1976: 9). Despite this announcement, it appears that structuralism pervades the methodological milieu of this work nevertheless. Articulations of the Saṃjñā story (and its Vedic correlates pertaining to the goddess Saraṇyū, whom Doniger equates with Saṃjñā) appear at several junctures of Indian lore, ranging from Vedas to the Upaniṣads to, of course, the Purāṇas.³ One might question the ability of any given author to translate and render thirteen mythic junctures ranging across two millennia of cultural and textual history in one fell swoop—but, graced by the powers of structuralist analysis, Doniger does just that. She presents “the” myth as follows:

Saṃjñā gave birth to twins, Yama and Yamī, and then left her husband, creating as a substitute in her place an identical goddess called Chāyā (“dark shadow”). Her husband discovered the deception only when Chāyā mistreated her stepson, Yama; Yama tried to kick Chāyā and was cursed by her to lose his leg, a curse which his father later modified so that Yama fell to the underworld, the first mortal to die and king of all subsequent dead people. Vivasvat pursued Saṃjñā, who had taken the form of a mare, and in the form of a stallion (whose seed she drank) he begat the twin Aśvins upon her. (Doniger 1976: 349)

She then proceeds to offer analysis of her translation under the section heading “The Good and Evil Mother” as follows:

The oppositional pairs of the good and bad mother, the bright image (saṃjñā) and dark shadow, are linked with the motif of the fertile solar stallion pursuing

the erotic, destructive mare. The sun himself is said to have been rejected and pushed from the breast by his mother, Aditi, or to have been threatened by her asceticism while still in her womb, becoming mortal because of this [fn. 143 reads RV10.72.8–9] . . . Chāyā's hatred of her stepson results in a curse that makes Yama into the king of the dead. Thus the wicked, false mother is the source of the greatest of all evils, the kingdom of the dead. (Doniger 1976: 349)

In the first section of her analysis above, Doniger draws upon a binary pair of opposites—the good and the bad mother—in order to explain how Saṃjñā and Chāyā relate to each other and their purpose in the myth as a whole: the ill-treatment of Yama. She furthermore links this binary with a second pair of opposites, namely the fertile solar stallion and the erotic destructive mare. These theoretical tropes curtail the individual articulations of this tale in ways that can be (as is the case in the MkP's telling) contrary to *what we actually see in the text*. It is, for example, mystifying how one could perceive, based upon the MkP account, an “erotic, destructive mare” when we are explicitly told that Saṃjñā in her equine form performed austerities and fasted “like a chaste wife,” (106.12), and that her efforts were geared towards pacification of her destructive husband. It is in fact Saṃjñā's steadfast celibate austerity that spiritually empowers her to reckon with her husband's overbearing *tejas*. Doniger nevertheless asserts elsewhere that sexual insatiability “is the telltale characteristic of the mare in Hindu mythology” (Doniger 1999: 48), and that this insatiability serves as an essential clue to Saṃjñā's “flight from marriage and motherhood” (Doniger 1999: 48). If Saṃjñā cared not for motherhood, it is doubtful that she would bother to craft a double and especially doubtful that she would instruct it to care for her children in her absence. Likewise, if she cared not for marriage, it is doubtful she would undertake austerities to ameliorate her husband's form. She flees from the Sun's excessive sharpness; once this is quelled, she gladly returns to both marriage and motherhood.

Reading the myths of the MkP through the lens of their “older, original” correlates is misguided, for, understandably in doing so, one might quite sensibly argue that “the fact the Saraṇyū myth is a hierogamy between a mortal and an immortal accounts for both Saraṇyū's desertion of her husband and her ‘trimming’ of him: either the sun is impotent and abandoned by the goddess or he is too powerful and is therefore castrated, a no-win situation if ever there was one” (Doniger 1980: 183). Similarly, as Robert Goldman points out, “the sun, of course, is the mortal par excellence in the Veda” (Goldman 1969: 278), and furthermore that he is “a progenitor of mortals.” In the Rg Veda, itself, he is

said to be the father both of Manu (VIII. 52.1) and Yama (X. 14.1)” (Goldman 1969: 279). However, the Sun is certainly not a mortal in the MkP. Therefore, while the myth of Saranyū and her husband in the Ṛg Veda may very well be one wherein “the male is a mortal while the female is immortal” (Goldman 1969: 275), this simply cannot be said to be true of the myth of Saṃjñā and her husband in the MkP. Not only is the Sun said to be immortal, he is described as the prime being among immortals, lauded variously as “the supreme light that was at the beginning” (103.7), “the eternal one” (104.19), “without birth” (107.4), “self-existent” (107.5), “lord without beginning” (109.72). Therefore, the mythology of Saṃjñā and Sūrya in the MkP is not a hierogamy between a mortal and an immortal, so this cannot possibly account for Saṃjñā’s flight, nor the pairing down of Sūrya. Nor does it appear sensible to attribute Saṃjñā’s flight in the MkP to either a distaste for motherhood or an insatiable sexual appetite. Saṃjñā in equine form is portrayed as neither destructive nor erotic; on the contrary, she maintains ascetic chastity in order to quell the destructive tendencies of an overbearing husband.

Let us now turn to the second section of the above analysis, regarding Chāyā’s alleged hatred for her stepson, causing her to curse Yama and become “the source of the greatest of all evils, the kingdom of the dead” (Doniger 1976: 349). Neither account in the MkP correlates Chāyā’s curse (that Yama’s foot should fall off) with his status as the lord of the departed: the first account tells us that “because he is righteous of eye, impartial to friend and foe, therefore the dispeller of darkness appointed him over the southern region” (78.29) (Pargiter 1904: 506), while the second account tells us that the Sun “appointed him to the southern region; his adorable father gave to him the duty of protecting the world, O brahman, and the lordship over the pitṛis” (106.18–19) (Pargiter 1904: 575–6). Furthermore, as we have seen above, it is Sūrya’s curse (based on Saṃjñā restraining her eyes) that causes Yama, “the restrainer” to be born to her. Yama and his role are inseparable; he was accorded this status before birth. More crucial to engaging this myth is the fact that while the myth of a primordial mother figure causing humanity’s fall from blissful immortality to tragic mortality might prevail in the Abrahamic mythic imagination, it, alas, is deeply incommensurate with the myth at hand, both with respect to its specific articulation and to the cultural imagination authoring it. Doniger’s distortion results from uprooting the myth from its narrative and cultural contexts, which she does in the interest of embellishing the discourse of a “bifurcated Hindu feminine,” a trope abounding throughout her work. While Doniger does indeed mention the MkP among the various literary spaces with which the Sūrya–Saṃjñā–Chāyā episode is furnished,⁴ she

neglects to register the import of the myth's narrative context therein. We ought not to read the myth as if Chāyā were some “other” mate chosen by Sūrya and forced to contend with her husband's children of a previous marriage (as the term “stepmother” might connote). Chāyā was created by Saṃjñā through an act of self-cloning, one reminiscent of the yogic attainment (*siddhi*) of bilocation wherein the yogi is able to project a duplicate of his form, known as a shadow self (*chāyā mūrti*). We must note that shadow here does not connote nefariousness as it might in English, but merely reflection. Furthermore, this reflected self of Saṃjñā was explicitly instructed to treat the children well. The text does not indicate hatred nor ill-treatment toward any of the children. Rather, it indicates favoritism shown toward the younger children, which as anyone familiar with the dynamics of childrearing in a South Asian context can readily attest, would likely have been the case, even where all of the children were of the same parents. If this sort of favoritism were unconventional, it would have in itself aroused suspicion. Chāyā is not suspected as being other than Saṃjñā through her favoritism toward the younger children, but through her very human reaction to Yama's egregious insult, a reaction which only a mother might, under ideal circumstances, have been able to suppress.

