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EMANATIONS, EMISSIONS, AND EGGS.
DIVINE (NON-)BIRTHS IN HINDU MYTHOLOGY – A COMMENTARY ON HUMAN AND NONHUMAN EXISTENCE?

Gerrit Lange

M1[1]. (5) This [the universe] consisted of darkness, nothing was recognizable, distinguished, defined nor conscious – as though everything was sleeping deeply. (6) Then, the Lord who created himself (*svayambhū*) made the universe manifest (*vi-añjay*), without becoming manifest himself [...]. (8) He contemplated how to bring forth (*sṛj*) the manifold beings out of his own body; thus, he poured out (*sṛj*) water, in which he then spilled (*ava-sṛj*) his semen. (9) This became a golden egg, splendid like a thousand suns – in this [egg] he was born himself, Brahmā, the grandfather of all worlds[2].

Introducing into Life: svayambhū and pratiṣṭha

M1, the narration introducing this article, is also introductory within its original context, being the prelude of a famous legal and religious Sanskrit text, the *Manusmṛti*. Social order is thus, by a powerful narrative act, legitimized and drawn as something invariable[3]. Brahmā is *svayambhū*, "self-created", and cre-

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[1] Mythical narrations are numbered from M1 to M16.

[2] Own transl. from *Manusmṛti* 1.5-9: *āsīd idaṃ tamobhūtam aprajñātam alakṣaṇam | apratarkyam avijñeyaṃ prasuptam iva sarvataḥ || 5 || tataḥ svayambhūr bhagavān avyakto vyañjayann idam [...] || 6 || [...] so 'bhidhyāya śarīrāt svāt sisṛkṣur vividhāḥ prajāḥ | apa eva sasarjādau tāsu vīryam avāsṛjat || 8 || tad aṇḍam abhavad dhaimaṃ sahasrāṃśusamaprabham | tasmiñ jajñe svayaṃ brahmā sarvaloka-pitāmahaḥ || 9 ||.*

In this article, I draw on Monier-William's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* in its 2008 online revision, https://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/monier/, for possible meanings of single words (last access 7 August 2019).

[3] Without much doubt, the authors were male Brahmins – but the same narrative act of setting cosmic and societal order in one and thereby naturalizing a *status quo* results in their intentions' complete inaccessibility. In general, the classical religious texts of Brahmanism or early Hinduism do not present themselves as authored and written within a historical situation. For a theory of myth as "ideology in narrative form" (Lincoln 1999, xii), applied to creation myths like M1 (cf. Lincoln 1986, 141-148), from the Manusmṛti, from the Purāṇa texts who mainly are collections of Hindu myths (and of rituals and lists of sacred spaces, whose religious significance is derived from these myths), and from religious traditions outside India, cf. Lincoln 1986, 141-148.

ates the world and its inhabitants both by metaphysical means of contemplation (*abhi-dhyāna*) and by the physical means of his own body (*śarīra*), which exudes water and semen; the water is then impregnated by the semen and brings forth an egg, containing the universe. This universe could be interpreted to be "twice-born" (*dvi-ja*), like every being hatching from an egg, but also like every male human being belonging to a higher caste of those who are "born" a second time, through initiation (*upanayana*)[4]. *Jati* itself, the word usually translated with "caste", means "birth".

Brahmā is not the only one who is "born by himself", *svayambhū*. Every representation or embodiment of a deity which has not been "installed", "set up" and "erected" (*pratiṣṭha*) falls into this category, whether it is a stone worshipped as *liṅga*, the symbol of god Śiva, the *tulsī* basil worshipped as goddess Lakṣmī or the ammonite fossils worshipped as the *śalagrāma* of god Viṣṇu. Perhaps the most prominent self-manifested body of a deity is the river Ganges, who *is* the goddess Gaṅgā, at least her embodiment (*avatāra*) on earth, having "come down" (also *avatāra*) from heaven. Her status as *svayambhū* has current consequences outside the realm of religion. On 20.03.2017, the rivers and goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā gained personhood in a legal sense, albeit only for some months, following the example of the Whanangui river in New Zealand. This directive, the *Mohd. Salim v. State of Uttarakhand and Others order* applied by the Supreme Court of India, was justified by use of the religious category *svayambhū*, translated as "self-revealed". In § 13, the order refers to another order from the 1999 case of the *Ram Jhankijee Deities and others v. State of Bihar and others*, arguing theologically[5] that "a svayambhu or self-revealed image is a product of nature and it is Anadi or without any beginning and the worshippers simply discover its existence and such images do not require consecration or Pratistha but a manmade image requires consecration". Thus, appearing within this world and worshipped in rituals, deities like Gaṅgā are not born but make themselves present, as Śiva does in silver and gold, rivers, lakes and mountains (M14). Within their own worlds and in mythical narrations, heterosexual intercourse, pregnancies and births of deities rarely take place. Why indeed "should human paradigms apply to divine physiology?"[6].

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[4] Cf. Michaels 2004, 71f.

[5] Calling a Hindu argumentation "theological" would be deeply unsound, were it not for the actual reference to Christian jurisdiction in medieval England, cited in § 12, about churches being "always under age". Arguably theological is the aim of the court to stay "true to the Shastras" and the premise of God being "omnipotent and omniscient", both quoted in § 13 from the 1999 case. For PDF files of the orders and a detailed analysis of the juristic processes, cf. https://lawandotherthings.com/2017/04/the-personhood-of-nature/.

[6] Pasche Guignard, Pedrucci 2018, 426.

Classical Sanskrit treatises on human physiology only agree on some core paradigms[7]: Female seed (*strī-bīja, ārtava,* or *rakta*), together with male seed (*retas* or *bīja*), forms the "germ" (also *bīja*) of an embryo (*garbha*), which evolves out of these mixed substances within the womb (also *garbha*)[8]. These ideas of how women normally get pregnant and give birth are thoroughly challenged by Hindu deities do not usually give birth to each other in this "normal" way – rather than having a goddess and a god coming together, having sex, her getting pregnant and later giving birth, there are plenty of stories of goddesses laying eggs and of male gods sweating or weeping offspring, of their powerful semen evolving by itself into some powerful being or of a female washing herself, rubbing her skin and forming a son out of her body's dirt. As this article will show, making use of only some of the innumerable classical Sanskrit accounts of how Hindu deities have come into existence, their coming into existence is evidence of the deities' non-human being. Although their nature is non-human, they are not at all asexual[9], at least not in the mythical narrations that I present – without only choosing the juicy ones, as Western indologists are sometimes (and often rightfully[10]) accused of[11] by Hindu Nationalists who keep their gods "pure" and "spiritual" by desexualizing them. As in other controversial issues, myths allow for both interpretations.

