After the Mahābhārata: On the Portrayal of Vyāsa in the Skandapurāṇa

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Certain works of literature function as cultural hegemons. Their influence is so forceful that subsequent authors and literary traditions take their place only in relation to them. In the world of premodern South and Southeast Asia, the *Mahābhārata* claims such a commanding position. There is an element of truth in the bold, much-cited claim in the first and the last books of the text, that "What is found here concerning *dharma*, the proper making of wealth, pleasure and final release, is to be found elsewhere, too, O bull-like heir of Bharata; but what is not found here is to be found nowhere."[1] In addition to its master narrative of the catastrophic war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, this status is to a large extent due to the epic's complex frame structure, which allowed for the nesting and integration of numerous additional narratives and didactic episodes that could be continuously expanded.[2]

Composed after the *Mahābhārata*, the Purāṇas constitute the most prolific genre of Sanskrit literature, displaying similarities in style and technique, but also departing from the epic in significant ways, particularly in terms of religious ideology, orientation, and scope. Recent work on the *Skandapurāṇa* – a text that was long held to be lost, but identified in early Nepalese palm-leaf manuscripts

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1 *MBh* 1.56.33 = 18.5.38:

> *dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe ca bharatarṣabha |*
> *yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kva cit ||*

The translation is that of John Smith, trans., *The Mahābhārata. An Abridged Translation* (London: Penguin, 2009). On the political status of the *Mahābhārata* in premodern South and Southeast Asia, see Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 223–258.
2 On the frame story in the Indian context, see Michael Witzel, "On the Origin of the Literary device of the 'Frame Story' in Old Indian Literature," in *Hinduismus und Buddhismus. Festschrift für Ulrich Schneider*, ed. Harry Falk (Freiburg: Hedwig Falk, 1987), 380–414.

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going back to the early ninth century CE – has brought to the fore the intricate layered history of Purāṇic text composition.[3] A textual tradition dating to the sixth to seventh century and associated with the burgeoning Pāśupata movement, the *Skandapurāṇa* advocates Śiva devotion and provides a Śaiva model for viewing the cosmos and its affairs. It integrates all other deities into an overarching hierarchical structure in which Śiva, paired with his devoted wife Pārvatī, reigns supreme. Particularly striking in this regard is the text's inclusion of extensive new retellings of the myths of the three main manifestations of Viṣṇu worshiped around the time of the Gupta period: Narasiṃha, Varāha, and Vāmana.[4]

While the incorporation and appropriation of narratives detailing the exploits of Viṣṇu's manifestations in a Śaiva text may hint at religious competition, the *Skandapurāṇa*'s engagement with these narratives first of all reflects a strategic awareness of the cultural importance of these myths. In order to capture the audience's attention, the authors of this new Purāṇa had to engage with and address the narratives and deities that mattered to their intended audience. In a similar fashion, they had to find a way into the *Mahābhārata*, which provided the reference frame of the Brahminic lore in which they were operating. They did so in the very first chapter of the text, through the narrative frame describing the scene of the "original" telling of the *Skandapurāṇa*. In developing this frame, the authors of the text connect the first narration of the *Skandapurāṇa* to a central event in the *Mahābhārata* epic, namely the departure of Vyāsa's son Śuka from this world. The inclusion of this frame story is revealing, because with it, the authors not only

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3 For a comprehensive study including the results of almost two decades of work on the critical edition, see Hans T. Bakker, *The World of the Skandapurāṇa. Northern India in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

4 Note, however, that they are not called *avatāra* in the text. See introduction to *SP* IV, 6. As was first observed by Phyllis Granoff, the *Skandapurāṇa* introduces a significant new element to Viṣṇu's demon-slaying manifestations: the god's attachment to the form he has taken on after he has killed the demon. The *Skandapurāṇa* raises the critical question of what happens to Viṣṇu's demon-slaying manifestation after he has done the job. The Narasiṃha episode, for example, shows him to be attached to his new man-lion form and Śiva, as the supreme God, has to intervene to make him return to his original form. Viṣṇu is assigned the task of slaying demons, while Śiva creates the circumstances that allow him to resume his true form afterwards. Śiva thus becomes the true savior – of both the gods, who need Viṣṇu to return to his original form, and Viṣṇu himself, who is not able to revert to his true form on his own. See Phyllis Granoff, "Saving the Saviour: Śiva and the Vaiṣṇava Avatāras in the Early Skandapurāṇa," in *Origin and Growth of the Purāṇic Text Corpus. With Special Reference to the Skandapurāṇa*, ed. Hans T. Bakker, Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference 3.2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 111–138. The *Skandapurāṇa*'s treatment of Viṣṇu's three main manifestations forms the subject of the PhD project "Counter-Narratives: Parallel Themes in Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Mythology," undertaken by Sanne Mersch at Leiden University.

engaged with and responded directly to the authority of the great Sanskrit epic but, as I will argue, ultimately tried to surpass it.

1 The Introduction of Vyāsa in the Opening Chapter of the *Skandapurāṇa*

While Vyāsa is well known as the composer and narrator of the *Mahābhārata* – a character who, at the same time, plays a key role in the epic "behind the scenes"[5] – his position in the *Skandapurāṇa* is reversed. No longer the all-knowing narrator, in the *Skandapurāṇa* Vyāsa is the pupil of Sanatkumāra, the first-born son of Brahmā. In this case it is Vyāsa who asks the questions, while Sanatkumāra provides the answers.

From the very start, the *Skandapurāṇa* recognizes the authority of the *Mahābhārata*: when the sages are assembled in Prayāga to bathe in the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, they ask the Singer of Ancient Lore (*paurāṇika sūta*) to tell them about "the birth of the wise Kārttikeya, which equals the story of the Bhārata (*Mahābhārata*) and surpasses the Purāṇa."[6]

The unnamed *sūta* starts by describing the scene of the original setting of the first narration of the birth of Skanda-Kārttikeya:

"After the noble Śuka had gone to the supreme station because of his desire for release, Vyāsa, tormented by grief for his son, saw Tryambaka (Śiva). Having seen the Great Lord, his pain disappeared.