In the MkP account, Chāyā is not demonized as “the wicked stepmother”—far from it. She succeeds in mothering children who are Sūrya's legitimate offspring, who have crucial cosmic roles, no less so than Sūrya's children by Saṃjñā.⁵ Despite Doniger chalking up Yama's inauspicious post as the result of Chāyā's curse, Mārkaṇḍeya informs us that envious of Chāyā's favoritism of the three younger siblings, Yama threatened to kick her due to “both anger and childishness.” As inappropriate a thing this is to do in Western culture, it would be absolutely inexcusable in an Indian context not only because of one's duty to respect elders and to revere one's parents as gods on earth, but especially because it is an expression of utter disregard to touch someone with one's foot, not to mention kicking them. So stigmatized is this that injunctions persist about even displaying the soles of one's feet toward a teacher or person of respect. One would not think to kick even inanimate objects that deserve respect, such as books. Chāyā curses Yama for his atrocious “unfilial conduct” (Pargiter 1904: 566). It is clear in the text that Yama is well aware that the transgression is his, not Chāyā's; he runs to his father to beg pardon and intercession of the curse, confessing that he “lifted my foot against her, but did not let it fall on her body; whether *it was* through childishness or through foolishness, do thou, Sir, deign to pardon it” (MkP 106.24. See Pargiter 1904: 568). He asks forgiveness because he has done wrong. Sūrya, in like manner, begins his response thus: “Without doubt, my

son, this curse must take effect here, since anger entered into thee” (MkP 106.25. See Pargiter 1904: 568). Even the overbearing Sūrya can recognize that the fault here lies with Yama’s conduct. If Chāyā is faulted in this myth, it is only for falling short of exhibiting saintly compassion in the face of atrocious disrespect on behalf on the part of a haughty youth.

The “wicked step-mother” motif—that is, the notion that “behind this complex myth we may discern a few repeated, familiar themes [such as the dual nature of Saṃjñā expressed as] the loving mother and the wicked step-mother” (Doniger 1980: 177)—is problematic, to say the least. The theme of the wicked stepmother may indeed be a “familiar” one, but only to those familiar with western fairy tales, and not necessarily their Indian mythic counterparts. In seeking to chart the “origins of evil” in Hindu mythology, one is confronted with two interconnected obstacles with respect to the conception of evil therein: first, the cosmos itself, much less any aspect of it, is fundamentally beginning-less, a notion which undercuts discourse of origins; second, one cannot treat as a separate entity that which is conceived as an aspect of a greater whole. The lines between good and evil are incredibly (and intentionally) blurred in *Purāṇic* discourse where gods may behave nefariously (typically for a greater good) and demons may exhibit extraordinary piety, particular in devotional milieus, for the sake of acquiring power. For example, the gods (*suras*) and the demons (more literally, the anti-gods, *asuras*) not only share an ancestry but, as we are reminded of in the myth of the churning of the ocean, are kindred polarities which must collaborate to generate the creative tension engendering all of the universe’s riches and even immortality itself. That these forces appear to oppose each other is so only from a limited perspective. From a grander perspective, these forces are like two separate hands pressed together in *añjali mudrā*, stemming from the same ground of being, producing a unified gesture.

In maintaining the evil stepmother motif, one silences what the MkP has to say; Doniger therefore writes,

this transition from good mother to evil mother is highly significant in the Indian context; Indeed, some *Purāṇic* texts tried to restore a modicum of maternal spirit to Saraṇyū by stating that she turned away from the stallion because she feared that he might be some man other than her husband (MkP: 103–5). This gloss . . . is untrue to the original spirit of the myth. (Doniger 1980: 185)

From what perspective should we gauge what is authentic? Doniger bases the “original spirit” of “the” myth upon her understanding of its earliest known incarnations and thus eclipses the authority of the composers of the MkP

themselves, along with the communities that preserve, invoke, and depend upon its current articulation in their religious lives. She not only reads the myth of Saṃjñā in the MkP at large through the lens of its earlier Vedic correlates, but she goes so far as to outright dismiss as inauthentic the elements that do not conform to that lens. To my mind, this outcome comprises the central hazard to uprooting *Purāṇic* tales from their narrative soil, intended to support, not thwart, their religious transmission; a compromise of their religious authority.

Sixteen years after her publication of the *Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Doniger produces a 1996 article dedicated to Saṃjñā/Saraṇyū (Doniger, 1996) wherein she perpetuates the practice of plucking from myth cycle across vast spans of time and reading later articulations as distortions of earlier ones. She draws her data from R̥g Veda 10.17.1–2, (Doniger 1996:171)⁶ the *Harivaṃśa*,⁷ the MkP, along with an episode from the classic series Indian comics, *Amar Chitra Katha* (Doniger 1996:172).⁸ Rather than chart the functions of the single character of Saṃjñā across three millennia of cultural history, it is perhaps more commensurate to the *Purāṇic* textual transformations to study in detail how that character relates to the whole within a single articulation of the myth cycle in a given *Purāṇa*. It is, for example, crucial to note that the *Purāṇic* authors never refer to the figure in question as Saraṇyū, but only as Saṃjñā, which suggests a distancing, if not radical reconfiguring, from the figure we find in Vedic lore to the one that graces the *Purāṇas*. As a result of this conscious transformation, tension arises while reading *Purāṇic* iterations and all the while harkening to Vedic articulations in order to understand “the myth” in itself. Hence Doniger, upon completing her discussion of Saraṇyū in the Vedic literature, refers to the articulation of this found in the *Harivaṃśa* and the *Purāṇas* as “later variants” (Doniger 1996: 158) wherein the goddess is not named Saraṇyū, but Saṃjñā (Doniger 1996: 158). This attitude of course echoes the trenchant bias toward the *Purāṇas* as corruptions of older texts. Keeping in line with her “variant from Vedic version” discussion, Doniger further notes that “Saṃjñā’s surrogate is no longer said to be of the same kind or type but is rather her chāyā, her mirror image or shadow, creature who is not exactly like her but is her opposite in terms either of inversion (the mirror image) or of color (the shadow)” (Doniger 1996: 158). This note regarding color keeps in line with her interest in question of race (Doniger 1996: 154), yet is problematized by the fact that Saṃjñā addresses Saṃjñā as “fair one” (MkP 106.7) in her instructions prior to fleeing.⁹ Regardless, these notable developments entailing the transition of Saraṇyū and Sāvarnā to Saṃjñā and Chāyā, respectively, ought not be viewed as deviations from the original Vedic myth, but as important *Purāṇic* articulations in their

own right, whose religious vision is equally authentic to its contemporaries as the Vedic myths were to theirs.

In the section of her article discussing the MkP, Doniger translates the opening of the first account of the Saṃjñā myth as follows:

Samjna was the daughter of Tvastr and the wife of Martanda, the Sun. He produced in her Manu, called Manu Vaivasvata, since he was Vivasvant's son. But when the sun looked at her, Samjna used to shut her eyes, and so the sun got angry and spoke sharply to Samjna: "Since you always restrain (samyamam) your eyes when you see me, therefore you will bring forth a twin (yama) who will restrain (samyamanam) creatures." Then the goddess became agitated by terror, and her gaze flickered; and when he saw that her gaze darted about, he said to her again, "Since now your gaze darts about when you see me, therefore you will bring forth a daughter who will be a river that darts about." And so because of her husband's curse Yama and Yamuna were born in her. (MkP 74.1–7) (Doniger 1996: 164).