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[7] Cf. Das 2003. Study of four classical medical Sanskrit texts, 3rd - 6th c. CE.

[8] "*bīja-* in medical texts seems to refer to the 'germ' created due to intercourse (i.e., the combined state of the substances which form an embryo) just prior to its formation, but after combination" (Das 2003, 21). The word for "womb" and "embryo", *garbha,* which can also denote the "innermost sanctuary of a temple", derives from the verb √*grabh,* "to grab", "to conceive".

[9] *Liṅga* and *yoni,* the symbols of Śiva and Pārvatī in their union, can indeed be translated as "penis" and "vulva", and have often been depicted as such. I don't want to reduce their multiple meanings to this, specific one though it fits to religious worldviews of the times when spirituality and sex did not seem incompatible. A famous passage from an *Upaniṣad* text, which identifies many different aspects of the physical world with the primordial sacrifice bringing forth creation, also brings sex into the picture, with "the woman being the alter and her lap (*upastha*) the inflammable matter. Within her hair is the smoke, her vulva (*yoni*) is the flame and that what is done within her (*yat antaḥ-karoti te*) is the charcoal. The pleasure of sensuality (*abhinanda*) is the flying sparks. In the fore consisting of all this the gods offer their seed. From this offering, man is brought forth (*sam-√bhū*)". Own transl. from *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* 6.2.13: *yoṣā vā agnir gautama | tasyā upastha eva samit | lomāni dhūmaḥ | yonir arciḥ | yad antaḥ karoti te 'ṅgārāḥ | abhinandā visphuliṅgāḥ | tasminn etasminn agnau devā reto juhvati | tasyā āhutyai puruṣaḥ saṃbhavati | sa jīvati yāvaj jīvati | atha yadā mriyate || 13 ||.*

[10] Rigid philology has a hard time dealing with assemblages of "bits and peaces of information which do not create the impression of having been searched for and selected systematically", especially when spiced with Freudian explanations "beyond proving or disproving" (Das 2003, 9).

[11] Such re-interpretive and apologetic acts by an intellectual Hindu Right can be studied in the Publication *Invading the Sacred. An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America* (New Delhi: Infinity Foundation, 2007). A PDF can be found online. It provides interesting criticism of indological works by Wendy Doniger, Sarah Caldwell, Jeffrey Kripal and Paul Courtright. Still, the Hindu-supremacist political agenda behind this publication and more visible in other works and actions related to the *Infinity Foundation* prevents me from including it in my bibliography.

Taking myth as a narrative genre both transcending the known world and re-integrating it within a larger cosmology, I suppose that stories about non-human and otherworldly beings tell a lot about human beings in this world – and about their birth. Natural phenomena are explained[12], traumatic and unspeakable experiences are symbolized[13] and social instutitions legitimized[14]. I conceive of myths as those stories which (indirectly) contain their narrators, performers, and audiences: They provide a background story of the world they are situated in or of the rituals they perform, or both. Myths are models of and models for life and ritual practice. Myths are also stories about virtual, alternative realities, sculpting possibilities of life which are elsewise prohibited by bodily disability (e.g., male birth) or by social norms:

> "The 'construction' of a pantheon is deeply rooted in social reality. This in itself may not be so surprising, but this can give us some insights into women's lives, especially for cultures of the past that we cannot access through research methods such as fieldwork or interviews"[15].

The pantheons this article is about are from the epic and purāṇic Sanskrit literature of ancient India as well as from current Hindu temple worship and village folklore. The deities of this mythology are still significant – to some extant, "the subordination of women on the social plane [is even] facilitated by the idealization of women as icons of virtue and the deification of the female"[16]. The Old Indian concepts of divinity have some (at least imagined) continuity[17], as the example of the river goddess Gaṅgā's legal personhood demonstrates. Self-creation – *autopoiesis* in old Greek and in modern ecology – is associated with features of "nature" (from Latin *natura*, the future participle of *nasci*, "to be born" or "to become"), such as stones, plants and rivers. The word most usually used in modern Hindi to translate "nature" is *prakṛti*: the abstraction and principle of all which is (in Sanskrit) *prakṛta*, "brought forth", "effected", "set in motion" by something or "consisting" of some matter. *Pra-kṛta* is all that is not

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[12] Cf., for instance, Müller 1889, 166ff.

[13] According to Freud, until modern times "the gods retain their threefold task: they must exorcize the terrors of nature, they must reconcile men to the cruelty of Fate, particularly as it is shown in death, and they must compensate them for the sufferings and privations which a civilized life in common has imposed on them" (Freud 1927, 17f.).

[14] Cf. Lincoln 1999.

[15] Pasche Guignard, Pedrucci 2018, 425. For male birth, cf. here the Chapter by Pedrucci.

[16] Bose 2010, 58.

[17] From Vedic to current times, deities are often personified abstractions and "powers", see Michaels 2004, 206.

saṃs-kṛta, "composed", "formed skillfully", "cooked", "dressed" or elsewise "elaborated" – in another word, cultivated. As cultivated as Sanskrit, the elaborated language, are the higher-caste men who have undergone "education" or "life-cycle rituals" (both *saṃskāra*). *Prakṛti*, on the other hand, the processual part of the world, is comparable to Latin *natura* and Greek *physis*, the later deriving from √*phyo*, "to grow, to appear" – a verb cognate to English *be* and to Sanskrit √*bhū*.

As in *svayam-bhū*, the verb √*bhū* means both "to become" and "to be". Accordingly, I use the birth stories of goddesses and gods to reflect on their existence, on the state (*bhava*, from √*bhū*) of being divine. The concepts of *physis, natura, prakṛti* and *bhava* all combine meanings of "growing" and "becoming" with the meaning "consisting of", thus giving their respective mode of coming into existence a strong material and bodily – a "physical" – connotation. The physical (bodily, material, "natural") world is thus, vice versa, construed as all which "grows" or "is born" – and, therefore, has to perish[18]. Accordingly, the natural world is often called an "illusion" (*māyā*), regarded as a field for gods like Viṣṇu to incarnate into and do their deeds merely as a "play" (*līlā*).

Rather than indulging myself into these (meta)physical depths, in this article I aim to explore how myths characterize their protagonists by the way they are born – either completely differently from or in an alteration of the human way to give birth.