"Then, while roaming the worlds, the sage (Vyāsa), the son of Satyavatī, saw Sanatkumāra, the first-born son of Brahmā, granter of boons, furnished with yogic power, on the peak of Mt. Meru, standing there like fire, in his *vimāna* which was brilliant like the sun, surrounded by noble sages who were perfected in yoga, furnished with ascetic power and masters of all sciences; he looked like the four-headed god (Brahmā).

"After Vyāsa had seen that very great being, the sage, dwelling there like the Grandfather (Brahmā) in person, he praised him with the highest devotion.

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5 Cf. Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata. A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), 32–91, and, for a critique of the same, James L. Fitzgerald, "The Many Voices of the Mahābhārata," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123, no. 4 (2003): 815–817.

6 *SP* 1.11:

> bhāratākhyānasadṛśaṃ purāṇād yad viśiṣyate |
> tat tvā pṛcchāma vai janma kārttikeyasya dhīmataḥ ||

"Then the son of Brahmā (Sanatkumāra), embraced with affection the very mighty Vyāsa, who had approached, and he delivered an auspicious speech.

"'You have arrived, o knower of Dharma, by good fortune, freed from sorrow because of the grace of Parameśvara. Ask and I will tell you!'"[7]

In response to Sanatkumāra's offer, Vyāsa asks him about something that has long bothered him: how is it possible that Skanda (Kumāra/Kārttikeya) can be the son of Rudra and of Vahni, of Gaṅgā, Umā, Svāhā, Suparṇī, and the Mothers, as well as of the Kṛttikās?[8] This question is remarkable, because it is after all Vyāsa himself who has given us at least three different accounts of Skanda's birth in his own *Mahābhārata*.[9] Sanatkumāra promises to tell it all, and this promise initiates the telling of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

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7 *SP* 1.15–22:

> *mumukṣayā paraṃ sthānaṃ yāte śubhamahātmani |*
> *sutaśokābhisaṃtapto vyāsas tryambakam aikṣata ||*
> *dṛṣṭvaiva sa maheśānaṃ vyāso 'bhūd vigatavyathaḥ |*
> *vicaran sa tadā lokān muniḥ satyavatīsutaḥ ||*
> *meruśṛṅge 'tha dadṛśe brahmaṇaḥ sutam agrajam |*
> *sanatkumāraṃ varadaṃ yogaiśvaryasamanvitam ||*
> *vimāne ravisaṃkāśe tiṣṭhantam analaprabham |*
> *munibhir yogasaṃsiddhais tapoyuktair mahātmabhiḥ ||*
> *vedavedāṅgatattvajñaiḥ sarvadharmāgamānvitaiḥ |*
> *sakalāvāptavidyais tu caturvaktram ivāvṛtam ||*
> *dṛṣṭvā taṃ sumahātmānaṃ vyāso munim athāsthitam |*
> *vavande parayā bhaktyā sākṣād iva pitāmaham ||*
> *brahmasūnur atha vyāsaṃ samāyātaṃ mahaujasam |*
> *pariṣvajya paraṃ premnā provāca vacanaṃ śubham ||*
> *diṣṭyā tvam asi dharmajña prasādāt pārameśvarāt |*
> *apetaśokaḥ samprāptaḥ pṛcchasva pravadāmy aham ||*

8 *SP* 1.24–26:

> *kumārasya kathaṃ janma kārttikeyasya dhīmataḥ |*
> *kiṃnimittaṃ kuto vāsya icchāmi etad dhi veditum ||*
> *kathaṃ rudrasutaś cāsau vahnigaṅgāsutaḥ katham |*
> *umāyās tanayaś caiva svāhāyāś ca kathaṃ punaḥ |*
> *suparṇyāś cātha mātṝṇāṃ kṛttikānāṃ kathaṃ ca saḥ ||*
> *kaś cāsau pūrvam utpannaḥ kiṃtapāḥ kaś ca vikramaḥ |*
> *bhūtasaṃmohanaṃ hy etat kathayasva yathātatham ||*

9 For the various and conflicting birth stories in the *Mahābhārata*, see Richard Mann, *The Rise of Mahāsena. The Transformation of Skanda-Kārttikeya in North India from the Kuṣāṇa to Gupta Empires* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 18–21, 79–100.

This frame narrative is significant in several respects. First of all, it shows that the text engages strategically with a key event of the great epic. It concerns an episode that, from the perspective of its supposed author, Vyāsa, is one of the most troubling of all: his son's departure from this world in his quest for liberation (*mokṣa*). Seen in this light, it is not so surprising that Vyāsa should ask about the miraculous birth of another son, Skanda, since his own son is still on his mind.[10] While Vyāsa, being the archetypical composer of Brahminic lore, is traditionally credited with many compositions, including the Veda, the *Mahābhārata*, and the Purāṇas,[11] on this occasion he is presented in an opposite role, as the dedicated

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10 It is even possible to establish a link between Vyāsa's questions at the start of the *Skandapurāṇa* (*SP* 1.24–26, cited above) and those of Yudhiṣṭhira to Bhīṣma at the start of the Śuka episode of the *Mahābhārata* (*MBh* 12.310.1–5), which likewise center around the mystery of his birth:

> *kathaṃ vyāsasya dharmātmā śuko jajñe mahātapāḥ |*
> *siddhiṃ ca paramāṃ prāptas tan me brūhi pitāmaha ||*
> *kasyāṃ cotpādayām āsa śukaṃ vyāsas tapodhanaḥ |*
> *na hy asya jananīṃ vidma janma cāgryaṃ mahātmanaḥ ||*
> *kathaṃ ca bālasya sataḥ sūkṣmajñāne gatā matiḥ |*
> *yathā nānyasya loke 'smin dvitīyasyeha kasya cit ||*
> *etad icchāmy ahaṃ śrotuṃ vistareṇa mahādyute |*
> *na hi me tṛptir astīha śṛṇvato 'mṛtam uttamam ||*
> *māhātmyam ātmayogaṃ ca vijñānaṃ ca śukasya ha |*
> *yathāvad ānupūrvyeṇa tan me brūhi pitāmaha ||*

As James Fitzgerald has pointed out to me (personal communication), both sons (Śuka and Skanda) share a similar kind of conception: Śuka is born from the seed of Vyāsa spilled on the fire sticks (see below) and Skanda is born from the seed of Śiva ejected into the fire (Agni).

