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Sanskrit and Pali Sources

Journeys and Travellers in Indian Literature and Art

edited by
Danuta Stasik & Anna Trynkowska

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Travelling through the Millennia: Travels in the Sanskrit Epics and in the Works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-Cycle

Introduction

More than a millennium separates the great Sanskrit epics—the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*—which were composed in the centuries preceding the common era, from the works belonging to what I will call the '*Bṛhatkathā*-cycle'—such as Budhasvāmin's unfinished *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* (10th c. AD), Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara* (11th c. AD) and Kṣemendra's *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* (1037 AD).[1] These texts, of course, belong to two different genres: the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are called epics, mainly for want of a better word, for they themselves claim to belong respectively to the genre of *itihāsa* (history)[2] and *kāvya* (poetry). The works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle (Guṇāḍhya's *Bṛhatkathā* itself being either lost or having never existed at all)[3] belong to the genre called *ākhyāna* or *kathā*, terms one could translate variously as legends, fairy tales or at times even animal fables, of the kind the French call *récits à tiroirs*: one main frame story, containing other stories embedded within the first story. But despite their difference in genre, both

1 Henceforth, the following abbreviations will be used for these works: *Mahābhārata* = MBh; *Rāmāyaṇa* = Rm; *Bṛhatkathā* = BK; *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* = BKŚS; *Kathāsaritsāgara* = KSS.

2 Though the MBh also claims to belong to many other genres, including *ākhyāna* (legend); see Danielle Feller, *The Sanskrit Epics' Representation of Vedic Myths*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004, pp. 12-13.

3 According to Félix Lacôte (*Essai sur Guṇāḍhya et la Bṛhatkathā*, Paris: Leroux, 1908, p. 147), Guṇāḍhya lived in the 3rd c. AD. Nalini Balbir (*Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, Bibliothéque de la Pléiade, Paris: Gallimard 1997, p. xvii) does not doubt the existence of the Great Story: 'l'existence de La Grande Histoire ne fait pourtant pas de doute'. James Mallinson (*The Emperor of the Sorcerers*, 2 vols, edn and tr. of the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha*, New York: New York University Press, JJC Foundation, 2005, p. 15) is a little less categorical: 'Now lost, it was ascribed to Gunádhya and said to have been composed in Paisháci the language of the goblins'.

the Sanskrit epics and the extant works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle share a number of common points:

both bodies of texts are very bulky;

both are composed in Sanskrit *śloka*s;[4]

both narrate central stories about royal dynasties, accompanied by numerous side-stories;

the compendium of stories contained in both bodies of texts, so to say, distills and represents the spirit of their different epochs.[5]

The aim of this paper is to examine in broad terms the main types of travels undertaken in both categories of works, and the differences (or similarities) in the types of travellers, the modes of locomotion, and the purposes for which the journeys are undertaken. Since these bodies of texts are vast, we shall limit our observations to the main events and characters within these stories, especially as far as the epics are concerned.[6] We shall first examine the Sanskrit epics, then the works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, before comparing the two and drawing some general conclusions about their outlook on travelling.

Travelling in the Epics

We can make the following preliminary remarks concerning the reasons for which travels are undertaken in the Sanskrit epics:

1) with a few exceptions, travelling for pleasure is by and large unknown;
2) the heroes travel mostly when they are forced to do so, in situations of hardship (exile, war, fleeing to save one's life, etc.);
3) voluntary travels are mainly undertaken in religious contexts, for the purpose of sacrifices (*yajña*) and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*).

[4] It may be argued, of course, that the original *Bṛhatkathā* is supposed to have been composed in a *prākrit* called Paiśācī, but whether there is any truth in the existence of this text (at least in written form) remains yet to be ascertained. Certainly, its origins, as narrated towards the beginning of the KSS, seem shrouded in myth. Some adaptations of the *Bṛhatkathā* are also composed in languages other than Sanskrit (see below).

[5] This is of course stated in so many words only in the *Mahābhārata* 1.56.33: *yad ihāsti tad anyatra, yan nehāsti tan na kvacit*, 'What is here may be elsewhere, but what is not here is nowhere else'.

[6] The works of the *Bṛhatkathā* of course also contain one main story, that of prince Naravāhanadatta, the future emperor of the *vidyādhara*s. But this main story is so crowded with side-stories, especially in the KSS, that it is hardly more than the bare thread of narration. The same cannot be said of the epics, not even of the MBh, which has more subsidiary tales than its sister-epic, the Rm.

1) Even though travelling 'to discover the world' or purely for fun's sake does not seem to occur, there are nevertheless a few occasions in which travels are undertaken for pleasurable purposes. Hunting is one of them. For instance, in MBh 1.106, we learn that Pāṇḍu spends his time roaming about, hunting in the mountains. He leads this peripatetic life-style entirely for his own enjoyment and thereby, of course, neglects his kingdom.

Another pleasurable occasion for which travels are undertaken is to visit relatives. Since the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa are cousins, there is quite a lot of visiting back and forth in the MBh between Dvāravatī, Kṛṣṇa's town, and Hastināpura or Indraprasthā, the Pāṇḍavas' capitals (e.g. MBh 1.213). In the Rm, Bharata, in the company of his younger brother Śatrughna, visits his maternal uncle in Rājagṛha. But we learn of this only when he is forced to return to Ayodhyā in a hurry because of his father Daśaratha's death, which is hardly a joyful event (Rm 2.62-65). Such journeys seem to be made on chariots (cf. Rm 2.65, which contains explicit references to chariot, horses and charioteer).

2) Apart from the above exceptions, the heroes travel mostly when they are forced to do so, in what might be broadly referred to as situations of distress. For instance, the Pāṇḍavas leave their home fleeing for their life when they learn that Duryodhana is planning to burn down their lacquer house in Vāraṇāvata (1.136). Then they travel on in hiding to the kingdom of the Pāñcālas, where Draupadī chooses Arjuna at her *svayaṃvara*. After finding a powerful ally in the person of King Drupada, Draupadī's father, the Pāṇḍavas can then come out of their forced hiding and return home.

Wars or fights constitute one of the reasons that force kings and warriors to travel, more or less voluntarily, depending on the type of war---offensive or defensive. A typical war of conquest is undertaken by Pāṇḍu in MBh 1.105, when he sets off to conquer all the directions of the world. In Book 5 of the MBh, which narrates the preparations for the great war, we see all the allies of the two armies flocking together to Kurukṣetra, sometimes coming from distant lands. In Book 1 of the Rm, the very young Rāma and his brother Lakṣmaṇa are taken (against their father's wishes) on a long journey by the sage Viśvāmitra, who requisitions them to kill some troublesome *rākṣasa*s (Rm 1.17.23ff.). In Book 6 of the Rm, Rāma crosses the ocean to the island of Laṅkā to wage war on the demon Rāvaṇa who has abducted Sītā. In Book 7 of the Rm, Śatrughna, who really comes into his own in this last portion of the epic, travels on a military expedition to conquer cities of which he then becomes the king (Rm 7.56-63).