I start with a section on the terms used to describe the coming into existence of deites, drawing these terms first from stories about how the world, the first gods, and birth itself came into being (M1-3b). The next section examines these narrations, especially from the *Mahābhārata* epic[19], for failed births of gods, humans and other beings. These accidents come close to, but do not fully resemble the dangers of human procreation (M4-7). A fourth section then puts together explanations for the curious "fact" that goddesses do not get pregnant. Some myths themselves declare them to be either barren or sexually too energetic (M8); elsewhere, they spring forth freely from each other and even from male gods (M9-11). The fifth section, dealing with concepts of deities as mere forms of an all-encompassing "female energy" (*śakti*), brings the motive of emanation, of divine beings flowing out of each other, to an extreme (M12-13). Section six shows that shows that divine emiṣsions of bodily fluids, which bring forth new divine life (M14-15), are closely associated with the emotions that had stimulated the emissions (also cf. M9-11). In a seventh chapter, the complicated births of

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[18] Cf. Jacobsen 1999.
[19] Cf. here the Chapter of Rossi.

Kṛṣṇa and his brother, Balarāma, illustrate that the births of gods remain complicated, even when they take a descendence (*avatāra*) into human form (M16). In conclusion, I will consider whether and how human birth is interpreted through divine birth, and therefore, how the concepts of being divine influence and shape the concepts of being human.

How are deities born?

This question is part of a bigger question: What are deities? In the words of Pasche Guignard and Pedrucci, "any religious system that admits and tolerates a divine being – to be understood as the existence of a superhuman or transhuman reality – declined in the plural form is a polytheism"[20]. Hindu religions are often ambiguous about this plural form, rather conceptualizing a "multiplicity in unity, [due to which] images of swallowing and incorporating are generally preferred to illustrate the omnipotence of the god: Viṣṇu or Brahmā have the world inside themselves, let it out and swallow it back; the worlds are in them and they themselves are the world"[21]. Still, Hindu belief and worship rather tends to polytheism than to an "omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and transcendent god"[22]: The mythological texts teem with goddesses and gods and with detailed descriptions of how they came into existence, alongside other inhabitants and features of the worlds. The narratives I am going to explore use words based on several verbal roots (√) for "becoming" and for "bringing forth":

- √*bhū* – to become, to be (supplemented by several prefixes, which add a more or less spatial nuance to its meaning: *prādur*-√*bhū* – to appear, *sam*-√*bhū* – to come into being, to conglomerate; *ud*-√*bhū* – to come up, to rise, *sam*-*ud*-√*bhū* – to come forth; etc.),
- √*sṛj* – to emit, to pour forth, to shed, to cause to flow (with the abstract nominalized forms *sarga, sṛṣṭi* – emission, creation),
- √*sṛ* – to begin to flow, (therefrom *niḥ*-√*sṛ*, to come forth, and *vi-niḥ*-√*sṛ*, to spring from, issue out),
- √*jan* – to be born, to become, to grow (with the causative √*janay* – to give birth, to lay eggs),
- *vi*-√*añj* – to become manifest (with the causative *vi*-√*añjay* – to make manifest; and with the abstract nominalized form *vyakti* – person, appearance),

[20] Pasche Guignard, Pedrucci 2018, 406, n. 1.
[21] Michaels 2004, 207.
[22] Pasche Guignard, Pedrucci 2018, 406, n. 1.

- sam-ud-√sthā – to rise, to come forth, to become visible, to arise for action, to awaken
- √klp – to become, to be arranged (with the causative √kalpay – to arrange, to craft, to bring forth, to imagine),
- niś-√kram – to come forth, to go out, to depart,
- √kṛ – to do, to make, to cause, to effect,
- vi-√dā – to give out, to distribute, (with ablative) to deliver from.

The creative act of Brahmā as narrated in the *Manusmṛti*, which has introduced my introduction, is not only denoted by the verb √bhū, "to be/become" (contained in *svayambhū*), but also by vi-√añjay and by three different usages of √sṛj. One of the oldest creation myths, told in hymn 10.90 of the *Ṛgveda* (and thus dating back to the second millennium BCE), interchangeably uses √jan and the passive voice of √kṛ. The first being, Puruṣa, already resembles the self-created Brahmā in that he is "everything that has been and that will be [...], from whom the cosmic entity Virāj is born (√jan) and who [is born] from Virāj"[23]. The creation of the world out of his body, sacrificed by the *deva*-gods, combines the mythical functions to explain natural phenomena and to legitimize social stratification:

M2. (12) The Brahmin was made (*kṛta*) from his mouth, the Royal [caste] from both his arms, his thighs became (√jan) the Vaiśya and his feet the Śūdra. (13) The moon was born (√jan) from his mind, the sun was born (√jan) from his eye, the gods Indra and Agni (fire) from his mouth and Vayu (the wind) was born (√jan) from his breath. [...] (16) With [his] sacrifice, the *deva*-gods sacrificed [to] the sacrifice[24].

In this context, *manas*, the mind or will, is itself a kind of organ[25]. In other instances, birth from *manas* might indeed mean immaterial or meta-physical parturition. In a later account from the *Mahābhārata*, dated back into the last centu-

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[23] Own transl. From *Ṛgveda* 10.90.2 and 5: *Sarvaṃ yad bhūtaṃ yac ca bhavyam* [...] *tasmād virād ajāyata virājo adhi pūruṣa |*.

[24] *Brāhmaṇo 'sya mukham āsīd bāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ | ūrū tad asya yād vaiśyaḥ padbhyāṃ śūdro ajāyata || 12 || candramā manasao jātaś cakṣoḥ sūryo ajāyata | mukhād indraś cāgniś ca prāṇād vāyur ajāyata || 13 || nābhyā āsīd antarikṣaṃ śīrṣṇo dyauḥ sam avartata | padbhyāṃ bhūmir diśaḥ śrotāt tathā lokāṃ akalpayan || 14 || [...] jajñena jajñam ayajanta devās* [...] *|| 16 || (Ṛgveda* 10.90.12-16, own transl).