11 Cf. Bruce Sullivan, *Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa and the Mahābhārata: A New Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1; also Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, A History of Indian Literature 2.3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 45–48, on Vyāsa as the composer of the "*Purāṇasaṃhitā*." For Vyāsa's own pedigree, see Giorgio Bonazolli, "Purāṇic Paramparā," *Purāṇa* 22 (1980): 33–60. His table I (pp. 36–39) indicates that the majority of the Purāṇas follow a tripartite scheme: Brahmā > sage (e.g. Vasiṣṭha, Sanatkumāra, or Nārada) > Vyāsa.

The name Vyāsa, as is well known, means "arranger," hinting at his role as a "transmitter" or "tradent" of Brahminic lore. For the term "tradent," used by scholars of Jewish rabbinic literature to refer to the "noncreative" role of the Rabbinic sages in the transmission of rabbinic literature, see Martin S. Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martins S. Jaffee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17–37. On this role of Vyāsa, see Peter C. Bisschop, "Vyāsa's Palimpsest: Tracking Processes of Transmission and Re-creation in Anonymous Sanskrit Literature," in *Perspectives on Lived Religion: Practices – Transmission – Landscape*, eds. N. Starling, H. Twiston Davies, and L. Weiss (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2019), 165–172.

student of the mysterious figure of Sanatkumāra, the first-born son of Brahmā. I argue that through the introduction of this frame narrative, the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa* were aiming to rewrite the received *Mahābhārata* tradition[12] and present the audience with a higher perspective. By starting with a new and un-known narrative that concerns the composer of the epic at his most vulnerable, the *Skandapurāṇa* authors added an additional layer of interpretation that, as we shall see, turned Vyāsa into a dedicated Pāśupata adept.

To properly appreciate the significance of the *Skandapurāṇa*'s adoption of this frame story, we should first of all take a look at the relevant passage in the *Mahābhārata*, in which Śuka departs from this world and Vyāsa is left behind, grieving for his son. The story is told in book 12 of the epic, the *Śāntiparvan* "The Book of Peace."[13] Vyāsa had received Śuka from Śiva after performing austerities on Mt. Meru. He had asked for a son who would be equal in power to the five elements. The son is born when Vyāsa sheds his semen on the sacrificial fire sticks (*araṇī*) at the sight of the beautiful Apsaras Ghṛtācī (*MBh* 12.310–311). Śuka first learns the *mokṣadharma* "Teachings on Liberation" from Vyāsa, then from king Janaka, and finally from Nārada (*MBh* 12.312–319).[14] In the end, Śuka re-solves to abandon his body and attain final liberation. A long description of his ever-higher journey toward liberation follows, in which he identifies himself with Brahman (*MBh* 12.319–320). Vyāsa tries to follow him through yoga but he ends up realizing that Śuka has left him behind, after which he sits down in grief.[15] At

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12 By "*Mahābhārata* tradition" I mean not only the text as we have it, but also the cultural awareness that comes with it. This involves multiple sources: from commentaries, to perfor-mance traditions, to material representations, as well as new compositions that refer to it, such as – in the present case – the *Skandapurāṇa*.

13 The story of Śuka in the *Mahābhārata* has been studied by a number of scholars, including V.M. Bedekar, "The Story of Śuka in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas: A Comparative Study," *Purāṇa* 7 (1965): 87–127; C. MacKenzie Brown, "Modes of Perfected Living in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas: The Different Faces of Śuka the Renouncer," in *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought*, eds. Andrew O. Fort and Patricia Y. Mumme (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 157–183; David Shulman, *The Hungry God. Hindu Tales of Filicide and Devotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 108–146; and Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 278–322.

14 In the light of the *Skandapurāṇa*'s account, it is noteworthy that Nārada first of all refers to the teachings on renunciation and liberation as they were taught by Sanatkumāra (*MBh* 12.316.5–19).

15 *MBh* 12.320.27:

mahimānaṃ tu taṃ dṛṣṭvā putrasyāmitatejasaḥ |
niṣasāda giriprasthe putram evānucintayan ||

this moment, Śiva appears before him to console him (*MBh* 12.320.31–37). The compound used to express Vyāsa's state of mind, *putraśokābhisaṃtapta* ("tormented by grief for his son," *MBh* 12.320.32c), is almost identical to that used by the *Skandapurāṇa* to describe the very same moment (*sutaśokābhisaṃtapta*, *SP* 1.15c). It functions as a clear marker linking the two texts. Śiva reminds Vyāsa that he had given him a son who would master the elements, in accordance with Vyāsa's own request. His son has won eternal fame. To console Vyāsa, he gives him Śuka in the form of a shadow as his constant companion.[16]

2 The Bhāgavata Character of the *Mahābhārata*

At this point, we need to ask the question: why did the authors of the *Skandapurāṇa* select this particular episode to frame the original narration of the *Skandapurāṇa*? I can see at least three reasons, which are, to a certain extent, all connected.

First of all, the position of the *Mahābhārata* as the founding epic of Sanskrit culture is undeniable. For new compositions to gain a mark of authority, it was thus good strategy to connect themselves in one way or another with events narrated in the great epic. The specific episode selected by the authors of the *Skandapurāṇa* is particularly fitting because it concerns one of the most moving moments in the life of the author of the text, namely his son's departure for *mokṣa*. To claim the authority of the epic, what better episode than this one, in which the author himself is distraught at his son's reaching the final state? It perfectly captures the conflict between the ideals of action (*pravṛtti)* and withdrawal (*nivṛtti*) that are at the heart of the epic. Moreover, the episode has a Śaiva connection, because Vyāsa had received his son from Śiva after practicing intense asceticism. This motif paved the way for linking it to the Śaiva Purāṇa about to be told.