Exile obviously figures prominently as a reason for travelling in the epics: indeed, both epics can be called stories of exile. In the MBh, Arjuna goes into exile for one year in 1.205, after failing to respect the covenant he had made with his brothers and entering Yudhiṣṭhira's house where the latter was spending

time alone with Draupadī.[7] He then travels extensively around India (first north, then east, south and west), visiting sacred fords—as we see, his exile is at the same time a pilgrimage. He also acquires a number of wives in the course of his journey: the snake princess Ulūpī (1.206), princess Citrāṅgadā, the daughter of the king of Manalūra, with whom he begets a son, Babhruvāhana (1.207), and finally Kṛṣṇa's own sister, Subhadrā, whom he abducts in typical *kṣatriya*-like fashion (1.211-212).[8] As we see, what started as an exile, with pilgrimages in mind, quickly transformed into an occasion for pleasure, enjoyment and revelling, even though he had not originally embarked on the journey with such amorous purposes in mind.[9] While travelling for reasons of love is exceptional in the epics, in the works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, on the other hand, it is quite frequent. It may well be that Pārtha's journey served as one of the models for amorous journeys. But the most important exile is of course that described in Book 3 of the MBh, when the heroes are banned for 12 long years to the forest after losing a dice-game against their wicked cousin Duryodhana. Not content with sitting quietly in one place during their exile, the Pāṇḍavas keep moving about, mainly shifting from the Dvaitavana to the Kāmyakavana (essentially for reasons of food),[10] and occasionally going on pilgrimages or even to heaven visiting their divine parents, as we shall see below.

[7] Arjuna had been forced to do so to help a Brahmin whose cows had been stolen. His weapons were stored in the very room where Yudhiṣṭhira was sitting with Draupadī, so he was forced to intrude upon them. As we see, the situation looks not a little contrived (why should the couple be in the weapon storage room when they had a whole palace at their disposal?), and it is likely that the narrator needed an excuse to send Arjuna off on a trip alone.

[8] We may note that Arjuna performs different types of marriages: that with Ulūpī, by mere mutual consent and without ceremony, is called a *gandharva*-marriage (see *Manusmṛti* 3.32). That with Citrāṅgadā (not listed among the traditional eight forms of marriage) can be called a 'marriage with an appointed daughter (*putrikā*)'. A man who has no male child can make his daughter an 'appointed' daughter: her son then inherits her father's property and performs the death-rites for him. In short, this son belongs to his maternal grandfather, not to his father (see *Manusmṛti* 9.127). And indeed, Babhruvāhana and his mother remain in Manalūra. The marriage with Subhadrā, by kidnapping the bride, is of the *rākṣasa*-type (see *Manusmṛti* 3.33). Manu recommends marriages of the *gandharva* and *rākṣasa* forms for *kṣatriya*s (3.26). See Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, *The Laws of Manu*, London: Penguin, 1991.

[9] Arjuna also saves five heavenly nymphs who had been cursed to become man-eating crocodiles (MBh 1.209). His journey is intimately concerned with women.

[10] See Danielle Feller, 'Ecology in the *Mahābhārata*?', Pandanus '13/1, vol. 7, no. 1, 2013, pp. 21-34 and eadem, 'Magical Kitchens or Hunting? How to Survive in the Epic Jungle', in *A World of Nourishment. Reflections on Food in Indian Culture*, eds Cinzia Pieruccini and Paola M. Rossi, Consonanze. Collana del Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Filologici e Linguistici dell' Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano: Ledizioni, 2016, pp. 59-70.

In Book 2 of the Rm, Rāma, accompanied by his wife Sītā and brother Lakṣmaṇa, is sent into exile to the wilderness for 14 years. This exile then turns into a quest for his beloved Sītā who has been kidnapped by the demon Rāvaṇa. The quest for the beloved in turn becomes a punitive war-expedition, once Rāma has come to know what happened to Sītā and has located Rāvaṇa's whereabouts. The Rm thus narrates one single southward *ayana*, whose purpose and aim, as we see, keep changing as the story unfolds. These exiles mostly take place in a forest environment, which is central to both epics. Indeed, the third chapter of both texts derives its name from the forest.[11]

3) Voluntary travels are undertaken mostly in religious contexts, for the purpose of sacrifices (*yajña*)[12] and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*). For instance, the Pāṇḍavas spend some of their time in exile touring sacred fords to gain merit and to make time go by more quickly (3.91-161). Kṛṣṇa's brother Balarāma, unable to choose sides in the war due to his equal affection for both parties (Bhīma and Duryodhana were both his star pupils at the mace-fight, see MBh 5.154), decides instead to go on a *tīrthayātrā* on the Sarasvatī river (described in 9.34-53).

Furthermore, certain types of sacrifices entail both travelling and waging war. Before Yudhiṣṭhira's *rāja-sūya* (royal consecration), the Pāṇḍavas conquer the four directions: Arjuna conquers the north, Bhīma the east, Sahadeva the south and Nakula the west, while king Yudhiṣṭhira remains in the center, in his capital (MBh 2.23-29). Likewise, before the performance of the horse-sacrifice undertaken by the Pāṇḍavas as an expiation after the war, Arjuna goes on a tour of India following the sacrificial horse (14.72-86): again, he travels first east, then south, west and north, before returning to Hastināpura.[13] On the way, he fights all the enemies who want to obstruct the horse's progress.[14] As we see, the travels undertaken in the context of such *yajña*s also entail wars, because the horse-sacrifice and the *rāja-sūya* are both conquests of the world in disguise. Finally, in a spirit of devotion and renunciation, the heroes circumambulate the

[11] Chapter 3 of the Rm is called *Araṇyakāṇḍa*, chapter 3 of the MBh, *Āraṇyakaparvan*.

[12] Some travels are obligatory parts of sacrificial performances, while others are performed because the situation requires it. Thus, in Book 14, the Pāṇḍavas lack the necessary funds to perform the very costly *aśvamedha*. That is why they travel to the Himālayas before the sacrifice, to dig up a fabulous and forgotten hoard of riches left there by the sage Marutta (MBh 14.62-64).