[25] Monier-Williams specifies that in the different philosophical systems, *manas* is rather embodied then immaterial, namely "the internal organ or *antaḥ-karaṇa* of perception and cognition, the faculty or instrument through which thoughts enter or by which objects of sense affect the soul; in this sense *manas* is always regarded as distinct from *ātman* and *puruṣ*, "spirit or soul" and belonging only to the body, like which it is – except in the *nyāya* [school of epistemology] – considered perishable".

ries B.C.E. or the first centuries C.E., Brahmā has six sons "delivered" (*viditā*) from his *manas*[26]. Given that Brahmā does not have to be sacrificed or to die in another manner, his *manas* here seems to be the capacity to think or to want rather than an organ. Nevertheless, he is also capable to have children "born" or "growing" (√*jan*) or "issueing forth" (*niḥ*-√*sr*) out of his physical organs:

> M3. "The venerable seer Dakṣa was born from the right thumb of Brahmā [...]. From the left thumb sprang the wife of the great-spirited Dakṣa, and on her the sage begot fifty maidens[27] [...]. The blessed lord Bhṛgu issued forth by breaking open Brahmā's heart. Bhṛgu begot the wise Śukra, son of a sage, who is a planet; at the behest of the self-created god, he circles the world presiding over rain and drought, fear and relief from fear, for the conduct of life in the three worlds"[28].

The male ones among these first primordial beings are *Ṛṣi*s (ascetics and sages), rather than gods or demons, and mostly depicted as humans. Still, their "begetting" sons to women is, in subsequent episodes, mostly described as granting wishes (cf. M4) and not as physical, sexual conception.

Among the fifty daughters of Dakṣa – who are thus granddaughters of Brahmā, or rather, of his thumbs – are the mothers of deities, such as the Ādityas, Nāgas (cobras, serpents in general or serpent deities) and the eagle Garuḍa. Others become mothers of demons or lower/adversary gods like the Daityas and Dānavas, of the heavenly singers (*gandharva*), of the nymphs (*apsaras*), of the nectar of immortality, of the cows and of the brahmins (*Mahābhārata* 1.59.10-50). The following chapter also names the mothers of the trees, vultures, eagles, horses, cows, elephants, lions and tigers, monkeys, bears,

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[26] "Of Brahma six sons are known, great seers who were born from his will, Marīci, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, and Kratu. Marici's son was Kaśyapa, and Kaśyapa begot [all] these creatures". (Transl. van Buitenen 1973, p. 148, from *Mahābhārata* 1.59.10f.: *brahmaṇo mānasāḥ putrā viditāḥ ṣaṇ maharṣayaḥ | marīcir atryaṅgirasau pulastyaḥ pulahaḥ kratuḥ ‖ 10 ‖ marīceḥ kaśyapaḥ putraḥ kaśyapāt tu imāḥ prajāḥ ... ‖ 13 ‖*).

[27] This kind of autogeny from bodily parts of a primordial being is not unique to India. In Snorri's *Gylfaginning* (13th c. CE) 4-7, when the ice giant Ymir was asleep, "he sweated and beneath his left armpit a man and a woman grew, and one of his legs begat a son with the other leg [...]. Not only the myth recorded by Snorri but also the etymology reveal Ymir as a hermaphrodite being because the name is etymologically related to Sanskrit Yama, Avedic [sic!] Yima (likewise mythical ancestors), Lat. *geminus*, Middle Irisch *gemuin* from the Indo-Germanic root **iemo-* 'twin, hermaphrodite'" (Simek 1993, 377).

[28] Transl. van Buitenen 1973, 148f, from *Mahābhārata* 1.60.9f. and 40f.: *dakṣas tv ajāyatāṅguṣṭhād dakṣiṇād ... | brahmaṇaḥ ... ‖ 9 ‖ vāmād ajāyatāṅguṣṭhād bhāryā tasya mahātmanaḥ | tasyāṃ pañcāśataṃ kanyāḥ sa evājanayan muniḥ ‖ 10 ‖ ... brahmaṇo hṛdayaṃ bhittvā niḥsṛto bhagavān bhṛguḥ | bhṛgoḥ putraḥ kavir vidvāñ śukraḥ kavisuto grahaḥ ‖ 40 ‖ trailokyaprāṇayātrārthe varṣāvarṣe bhayābhaye | svayambhuvā niyuktaḥ san bhuvanaṃ paridhāvati ‖ 41‖*.

deer, parrots, geese and ducks, kites, owls, and, again, of the snakes (ibid., 55-67). All these women are impregnated by male Ṛṣis such as Kaśyapa, but – seemingly – not in a sexual act[29].

In a preceding narration within the *Mahābhārata*, the birth of the Nāgas gives a good example of this asexual (nevertheless, heterosexual) siring. To explore the concrete implications of myth for social norms and concepts of conception, pregnancy and birth, the next section will focus on this and other stories of birth.

Impatient mothers and the dangers of pregnancy

Among Dakṣa's fifty daughters are the sisters Kadrū and Vinatā, who were wifes of Kaśyapa, one of the six sages born from Brahmā's mind.

M4. "Kaśyapa [...] once when he was pleased and happily disposed granted a boon to each of his lawful wifes [...]. Kadrū chose a thousand snakes for her sons, all to be equal in splendor, and Vinatā chose two sons who were to excel them in brilliance, beauty, and might. Her husband granted her the boon"[30].

"After a long time, Kadrū gave birth (√*janay*) to ten hundred eggs, O lord among brahmins, and Vinatā laid two eggs. Their happy servants placed the eggs of both of them in pots that were steaming[31], and kept them there for five hundred years. After five centuries Kadrū's sons were hatched[32], but no twins were seen to

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[29] This stands in stark contrast to older accounts of the creation of the species, which are not only explicitly sexual, but even describe incestuous and non-consensual conception. The *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* has it that (M3b) the first man, after splitting into a male and a female part, "united with her, and from this mankind was born [*ajāyanta*]. She reflected, 'How can he unite with me after engendering [√*janay*] me from himself? For shame! I will conceal myself.' She became [√*bhū*] a cow; he became a bull and united with her, and from this all the cattle were born [*ajāyanta*]. She became [√*bhū*] a mare; he became a stallion. She became a female ass; he became a male ass and united with her [*sam*-√*bhū*], and from this all whole-hooved animals were born [*ajāyanta*]. She became became [√*bhū*] a she-goat; he became a billy-goat; she became a ewe, he became a ram and united with her [*sam*-√*bhū*], and from this goats and sheep were born [*ajāyanta*]. Thus he created [*asṛjata*] all the pairs, even down to the ants" (transl. Doniger 1975, 34, from *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* I.4.3-4: *tāṃ samabhavat | tato manuṣyā ajāyanta ||3 || so heyam īkṣāṃ cakre – kathaṃ nu mātmana eva janayitvā sambhavati | hanta tiro 'sānīti |sā gaur abhavad vṛṣabha itaraḥ | tāṃ sam evābhavat | tato gāvo 'jāyanta | vaḍavetarābhavad aśvavṛṣa itaraḥ | gardabhītarā gardabha itaraḥ | tāṃ sam evābhavat | tata ekaśapham ajāyata | ajetarābhavad basta itaraḥ | avir itarā meṣa itaraḥ | tāṃ sam evābhavat | tato 'jāvayo 'jāyanta | evam eva yad idaṃ kiñca mithunam ā pipīlikābhyas tat sarvam asṛjata ||4 ||*).