A second reason, I argue, has to do with the Bhāgavata character of the *Mahābhārata*.[17] While the epic may not have started out as a religious document, it had been infused with a Kṛṣṇa and Nārāyaṇa theology by the time of its written Gupta redaction, which is what most scholars see as the form of the text as we

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16 *MBh* 12.320.37:

> *chāyāṃ svaputrasadṛśīṃ sarvato'napagāṃ sadā |*
> *drakṣyase tvaṃ ca loke 'smin matprasādān mahāmune ||*

17 I use the term "Bhāgavata" in a general sense to refer to early traditions of Viṣṇu worship. Cf. Gérard Colas, "Bhāgavatas," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hindusim*, vol. 3, eds. Knut Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 295–301.

find it more or less represented in the main text of the Poona critical edition.[18] This Bhāgavata character is particularly evident in the teachings of the *Bhagavadgītā* (*MBh* 6.23–40) just before the start of the central battle, as well as various other Kṛṣṇa-, Viṣṇu- and Nārāyaṇa-related teachings strategically placed across different parts of the epic, but in particular in the – undeniably sectarian – *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (*MBh* 12.321–339).[19] It may be precisely because of the insertion of Nārāyaṇa theology that many manuscripts of the individual books of the epic start with the celebrated *maṅgala* invocation of Nara and Nārāyaṇa:

> *nārāyaṇaṃ namaskṛtya naraṃ caiva narottamam |*
> *devīṃ sarasvatīṃ caiva tato jayam udīrayet ||*[20]

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18 For a general overview, see James L. Fitzgerald, "Mahābhārata," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 2, eds. Knut Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 72–94. Cf. his characterization of the epic (p. 92): "The text of the *Mahābhārata* at the close of the Gupta era describes a particular episode of world history at a particular juncture of the flow of time in the cosmos, one of the occasional severe crises that arise in terrestrial affairs and call for apocalyptic divine sanction – god's descending in disguised form into terrestrial affairs and marshalling divine and human forces against demonic energies that harm the fundamental welfare of all souls in the universe. In this text's teachings, solace and hope are offered to all weary souls by showing that all things are centered upon the reality and activity of the god Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu, who presides over the creation, sustenance, and then destruction of the universe against the tableaux of the vast movements of time that are now seen." See also John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Brill: Leiden, 1998), 256–302.

19 Reinhold Grünendahl characterizes the overall incorporation of a Nārāyaṇa scheme in the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata* as follows: "Die Nārāyaṇa-Theologie des Nārāyaṇīya und das ihr zuzuordnende Ideenprofil manifestieren sich an diversen, über das *Mahābhārata* verteilten Stellen, die zusammen eine Art Rahmen bilden. Mittels dieses Rahmens hat die in ihm sich artikulierende Schule der »epischen Pāñcarātrins« ihre theologischen Vorstellungen offenbar planmäßig in das Mahābhārata integriert [. . .] und dem Epos als Ganzes damit zugleich ihre unverwechselbares Gepräge gegeben." See Reinhold Grünendahl, "Zur Stellung des Nārāyaṇīya im Mahābhārata," in *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien*, ed. Peter Schreiner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997), 197–240; also Reinhold Grünendahl, "On the Frame Structure and 'Sacrifice Concept' in the Nārāyaṇīya and Tīrthayātrā Sections of the Mahābhārata, and the Craft of Citation," *Zeitschrift der Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 152, no. 2 (2002): 309–340. This is not to deny that the *Mahābhārata* contains teachings involving Śiva as well, but when it comes to the epic's overarching model, it is clearly centered around Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. The *Anuśāsanaparvan* in particular has a number of significant Śaiva episodes. For a structural study of Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*, see Jacques Scheuer, *Śiva dans le Mahābhārata* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982); also Peter C. Bisschop, "Śiva," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 1, eds. Knut Jacobsen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 744–746.

20 On the other hand, as observed by V. S. Sukthankar in the prolegomena to the edition of the *Ādiparvan* (p. iii), this stanza is missing from the Southern manuscripts. See also Sylvain Lévi, "*Tato jayam udirayet*," trans. L. G. Khare, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 1, no. 1 (1918–19): 13–20. No less important than the specific form of the epic after its Gupta redaction

"Honour first Nārāyaṇa, and Nara, the most excellent of men; honour too Sarasvatī the goddess; then proclaim the Tale of Victory!"[21]

A text like the *Skandapurāṇa*, which advocates a Śaiva perspective, would have been confronted with this situation and have to address it in one way or another. In this connection, it seems significant that the Śuka episode of the *Mahābhārata* (12.310–320) precedes exactly the teachings of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* (*MBh* 12.321–339). We have seen how the Śuka episode forms the starting point for the telling of the Purāṇa. In the chapters that follow, in fact, some of the central doctrines concerning Rudra in the *Nārāyaṇīya* are taken up, but their message is turned around. This concerns in particular the teaching that Brahmā is the father of Rudra, which is a doctrine characteristic of the *Nārāyaṇīya*, but spectacularly overturned by the account of creation given in the *Skandapurāṇa*. Chapter 3 of the *Skandapurāṇa* tells how Brahmā was born in the Cosmic Egg and in his ignorance did not realize that he had a father. Thinking himself to be alone at the beginning of time, he hears a voice addressing him with the words "son, son!" (*putra putra*), which turns out to be that of Śiva. Brahmā takes refuge with Śiva, who grants him the position of demiurge and ruler over the worlds.[22] Various other elements in the *Skandapurāṇa* likewise show that the authors of

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is the question to what extent the transmission and control of the *Mahābhārata* may have been in the hands of Bhāgavata communities. The *maṅgala* verse of the Northern manuscripts certainly points in such a direction. The inclusion and general acceptance of the *Harivaṃśa*, treating of the life of Kṛṣṇa, as an appendix (*khila*) to the *Mahābhārata* suggests a Bhāgavata-dominated environment of *Mahābhārata* transmission as well. For the status of the *Harivaṃśa* as an "appendix" to the *Mahābhārata*, see André Couture, "The *Harivaṃśa*: a Supplement to the *Mahābhārata*," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 4, no. 3 (1996): 127–138; Freda Matchett, "The *Harivaṃśa*: Supplement to the *Mahābhārata* and Independent Text," *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 4, no. 3 (1996): 139–150.