[13] The Rm also describes two horse-sacrifices, one undertaken by King Daśaratha (Rm 1.11-13) and one undertaken by Rāma (Rm 7.82ff.). These descriptions, however, do not dwell at all on the horse's one-year travel before it is put to death.

[14] As during Arjuna's first tour of India in Book 1, during his semi-voluntary exile, women play an important role in this one too: but this time not on an erotic note, but in a more sorrowful vein, since many are the widowed wives or mothers of warriors slain in the war.

earth one last time, and then climb mount Meru, when they decide that their time has come to die (Book 17.1).

On habitual journeys, such as visits, or else during *yajña*s which involve travelling and fighting, the usual mode of locomotion appears to be the chariot. Otherwise, during exiles or *tīrthayātrā*s, walking seems to be the favoured—or, perhaps more accurately, obligatory—mode of transport. When the heroes of the Rm set off on foot into the wilderness after crossing the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, a well-defined *ordre de marche* is indicated by Rāma:

> Go in front, Saumitri, let Sītā follow behind you.
> I shall go last, to protect you and Sītā. (Rm 2.46.76-77)[15]

Likewise, in the MBh, Vidura describes circumstantially to Dhṛtarāṣṭra how the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī leave Hastināpura on foot for their exile in the forest:

> Kuntī's son, Yudhiṣṭhira has covered his face with his shawl, and Bhīma Pāṇḍava has spread his arms wide as he goes. The left-handed archer (Arjuna) follows the king, scattering sand, and Mādrī's son Sahadeva goes with his face all streaked. Nakula is much distressed in his thoughts and is walking with his whole body limned with dust, behind his king, he the handsomest man on earth. Kṛṣṇā of the long eyes, hiding her face in her hair, beautiful and crying much follows the king. Dhaumya is chanting the gruesome Chants of Death, lord of the people, and as he walks the tracks he holds up *kuśa* grass in his hand. (MBh 3. 71.3-7)[16]

Vidura then goes on to explain why the Pāṇḍavas behave in this way: Yudhiṣṭhira has covered his face so that his burning looks of hatred will not kill an innocent person by mistake; Bhīma flexes his arms to display their famous strength in war; Arjuna strews grains of sand to indicate that his arrows will kill his enemies in great numbers; Sahadeva has painted his face to escape recognition; Nakula, the handsomest man on earth, has covered his body with dust so that no woman will fall in love with him during his exile; Draupadī, in her sad disheveled state, indicates that the wives of the Kauravas will be in the same predicament in 13 years' time, when their husbands have been killed off in the

[15] Tr. Sheldon I. Pollock in Robert P. Goldman (ed.), *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki. An Epic of Ancient India*, 7 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984-2017. In most visual representations of this scene, however, Rāma is usually shown walking in front.

[16] Tr. J.A.B. van Buitenen (tr. and ed.), *The Mahābhārata, 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall, 3. The Book of the Forest*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1975.

war by the Pāṇḍavas; and finally, their *purohita*, Dhaumya, chants songs of death to indicate that the Kauravas will also soon be singing the same songs at their soldiers' funeral ceremonies.

We may say that travelling on foot is a sort of *tapas*, an austerity which increases the merit (*puṇya*) gained during exiles and pilgrimages. The hardship is of course even greater for delicate pampered princes and princesses, who are not otherwise used to walking. This is well-expressed by Daśaratha when he laments his sons' fate:

> How could the princes and poor Sītā, so delicate a young woman, have alighted from the chariot, Sumantra, and proceeded on foot? (Rm 2.52.7)[17]

We have seen above that the heroes of the epics reach the ocean a number of times in the course of their peregrinations. Even though both epics contain descriptions of the sea[18] and mention distant lands, the epic heroes do not resort to boats to cross the ocean, even though they use them to ford rivers. Thus, Rāma matter-of-factly crosses the Gaṅgā at the beginning of his exile by means of a boat (*nau*), with the help of his good friend, Guha, the Niṣāda-king. We learn that this boat is steered by a helmsman and is propelled by means of strong oars (Rm 2.46.66). Afterwards, the three heroes cross the Yamunā by means of a raft which they build themselves, on the advice of the sage Bharadvāja (Rm 2.49). But subsequently, when Rāma reaches the shore of the ocean in his quest for Sītā, the thought of borrowing or building boats to reach the island of Laṅkā does not appear to cross his mind. Rather, the monkeys build a bridge made out of tree-trunks (Rm 6.15), which seems to involve a much greater effort.[19] Of course, we should not draw from mythological sources too hasty conclusions about the

[17] Tr. Pollock in Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*.

[18] On the sea in the MBh, see Tiziana Pontillo and Paola M. Rossi, 'Sea-Images in pre-Kāvya Literature. The Relationship between *Mahābhārata* and Pāli Buddhist Canon Occurrences', in *Nature Symbols in Literature*, ed. J. Vacek, *Pandanus '03*, Praha, 2003, pp. 167-214. See esp. Appendix 1 for the list of narrative passages describing the sea. For a lexical study of the terms designating the ocean in the Rm, see Tiziana Pontillo, 'A Lexical Study of the Terms for the Sea in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Raghuvaṃśa*', in *Love and Nature in Kāvya Literature. Proceedings*, ed. L. Sudyka, *Cracow Indological Studies*, vol. 7, 2005, pp. 103-114.

[19] In Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa*, they use boulders to build a causeway from the shore of the subcontinent to Laṅkā, inscribing Rāma's name on each rock. This by the way seems to be the favoured way of representing the scene of crossing the ocean in paintings and sculptures.

historical reality.[20] This is no firm proof that ocean-faring boats did not exist at that time, but probably merely that they were not commonly known, at least to author(s) whose works were composed far away from the sea.

In the MBh, sailing on the sea is hardly mentioned and not resorted to by our heroes, since indeed most of their adventures take place in-land, near their capital city Hastināpura, which is near modern Delhi. As we have seen, the heroes of the MBh perform *pradakṣinā*s of the Indian subcontinent on various occasions. The *pradakṣinā*—i.e. circling a holy object clock-wise in order to pay homage—holds, of course, a religious significance since it is a way of showing respect: thus circled, the land of India, with the capital of the Pāṇḍavas and their place of sacrifice in its centre, is sanctified. On each journey, the ocean is the limit in three directions—east, south, west—while the Himalāyas form the boundary to the north, beyond which begins the sojourn of the gods which is forbidden to humans. This, by the way, shows that the authors of the epic had a good general representation of the south-Asian sub-continent, as a peninsula bordered by the ocean on three sides, with the Himālayan range in the north. For all practical purposes, the ocean might be the end of the world, because the heroes never think of crossing its boundaries, even though this is not explained by any negative injunction or sin attached to crossing the ocean.[21] In the Rm, on the other hand, we find one main pendulum-like journey from north to south, even going beyond the sea, and then back from south to north. The Rm has lost some of the sacrificial symbolism which is so central to its sister-epic, but in exchange gained some spirit of innovation, since Rāma not only reaches the shore of the ocean, but unhesitatingly crosses it to the island of Laṅkā.