Doniger then proceeds to offer the following analysis: "where Manu is named after his father, and is blessed, Yama is named after his mother, and is cursed; for he is named not after her name but after her evil deeds" (Doniger 1996: 164). First, let us be reminded that, it is not Yama who is named after his mother. Rather, it is the second Manu, Sāvarṇi, who is named after Chāyā, known also as Sāvarṇā, (i.e., She of the Likeness). Second and more important, the fact that this exchange is designed to paint the Sun (and not Saṃjñā) in less than favorable light is corroborated throughout the solar myths to be found in the MkP. They unanimously warn us of the danger and disruption which ensues when the Sun is excessive in his intensity. This is unsurprising to a people born of a climate wherein when the Sun is too intense, drought ensues, hence his epithet, "Robber of the Waters." The aforementioned portion of the myth, accounting for Yama's birth, tells us that death (Yama) is fathered by the wrath of the Sun. Recall this entire episode is framed by the mythology of the Sun who is unbearable even to the creator himself and constitutes a threat to cosmic order. That this episode (between Brahmā and Sūrya) occurs before the Sūrya–Saṃjñā episode is, of course, significant: the earlier serves to frame the later.

There can be little doubt that the MkP is sympathetic to the plight of Saṃjñā: for who is able to gaze at the Sun full on, in its full fury, without squinting? The text portrays an overbearing husband rather than a nefarious wife. The Sun curses Saṃjñā in this moment but the text clearly sides with Saṃjñā; hence she flees and is never once admonished for doing so, neither by her husband, her sons, her father, nor the narrator of the text. Recall that Sūrya himself realizes the folly

of his ways and *volunteers* to be pared down toward the conclusion of this telling. In the Sun's rash cruelty, he curses his own unborn children, but let us not forget that Yama's curse is ultimately reconfigured as a cosmic benediction insofar as Yama became the righteous-eyed judge because of it. Doniger misguidedly argues that "as anthropogonies, these stories are saying that the primeval children, our ancestors, were abandoned by their mother" (1996: 170). Even to entertain that this angle of inquiry as central to the contours of this myth (which, as Doniger herself admits, is probably not the case—a wise move considering Indian deities are rarely rendered as exemplars for human conduct), can we sensibly arrive at this conclusion when we are told that our primordial mother(1) was unable to remain due to our father's excessive sharpness, (2) that she made arrangements for our care during her necessary respite, cloning herself and commanding her clone to treat us well, (3) that she engaged in religious practices in order to restore balance to our family, and (4) that she was successful in neutralizing our father's overbearing wrath and restoring balance, such that she ended up returning to us and so didn't ultimately abandon us at all? It is perhaps precisely due to the resilient faces of the Feminine Divine pervading the MkP, such as that of Saṃjñā, that the DM is happily at home therein.

Doniger's own words point to the incommensurability between her hermeneutic approach and the myth we find in the MkP. She states at the outset of her Saṃjñā study that she is primarily interested in "questions of gender and race" (Doniger 1996: 154), but must admit that nothing is said of the Sun's "ugliness or dark color" in the MkP's accounts of his mythology, which leave only questions of gender. With respect to such questions, she appears intent on painting the picture of humanity's fall from grace due to the evils of a primordial stepmother (a motif familiar to anyone acquainted with Abrahamic religion), that she fails to address the obvious feminist gems of this myth cycle: first that wives and mothers are thought to hold tremendous power over the domestic sphere and thus exert great influence over their families through their religious activities; and second, rather than the typical motif of the daughter being made to succumb to the pressures of the mother-in-law, we have a shocking and refreshing reversal: a son-in-law (the Sun himself no less) who submits to the hammering down of his father-in-law for the safety and comfort of his wife, family, and society as a whole. When Doniger does turn her attention to the fact that the versions of this myth cycle occurring in the MkP (along with the one occurring in the *Harivaṃśa*) "give new prominence to an old, silent character: the father-in-law, Tvastr" (Doniger 1996: 165), she does so in order to argue that "the aggression of the bride's father against her husband" (Doniger

1996: 166) (a statement that itself cannot be said to apply to the MkP's tellings) "lends weight, retrospectively, to the possibly incestuous connection that some Indologists have seen between Tvastr and Saranyu in the Vedic corpus" (Doniger 1996: 166).

Strangely, she opts to read the father-in-law's willingness to pare down the Sun's splendor (at the Sun's behest) for the sake of the welfare of his daughter as grounds for reading into the *Purāṇic* telling conjecture into a possible incestuous relationship held by some Indologists in reference to myths composed two millennia earlier, rather than register that the myth serves as a salient reminder to overbearing husbands that daughters are always welcomed (albeit temporarily) to their fathers' homes post-marriage. Not only does Doniger appear disinterested in this dimension of the myth, she also claims that Saṃjñā took the form of a mare "when her father threw her out of his house" (Doniger 1996: 163). Similarly, in *Hindu Myths*, wherein she translates this same passage from the MkP, she writes that Saṃjñā's father "admonished her again and again to go to her husband" (Doniger 2004: 66). She fails to mention that the MkP tells us that Saṃjñā remained in her father's house "unreproached" (*aninditā*, 77.16), or that her father, "after praising her and prefacing his speech with love and much respect," (*stutvā ca tanayām premabahumānapurāḥ saram*, 77.17) advises her to leave since it is improper for a married woman to remain among her kinsmen (i.e., away from her husband) for a long time, and that she was welcome to return in the future. The text goes out of its way to indicate that Saṃjñā was welcome in her father's home and that her father lovingly sends her back for the sake of her honor, all the while unaware that she was imperiled by her husband's overbearing nature. It is the Sun, and not Saṃjñā, who mends his ways in the MkP. In portraying this mother of the Manus, the MkP certainly does not paint a portrait of an absentee mother nor wicked stepmother nor ultimately disenfranchised wife. Rather, it portrays a resilient feminine figure who succeeds in softening overbearing masculinity when she is imperiled by the dangers of its sharpness.

Seminal Splendor and the Transmission of *Tejas*

Despite the richness of the term *tejas* (fiery energy, vital power, spirit), and its obvious connotations to majesty, Wendy Doniger, in her reading of this myth, favors one of its more figurative meanings: semen.¹⁰ She therefore translates the encounter as follows:

Then Vivasvant's body was beautiful, and had no excessive fiery energy. He went to his wife, the mare, in the form of a stallion. But when she saw him approaching she feared it might be another male, and so she turned to face him, determined to protect her hindquarters. Their noses joined as they touched, and the seed of the Sun flowed from his two nostrils into the mare and came out of her mouth, and in that way the equine twin gods called the Asvins were born. (Doniger 1996: 165)

She notes that “impregnation by drinking semen is a world-wide theme, and it is particularly well developed in India. In the Vedic story of Saṃjñā, the mare becomes pregnant by smelling or absorbing through her nostrils the seed of her husband” (O’Flaherty 1973: 276). Therefore, she reads the sun’s excessive splendor (*tejas*) as his overbearing sexuality, from which Saṃjñā must flee. She reasons that it is significant that the word for “energy” (*tejas*) is also a word for semen since Saṃjñā “in her anthropomorphic form avoids the Sun’s energy, while in her mare form she avoids the stallion’s semen” (Doniger 1996: 163). However, this comparison is lopsided: Saṃjñā does not merely avoid the Sun’s energy, she flees from it out of desperation. With respect to the “strange” male, she does not flee but merely averts penetration and engages him face to face. Furthermore, Saṃjñā here does not fear Sūrya’s semen but the semen of “another male.” She fled from the overbearing majesty of the Sun, not his procreative proclivity, hence the begetting of three children with him prior to fleeing. This fear results not merely as a threat to her womanhood (or marehood rather) but as a threat to the celibate austerities in which she was engaged, along with a threat to her marital fidelity. In other words, she was not afraid because it was Sūrya (from whose sexuality she needed to flee) but precisely *because it wasn’t Sūrya* (or so she thought), on account of her commitment to whom, sexual engagement with another ought to be avoided at all costs. These sources of anxiety may not be simplified as tantamount to fearing male sexuality at large, and particularly not her husband’s.