21 Trans. Smith, *The Mahābhārata*.

22 *SP* 3.4–7:

purā brahmā prajādhyakṣaḥ aṇḍe 'smin samprasūyate |
so 'jñānāt pitaraṃ brahmā na veda tamasāvṛtaḥ ||
aham eka iti jñātvā sarvāṃl lokān avaikṣata |
na cāpaśyata tatrānyaṃ tapoyogabalānvitaḥ ||
putra putreti cāpy ukto brahmā śarveṇa dhīmatā |
praṇataḥ prāñjalir bhūtvā tam eva śaraṇaṃ gataḥ ||
sa dattvā brahmaṇe śambhuḥ sraṣṭṛtvaṃ jñānasaṃhitam |
vibhutvaṃ caiva lokānām antardhe parameśvaraḥ ||

the text were familiar with and opposed to the teachings of the *Nārāyaṇīya*.[23] By putting the narrative frame in relation to the Śuka episode that directly precedes the *Nārāyaṇīya*, the authors were able to take control of the epic's religious teachings and bring in their own Śaiva perspective.[24]

A final reason for selecting this episode to frame the Śaiva teachings of the *Skandapurāṇa* is connected to the nature of the subject. The Śuka episode centers around the ideal of *mokṣa*, final liberation, realized by renunciation of life in total. Śuka is the quintessential yogin and renouncer. The *Nārāyaṇīya*, which follows upon the story of Śuka, teaches that devotion to lord Nārāyaṇa is the means of *bhakti* to achieve the same goal. The *Skandapurāṇa*, aside from being a foundational work that integrates Śaiva- and non-Śaiva mythology in a comprehensive manner, also teaches a theology and a corresponding path toward liberation. This path centers around the Pāśupata ideal of union with Śiva (*śivasāyujya*) reached through complete devotion (*bhakti*) to Śiva. As such, the way of *mokṣa* turns out to be the final teaching of the *Skandapurāṇa* as well. And it is this Pāśupata path to liberation that is ultimately taught to Vyāsa, the father who has lost his own son in the quest for final liberation. To understand how this links up with the narrative frame of the *Skandapurāṇa*, we now have to leave aside the main body of the work and turn to the conclusion of the text.

3 Vyāsa the Pāśupata

The final ten chapters of the *Skandapurāṇa* are dedicated to the teaching of Pāśupata yoga.[25] Ultimately, this yoga involves a practice of what is called *utkrānti* ("proceeding upwards," "stepping out," or "yogic suicide," as it is sometimes

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23 The relations between the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the *Skandapurāṇa* are addressed in my forthcoming study: "Rudra-Śiva in the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the Rejoinder of the *Skandapurāṇa*," in *The Nārāyaṇīya: Reconsidering an Epic and Its Contexts*, eds. Robert Leach and Angelika Malinar.
24 On the connection between the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the Śuka episode, see Alf Hiltebeitel, "*Mokṣa* and *Dharma* in the *Mokṣadharma*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 45 (2017): 749–766.
25 For the *Skandapurāṇa*'s connections with the Pāśupata movement, see Peter C. Bisschop, *Eary Śaivism and the Skandapurāṇa. Sects and Centres* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2006), 37–50; Bakker, *The World of the Skandapurāṇa*, 137–153; and Elizabeth A. Cecil, "Mapping the Pāśupata Landscape: Narrative, Tradition, and the Geographic Imaginary," *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 3 (2018): 285–303. Although the last ten chapters as a whole may be referred to as "Pāśupatayogavidhi," the text also addresses and criticizes the rival system of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. The Pāśupata teaching proper starts at SP_{Bh} 180.

referred to).[26] "Suicide" brings with it a whole set of Western ideas that are not applicable; I therefore prefer to refer to *utkrānti* as "liberational death." It is a way of taking control of death, which awaits us all, and turning it into the key to liberation.

The practice is described in detail in the text's penultimate chapter (*SP*$_{Bh}$ 182); it is performed through a process of actively blocking the breath and pushing it upwards through the cranium. This voluntary death brings about final liberation through merging with Śiva (*SP*$_{Bh}$ 179.46–47ab):

> sadaivaṃ dhyāyato[27] vyāsa tad aiśvaryaṃ pravartate |
> yena ṣaḍviṃśakaṃ buddhvā hṛdayasthaṃ maheśvaram ||
> svecchayā svatanuṃ tyaktvā tasminn eva pralīyate |

"As one constantly meditates like this, Vyāsa, that lordship comes about, through which, after realizing the twenty-sixth [principle], Maheśvara, who resides in the heart, [and] abandoning one's own body according to one's own will, one is absorbed in Him [i.e. Maheśvara]."

The practice is the preserve of the Pāśupata yogins who, during life, abide by the regime of the Pāśupata observance of bathing in ashes (*SP*$_{Bh}$ 182.53):

> evaṃ pāśupatā viprā niṣkalaṃ taṃ maheśvaram |
> yogād āviśya mucyante punarjanmavivarjitāḥ ||

"In this way the Pāśupata brahmins are released, freed from rebirth, after reaching the undivided Maheśvara through yoga."

In several respects, one may argue, the practice of *utkrānti* forms the counterpart of the yogic ideal of retreat from bodily existence that was realized by the renunciant Śuka. For example, in *SP*$_{Bh}$ 181.29–30d, it is said:

> nirmamā yogaviduṣaḥ śaṃkaravratam āsthitāḥ |
> gacchanti svatanuṃ tyaktvā hitvā māyāṃ paraṃ padam ||

"The knowers of yoga, free from possession, abiding by the observance of Śaṃkara, reach the supreme state, after abandoning the body, leaving behind material existence."

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26 On *utkrānti* in the context of traditions of yoga, see Peter Schreiner, "Yoga – Lebenshilfe oder Sterbetechnik?" in *Hinduismus-Reader*, ed. Angelika Malinar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 137–148; David Gordon White, "Utkrānti: From Epic Warrior's Apotheosis to Tantric Yogi's Suicide," in *Release from Life – Release in Life. Indian Perspectives on Individual Liberation*, ed. Andreas Bigger et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 291–302; and James Mallinson and Mark Singleton, *Roots of Yoga* (London: Penguin, 2017), s.v. "yogic suicide (*utkrānti*)."