Resorting to divine flying chariots (*vimāna*s) or flying through the air is very exceptional for human beings in the MBh, and not used as an everyday means of transport. *Vimāna*s are only used by our heroes when they go to heaven, with the gods' permission: thus, Arjuna in Book 3 is taken to heaven on his father Indra's chariot because his father needs his help to fight against some demons (3.43) and he is brought back from heaven by the same means (3.161). Yudhiṣṭhira, at the time of his death, is likewise taken up to heaven in a chariot (17.3). Duryodhana too, in a moment of discouragement, experiences an epiphany of sorts when he

[20] Even though, as P.C. Chakravarti ('Naval Warfare in Ancient India', *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 4/4, 1930, pp. 645-664) remarks, according to the Greek historian Megasthenes, King Chandragupta Maurya (who reigned from 322 to 298 BC) had a navy.

[21] Some *dharmaśāstra*s, but not all, mention this prohibition: e.g., *Baudhāyanadharmasūtra* 2.2.2 lists *samudrasaṃyānam*, 'undertaking a sea voyage', as the first of the sins causing loss of caste (*patanīyāni*); see Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras. The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha, Annotated Text and Translation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000. This idea seems to have gained preeminence in much later times, when crossing the *kālā-pānī* (black water) was feared and avoided by good Hindus.

is whisked off by a demoness to the nether world, the abode of the Daityas, who inform him that he is their champion and exhort him not to let them down in the war to come (3.239-240). It is not usual for humans to fly about or to move about in heavenly chariots, but of course, supernatural beings, like the gods, Garuḍa, the *nāga*s, the *rākṣasa*s, etc, and even perfected sages,[22] use this mode of transportation abundantly. The Rm differs in this respect from the MBh (esp. in Books 6 & 7) because it introduces the *vimāna* Puṣpaka ('little flower')—probably the best-known of all *vimāna*s. Puṣpaka first belonged to Kubera, was forcefully taken from him by Rāvaṇa, and finally became Rāma's possession by right after he had killed the demon. The heroes of the Rm use Puṣpaka to return quickly from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā. Even after that, Rāma continues to use the divine chariot on certain errands described in Book 7, such as killing the *śūdra* ascetic Śambūka (Rm 7.66.5ff.). But we must note that Rāma uses the chariot only after it has been revealed that he is the incarnation of Viṣṇu, the supreme god, and the chariot clearly helps to confer divine status on Rāma.[23]

TRAVELLING IN THE WORKS OF THE *BṚHATKATHĀ*-CYCLE

Let us now examine the motif of travelling in the second set of texts that interests us here, namely, the works deriving from, or inspired by, the *Bṛhatkathā*. We shall here study especially the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha*.[24] The oldest of the two works, Budhasvāmin's BKŚS, *The Abridgement of the Great Story*, composed in the tenth century AD in 4539 *śloka*s, is an incomplete work.

[22] See for instance the story of the *ṛṣi*s Asita Devala and Jaigīṣavya (MBh 9.49), who can fly not only in the sky, but also up to the gods' heavenly abodes. See for this story: Danielle Feller, 'The Story of Asita Devala and Jaigīṣavya in *Mahābhārata* 9.49', in *Epic Undertakings, Papers of the 12th World Sanskrit Conference*, vol. 2, eds Robert P. Goldman and Muneo Tokunaga, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009, pp. 79-94.

[23] In my opinion, Puṣpaka's role is threefold: narrative (allowing the heroes' homeward journey to wind up quickly), psychological (provoking envy) and theological (making Rāma the equal of a god).

[24] Kṣemendra's *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* was unfortunately unavailable to me for this examination. I will therefore not deal with it here. However, according to Donald Nelson ('*Bṛhatkathā* Studies: The Problem of an Ur-text', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 37/4, 1978), it derives from the same 'northwestern' (Kāśmīri) version of the BK as the KSS (and may therefore be quite similar to it), unlike the BKŚS which derives from a northern recension (perhaps Nepāl). There are also two other recensions of the Great Tale, Saṃghadāsagaṇin's *Vasudevahiṇḍī*, 'Travels of Vasudeva', in Old Mahārāṣṭrī (around 600 AD) and Konkuvēḷir's incomplete Old Tamil *Perunkatai* 'Great Story' (10th c. AD?). As we see, the BK was of pan-Indian importance and interest.

Had it been complete, it would have numbered approximately 20,000 *śloka*s.[25] The Kāśmīri Śaiva author Somadeva's KSS (11th c. AD), which is complete, contains about 20,000 *śloka*s. Both these works belong to the genre one might call fairy tales, and contain 'boxed' stories reminiscent of Russian dolls: a main story within which another is told, etc., till we revert to the main story. In the KSS, this trait is more accentuated than in the BKŚS. Noting that we sometimes find up to five or six successive levels of stories, Balbir remarks: 'L'effet de brouillage est garanti!'.[26] Even though the KSS and the BKŚS are supposed to be derived from the same model, and indeed roughly contain the same principal story (though many side-stories differ), they are nevertheless arranged quite differently, and their comparison does not allow us to reconstruct an original. Both works provide us with a vivid and colourful picture of everyday Indian life towards the end of the first millennium AD.

The main hero of the story is prince Naravāhanadatta, the son of Udayana, the king of Kauśāmbī. There has been a prediction that Naravāhanadatta will become the emperor of the *vidyādhara*s: supernatural beings who are endowed with magical powers, especially the ability to fly.[27] In the KSS, his consecration takes place at the end of the story, after the prince has gone through many adventures. Most of them are of the amorous kind: in their course, he acquires no less than 26 wives[28] from all walks of life, ranging from human—princesses, courtesans, even untouchables—to supernatural, especially *vidyādharī*s. This allows of course the future emperor to contract many alliances with other kings. Thus, Naravāhanadatta travels—voluntarily or not—through many cities and distant lands, sometimes even to supernatural realms.

By and large, in the texts of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, unlike in the epics, the main reasons for travelling are no longer wars,[29] exiles or pilgrimages[30]—even

[25] The story abruptly stops when Naravāhanadatta is about to win his sixth wife (out of 26). We can thus estimate that the extant text is a little more than one fourth of the total.

[26] *Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, p. xxv. This has often led to a negative evaluation of the KSS's literary merits. See on this ibid., p. xix.