[30] Transl. Van Buitenen 1973, 71, from *Mahābhārata* 1.14.6-8.: *prādāt tābhyāṃ varaṃ prītaḥ ... | kaśyapo dharmapatnībhyāṃ mudā paramayā yutaḥ || 6 || ... vavre kadrūḥ sutān nāgān sahasraṃ tulyatejasaḥ | dvau putrau vinatā vavre kadrūputrādhikau bale | ojasā tejasā caiva vikrameṇādhikau sutau || 8 || tasyai bhartā varaṃ prādād ... |.*

[31] *upasveda,* "moist, sweaty, vaporous", from *upa*-√*svid*, "to cause to sweat".

[32] *vi-niḥ*-√*sṛ,* "to issue out".

hatch[33] from Vinatā's two eggs. Thereupon the divine Vinatā, impatient for a son, embarrassed and aggrieved, broke open one of the eggs and beheld her son: the upper half of his body was full grown[34], the other half stunted [*aprakāśa:* rather "formless, without appearance"]. The tale has it that the son was enraged and cursed her: 'since you, mother, a prey to your greed, have now stunted the growth of my body [left it *asamagra,* "uncompleted"], therefore for five hundred years you shall be the slave of the woman whom you sought to rival. And your other son, mother, will set you free from your slavery – unless you deform him too, like me, mother, by breaking his egg, or deform his future body miserably! You must patiently wait for the time of his birth […]'. Having thus cursed Vinatā, her son flew up into the sky and can now be seen, o brahmin, as Aruṇa, the red dawn at daybreak"[35].

In the moral instruction by her (kind of) dying son, Vinatā – and, potentially, every woman hearing this story – is instructed not to act as an impatient, "embarressed" (*vrīditā*) and "aggrieved" (*tapasvinī*) woman, seized by greed (*lobha-parītā*). In order not to cause her son to be "deformed" (*adeham,* "bodiless", and *vyaṅgam* "limbless" or "crippled"), a pregnant woman is expected to be patient (*dhīrā,* "steady, firm, resolute, composed, calm, grave")[36].

(M5.) The *Mahābhārata* features another legendary, albeit human mother who fails to fulfill these values. Gāndharī is the mother of the one hundred Kaurava brothers, who are the archenemies of their cousins, the five heroic Pāṇḍava brothers, and thus the main antagonists of the epic as a whole. After two years of pregnancy, Gāndharī is "stultified by pain" (*duḥkha-mūrcchitā*)[37] and violently punches her own belly. Thus, "a clump of flesh, compact like an

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[33] *vi-√dr̥ś,* "to become apparent".

[34] *sampanna,* "turned out well, prospering, completed, born".

[35] Transl. Van Buitenen 1973, 71, from *Mahābhārata* 1.14.12-20.: *kālena mahatā kadrūr aṇḍānāṃ daśatīr daśa | janayām āsa viprendra dve aṇḍe vinatā tadā* || 12 || *tayor aṇḍāni nidadhuḥ prahr̥ṣṭāḥ paricārikāḥ | sopasvedeṣu bhāṇḍeṣu pañca varṣaśatāni ca* || 13 || *tataḥ pañcaśate kāle kadrūputrā viniḥsr̥tāḥ | aṇḍābhyāṃ vinatāyās tu mithunaṃ na vyadr̥śyata* || 14 || *tataḥ putrārthiṇī devī vrīditā sā tapasvinī | aṇḍaṃ bibheda vinatā tatra putram adr̥kṣata* || 15 || *pūrvārdhakāyasaṃpannam itareṇāprakāśatā | sa putro roṣasaṃpannaḥ śaśāpainām iti śrutiḥ* || 16 || *yo 'ham evaṃ kr̥to mātas tvayā lobhaparītayā | śarīreṇāsamagro 'dya tasmād dāsī bhaviṣyasi* || 17 || *pañca varṣaśatāny asyā yayā vispardhase saha | eṣa ca tvāṃ suto mātar dāsyatvān mokṣayiṣyati* || 18 || *yady enam api mātas tvaṃ mām ivāṇḍavibhedanāt | na kariṣyasy adehaṃ vā vyaṅgaṃ vāpi tapasvinam* || 19 || *pratipālayitavyas te janmakālo 'sya dhīrayā | … *|| 20 ||.

[36] Curiously, the motive of a son cursing his mother is later reversed by Vinatās sister, Kadru, who curses her own 1000 Nāga sons, after they have refused to comply in her scheme to trick her sister into slavery. This story (*Mahābhārata* 1.18.5-10) further raises some interesting (and, in the narrative, unanswered) questions about conflicting moral obligations: Should the sons rather follow their mother's orders or rather restrain from being engaged in deceit?

[37] Mahābharata 1.107.11-18.

iron globe"[38] is born ($\sqrt{jan}$), which, after being sprinkled with cool water, divides into 101 embryos, each as small as the tip of a thumb. These are then placed into a hundred pots filled with ghee. Nowadays, such myths and legends get a new life, due to reinterpretations as proof for the scientific advances and glory of ancient India. On 04.01.2019, just a few days before this paper was presented in Erfurt, G. Nageshvar Rao, Vice Chancelor of Andhra University, uttered such a claim on the Indian Science Congress in Jalandhar:

> "The Mahabharata says, 100 eggs were fertilised and put into 100 earthen pots. Are they not test tube babies? Stem cell research in this country was present thousands of years ago"[39].