27 Corrected. Bhaṭṭarāī's edition reads *dhyayato*. All of the following quotations from the final ten chapters of the text refer to the editio princeps of Bhaṭṭarāī (*SP*$_{Bh}$).

This recalls Śuka's reaching of the highest state after giving up his body. Sanatkumāra indeed refers to the practice as "voluntary renunciation of the body" (*svacchandatanusaṃtyāga*, *SP*$_{Bh}$ 182.26a). The main difference, of course, is that Śuka did not take up the Pāśupata observance taught here, but followed his own path of yoga.

Although the Pāśupata yoga is described in these last chapters in a more or less general way, at several key moments in the instruction, Sanatkumāra addresses his teaching to Vyāsa personally, who affirms that he has understood it. The two share a *guru-śiṣya* relationship, as is made explicit for example in *SP*$_{Bh}$ 182.9:

> *evamuktaḥ sa śiṣyena vyāsena sumahatmanā |*
> *kathayāmāsa viprendraḥ śivasiddhāntaniścayam ||*

> "Thus addressed by his pupil, the very noble Vyāsa, the chief of brahmins (Sanatkumāra) explained the ascertainment of the dogma of Śiva."

And in *SP*$_{Bh}$ 182.50, Sanatkumāra emphatically instructs Vyāsa to practice the Pāśupata observance himself:

> *sa tvaṃ vyāsa mahābuddhe caran pāśupataṃ vratam |*
> *mahādevaparo bhūtvā jñānam etad avāpnuhi ||*

> "You, Vyāsa, very intelligent one, must practise the Pāśupata observance. Having become dedicated to Mahādeva, you will attain this knowledge."

It is worth taking a moment to step back and reflect on the implications of the bold move expressed here; for with it, the composers of the *Skandapurāṇa* have managed to turn the celebrated author of the epic *Mahābhārata* into a dedicated Pāśupata ascetic.

The same is restated once more, in even stronger terms, in the text's final chapter (*SP*$_{Bh}$ 183.53ff.). Here Sanatkumāra once again confirms that he has taught him the supreme yoga and that Vyāsa will attain the highest liberation after realizing the supreme lord. In this connection, he adds several prophesies about Vyāsa as well: he will become a yogin, he will compose the Purāṇa, he will divide the Veda into four, he will institute the Dharmas, and finally, he will attain absorption in Īśvara (*SP*$_{Bh}$ 183.59c-60b):

> *bhasmavrataṃ ca samprāpya paśupāśavimocanam ||*
> *śāṃkarajñānasampannaḥ īśvare layam āpsyasi |*

> "After completing the ash-observance, which releases from the bondage of a bound soul, you will attain absorption in the lord, being endowed with the knowledge of Śaṃkara."

Several of these prophesies, such as his composition of the Purāṇa and his division of the four Vedas, fit with what we know about Vyāsa from other sources, but the notion that he achieves salvation through Pāśupata yoga is unique to the text and introduces a radically new perspective. It reorients the audience's perception of the identity of the author of the great epic.

The passage concludes as follows (SP_{Bh} 183.60cd–62):

> evamuktaḥ sa viprendro hṛṣṭasarvatanūruhaḥ ||
> upasadya munīndraṃ taṃ bhasmasaṃskāram āptavān |
> tatkṣaṇāc cāsya yogo 'sau prādurbhūto mahāmuneḥ ||
> abhivādya guruṃ vyāso brahmasūnuṃ mahaujasam |
> śarvāyatanavīkṣārthaṃ vicacāra mahītale ||

> "Thus addressed, that best of brahmins (Vyāsa), with all his hair bristling with joy, approached the supreme sage and received the consecration with ashes; at that moment that yoga appeared to the great sage. After Vyāsa had saluted his preceptor, the son of Brahmā, of great might, he roamed the earth to see the abodes of Śaṃkara."

These verses contain significant initiatory terminology, such as "consecration with ashes" (bhasmasaṃskāra) and "preceptor" (guru), once again indicative of the guru-śiṣya relationship between the two, and leave no doubt that Vyāsa is being initiated in the Pāśupata observance by Sanatkumāra. The latter is thus not only the narrator of the Purāṇa's stories, but ultimately his spiritual guide, a Pāśupata teacher who directs Vyāsa on the Pāśupata path to liberation.[28]

4 The *Mahābhārata*'s Cultural Hegemony and What It Meant for Subsequent Compositions

Having shown how the authors of the *Skandapurāṇa* capitalized on the *Mahābhārata* epic by turning its composer into a dedicated student of Sanatkumāra and, ultimately, a Pāśupata liberation-seeker, I want to conclude with a few observations on the position of the *Mahābhārata* in the wake of the

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28 As for Sanatkumāra's *adhikāra* to do so, in SP 175.35–36, Sanatkumāra tells Vyāsa that he received instruction in Pāśupata yoga from Śiva himself, which qualifies him as a Pāśupata teacher:

> yadāhaṃ devadevena svayam eva jagatsṛjā|
> svayogaṃ śambhunā vatsa grāhito gatasaṃśayaḥ||
> tadā ṣaḍviṃśakaṃ tattvaṃ jñātvā sarvagam īśvaram|
> vimukto yogasaṃsiddho 'haṃ mohavivarjitaḥ||

Gupta period. In particular, I would like to raise the question to what extent its final Bhāgavata orientation may have affected the form and narration of subsequent compositions by different Brahminic religious communities, specifically the works of professed Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva identification. Naturally, this is a huge topic that I cannot address here in all its detail, but I do think it deserves more attention than it has received so far.