[27] In this respect, see BKŚS 14.30-82, which explains how the *vidyādharī* Vegavatī acquires her magical powers, partly by penance, partly because her father confers the *vidyā*s on her.

[28] In BKŚS 5.17-46, before Naravāhanadatta's birth, his parents, King Udayana and Queen Vāsavadattā, have the same dream: Kubera, the God of Wealth, gives them a precious ruby surrounded by 26 pearls, which turns into a lion cub and enters into Vāsavadattā's womb. This dream is interpreted to mean that a prince—the ruby—will be born to them, who will have 26 wives—the pearls.

[29] The KSS contains quite a few quasi epic war-descriptions: KSS 7.8.78-96; 8.4-5 & 7; KSS 12.7.262-304; KSS 12.36.1-10; KSS 17.5.103-129; KSS 18.1.52-82; KSS 18.2.245-289 and 18.3.1-19; and Naravāhanadatta's final fight against the *vidyādhara*s before becoming their emperor: 14.3.93-118; 15.1.48-60; 15.1.108-152. Of course, the BKŚS being incomplete, it may have contained more on fighting in its final portions.

[30] KSS 8.6.218; KSS 9.6.207; KSS 10.10.5-20; KSS 12.19.1-171; KSS 18.4.20.

though stories about these do occur, more frequently in the KSS than in the BKŚS. The two most prominent reasons for travelling are:

to acquire riches: this mainly concerns merchants, who, as a class, really come into their own in these works, whereas the epics practically ignore them;
for love: this mainly concerns princes.[31]

And there are two main modes of locomotion as far as long-distance journeys are concerned:

through the air, by *vimāna*s or carried by supernatural beings;
by boat across the sea.

Within cities or for shorter trips, affluent characters mainly resort to chariots, often drawn by oxen (BKŚS 8.13), carriages (*pravahana*, BKŚS 16.42) or palanquins (*śibikā*, BKŚS 12.58). In BKŚS 28.38, a princess has 'a chariot yoked to some beautifully decorated oxen'. Kings often ride swift and spirited horses (KSS 3.4.86-102), in particular while hunting (KSS 7.8.1-8; KSS 18.4.5-19). The nobility, especially kings and queens, also use elephants as a means of conveyance (BKŚS 8.1-4; 19.162; KSS 3.4.1-27). In the town of Campā, a character named Dattaka, who receives prince Naravāhanadatta hospitably, asks him by what means he would like to pay a visit to a lady called Gandharvadattā (one of Naravāhanadatta's future wives): by elephant, on horse-back, or by some other conveyance? (BKŚS 17.46). Wishing to keep a low profile, the prince replies that the others may do as they wish, but that he will walk there (*pādacāreṇa gacchāmi*, BKŚS 17.47), whereupon all the angry *nāgaraka*s (townspeople) feel obliged to walk as well, abandoning the comfort of their beautiful vehicles. Evidently, walking was good enough for the lower orders,[32] but not for the wealthy.

The tale of the merchant's son Sānudāsa occupies the whole of Chapter 18 of the BKŚS, and in certain respects mirrors Naravāhanadatta's own adventures.[33] Sānudāsa has lost all his riches due to his imprudent behaviour. His mother advises him to travel from his native town of Campā (in modern Chattisgarh) to Tāmraliptī,[34] on the Bay of Bengal: her brother resides there and he might be able to help Sānudāsa. On the way, Sānudāsa describes other poor people walking along the same road:

[31] According to Balbir (*Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, p. xxxvii), princes mainly travel for conquests: '[Le déplacement] du prince a pour objet la conquête'. But even though wars do occur (see footnote 29), amorous conquests are far more frequent than martial ones.

[32] And also for wandering ascetics (see e.g. BKŚS 22.220ff.).

[33] Like Naravāhanadatta who multiplies feminine conquests, Sānudāsa acquires not less than three wives within a single chapter. As far as I could ascertain, his story does not appear in the KSS.

[34] Modern Tamluk, east of the Ganges delta.

> I carried along that road that leads to the east. I saw people from foreign lands with tattered parasols and shoes. From their shoulders hung cooking pots and old leather knapsacks. I looked like them and when they saw me they took pity on me, saying to one another, 'Oh! Look at this terrible twist of fate. How could the goodly Sānudāsa have ended up like this?'. (BKŚS 18.178-181)[35]

As we see, these poor travellers still find it in their heart to pity Sānudāsa, as if his plight was even worse than theirs. The idea is of course that walking on the country-roads is more difficult for someone who has so far led a life of luxury—as we have seen, the same motif already occurs in the Rm.

In both the BKŚS and the KSS, flying supernatural beings abound to an extraordinary degree, and often freely mix with humans. These supernatural beings often carry humans about and sometimes even fly with them to their heavenly realms:[36] mainly *vidyādhara*s, of course,[37] but also gods,[38] *gandharva*s,[39] *yakṣa*s,[40] *daitya*s, *dānava*s or *asura*s,[41] *rākṣasa*s,[42], *guhyaka*s,[43] *vetāla*s,[44] *yoginī*s,[45] *ṛṣi*s,[46] giant divine birds,[47] *garuḍa*s,[48] flying bulls,[49] flying elephants,[50] etc.[51] In KSS

[35] Tr. Mallinson, *The Emperor of the Sorcerers*.

[36] Once, prince Naravāhanadatta is even brought to Viṣṇu's paradise by sons of gods (KSS 9.4.11-61).

[37] KSS 8.2.65-76; KSS 9.3.405-410; KSS 12.1.4-14; KSS 14.1.14-21; KSS 14.1.78-85; KSS 14.2.33-43; KSS 14.2.56-105; KSS 14.2.106-120; KSS 14.3.36-60; BKŚS 9.107; 12.14; 12.20; 14.30-82; 15.70; 16.1; 20.219; 20.302-303; on *vidyādhara*s, see E.P. Maten, *Budhasvāmin's Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha. A Literary Study of an Ancient Indian Narrative*, Leiden: Brill, 1973, pp. 2-3 and Balbir's remarks in *Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, p. xxxiii.

[38] BKŚS 5.21-22.

[39] KSS 7.2.9-109 (cursed to become a magical elephant); KSS 14.2.1-6; BKŚS 18.579-580.

[40] KSS 7.3.31-88; KSS 12.6.179-193; BKŚS 19.80.

[41] KSS 6.2.96-112; 6.5.44-61; KSS 17.5.8-65; BKŚS 5.183.

[42] KSS 3.5.379-407; KSS 5.2.160-250.

[43] BKŚS 5.300.