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the second one of the two great epics composed in the first centuries BCE and CE, he could have found numbers even more impressive and a slightly more detailed instruction for how to raise babies in tubes:

> M6. [King Sagara had two wifes, Keśinī and Sumati. After long years of meditation, the sage] Bhṛgu granted Sagara a wish: (8) 'One of [your wifes] shall give birth ($\sqrt{janay}$) to a son who will be your progenitor, and the other one to 60.000 sons.' ... (14) Sumati, the sister of the eagle Garuḍa, chose (*grabh*) the 60.000 sons, who would gain great power and fame.
> ... (16) Time passed by. Keśinī, the older sister, gave birth (*vi-*$\sqrt{jan}$) to a son of Sagara, called Asamanja. (17) Sumati ... gave birth (*vi-*$\sqrt{jan}$) to a gourd she had conceived (*garbha-tumba*), and from the splitting of the gourd (*tumbabheda*) came forth (*vi-niḥ-*$\sqrt{sṛ}$) 60.000 sons. (18) Nurses fostered them in pots filled with ghee, and they all reached puberty after a long time[40].

Like the servants of Kadru and Vinatā in the story related above, these nurses illustrate how "mythological narratives in polytheistic systems often (though not always) dissociate the function of mother as 'birth-giver' from that of mother as 'nurturer'"[41]. According to her status as a queen, she shares the

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[38] Own transl. from *Mahābhārata* 1.107.12: *māṃsapeśī lohāṣṭhīleva saṃhatā.*

[39] http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/67390766.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (last access 7 August 2019).

[40] Own transl. from *Ramāyana* 1.37.6-18: *sagarāya varaṃ prādād bhṛguḥ ... ‖ 6 ‖ ... ekā janayitā tāta putraṃ vaṃśakaraṃ tava | ṣaṣṭiṃ putrasahasrāṇi aparā janayiṣyati ‖ 8 ‖ ... ṣaṣṭiṃ putrasahasrāṇi suparṇabhaginī tadā | mahotsāhān kīrtimato jagrāha sumatiḥ sutān ‖ 14 ‖ ... atha kāle gate tasmiñ jyeṣṭhā putraṃ vyajāyata | asamañja iti khyātaṃ keśinī sagarātmajam ‖ 16 ‖ sumatis tu ... garbhatumbaṃ vyajāyata | ṣaṣṭiḥ putrasahasrāṇi tumbabhedād viniḥsṛtāḥ ‖ 17 ‖ ghṛtapūrṇeṣu kumbheṣu dhātryas tān samavardhayan | kālena mahatā sarve yauvanaṃ pratipedire ‖ 18 ‖.*

[41] Pasche Guignard, Pedrucci 2018, 425.

tasks of mothering with midwifes and wetnurses – even the pregnancy itself, which continues within the pots filled with ghee, is delegated to her servants, who then completely take over in "rearing/fostering/strengthening" (*sam-√vardhay*) the infants, literally letting them "grow up" (*sam-√vṛdh*).

Although the 60.000 sons turn out to be rascals, Sumati is not described as an impatient mother such as Vinatā or Gandharī but, as far as we can read, does everything right. Sumati's "fetus-gourd" or "conceived pumpkin" (*garbha-tumba*) is split (*√bhid*) according to the wish granted by the sage, and nothing goes wrong. Another episode about a "fetus being split" (*bidhyamāna garbha*), however, illustrates how quickly the slightest transgression or negligence can destroy the fragile dignity a pregnant woman is granted as the fulfillment of her existence.[42] Shortly after he has heard the story of Sumati, prince Rāma hears about Diti, the mother of the Daitya demons, who is pregnant for a thousand years with an upcoming "killer of Indra" (*śakrahantṛ*), the king of the *deva*-gods. Indra keeps staying at her side all the time like a servant, hypocritically caring for her needs, "providing her with fire, *kuśa* grass, wood, water, fruits, roots, and the like, whatever she wanted"[43]. Only within the last years of her pregnancy he seizes an opportunity to prevent the birth of his nemesis while she sleeps.

> M7. (16) Seeing her in an impure (unprotected) state, with her hair[44] placed where the feet [ought to be] and the feet at the place of the head, he laughed and rejoiced. (17) This supreme destroyer of strongholds entered the vulnerable spot (*vivara*, also "fissure, hole, slit, cleft") of her body and split the fetus into seven pieces, o Rāma. (18) Split by Indra's thunderbolt, the fetus loudly cried, and Diti woke up[45].

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[42] Mandakranta Bose finds, in Old Indian texts as well in current practice, an ideology wherein "total surrender to the husband's interests, which includes the duty of bearing his children – and male children at that – becomes the validation of wifely existence. The Brahmavaivartapurāṇa declares that the life of a woman who has no son is useless (2.16). Men need wives for procreational purposes, as we find in the popular (though unattributed) dictum, 'putrārthe kriyate bhārya', and Nārada explicitly says that 'apathyārthaṃ striyaḥ sṛṣṭāḥ …' (12.19), that is, women are created to bring forth sons" (Bose 2010, 71).

[43] Own transl. from *Ramāyana* 1.45.10: agniṃ kuśān kāṣṭham apaḥ phalaṃ mūlaṃ tathaiva ca | nyavedayat sahasrākṣo yac cānyad api kāṅkṣitam || 10 ||.

[44] *Mūrdhaja*, lit. "head-born".

[45] Own transl. from *Ramāyana* 1.45.16-18: *dṛṣṭvā tām aśuciṃ śakraḥ pādataḥ kṛtamūrdhajām | śiraḥsthāne kṛtau pādau jahāsa ca mumoda ca || 16 || tasyāḥ śarīra-vivaraṃ viveśa ca puraṃdaraḥ | garbhaṃ ca saptadhā rāma bibheda paramātmavān || 17 || bidhyamānas tato garbho vajreṇa śataparvaṇā | ruroda susvaraṃ rāma tato ditir abudhyata || 18 ||.*

One wonders about who is the "demon" here. Isn't it the one who enters a body whose orifices are usually protected from malevolent forces by sticking to the ritual rules of proper conduct and purity? "This fetus has been divided into seven pieces and made fruitless by my own fault (*aparādha*)!"[46], she acclaims and persuades Indra to transform the seven pieces into the seven Maruts, who are wind gods and servants of Indra.

This section has not been about divine non-birth, but rather, about deformed or misshapen births of human, demonic, or semi-divine beings. More prominent deities, both Pan-Indian and regional ones, tend to not being conceived in a womb at all. This is most obvious concerning female goddesses who, supposedly, have a womb (apart from Viṣṇu's female avatar, Mohinī), but do not use them for procreation.