A good starting point for comparison is the composition of a new class of literature dedicated to the rituals, activities, and attitudes of devotion to be adopted by worshippers of Viṣṇu and Śiva, composed in the centuries after the completion of the *Mahābhārata*. For this, we have the *Viṣṇudharma* on the one hand and the *Śivadharma* (or *Śivadharmaśāstra*) on the other. While the precise dates of these texts remain open for discussion, there can be no doubt that both of them are postepic compositions.[29]

The *Viṣṇudharma* emphatically styles itself as a direct continuation of the *Mahābhārata* epic. This can already be seen from its opening verse, which – after the Bhāgavata mantra *oṃ namo bhagavate vāsudevāya* "Oṃ, homage to the Blessed Vāsudeva!" – commences with the same benedictory verse invoking Nara and Nārāyaṇa that also heads manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*.[30] The second verse of the text is identical to the final verse of the entire *Mahābhārata*, asking the rhetorical question: "he who learns the Bhārata, what need has he of sprinkling with the waters of Puṣkara?"[31] By starting the work with a combination of the opening and concluding verse of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Viṣṇudharma* presents itself as a direct continuation of the epic. These verses can be seen as further markers of the Bhāgavata-controlled transmission of the *Mahābhārata* at the time.

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29 The *Viṣṇudharma* has been edited by Reinhold Grünendahl, *Viṣṇudharmāḥ. Precepts for the Worship of Viṣṇu*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983–1989). The study of the *Śivadharmaśāstra* has been taken up only relatively recently. For an introductory survey, with references to recent editions and studies, see Peter C. Bisschop, *Universal Śaivism. The Appeasement of All Gods and Powers in the Śāntyadhyāya of the Śivadharmaśāstra* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1–27.

30 The same verse also appears at the beginning of several Purāṇas, as well as the *Harivaṃśa*, which thus likewise present themselves as continuations of the *Mahābhārata*.

31 *MBh* 18.5.54 (also *MBh* 1.2.242):

> *dvaipāyanauṣṭhapuṭaniḥsṛtam aprameyaṃ, puṇyaṃ pavitram atha pāpaharaṃ śivam* (ViDh: *śubhaṃ*) *ca |*
> *yo bhārataṃ samadhigacchati vācyamānaṃ, kiṃ tasya puṣkarajalair abhiṣecanena ||*

On this verse, see James Hegarty, "What Need Has He of the Waters of Puṣkara? The Narrative Construction of *tīrtha* in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*," in *Battle, Bards and Brāhmins*, ed. John Brockington, Papers of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference 2 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012): 129–156.

The same strategy is continued in the frame narrative of the *Viṣṇudharma*. The chief narrator of the text is Śaunaka, who plays a key role in the outermost narrative frame of the *Mahābhārata*'s elaborate frame structure. The text commences with the visit of Śaunaka and other sages to Śatānīka, the son of Janamejaya, following his royal consecration. This setting once again evokes the *Mahābhārata*, for it was at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice that Vyāsa's *Mahābhārata* was told by Vaiśaṃpāyana and heard by Ugraśravas.[32] Śatānīka requests Śaunaka to tell him about Nārāyaṇa, referring to the fact that his ancestors had regained their kingdom by turning to Nārāyaṇa, and that Nārāyaṇa had saved the life of his stillborn grandfather Parīkṣit.[33] In other words, the *Viṣṇudharma* emphatically places itself in direct relation to the *Mahābhārata* and, more importantly, presents the epic as a history in which the protagonists were ultimately successful because of their devotion to Nārāyaṇa. This further fuels the Bhāgavata perspective of the epic. Furthermore, the teachings of the *Viṣṇudharma* themselves have much in common with those of the *Nārāyaṇīyaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.[34]

If we turn to the narrative frame of the *Śivadharma*, however, the model is radically different. In a situation in which the canon of the *Mahābhārata* was in the hands of the Bhāgavatas, which allowed little room for the upcoming Śaiva traditions to claim their place, the *Śivadharma* adopted a model that overruled anything that had been taught before, for the teaching of the *Śivadharma* is fundamentally presented as the teaching of god Śiva himself. He is, in other words, both subject

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32 When the sages headed by Śaunaka perform a twelve-year sacrifice in the Naimiṣa forest, the *sūta* Ugraśravas appears and tells the sages about how he attended the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya, where he heard the *Mahābhārata* composed by Vyāsa being recited by Vaiśaṃpāyana.

33 *Viṣṇudharma* 1.1–6:

> kṛtābhiṣekaṃ tanayaṃ rājñaḥ parīkṣitasya (corr.; *pārīkṣitasya* Ed.) ha |
> draṣṭum abhyāyayuḥ prītyā śaunakādyā maharṣayaḥ ||
> tān āgatān sa rājarṣiḥ pādārghyādibhir arcitān |
> sukhopaviṣṭān viśrāntān kṛtasaṃpraśnasatkathān ||
> tatkathābhiḥ kṛtāhlādaḥ praṇipatya kṛtāñjaliḥ |
> śatānīko 'tha papraccha nārāyaṇakathāṃ parām ||
> rājovāca:
> yam āśritya jagannāthaṃ mama pūrvapitāmahāḥ |
> vipakṣāpahṛtaṃ rājyam avāpuḥ puruṣottamāḥ ||
> drauṇibrahmāstranirdagdho mama yena pitāmahaḥ |
> parīkṣit prāṇasaṃyogaṃ devadevena lambhitaḥ ||
> tasya devasya māhātmyaṃ śrutaṃ subahuśo mayā |
> devarṣisiddhamanujaiḥ stutasyāśeṣajanmanaḥ ||

The story of the resurrection of Parīkṣit is told in *MBh* 14.65–70.

34 See Grünendahl, "Zur Stellung des Nārāyaṇīya im Mahābhārata," 234–235.

and object of the teaching, just like Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*. The *Śivadharma* is presented in its opening chapter as a dialogue between Nandikeśvara and Sanatkumāra (and other sages) on Mt. Meru, but Nandikeśvara tells Sanatkumāra that it was Śiva himself who had originally revealed the teaching of his own worship to Pārvatī, Skanda, Nandikeśvara, and other gods.[35] The text ends with an account of how the teaching came to the human world, stating that Sanatkumāra passed the teaching onto "a Śaiva devotee of the Candrātreya lineage" and that Candrātreya extracted the essence from it and taught the *Śivadharma* in its present twelve chapters.[36] This model corresponds to that of the *tantrāvatāra* or "descent of the Tantra," which became highly effective and was widely adopted in the early medieval period.[37]

The *Śivadharma*'s model presents one way of circumventing the issue of the Bhāgavata canonization of the *Mahābhārata*. It effectively involved a complete disregard of the epic, instead introducing the very successful model of instruction by

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35 *Śivadharmaśāstra* 1.10–11:

> *śrūyatām abhidhāsyāmi sukhopāyaṃ mahatphalam |*
> *paramaṃ sarvadharmāṇāṃ śivadharmaṃ śivātmakam ||*
> *śivena kathitaṃ pūrvaṃ pārvatyāḥ ṣaṇmukhasya ca |*
> *gaṇānāṃ devamukhyānām asmākaṃ ca viśeṣataḥ ||*

Text as quoted in Bisschop, *Universal Śaivism*, 6–7, from Nina Mirnig's draft edition of the first chapter.