[44] KSS 3.4.183; 5.3.195-255; KSS 12.8.2-8; KSS 12.33.42-58; their physical appearance is described in detail in KSS 12.35.10-20.

[45] KSS 10.9.213-255.

[46] KSS 10.11.90-105; KSS 12.6.367-400; BKŚS 5.154.

[47] KSS 5.3.29-43; KSS 17.4.1-62; KSS 17.4.63-90; KSS 17.4.118-161; KSS 17.5.8-65; BKŚS 5.95-96; BKŚS 18.499; BKŚS 18.501.

[48] In KSS 2.4.78ff., the wily Brahmin Lohajaṅgha receives a bird of Garuḍa's lineage from the *rākṣasa* king Vibhīṣaṇa. Flying about on the bird, carrying a mace, discus, lotus and conch, he passes himself off as Viṣṇu!

[49] KSS 10.9.131-212.

[50] KSS 17.4.118-161; KSS 17.5.8-65.

[51] Certain objects, such as magical mustard seeds (KSS 3.4.166-205), shoes (KSS 1.3.45-52), or swords (KSS 5.2.256-285; 7.8.135-156; 9.2.183-184) also enable human beings to fly.

1.8.1-5, they flock together in such large numbers to hear Guṇāḍhya reciting his *Bṛhatkathā* that they form a sort of canopy in the sky as they hover above him! Occasionally, they also assemble to witness battles (KSS 8.4.45-49). Thus, prince Naravāhanadatta is quite often carried through the air, notably by *vidyādhara*s, or taken on celestial chariots (*vimāna*s). Once he is taken on a flying chariot to the wonderful heavenly city belonging to the father of one of his wives. This gives rise to an interesting description of the chariot and of the sky, and of the view from the chariot:

> I saw an aerial chariot descend from the sky, its light eclipsing that of the moon. It was as fast as thought but seemed stationary even when it was moving, and as I went up into the sky in it I felt as if I was going nowhere, like in a ship going across the ocean.
> From the great height of the chariot, I saw the disk of the earth. It looked like a round map, showing everything as far as the mountains at the end of the world. The sky looks empty but there is no part of it that is not full of aerial chariots. Even a lowly god's aerial chariot is one *yojana* long, crowded with hundreds of heavenly damsels, and has pleasure groves and mountains in which to sport. Along the way, I saw countless similarly beautiful and enormous aerial chariots coming and going. (BKŚS 20.132-137)[52]

As we can see, the air traffic was as dense in Budhasvāmin's days as it is nowadays![53] This flying about has several consequences for the story:

it helps create a magical atmosphere;
the action moves forward faster;
it introduces a welcome and rapid change of scenery;
especially in the case of Naravāhanadatta, it increases the hero's status: even though he is not yet the emperor of the *vidyādhara*s, he can already fly like one;

Flying carpets, on the other hand, are not mentioned in these texts, even though the One Thousand and One Nights cite India as their place of origin: 'One of the stories in the One Thousand and One Nights relates how Prince Husain, the eldest son of Sultan of the Indies, travels to Bisnagar (Vijayanagara) in India and buys a magic carpet'!; see Wikipedia, 'Magic carpet'.

52 Tr. Mallinson, *The Emperor of the Sorcerers*.

53 This is already the case in the last Book of the Rm, as we can see from the following passage which describes Rāma's final departure to heaven: 'At that very moment, Brahmā, grandfather of the worlds, surrounded by all the gods and great seers and accompanied by hundreds of millions of celestial flying chariots, came to where Kākutstha, who was setting out for heaven, stood'; Rm 7.100.2-3; tr. Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, 2017.

being occasionally carried against his will, even kidnapped, makes him look less of a cad as he flies from wife to wife![54]

As compared to the epics, the KSS and BKŚS's innovation lies not only in the extraordinary multiplication of flying journeys, but also in the fact that aerial chariots are not only divine: they can be man-made as well. In KSS 4.2.1-15 and in Book 5 of the BKŚS, Vāsavadattā, Udayana's queen, has the following pregnancy longing (*dohada*): 'She wants to fly in a sky-chariot and see the whole world' (BKŚS 5.190). This wish is shared by the wives of Udayana's ministers, who are all pregnant at the same time as Vāsavadattā. Accordingly, artisans (*śilpin*) are called to make such an aerial chariot (*vimāna*). One of them 'quickly made a sky chariot shaped like Garuḍa' (BKŚS 5.279), which is capable of supporting the whole town of Kauśāmbī (BKŚS 5.283). The king and his whole entourage then fly about in the sky on the wonderful chariot. The artisan who drives it is even capable of making it stop during the flight and hover in the air (5.289), in helicopter-like fashion! In BKŚS 5.248, we hear of a similar machine shaped like a cockerel (*yantra-kukkuṭa*).

Within this tale, other tales concerning man-made flying machines (*ākāśa-yantra*s) are also told. From the BKŚS, we gather that the science of making such machines was attributed to the Greeks (Yavanas, 5.199; 5.224; 5.251; 5.261). In the KSS, this science is attributed to skilled carpenters (7.9), to magic (7.1.115-137; 12.12.1-50; 14.3.76-92) or to divine beings, for instance *vidyādhara*s (9.2) or the *asura* architect Maya (8.1.26-39). This is not surprising, for fantastic inventions are naturally likely to be given an exotic or supernatural origin. We also learn that this art was kept highly secret among artisans, who were even ready to give up their life and that of their family to keep it as such (BKŚS 5.268). Also, it is reported that these flying machines can occasionally crash when loaded with too many people (BKŚS 5.277), but this is only reported as hear-say and no incident in the story actually depicts such a disaster. In this respect, the flying machines seem much safer than ships, as we shall presently see![55]

Descriptions of sea-voyages are extremely frequent in the texts belonging to the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle. As earlier in the epics, no sin seems to be attached to

[54] This is especially true for the BKŚS: towards the end of the existing text, Naravāhanadatta sometimes falls in love with his next wife even before he has properly wed the previous one. At times, it looks as if the author had suddenly remembered that his hero had a total of 26 wives to acquire, and that he ought to get on with it! This trait is less striking in the KSS: although Naravāhanadatta sometimes marries several wives at the same time, this is often because they have fallen in love with him at first sight and collectively vowed either to marry him or commit suicide, which of course leaves Naravāhanadatta no choice!