Barren goddesses and the birth of death from anger

"Some goddesses give birth to divine children by themselves, through some kind of parthenogenesis, but never anthropomorphically, and never through sexual union with a god. In fact, later texts tell stories to explain why all the goddesses are barren, sometimes as the result of a curse. But this is an afterthought, a backformation to explain what has already long been taken for granted, namely, that immortals do not have children simply because they are immortal; if you don't die, there is no need to reproduce yourself. Or, to put it the other way round, as myth often does, if you have sex, you must have death"[47].

What had been "taken for granted" is an exegesis, a hardly provable, albeit fascinating comment on the alleged nature of gods. The "parthenogenesis" and the "curse", on the other hand, allude to the stories of Śiva and Pārvatī. This well-known divine couple has two children, Skanda and Gaṇeśa, although the other gods have to interrupt their sexual union. Otherwise, the heat and energy discharched in the climax would destroy the world, so their procreation has to find other ways. The birth of Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god of success (fig. 1), is the best example of what Doniger calls "parthenogenesis". The *Vāmana-purāṇa*, originating around the 9th century, calls it a "wonder" (*adbhuta*):

M8. "Pārvatī arrived there and witnessed a marvel, that from the filth of her body [*anga-mala*] was created [*kṛta*] an elephant-faced human being. Pleased with

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[46] Own transl. from *Ramāyana* 1.46.2: *mamāparādhād garbho 'yaṃ saptadhā viphalīkṛtaḥ | ... || 2 ||*.
[47] Doniger 1999, 54.

it, she embraced the son. Smelling in his head [sic!][48], Śarva [Śiva] said to Umā [Pārvatī], 'O Devī, a son has been born [*bhṛta*] without a Nāyaka (husband). Therefore will he bear the name Vināyaka'"[49].

Some lines before, it is told that "the sweat of Umā and Śankara [Pārvatī and Śiva] mixed on the moist earth[50]. From their union [*sam-parka* – also "mixture"] sprang up [*sam-ut-√sthā*] a person with the trunk, blowing air. The Lord of the universe was pleased to know him as his child"[51]. This also seems to be Gaṇeśa, possibly in an attempt to merge two different accounts of his birth.

In this text, the birth of Gaṇeśa/Vināyaka is only the happy end of the long story of Pārvatī's frustration about the *coitus interruptus* with Śiva, who had been

"immersed in sensual enjoyment with Pārvatī for a thousand years. While Śankara [Śiva] was just engrossed in sensualism, the worlds shook exceedingly, the seven oceans were agitated and the gods were frightened. [Approaching him,] the gods said, 'if you are pleased upon the gods and desire to grant them a boon, then put a stop to the great copulation you are engaged in, o Lord'. The Lord said, 'May it be so, I have renounced the disposition. But some god should receive my semen which is overflowing'"[52]. "Hearing the words of her husband, the eyes of the Devī became red with anger, and Pārvatī who could not give birth to a son now [whose 'procreation of a son' (*putra-ut-bhava*) had been spoiled], cursed the host of gods saying: 'As those wicked fellows do not desire that a son should be begotten in me, so shall they not produce sons in their own wives'"[53].

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[48] Śiva "smells at" or "kisses" (*upa-ā-ghrā*) the forehead (*mūrdhan*) of her (and therefore his?) son.
[49] Transl. Svarūp 1968, 269, from *Vāmanapurāna* 28.69-72: … | *parvatasutā sametyāpaśyad adbhutam* ‖ 69 ‖ *yat tad aṅgamalād divyaṃ kṛtaṃ gajamukhaṃ naras | tataḥ prītā girisutā tam putraṃ pariṣasvaje* ‖ 70 ‖ *mūrdhni cainam upāghrāya tataḥ śarvo 'bravīd umām | nāyakena vinā devī tava bhṛto 'pi putrakaḥ* ‖ 71 ‖ *yasmāj jātas tato nāmnā bhaviṣyati vināyakaḥ |* … ‖ 72 ‖. An older account makes it clearer how exaclty her bodily filth is separated from her body: "The goddess cleansed her person and applied perfumes and unguents over her body. With the dirt of the cleansing therefrom she created a human body with elephantine face […]. The goddess spoke to him addressing 'O son' with delighted mind" (*Skandapurāṇa* I.ii.27.4-6, transl. in Tagare 1992, 227).
[50] *jala-bhūti-sam-anu-ita* might also mean "mixed with water and ashes", for Śiva's body is often described as smeared with ashes.
[51] Transl. Svarūp 1968, p. 268 f., from *Vāmanapurāna* 28.65f: … *umasvedaṃ bhavasvedaṃ jala-bhūtisamanvitam* ‖ 65 ‖ *tatsaṃparkāt samuttasthau phūtkṛtya karamuttam | apatyaṃ hi viditvā ca prītimān bhuvaneśvaraḥ* ‖ 66 ‖.
[52] Transl. Svarūp 1968, p. 266f., from *Vāmanapurāna* 28.30f., 46f.
[53] Transl. Svarūp 1968, p. 268, from *Vāmanapurāṇa* 28.54f.: *sāpi bharturvacaḥ śrutvā kruddhā raktāntalocanā | śaśāpa daivatān sarvān naṣṭaputrodbhavā śivā* ‖ 54 ‖ *yasmānnecchanti te duṣṭā mama putramathaurasam | tasmāt te na janaṣyantisvāsuyoṣitsu putrakān* ‖ 55 ‖.

[*tejas*] came forth [*niś-√kram*], and similarly from Śambhu [Śiva] and from the Creator, and from the bodies of Indra and all the other gods the cruel energies came forth [*sam-ud-√bhū*] and they all became one (*ekam sam-√jan*). The great mass of their united energies seemed to all the multitudes of gods like a blazing mountain that pervaded all the regions of the sky with flames. Then from the combination of these energies a certain woman appeared: her head appeared from the energy of Śiva, her two arms from the energy of Viṣṇu, her two feet from the energy of Brahmā, and her waist from the energy of Indra; her hair was made from Yama's energy, her two breasts from the moon's energy, her tighs from the energy of Varuṇa, her hips from the earth's energy, her toes from the sun's energy […]; and from the incredibly fierce energies of the other gods other limps were made for the women who was the supremely radiant Durgā, more dangerous than all the gods and demons"[56].

All the gods cooperate to make her, similar to the crafting of Pandora, who in Greek mythology is designed as the first human woman[57]. Unlike Pandora, Durgā is dangerous in an appreciated sense, as a much needed warrier against demons. Another difference is the ambivalence of the text regarding her being created or, rather, "creating herself" as yet another *svayambhū*. The verb used, *sam-ud-√bhū*, can mean both "to spring forth from" or "to be created". Are the gods intentionally and with a plan brewing her out of their anger (*kopa*), or is she rather brewing herself, like a storm?