36 *Śivadharmaśāstra* 12.102:

> *sārāt sāraṃ samuddhṛtya candrātreyeṇa dhīmatā |*
> *uktaṃ ca dvādaśādhyāyaṃ dharmaśāstraṃ śivātmakam ||*

Text as constituted in Florinda De Simini, *Of Gods and Books. Ritual and Knowledge Transmission in the Manuscript Cultures of Premodern India* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 62, n. 173.

37 See Dominic Goodall and Marion Rastelli, eds., *Tāntrikābhidhānakośa. A Dictionary of Technical Terms from Tantric Literature*, vol. 3, *Ṭ–PH* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013), s.v. *tantrāvatāra* (pp. 77–79); Gerhard Oberhammer, *Offenbahrungsgeschichte als Text: Religionshermeneutische Bemerkungen zum Phänomen in Hinduistischer Tradition* (Vienna: Samlung De Nobili, 1994).

38 A precedent for this had already been set in some sense in the *Mahābhārata*, in the form of the "Dialogue between Umā and Maheśvara" (*Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda*) of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (*MBh* 13.126–134). It is noteworthy that an *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda* was included as part of the *Śivadharma* corpus in Nepal. For a preliminary study of the links between the *Umāmaheśvarasaṃvāda* of the *Śivadharma* and the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, see Florinda De Simini and Nina Mirnig, "Umā and Śiva's Playful Talks in Detail (*Lalitavistara*): On the Production of Śaiva Works and their Manuscripts in Medieval Nepal," in *Indic Manuscripts Through the Ages*, eds. Vincenzo Vergiani, Daniele Cuneo, and Camillo Formigatti (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 587–653.

Śiva himself through a lineage of subsequent teachers.[38] The *Skandapurāṇa*'s strategy was a different one: it rather presents a complete reorientation of the *Mahābhārata* by turning its author into a Pāśupata ascetic. This involves a radical break with the received tradition, in particular that advocated by the *Nārāyaṇīya*.[39]

In the centuries to come, different religious communities developed different ways of connecting themselves with the *Mahābhārata*. Another telling example of this process is the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, which likewise presents Vyāsa as a pupil, but this time of the sage Nārada. Vyāsa asks Nārada what he had missed when he composed the *Mahābhārata*. Nārada tells him that he has not given due attention to the Bhagavat Vāsudeva (*BhP* 1.5). Vyāsa then composes the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* about devotion to the Bhagavat, which he subsequently teaches to none other than his son Śuka, who becomes its narrator. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* can indeed claim to have outdone the *Mahābhārata* as well, having gained a special status among the Purāṇas as the central sacred scripture of Vaiṣṇava communities up to the present day.[40] In the end, it all serves to show the prominent position that the *Mahābhārata* has had as a founding epic of Brahminic lore.

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39 According to two passages in the *Nārāyaṇīya*, Vyāsa is an incarnation of Nārāyaṇa: *MBh* 12.334.9 and *MBh* 12.337.3–5; 42–44. This tradition is followed in several Purāṇas. See Marcelle Saindon, "Quand Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa est considéré comme un *avatāra* de Viṣṇu," *Bulletin d'Études Indiennes* 22–23 (2004–05): 307–321. The rhetorical remark in *MBh* 12.334.9, however, has been given a Śaiva twist in *KūP* 1.30.67. This may reflect the influence of the *Skandapurāṇa*'s perspective.

    MBh 12.334.9:

    kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaṃ vyāsaṃ viddhi nārāyaṇaṃ prabhum |
    ko hy anyaḥ puruṣavyāghra mahābhāratakṛd bhavet ||

    KūP 1.30.67:

    kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaḥ sākṣād viṣṇur eva sanātanaḥ |
    ko hy anyas tattvato rudraṃ vetti taṃ parameśvaram ||

40 On the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as a "new *Mahābhārata*," see Freda Matchett, "*Some Reflections on the Frame-Narrative of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa*," in *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature*, ed. Mary Brockington, Proceedings of DICSEP 2 (Zagreb: Croatian Academy, 2002): 287–295. As Matchett observes (p. 290), although the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* has much to say about Śuka, in line with its Kṛṣṇaite teachings, it refrains from referring to Śuka's connection with Śiva. The connections between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* have been well studied: Wendy Doniger, "Echoes of the *Mahābhārata*: Why is a Parrot the Narrator of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*?" in *Purāṇa Perennis. Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jain Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 31–57; Martin Christof, "The Legitimation of Textual Authority in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*," in *Charisma and Canon. Essays on the Religious*

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Abbreviations

BhP – Shastri, H. G., ed. *The Bhāgavata [Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa]*. Vol. 1, *Skandas I to III*. Ahmedabad: B. J. Institute of Learning and Research, 1996.

KūP – Gupta, Anand Swarup, ed. *The Kūrmapurāṇa*. Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust, 1971.

MBh – Sukthankar, V. S., S. K. Belvalkar, and P. L. Vaidya, eds. *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933.

SP I – Adriaensen, Rob, Hans T. Bakker, and Harunaga Isaacson, eds. *The Skandapurāṇa*. Vol. I, *Adhyāyas* 1–25. Groningen Oriental Studies, Supplement. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998.

SP IV – Bisschop, Peter C. and Yuko Yokochi, eds. *The Skandapurāṇa*. Vol. IV, *Adhyāyas 70–95: Start of the Skanda and Andhaka Cycles*. In cooperation with Diwakar Acharya and Judit Törzsök. Groningen Oriental Studies, Supplement. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

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