[55] Occasionally, other robot-like devices are made by carpenters, for instance wooden automatons who behave exactly like humans (KSS 7.9.8-60) or flying wooden geese (KSS 7.9.18-60).

crossing the ocean in these works. In the BKŚS and KSS, sea-travels are not without dangers, and there are many shipwrecks caused by storms.[56] Sometimes it even happens that a boat is swallowed whole by a huge fish![57] The ocean is often described as terrifying: *mahābhayam* (...) *mahodadhim* (BKŚS 19.132). Indeed, at the very beginning of the BKŚS, what prompts the as yet childless King Udayana to have a son is the story of the recently widowed wife of a merchant who was drowned during one of his sea-voyages; she manages to save her husband's inheritance from the clutches of her greedy brothers-in-law only because she is pregnant with a son. This makes the king realize the importance of having sons (BKŚS 4.21-46). Since the ocean *sāgara*—is simultaneously a place of all dangers, but also the abode of gems and other wonders, it is often used as a metaphor for life with its ups and downs.[58] This is revealed in the very title of the KSS, where the entwined life-stories make up *saṃsāra*, just as the rivers flowing together fill the ocean. 'Going to the other shore' (*pāraṃ* GAM-) is synonymous with obtaining liberation from the cycle of rebirths.[59] The following passage of the KSS, with its truly terrifying description of a shipwreck, nicely illustrates this metaphor of the life-ocean:

> When they had but a short distance to travel, there arose a black cloud with rumbling thunder, resembling a roaring Rákshasa, with flickering lightning to represent his lolling tongue. And a furious hurricane began to blow like Destiny herself, whirling up light objects and hurling down heavy.[60] And from the sea, lashed by the wind, great waves rose aloft like the mountains equipped with wings, indignant that their asylum had been attacked. And that vessel rose on high one moment, and the next moment plunged below, as if exhibiting how rich men are first elevated and then cast down. And the next moment that ship, shrilly laden with the cries of the merchants, burst and split asunder as if with the weight. (KSS 5.2.41-45)[61]

[56] E.g. KSS 12.34.118-160; 12.34.161-219; KSS 18.1.95-133.

[57] KSS 18.4.103-126.

[58] Balbir, *Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, p. xiii.

[59] This of course occurs not only in the BK, but also earlier in epic literature (Pontillo and Rossi, 'Sea-Images in pre-Kāvya Literature', p. 175), and quite prominently in Buddhist literature (ibid., pp. 193-194).

[60] *Laghu* (light) and *guru* (heavy) also mean 'of no importance' and 'respectable', to indicate that men of no account are raised, and grave men are down-trodden. Kālidāsa uses the same *double-entendre* in his *Meghadūta* 1.20.

[61] Tr. C.H. Tawney, *The Kathā Sarit Sāgara or Ocean of the Streams of Story*, tr. from the original Sanskrit, 2 vols, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968 (1st published: Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1880).

As far as sea-voyages are concerned, we can note that they are undertaken mainly by two classes of men: merchants and princes.[62] But their motivations are radically different: merchants are mostly motivated by their desire for riches[63]—a love which is often described in the BKŚS as congenital to the merchant caste,[64] whereas princes cross the ocean in their quest for love. Thus, in BKŚS chapter 19, we find the story of prince Manohara, who is the son of the king of Kānanadvīpa (19.62), a city on the shore of the western ocean. The prince embarks on a journey across the ocean, not for the love of gold, but for the love of a *yakṣī*-damsel. The *yakṣī* vanishes after letting him know that she comes from a mountain called Śrīkuñja, in the midst of the sea. A sea-faring merchant, who has been to this place, describes it to the prince, who manages to reach it and be reunited with his beloved *yakṣī*. It matters little to him that the mountain Śrīkuñja is made of pure gold with stairways of sapphire! Love is all he cares for.

Merchants travel the ocean in search of gold and precious stones. These can be found in the sea itself, that repository of gems like pearls and coral, as well as in far-off exotic destinations. Suvarṇabhūmi, Kañcanadvīpa, Suvarṇadvīpa,[65] etc.—the lands or islands of gold, usually considered to mean the coast of Burma—are often mentioned as places where traders travel to. After reaching the city of Tāmraliptī on the Bay of Bengal, the merchant Sānudāsa embarks on a ship with other traders looking for riches, claiming to be an expert in gemstones. This is how he describes his voyage which ends in disaster:

> In an oceangoing boat that looked like an aerial chariot, the traders set out for the sea which, infinite, eternal and blue as Shiva's throat, its waves like clouds and its wheeling dolphins and crocodiles like

[62] Occasionally Brahmins too. In KSS 5.2.1-73, a Brahmin named Śaktideva crosses the ocean in search of the town of gold, Kanakapurī, in order to win the love of a princess.

[63] There are exceptions to this rule: thus, in KSS 2.5.178-195, the merchant's wife Devasmitā travels by boat to the island of Kaṭāha in order to save her husband. The story contains a double anomaly, in that the journey is undertaken by a merchant-woman (usually only men travel), and what is more, one who is motivated by love!

[64] For instance, the merchant's daughter Samudradinnā, who has been shipwrecked on a deserted sea-shore, describes how she spent her days alone (BKŚS 18.289): 'With the greediness of one born to a trader (*lubdhatvāc ca vaṇigjāter*), I have collected pearls from the beach and made a large pile of them in the corner of the cave' (tr. Mallinson, *The Emperor of the Sorcerers*). As we see, even in a situation of utter distress, her love of gems does not desert her!

[65] According to Balbir (*Somadeva. Océan des rivières de contes*, p. xxxvii), this term designates the island of Sumatra.

> the spinning constellations of Makara and Nakra, could just as well have been the sky!
> And why not believe it was an aerial chariot when, with the speed of thought, it crossed one hundred *yojana*s in the blink of an eye? Then a huge whale emerged from the water and struck the boat. Its keel was smashed and it splintered into pieces. (BKŚS 18.252-255)[66]

It is interesting to note the comparison between the sea and the sky, and the ship and a *vimāna*.[67] As Boccali remarks, this 'mirroring between the sky and the sea' is already found in the Rm, in a rare description of the ocean.[68] This is how the ocean is described when Rāma, Lakṣmana and the monkey army arrive on its shore in their quest for Sītā:

> The ocean looked just like the sky, the sky just like the ocean. Ocean and sky appeared undistinguishable.
> For the waters merged into the sky, and the sky into the waters. Filled with stars and gems, respectively, they both looked exactly alike.
> Between the sky with its scudding clouds and the ocean covered with waves passing in succession, not the slightest distinction could be found.
> (Rm. 6.4.83-85)[69]

We see that both passages contain an extended comparison between the sea and the sky—they share in particular the similitude between waves and clouds.

[66] Tr. Mallinson, *The Emperor of the Sorcerers*.