The text could not possibly be referring to the stallion’s literal semen flowing into Saṃjñā since it was emitted through his nose, not his genitals. She also received it through her nose, and receiving liquid through one’s nose, as we know, is an unpleasant and dangerous experience. Saṃjñā birthed the Aśvins through her mouth, and not her genitals. It is noteworthy that the verb “to drink” (*pā*) appears nowhere in this passage, despite Doniger’s claim that the worldwide theme of impregnation through drinking semen has been particularly well developed in India (O’Flaherty 1973: 276). Even if seminal *fluid* was involved, Saṃjñā doesn’t drink it since it would have then passed from her

nose to her mouth; drinking involves swallowing. The supernormal dimension of this encounter strongly suggests that we are to literally take it that the Sun conceived the celestial twins with his literal *tejas*, his spiritual power. If the authors meant to signify physical semen, they could have easily used the term *retas*, which would very conveniently serve the prosodic demands of both meter and stress, and much better connote seminal fluid than does *tejas*. That the Aśvins were conceived with such miraculous power befits their own miraculous healing ability. We are told that the Sun and Saṃjñā in equine form “joined their noses” (Pargiter 1904: 460)¹¹, an act that is bereft of physical penetration. We are soon thereafter told that Revanta was born at the end of the flow (*retaso ante*), presumably of the Sun’s transmission. *Retas*, as noted above, also connotes the flow of semen. Thus, in *Hindu Myths*, Doniger translates this as “and when the seed ceased to flow [*retaso ante*, ‘at the end of the seed’] Revanta was born” (Doniger 2004: 69). However, there is only one mention of *retas*, which cannot be translated twice as both “seed” and “flow.” Therefore, it may be translated as “as the end of the seed” or “at the end of the flow.” It is less forced to translate *retas* as ‘flow’ [i.e., of *tejas*] in this context given the absence of reproductive organs or penetration involved in the encounter. Also the phrase *retaso ante* is a play on the name Revanta, which cleverly evokes “*revato ante*”, that is, at the end of the constellation *Revati* where one finds the constellation Aśvini, the same asterism over which the Aśvin twins preside. Interestingly, there is an account of a previous Manu (the fifth one) Raivata whose backstory is heavily interspersed with the constellation *Revati*. Perhaps it is not without design that we hear the tale of a Manu whose backstory invokes *Revati* before hearing a tale of a Manu whose backstory invokes Aśvini, at the end of *Revati* (*revato ante*).

Given the supernormal, non-penetrative, voluntary encounter between Sūrya and Saṃjñā, Doniger’s claim that Saṃjñā was “raped by the Sun stallion and brought home again . . . [since] in the end she must submit to her husband’s sexual demands, just like a human woman” (Doniger 1999: 49) is most mystifying to my mind. This reading presents the myth out of the context of its various narrative frames. Narrative frames bear tremendous thematic import, devised to ideologically orient one’s reading of myth. Doniger’s reading presumes that Saṃjñā attains equine form to enjoy sexual freedom. But if Saṃjñā had the gumption to devise and implement an escape plan so that she didn’t have to contend with the energetic threat of her husband while in anthropomorphic form, could we really think she would hesitate to gallop away from the sexual threat of a strange male while in equine form? How can this stallion be portrayed as a threat when she turns and unflinchingly encounters him face to

face? Post-encounter, the MkP unambiguously informs us that Saṃjñā is *pleased* at the sight of her husband's pared-down form and describes her as the Sun's "loving wife." The passage reads, "then the Sun displayed his own peerless form, and she gazing upon his true form felt a keen joy; and the Sun, the robber of the waters, brought home this his loving wife Saṃjñā restored to her own shape."¹² One is unable to locate within this passage indications of sexual coercion of any kind, nor evidence supporting the presumption that Saṃjñā is dragged home.

That Saṃjñā opts not to flee indicates no sign of struggle, and that she voluntarily joins noses with the equine-Sun is consistent with what the text tells us: she is afraid of union with another male, intent on guarding her chastity. She attains the form of a mare to practice *chaste* austerities, rather than indulge her sexual appetite. And if the text indeed intended to portray a Saṃjñā who wished to sow her wild oats, it is doubtful that the idyllic land of the Northern Kurus¹³ would be the place to do so, since it is a location where folks are born in pairs and each partner has the same lifespan so that blissful monogamy may ensue. Had they intended to invoke the theme of sexual freedom, the others of this episode would have much better served their cause by (1) refraining from having Saṃjñā guard her rear and (2) choosing any of the several other regions described in the MkP than one explicitly associated with contented monogamy. The resilient and resourceful Saṃjñā of the MkP was neither raped, nor "dragged" anywhere; she left home because of her husband's overbearing *tejas*, and while we may debate about what that *tejas* might be said to represent, there is no question that the Sun had his *tejas* checked by his father-in-law. Since the cause of her discontent and flight were eliminated, what reason do we have to assume her discontent continued? She conceives the Aśvins and joyfully returns home. While Saṃjñā suffers to conceive death (Yama) when the Sun's *tejas* is overbearing, she readily receives his pared-down energy to conceive health through the healer twins. In his fierce form, the Sun fathers death. In his contained, pleasant form, he births divine medicine in the idyllic Northern Kurus. And this latter achievement is directly attributed to the equine austerities of an empowered Saṃjñā.

In addition to discourse on *tejas* and the birth of the Aśvins, there are a number of notable themes running through the MkP's account of the mythology of Sūrya. In particular, this myth cycle is redolent with the overarching theme of mirror images: not only does Chāyā mirror Saṃjñā but we are, as well, presented with the production of two sets of children, the second of which set mirrors the first. Manu Vaivasvata, Yama, and Yamī are mirrored by their younger stepfamily Manu Sāvarṇi, Śanaīścara, and Tapatī (the current Manu, the planet Saturn,

and the Narmadā river, respectively). Thus we hear the tale of two Manus, two gods of human suffering, and two dark rivers. Interestingly, there is a tertiary dimension to the duality of this mythology: (1) each stepfamily consists of a threesome, not just a pair; (2) the Sun and Saṃjñā, while in equine form, beget a third set of triple offspring comprised of the Aśvin twins and Revanta. We seem to be presented with an intriguing triplet motif comprised of “a pair and a third entity”: the daughters are the third appendage to the pairs of sons, Revanta is the third entity to be born in tandem with the Aśvins, and the entire equine family itself is a tertiary emanation of Sūrya’s two anthropomorphic families.¹⁴ Perhaps this tertiary dynamic is fitting considering it is spawned by the threefold intertwining of Sūrya, Saṃjñā, and Chāyā. An object cannot be reflected in the absence of light. Arguably, the most trenchant expression of mirroring featured in this myth consists of the interplay between shadow and light. This interplay (like the set of offspring noted above) is not merely a binary one (as might be expected in this case) but, intriguingly, is tertiary. The main actors are Sūrya as emblematic of the primal, self-effulgent progenitor of the universe, along with his primary consort Saṃjñā, and his secondary consort (born of the interplay of Sūrya and Saṃjñā), that is, Chāyā. Saṃjñā casts behind her own shadow, unable to bear the Sun. For a shadow to exist before a source of light, there must be a third entity: an object to cast its shadow.

Shadow and Light in the MkP

In my view, the brilliance of this myth is to be found in its treatment of the interplay between shadow and light: given that it is ultimately Sūrya’s brilliance (*tejas*) that causes Saṃjñā to cast behind her shadow in her stead, who is to blame for Saṃjñā’s flight? When Sūrya ventures to his father-in-law’s¹⁵ home in search of Saṃjñā (clarity), he requests that his father-in-law Viśvakarman pare down his form so that it is once again bearable (MkP 106.36–38. See Pargiter 1904: 569). One sees clearly neither in the dark nor when the light is too bright. Doniger reads this as an encounter where Viśvakarman “finally mutilates [Saṃjñā’s] husband in order to make him acceptable to her” (Doniger 1996: 166). Mutilation connotes forceful disfigurement resulting in unsightliness and suffering and can hardly be said to properly refer to a voluntary act of beautification and pacification, undertaken by a “mutilator” all the while full of songful praise of his object of mutilation. It is the Sun’s overbearing aspect that results in Saṃjñā’s flight,¹⁶ an aspect so overpowering that at the dawn of

time, the creator himself must pare down that aspect for creation to successfully occur. Rather than fault Saṃjñā, the MkP expresses a *necessity* for Sūrya to be pared down, a task accomplished at the hands of the divine tinkerer, who is conveniently cast as Saṃjñā's father. The Sun never chastises Saṃjñā for fleeing, but rather is so much in agreement with the dangers of his overbearing nature that he *voluntarily* acquiesces to being pared down.

The Sun does not disown his children born of shadow (Chāyā); rather, he promotes them in rank to statuses parallel to those of his children born of Saṃjñā. Sūrya fathers three children with each of these wives and these stepfamilies are parallels of one another: Saṃjñā mothers Vaivasvata (the current Manu), Yama (the god of the dead, as the shadow of that Manu), and Yamunā (a river known for turning black, also named Kālindī) (Mani 1975: 894) while Chāyā mothers three children: Sāvarṇi (the next Manu), Śanaiścara (Saturn, the lord of karmic retribution), and Tapatī, who eventually receives a blessing from Sūrya whereby she becomes the Narmadā river, flowing west from the Vindhya mountains (Mani 1975: 798).

Chāyā's daughter, Tapatī, has an ever far more significant role to play in the unfolding of *itihāsa*. The MkP sums this up in the following line: "The third of them, the daughter named Tapatī, had a son, Kuru, king of men, by king Samvaraṇa."¹⁷ In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna asks the Gandharva in the forest why the Gandharva not only addresses him with the matronymic Kaunteya, son of Kuntī, but also as Tāpatya, son of Tapatī.¹⁸ The Gandharva then dedicates a subtale¹⁹ to explaining that radiant Tapatī was wedded by King Samvaraṇa (himself a devotee of the Sun), upon whom was begotten Kuru, that great ancestor of the entire lineage. Tapatī is not only the mother of Arjuna, she is the mother of the entire line of kings populating both Pāṇḍava and Kaurava camps.²⁰ The Sun is so inextricable from the symbolism of kingship that even the lunar line of kings showcased in the *Mahābhārata* attributes their lineage to the seed of the Sun. The legitimacy of both of the Sun's stepfamilies (along with the legitimacy of the solar race mothered by one branch of that family tree through Tapatī, daughter of Chāyā) bespeaks of the legitimacy of both of the *śaktis* (powers, consorts) of the Sun to whom both shadow and light must ultimately be attributed for him to retain primordial supremacy within the solar myths as the cause of all creation. Therefore, rather than being a story of a wicked stepmother or absentee birthmother, a raped wife, or a mutilated son-in-law, the Sūrya–Saṃjñā–Chāyā exchange, couched in a section of the MkP dedicated to the splendor of the Sun, perhaps more directly comments on the symbiosis of light and dark.²¹

Doniger concludes her study by confessing that questions of sociology are not the dominant questions entertained by this myth. She states that this myth cycle, rather,

raises theological questions about the origin of the human race and of human death, about appearance and reality, about the relationship between male and female divine powers, and about the nature of the relationship between humans and the divine . . . But that is yet another story, best left for another time. (Doniger 1996: 170–1)

Despite the tantalizing hope of having these seminal aspects of this myth cycle addressed, yet another eighteen years elapsed before this article on Saṃjñā reappears in Doniger's 2014 collection *On Hinduism*, relatively unaltered from its 1996 state. It is no wonder that she writes at the very outset of her discussion that despite having addressed it “variously in various books,” the mythology of Saraṇyū/Saṃjñā “still accuses [her] of not even having begun to plumb its depths” (Doniger 2014a: 607 See fn. 1). Yet, she tells the same story in this article as she did in her 1996 article and one is left wondering about this profound story “best left for another time” (Doniger 2014b: 287) as again quoted at the conclusion of the 2013 edition. This present study, at long last, begins to tell the tale of this captivating myth cycle that Doniger has broached only in passing for forty years; for it is these very issues pertaining to “the relationship between male and female divine powers, and about the nature of the relationship between humans and the divine” (Doniger 1996: 171) which the DM addresses and furthermore, why its composers opted to dovetail its narration alongside the mythology of the Sun found in the MkP. Both mythologies bespeak powerful feminine divinities whose efforts restore order in the face of peril, and both bespeak the danger that results when fiery figures, though required to preserve our world, exceed safe bounds.

Reading the story of Saṃjñā as merely a tale of an ill-treated goddess who abandons her children and whose actions are the source of the evil of death is fundamentally incommensurate with the vision of the Feminine Divine that the authors of the DM present and by virtue of this, incommensurate with their understanding of Saṃjñā with who's mythology they yolk the grandeur of the Goddess to the fabric of the MkP. Saṃjñā's tale is the one that demonstrates feminine resourcefulness, faith, and tenacity of spirit that ultimately restores cosmic balance. Saṃjñā, through her austerity, causes the destructive aspect of the Sun to keep at bay and thus ensures the preservation not only of self and family, but also of the cosmos as a whole. It is primarily her efforts, and only

secondarily her husband's (once he realizes the motivation for her penance), which restores cosmic balance. Doniger writes that "on the metaphysical level the myth of Saṃjñā seems to be saying that we, the descendants of Manu, are the children of the image—the children of *māyā*, not the children of the real thing" (Doniger 1996: 170) and that "these myths embody the Vedantic view that we are born into illusion, live in illusion, and can only know illusion" (Doniger 1996: 170). But in my estimation, this myth, in the context of the MkP (especially given its vital association to the DM), goes well beyond the values of Vedantic binary, succeeding in subverting them by positing a supremacy on the part of that illusion insofar as it is inextricable from anything conceived to be superior to it. We are told at the very beginning of the DM, for example, that King Suratha is made the lord of an age by the might of Mahāmāyā. To be the children of Mahāmāyā is to be children of the divine mother and arguably, to be children of the future: while the current Manu, the child of Saṃjñā, is patrilineally named Vaivasvata (after Vivasvat, the Sun), the Manu Sāvarṇi, primordial overlord of the *next* epoch, is named after his mother, Sāvarṇa,²² She of the Likeness. Her Likeness, through Sāvarṇi, our primordial forefather to come, shall populate an entire age. Bolstered by its *Purāṇic* context, the DM affirms that the diversity of this phenomenal world, along with the myriad of life forms finding homes herein, is as supreme as that dynamic feminine mystery which engenders, supports, and governs it, compelled through compassion toward colossal acts of cosmic preservation.²³

Appendix 1: Synopsis of Saṃjñā Story

The mythic juncture in question comprises the opening frame of discourse on the seventh Manu whereby the first telling of MkP informs us straight away (at the outset of Canto 77) that the Sun and his wife Saṃjñā²⁴ (77.1–2) beget a famous and learned Manu, namely the current Manu Vaivasvata, that is, "He of Vivasvat," which is an epithet of the Sun. The text next tells us that Saṃjñā would shut her eyes when met with the Sun's gaze (77.3) and the Sun, angered, curses her to bring forth Yama, the prisoner (*samyamanam yamam*), given that her eyes remained imprisoned (*netrasaṃyamam*) at the sight of him (77.4). Saṃjñā "unnerved by fear, became wild-eyed" (Pargiter 1904: 455), and the Sun again curses her (77.5) through means of a second wordplay to bring forth the tumultuous river Vilolā (Yamunā) due to her tumultuous glances (77.6). Thus Manu Vaivasvata's siblings Yama and Yamunā are born (77.7).