[67] We have already seen the reverse comparison above, where Naravāhanadatta likens a *vimāna* to a boat: 'It was as fast as thought but seemed stationary even when it was moving, and as I went up into the sky in it I felt as if I was going nowhere, like in a ship going across the ocean'. See also BKŚS 18.498: 'We prepared ourselves for this crazy aerial journey, which was even more terrifying than crossing the ocean'; and BKŚS 19.100, where the ocean after a storm is said to be as calm as the sky.

[68] Giuliano Boccali, 'The Sea in Ancient India's Literary Landscape: Pravarasena's *Setubandha* II, 1-36', in *Love and Nature in Kāvya Literature. Proceedings*, ed. L. Sudyka, *Cracow Indological Studies*, vol. 7, 2005, p. 117. As Boccali (ibid., p. 116) rightly notes, 'the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not take advantage of the many occasions to describe the sea that the plot could have afforded', 'not even when Rāma and Sītā are travelling to Ayodhyā on the magical chariot Puṣpaka and the hero is describing the underlying landscape to his bride. Such absence is even more significant if one considers that this would have been the perfect occasion to introduce a development of the theme' (ibid., p. 117). He further notes (ibid.) that Kālidāsa's reprise of this scene in his *Raghuvaṃśa* 'is the occasion of the first ample description of the ocean left in *kāvya* and indeed in the whole Indian literature'.

[69] Tr. Goldman, *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, 2009.

Yet there are significant differences between the two texts: in the Rm, the ocean is described from the safety of the shore, whereas in the BKŚS it is described from the deck of a ship; in the BKŚS, this ship is compared to a *vimāna*, whereas in the Rm, both the sky and the ocean are empty of man-made artefacts. *A priori*, one would imagine that in a comparison, one compares the less known—travelling through the sky—with something better known—travelling on the sea. But we see from the above-quoted passage of the BKŚS that the poet also compares the presumably better known—the sea as the *upameya*—with the less known —the sky, serving as the object of comparison (*upamāna*). From this, and also from the general lack of technical terms concerning boats found in the texts belonging to the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, we can surmise that their authors knew equally little about navigation on the sea as about flying through the sky. Historically speaking, we know of course that sea-faring and trade across the oceans was in full bloom towards the end of the first millennium AD.[70] Sea-voyages are therefore realistic, whereas flying machines are clearly imaginary. Yet in the literary descriptions of the works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, both appear to be equally fanciful. Perhaps, in a certain sense, the authors of these texts, who after all hailed from land-locked countries, did know more about aerial flights than about sea-voyages; for the simple reason that, from the Rm onwards and throughout the tradition of *dūta-kāvya*s, starting with Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*, this theme had a well-known literary history which voyages on the ocean did not have.

But the sea is not only a place of terror. After the shipwreck, Sānudāsa is washed ashore and wakes up in an idyllic spot, where he meets a girl, Samudradinnā, who has been shipwrecked just like him, and whom he 'marries'. The couple then spend a honey-moon of sorts in this lovely place on the sea-shore:

> There were rock-pools everywhere, surrounded by sandal, aloe, camphor, clove and *lavalī* groves. The forests were thick with banana, coconut and other fruit trees, and frequented by wild elephants. (BKŚS 18.257-258)
>
> All the distress brought about by the shipwreck was destroyed in an instant (...) Like a couple of amorous swans, we joyfully roamed about the beaches, which were covered in pearls and coral. Sometimes we were like a pair of young elephants, wandering about the lush mountaintops with their waterfalls and mantles of fruit trees. (BKŚS 18.308-311)[71]

[70] See Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986, pp. 152-161.

[71] Tr. Mallinson, *The Emperor of the Sorcerers*.

The beach is a paradise, and the two lovers return to a state of primeval innocence, roaming the wilderness like couples of animals—note the comparison with swans and elephants. Nature provides all the shelter and nourishment they need, including aphrodisiacs and stimulating, invigorating food which come in handy for a honeymoon. Indeed, the whole description could be used as publicity for a seaside resort! As we see, the sea is not always terrifying, in the BKŚS it occasionally also provides for lovely scenery, which is quite unusual in Sanskrit poetry.[72]

There is another passage where the ocean is described in positive terms. The queen of the king of Campā has a pregnancy longing (*dohada*): she wants to play with her husband 'in the water of the ocean, where dolphins, crocodiles, crabs, fish and turtles play' (BKŚS 19.24). Since Campā is not on the shore of the ocean, the king arranges for a river to be dammed, thus creating an artificial lake which he adorns with wooden crocodiles and other creatures! We remember that Queen Vāsavadattā's *dohada* was to travel through the sky. It is interesting to note that both the sea and the sky are objects of desire, equally unattainable, and necessitating extraordinary means to be brought within reach.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though travelling first appears to be a very specific and circumscribed topic within the study of the ancient Indian past, the examination of this theme yields some interesting results as to the general world-view evidenced in the epics and in the works belonging to the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle. The epics depict a rather land-locked universe (with the exception, of course, of Rāma's travel to Laṅkā), in which the heroes can fly only with the gods' help—or indeed, by becoming gods themselves—and in which crossing the sea, if it is undertaken at all, is difficult and requires extraordinary measures. Travels, which are full of dangers and hardship, are mostly performed out of sheer necessity, not for their own sake. Apart from situations of distress, religious pursuits alone incite the heroes to undertake voluntary travels, in order to gain merit or cleanse their sins. In the works belonging to the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, travels are no less dangerous and equally full of hardship. Yet they are undertaken with a certain 'lightness of being' and in a spirit of enterprise which is quite unknown to the darker, more tormented and religiously-minded spirit of the epic age. In the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle, it is mostly desire for women or gold—not necessity or religion, which prompts

[72] The couple is then rescued by another merchant's boat, and, after many tribulations including an extraordinary number of shipwrecks, finally reunited in Campā.

the heroes to undertake difficult voyages. Though still fraught with perils, the sea and the sky are no longer mere obstacles, but become on the contrary promising destinations yielding rich fruit to those daring enough to cross them in their search for either love or riches. The works of the *Bṛhatkathā*-cycle share with the epics a universe in which the mundane and the divine intermingle freely, and which teems with heavenly aerial chariots, and divine and semi-divine beings (the latter more prominent in the KSS and in the BKŚS than in the epics) which can fly through the air, and sometimes carry the human heroes with them. But unlike the epics, in the BKŚS and the KSS, the artisans and their wonderful craft come to the fore: they are credited with marvellous constructions such as sea-faring ships and flying machines. Whether real or imaginary, thanks to thems men no longer depend solely on supernatural powers to move beyond their earthly ken. Imagination is perhaps the first step towards progress and emancipation from the divine.

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