Samjñā, having suffered the sharpness (*tejas*) of the Sun for some time (77.8) and unable to bear it further, decides to take refuge with her father (77.8–10). In order to do so, she “fashioned her body, that the Sun loved, in shadow-form, and addressed her shadow-self: ‘Remain thou here in the Sun’s house even as I; and behave thou becomingly to the children even as to the Sun.’” (77.11–12). Chāyā-Samjñā (Samjñā’s “shadow-self” or “reflected-self,” used herein interchangeably with Chāyā for the sake of simplicity) agrees to remain in Samjñā’s stead, holding up the ruse as ordered, even to the point of being seized by her hair or drawing curses upon herself (77.13–14). The goddess Samjñā, “receiving this assurance, then went to her father’s abode” (77.15). We are told that the great Tvaṣṭṛ²⁵ (“cleansed from stain by means of austerities” 77.15) honored her with much respect (77.16) and that she “remained in her father’s house some time, unrepached” (*tasthau pitṛgrhe sā tu kañcitkālam aninditā*, 77.16). Then after having dwelt there for a short time, her father, “after praising her and prefacing his speech with love and much respect,” (*stutvā ca tanayāṃ premabahumānapurāḥ saram*, 77.17) advises her thus:

Now while I have been seeing thee my child, the days though very many may be reckoned as equal to half a moment; nevertheless righteousness suffers loss. Dwelling a long time among kinsmen brings no good repute to women; kinsmen hold a woman’s proper residence is in her husband’s house. Such art thou, and thou art mated to a husband, the Sun, the lord of the three worlds; deign not my daughter to dwell a long time in thy father’s house. Being such, go thou to thy husband’s home. I am pleased; thou hast been honoured by me. Thou must come again to see me, my beautiful one. (77.18–21²⁶)

Agreeing to his counsel, she salutes her father respectfully and secretly departs for the Northern Kurus, unbeknownst to him, still fearing the sharp splendor of the Sun. She practices austerities and changes herself into the form of a mare (77.22–23).²⁷

Meanwhile the Sun, unaware of the ruse, begets a second family with Chāyā, one reflecting the first family by consisting also of two sons and a daughter, Manu, Śanaīścara, and Tapatī. Yama exhibits petty envy when the younger children are favored (77.24–25) and goes so far as to raise his foot in anger against his own mother (i.e., Chāyā, whom he believes at this point to be his own mother). Astonished at his appalling behavior, Chāyā curses Yama that his foot would fall to earth that very day. She cleverly gives her reason for her curse that he insulted

his father's wife (*pituḥ patnīm*) as opposed to his mother (77.26–29). Yama, terrified of the curse, runs to his father, Sūrya (77.30), and complains as follows:

O father, this great marvel was never seen by any one, that a mother casting love away imprecates a curse on her son. She is not mother to me in the same way as Manu calls her his mother; no mother would abandon her good qualities even towards sons devoid of good qualities (77.31–32).²⁸

We are told that upon hearing these words from his son, the “illustrious dispeller of darkness” (*bhagavāṃs timirāpahaḥ*) summons Chāyā and apparently seeing through the ruse, asks, “Where has she gone?” (77.33). Though Chāyā answers that she is his wife, Saṃjñā, and the mother of his children (77.34), the Sun repeatedly questions her and, eventually, enraged by her silence on the matter, threatens to curse her (7.35). Although she promised to hold to the false story, even to the point of bringing curses upon herself, the Sun's glare succeeds in breaking through Chāyā's pretense. She confesses the truth, at which point Sūrya goes to pay a visit to his father-in-law, Tvaṣṭṛ, in order to reclaim Saṃjñā (77.36). Once there, he is received with honor and “with sublime faith” (77.37). Tvaṣṭṛ, upon being asked after his daughter, responds, “She came indeed here to my house, saying she had been verily sent by thee” (77.38).

Upon hearing this, the great Maker of Day (*divākaraḥ*) concentrates his mind in yogic meditation and inwardly sees his wife in the form of a mare, practicing austerities in the Northern Kurus (*samādhistho vaḍavārūpadhāriṇīm / tapaścarantiṃ dadṛṣe uttareṣu kuruṣvatha*, 77.39). Through his yogic attainment, he is furthermore able to perceive the purpose of her penance, namely that her husband should acquire a gentle form, beautiful to behold (77.40). Upon becoming aware of this, the Sun immediately asks of his father-in-law that his sharp splendor be pared down (77.41), to which Viśvakarman of course reverently complies (77.42). Thus ends the first canto of the first telling.

The following Canto (78) commences with the praise of the gods and divine seers (*devarṣayaḥ*) who had assembled for the cosmic event, that is, the paring down of the Sun. Interestingly, this event appears to be construed as an auspicious one. While, for example, the waning of the moon is considered inauspicious, this appears to be a different scenario wherein excess energy is reabsorbed by the universe to grant the Sun a more balanced, benign form. Immediately following the fourteen-verse praise,²⁹ the Sun begins to shed his splendor (78.15), which not only comprises the earth, sky, and heaven (*svarga*) from the aspects of him

which comprised the *Ṛg*, *Yajur*, and *Sāma Veda*, respectively (78.16), but the “fifteen shreds of his splendour which were pared off by Tvaṣṭṛ” (78.17) were used to craft Śiva’s trident (78.17), Viṣṇu’s discus, “the Vasus, the very terrible weapon of Śankara,” Agni’s spear, Kubera’s *palki* (78.18), “and all the fierce weapons of the others who are the gods’ foes, and of the Yakṣas and Vidyādharaś” (78.19). The Sun at this point, therefore, “bears only a sixteenth part . . . of his splendour [which] was pared off by Viśva-karmaṇ into fifteen [other] parts” (78.20). Having successfully shed himself of his extraneous sharpness (which was harnessed to craft the weapons of gods and demons alike), the Sun assumes the form of a stallion and journeys to the Northern Kurus where he encounters Saṃjñā in her equine guise (78.21). Upon seeing the stallion approach, Saṃjñā was “afraid of [an encounter by] a strange male,” and so she “went towards him face to face, intent on guarding her rear” (78.22). As their noses met, two sons were born in Saṃjñā’s mouth, namely Nāsatya and Dasra, (78.23), better known as the Aśvin twins. At the end of the Sun’s emission, Revanta was born (78.24). The Sun then reveals his “own peerless form, and she gazing upon his true form felt a keen joy” (78.25). Then the Sun “brought home this his loving wife Sañjñā restored to her own shape” (78.26).

The myth then recounts the posts appointed to the children of the Sun as follows (78.27–34):

Her eldest son then became Vaivasvata Manu; and her second son Yama became the righteous-eyed judge because of the curse . . . And Yamunā became the river which flows from the recesses of Mount Kalinda. The Aśvins were made the gods’ physicians by their high-souled father. And Revanta also was appointed king of the Guhyakas. Hear also from me the places assigned to the Shadow-Sañjñā’s sons. The eldest son of the Shadow-Sañjñā was equal to Manu the eldest-born; hence this son of the Sun obtained the title Sāvārṇika. He also shall be a Manu when Bali shall become Indra. He was appointed by his father as the planet Saturn among the planets. The third of them, the daughter named Tapatī.

Let us now turn to the second occurrence of this myth, situated a little later in the MkP at the beginning of the section on genealogies. While the telling therein is part of a sequence of myths glorifying the sun termed herein the Sūrya Māhātmya (to be discussed in greater detail below), the segment recapitulating the exploits of Sūrya, Saṃjñā, and Chāyā-Saṃjñā (i.e., the mythic locus giving rise to Sāvārṇi, who as we know, is none other than a future incarnation of King Suratha, by the grace of the Goddess) are self-contained in Cantos 106 through

108. I will present a more abridged version of this telling, emphasizing only the elements that depart from the first telling.

This telling makes no mention of the Sun's curses to Saṃjñā but merely informs us that "He, *Vivasvat*, lord of the *heavenly* cattle, begot three children of her, two most illustrious sons and a daughter Yamuna . . . Manu Vaivasvata was the eldest...then were born Yama and Yami as twins" (106.4–5). The account tells us that the sun's exceeding splendor

scorched the three worlds and the moveable and immoveable things therein very grievously [and that] Saṃjñā saw Vivasvat's globe-like form and, being impatient of his great splendour, gazed at her own shadow *C'haya* and spoke: 'Fare thee well! I will go to my father's very own abode. Yet thou must stay here without change at my command, O fair one; and thou must show honour to these two boys for me and to *this* daughter who is of noble rank; and thou must not declare this at all to the god. (106.5–8)

In like manner as the first telling, Chāyā promises to maintain the charade even amid the seizing of her hair and the incurring of curses, promising to never divulge Saṃjñā's design (106.9).

Saṃjñā again retreats to her father's abode, who repeatedly advises her to return to her husband. Then Saṃjñā turns herself into a mare and departs for the Northern Kurus (106.11). In this version, she apparently already possesses the power to assume equine form and does not need austerities to do so. However, as with the first telling, once she arrives there, "like a chaste wife, she practiced austerities, fasting" (106.12). And again, the Sun proceeds with Chāyā as with Saṃjñā and "the adorable Sun begat of her, *he* thinking *it was* of Saṃjñā, two sons in addition and a daughter. The firstborn of the two sons was equal to the eldest *son* Manu, hence he was *called* Savarṇi, O best of dvijas. And the other, who was the second *son*, became the planet Saturn. And the daughter who was *Tapatī*" (106.13–15). And again Chāyā favors the younger threesome, and while Manu nobly accepts the favoritism, Yama does not, and "by reason of both anger and childishness and indeed by the force of predestination, threatened C'haya-Saṃjñā with his foot . . . and thereupon *the Shadow-Saṃjñā*,³⁰ full of resentment, cursed Yama severely" (106.18–19). The same sequence of events ensues: Chāyā curses Yama and Yama complains to Sūrya. However even in his own complaint, Yama confesses his own culpability in the matter. Sūrya again promises to alter the curse, whereupon he confronts Chāyā, and this time it is through his yogic vision that he is able to perceive the truth that the form before him was not Saṃjñā (106.33–34). Again the Shadow weakens by the glare of the Sun and

on the brink of being cursed, Chāyā relays what had transpired, which again sets the Sun in motion toward the residence of his father-in-law Viśvakarman. Viśvakarman is again quite reverent to the Sun and succeeds in pacifying the Sun's wrath with the following words:

Permeated with surpassing glory is this thy form which is so hardly endurable; hence Saṃjñā, unable to endure it, practices austerities in the forest in sooth. Thou shalt now see her, Sir, thy own wife, beautiful in her behaviour, practicing most arduous austerities in the forest on account of thy *too glorious* form. I remember Brahma's word: if it please thee, my lord, I *will* restrain thy beloved form, O lord of heaven. (106.36–38)

In this version, it is Viśvakarman's suggestion that the Sun be pared down, though he readily agrees. When he is being pared down, there is great chaos amid the heavens and the earth (106.39–47), and the gods again praise the Sun (106.48–65). Then Viśvakarman offers his own praise (107.1–10) while paring down the Sun's glory to one-sixteenth of its original status, forging with the remaining fifteen-sixteenths “Vishṇu's discus, and Siva's trident, Kubera's *palki*, the rod of the lord of the dead, and the spear of the gods' general [along with] brilliant weapons of the other gods with the Sun's splendour for the quelling of their foes” (108.3–5). We are told at the end that “He whose splendour had been thus pared down shone with no excessive splendour.

Figure 12.1 The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa Solar Family Tree

Sūrya (the Sun)

+ his wife Saṃjñā

- begets → Vaivasvata, 7th (current) Manu
- Yama, god of the dead
- Yamī / Yamunā River

Sūrya

+ his wife Chāyā

- begets → Sāvarṇi, the 8th (next) Manu
- Śanaīścara, the planet of karmic retribution
- Tapatī / Narmadā River

equine-Sūrya

+ equine-Saṃjñā (while in equine form)

- begets → Nāsatya (first of the Aśvin twins, divine physician)
 - Daśra, (second of the Aśvin twins, divine physician)
 - Revanta
-

Mārtaṇḍa retained a body resplendent in every limb” (108.6). The remainder of the canto details the same sequence of events and the same allotment of posts as in the first telling.

Notes

- 1 Cheever Mackenzie Brown, “Purāṇa as Scripture: From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition,” *History of Religions* 26, no. 1 (August 1, 1986): 68–86; Arti Dhand, “The Dharma of Ethics, the Ethics of Dharma: Quizzing the Ideals of Hinduism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 347–72; Thomas B. Coburn, “The Study of the Purāṇas and the Study of Religion,” *Religious Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 1980): 341–52; McComas Taylor, “What Enables Canonical Literature to Function as ‘True’? The Case of the Hindu Purāṇas,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 12, no. 3 (December 1, 2008): 309–28.
- 2 Wendy Doniger has written profusely on Hindu mythology throughout her career. Hers has certainly been the most acclaimed scholarly pen of the last half-century to have drawn from the ink of *Purāṇic* lore. Western scholars of Purāṇa are deeply indebted to her work and as a discipline, the extent of her influence on approaches to Hindu myth is only beginning to become clear. While Doniger has written voluminously on Indian mythology, this discussion confines itself to her work on the mythology of the Sun and his wife, Saṃjñā, as appearing in the MkP. Unless otherwise specified, translations from the MkP are F. E. Pargiter’s, see: Pargiter, 1904. You can find a synopsis of the Saṃjñā story in Appendix 1 at the end of this article.
- 3 Doniger, 1976, p. 349. See fn. 142, whereby Doniger lists the following textual sources for this myth: *Ṛg Veda* 10.17.1–2; Nirukta 12.10; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.1.4.14; Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa 1.1.4.4; 1.1.9.10; 3.2.5.9; Taittirīya Saṃhitā. 2.6.7.1; 6.5.6.1; 6.6.6.1; Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 103–105; Mahābhārata 1.66; Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa 3.59–60; Matsya Purāṇa 11; Padma Purāṇa 5.8; Vāyu Purāṇa 2.3; Viṣṇu Purāṇa 3.2; Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 1.1.3.
- 4 Doniger, 1976, p. 349. See fn. 142, whereby Doniger cites, among other sources, *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 103–5.
- 5 For example, in his study of the MkP, Desai discusses the statuses accorded to all of Sūrya’s offspring, without feeling the need to distinguish whether Saṃjñā was in his original form, her Chāyā form, or her mare form, at the time of their conception: “He then allotted different offices to his children. Thus Vaivasvata became the lord of the seventh manvantara, Yama the lord of manes, Yamunā the river flowing from the recesses of mount Kalinda, two Aśvins the physicians of gods, Revanta the lord of Guhyakas, Sāvārṇi the lord of the eight manvantara, Śanaīścara the planet and Tapatī the river.” Desai 1968: 164.

- 6 See fn 2, which references “Rig Veda, with the commentary of Sayana, 6 vols. (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series no. 99, 1966), 10.17.1–2.
- 7 *Harivaṃśa*, critical edition; Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1969.
- 8 See fn 31, which references “Sūrya,” retold by Mayah Balse, Amar Chitra Katha no. 58, ed. Anant Pai (Bombay: India Book Trust, n.d.), as “retold from the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa” (Doniger 1996: 166 The comic cover is labelled “Sūrya,” depicting Sūrya and Saranyū (Hindi edition), Amar Chitra Katha comic book no. 58., Bombay: India Book House, n.d.)
- 9 MkP 106.7–8 reads: “Fare thee well! I will go to my father’s very own abode. Yet thou must stay here without change at my command, O fair one; and thou must show honour to these two boys for me and to this daughter who is of noble rank; and thou must not declare this at all to the god.” See: Pargiter 1904: 566–7.
- 10 Corroboration of the primary meaning of the word *tejas* can be taken from its antithesis: *atejas*. The Monier Williams entry for the antonym at hand specifies the following meanings: “n. absence of brightness or vigour”; “dimness, shade, shadow”; “feebleness, dulness, insignificance”; “not bright, dim, not vigorous.” While the listlessness associated with these meanings can surely be symbolically applied to render a sense of (sexual) impotence, seminal fluid is far from the primary connotation of the term *tejas*. Furthermore, the verbal root *tij* (which, as mentioned, means to “be or become sharp,” does not carry with it the connotation of “to inseminate.”)
- 11 The Sanskrit reads: tato ‘*śvarūpadhrgbhānuruttarānagamat kurūn / tadṛṣe tatra saṃjñāṇca vaḍavārūpadhārīṇim* // 78.21 // *sā ca dṛṣṭvā tamāyāntaṃ parapuṃso viśaikayā / jagāma saṃmukhaṃ tasya pṛṣṭharakṣaṇataparā* // 78.22 // *tataśca nāsikāyogaṃ tayostatra sametayoh / nāsatyadastrau tanayāvaśvīvakravīnirgatau* // 78.23 // *retaso ‘nte ca revantaḥ khadgī carmo tanutradhṛk / aśvārūḍhaḥ samudbhūto bāṇatūṇasamanvitaḥ* // 78.24 //)
- 12 MkP 78.25–26: *tataḥ svarūpamatulaṃ darśayāmāsa bhānumān | tasyaiṣā ca samālōkya svarūpaṃ mudamādade* || 78.25 ||

svarūpadhārīṇīṇcaimāmānināya nijāśrayam | saṃjñāṇ bhāryāṃ prītimatīm bhāskaro vāritaskaraḥ || 78.26 ||
- 13 Mārkaṇḍeya describes the Northern Kurus thus: “Next I will tell thee of the Northern Kurus; hearken to me now. There the trees yield sweet fruit, they bear blossoms and fruit in constant succession; and they produce garments and ornaments inside their fruits; verily they bestow all one’s desire; they yield fruit according to all one’s desire. The ground abounds with precious stones; the air is fragrant and always delightful. Mankind are born there, when they quit the world of the gods. They are born in pairs; the pairs abide an equal time, and are as fond of each other as c’akravakas. Their stay there is fourteen and a half thousands of years

indeed. And C'andra-kanta is the chief of the mountains, and Surya-kanta is the next; they are the two mountain ranges in that continent. And in the midst thereof the great river Bhadra-soma flows through the earth with a volume of sacred and pure water. And there are other rivers by thousands in that northern continent; and some flow with milk and others flow with ghee. And there are lakes of curdled milk there, and others lie among the various hills. And fruits of various kinds, which taste rather like amṛta, are produced by hundreds and thousands in the woods in those continents.” MkP 59.18–26. See Pargiter 1904: 389.

- 14 See Figure 12.1, “The MkP Solar Family Tree.”
- 15 Saṃjñā is the daughter of Viśvakarmā, the divine architect, who functions in many myths as a tinkerer type, much akin to Hephaestus of Greek mythology, the god of the forge whose handyman prowess was utilized in cracking open the skull of Zeus at the time of Athena’s birthing. As you will see, this function is integral to the myth since Viśvakarmā alone among the gods would possess the skill and the tools to hammer away at the overbearing might of the Sun.
- 16 And the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa in no way faults her for fleeing. Recall that Sūrya’s luster was unbearable to Brahmā (and indeed imperiled the universe), and also originally unbearable to Aditi, the mother of the demons and the gods, in whose womb he agreed to take birth.
- 17 See Pargiter (1904: 461). Pargiter’s footnote reads, “She married the Paurava king Saṃvaraṇa and was the twelfth ancestress of the Pāṇḍavas.” However, if he means she was twelve generations removed from them, I am unsure of how he arrived at this number since the Pāṇḍavas were her sixth-generation descendants.
- 18 While this matronymic Kaunteya of course is self-evident to him (and the reader) given that his mother’s name is Kuntī, both he and the reader wonder how he can be said to be the son of Tapatī. His query reads (MBh I.11.60.1–2): tāpatya iti yad vākyam uktavān asi mām iha | tad ahaṃ jñātum icchāmi tāpatyārthaviniścayam || tapatī nāma kā caiṣā tāpatyā yatkr̥te vayam | kaunteyā hi vayam sādho tattvam icchāmi veditum ||
- 19 The tributary is named “Tapatī,” to be found at MBh I.160–163. (See Buitenen 1973: 324–9).
- 20 Also of use for the purposes of this discussion is that fact that Saṃvaraṇa, upon wedding Tapatī “frolicked on the mountain like an Immortal” (so ‘pi rājā girau tasmin vijahārāmaropamaḥ, I.163.13, (Buitenen 1973: 329)), making love with her for twelve years. The implication here is that Tapatī, daughter of an immortal (the Sun), is already immortal, and it is the mortal Saṃvaraṇa who has the chance to experience the life of an immortal due to her company.
- 21 It also partakes in a clever mythological encoding of the astronomical timing of the Nine Nights Goddess festival, see (Balkaran 2018).

- 22 Sāvārṇa literally denotes one having the same color or appearance, similar to, or equal to.
- 23 The theme of preservation is invoked at the very outset of the MkP, and perhaps accounts for why the DM was included within its *Purāṇic* fold. See Balkaran (2017).
- 24 Saṃjñā is the daughter of Tvaṣṭṛ, also known as Viśvakarman, the divine architect-tinkerer figure who roughly correlates to Hephaestus of the Grecian mythological heavens.
- 25 Saṃjñā's father; see fn 6.
- 26 *tvāntu me paśyato vatse dināni subahūnyapi / muhūrtārdhasamāni syuḥ kintu dharmo vilupyate // 77.18 // bāndhaveṣu ciraṃ vāso nārīṇāṃ na yaśaskaraḥ / manoratho bāndhavānāṃ nāryā bhartṛgrhe sthitiḥ // 77.19 // sā tvaṃ trailokyanāthena bhartrā sūryeṇa saṅgatā / pitṛgehe ciraṃ kālāṃ vastuṃ nārhasi putrike // 77.20 // sā tvaṃ bhartṛgṛhaṃ gaccha tuṣṭo 'haṃ pūjitāsi me / punarāgamaṇaṃ kāryaṃ darśanāya śubhe mama // 77.21*
- 27 *ityuktā sā tadā pitrā tathetyuktā ca sā mune / saṃpūjayitvā pitaraṃ jagāmāthottarān kurūn // 77.22 //*
- sūryatāpamanicchanti tejasastasya bibhyati / tapaścacāra tatrāpi vaḍavārūpadhārīṇi // 77.23 //*
- 28 *tātaitanmahadāścaryaṃ na dṛṣṭamiti kenacit / mātā vātsalyamutsrjya śāpaṃ putre prayacchati // 77.31 //*
- yathā manurmamācaṣṭe neyaṃ matā tathā mama / viguṇeṣvapi putreṣu na mātā viguṇā bhavet // 77.32 //*
- 29 Included in Appendix 1.
- 30 This must be *C'haya-Saṃjñā*; but both editions read *Saṃjñā*.

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