This birth of Durgā might intertextually originate in the mythology of Śiva or Rudra, the male god with whom she is most often associated and who is, in older texts, also collectively "assembled" by the gods[58]. Another woman, likewise "consisting of" and "sprung forth from" (*sam-ud-√bhū*) anger, already appears in the *Mahābhārata*, which does not name her, but demonstrates that even

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[56] Transl. Doniger 1975, 241, from *Skandapurāṇā* III.1.6.31-42: … *kopāt karālavadanau duṣprekṣyau tau babhūvatuḥ* ‖ 32 ‖ *atyanta kopajvalitād mukhād viṣṇhor atha dvijāḥ | niścakrāma mahattejaḥ ṣambhoḥ sraṣṭuṣ thathaiva ca* ‖ 33 ‖ *apareṣāṃ surānāṃ ca dehād indraśarirataḥ | tejaḥ samudabhūt krūraṃ tad ekam sam-ajāyata* ‖ 34 ‖ *teṣāṃ tu tejasāṃ raśir jvalatparvata sannibhaḥ |* … ‖ 35 ‖ *tejasāṃ samudayoḥ 'sau nārikā cid abhūt tadā | śiva-tejo-mukham abhūt viṣṇu-tejo-bhujau dvijāḥ* ‖ 36 ‖.

[57] The *Works and Days*, ascribed to Hesiod, have it that Pandora is furnished by the divine craftsmen, Hephaistos, and the goddesses and gods assemble, each giving her specific abilities, bodily features or character traits (lines 54-89).

[58] M10a. Doniger 1973, p. 29, has a translation from the narrative as given by *Aitareyabrāhmana* 3.33-34. Śiva himself is, according to *Mahābhārata* 12.274.36-39, also capable to create a being out of his emotion, or rather, out of his "drop of sweat" (*svedabindu*) issued forth due to anger. This revengeful deity, who is "Fever" (*jvara*) "appears" (*pradurbhū*) out of the sweat in a shape resembling female fierce goddesses, but also other male incarnations of Śiva: He is "a short man with extraordinarily red eyes and a tawny beard; he was gruesome and his hair stood on end; his body was extremely hairy like that of a hawk or an owl" (trsl. Doniger 1975, 121; cf. Lange 2017, 98 ff., 270 ff.).

a blood-thirsty goddess is able to be a good (foster-) mother to the newborn god Skanda:

> M11. (21) Amongst all mothers [of the world] was a woman, grown together (*sam-ud-√bhū*) out of wrath (*krodha*). With her trident in her hand, she attended to Skanda like a wetnurse/mother to a son. She was the „daughter of an ocean of blood"[59], gruesome, devouring blood – [but] she embraced Skanda like a son and guarded him[60].

Once more, "mothers" do not have to be "birth-givers"; among them are the "nurturers" as well. Skanda, "the skeeted one", is often told to originate out of the semen spilled by Śiva in the aforementioned coitus interruptus (M15).

The description of this gruesome mother resembles those of many fierce and warlike Hindu goddesses, such as Durgā, Kālī, Ambikā, Cāmuṇḍā. All of those fierce goddesses might fit into this description, but, according to later mythical texts, they are all but emanations of one singular female force. When all goddesses are conceived of as different forms (*rūp*) of *śakti*, a single and universal female power or energy, in that case no explanation at all is needed for how they can freely, chaotically and repeatedly bring forth each other.

Female energy (śakti)

Śākta, the religious tradition of worshipping the same *śakti* within all beings and deities, is influential even today. In Garhwal, the region where I do my ethnographic fieldwork, I was often told that "all goddesses are but one" – *sab devī ek hī haiṃ* – and that she was within everything. When released from the matter she is hidden within, she can bring forth all kinds of power or energy: electricity, nuclear power, the wind, etc. All of these powers are potentially dangerous, if they slip out of control. As William Sax has been told by a "well known local bard, Bacan Singh Rawat of Toli village, [the goddess Kālī/Draupadī is identified] with numerous forms of disease, including jaundice, bile, sore throat, measles, fatal snakebite, and whooping caugh"[61]. All of these "incarnations" – in the most literal sense – are listed in a mantra as forms (*rūp*) she can take.

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[59] *lohitasya udadheḥ kanyā* could also be the daughter of a "red sea", or, improbably, of a "red cloud".
[60] Own transl. from *Mahābhārata* 03,215.21f.: *sarvāsāṃ yā tu mātṛṇāṃ nārī krodhasamudbhavā | dhātrī sā putravat skandaṃ śūlahastābhyarakṣata ‖ 21 ‖ lohitasyodadheḥ kanyā krūrā lohitabhojanā | pariṣvajya mahāsenaṃ putravat paryarakṣata ‖ 22 ‖.*
[61] Sax 2002, S. 137, Fn. 8. The identification of human women from the epics with goddesses can also explain the special abilities of Kunti, the mother of the Pāṇḍava heroes. In a local *Mahābhārata* episode, also narrated to William Sax by Bacan Singh Rawat, her son Arjuna gets lost in the Netherworld, where

If all goddesses are appearences of one and the same goddess or principle, there is no way to distinguish between her taking another form (or *avatāra*), and her giving birth to another goddess. The *Devīmāhātmya*, a text from the 6th century CE, is reckoned the earliest text propagating *śakti*-monism[62]. It already elaborates the idea of a female force infusing and permeating the world, "known as the *māyā* of Viṣṇu in all creatures [...] who is designated 'consciousness' in all creatures [...] who abides in all creatures in the form of intelligence [...] sleep [...] hunger [...] shadow [...] power [...] thirst [...] patience [...] birth [...] modesty [...] tranquillity [...] faith [...] loveliness [...] Lakṣmī [...] activity [...] memory [...] compassion [...] contentment [...] mother [...] error [...] the inner controller of the senses [...] universal presence [...] mind"[63]. All the Goddesses are forms taken by this force and therefore able to multiply through every slight release of bodily material (M12a) "The breaths that Ambikā released while fighting in the battle, these immediately became her hosts, by the hundred and thousand. They fought with axes, javelins, swords, and pikes"[64]. When Pārvatī takes a bath, she gets another incarnation – or, rather, excarnation:

M12b. "An auspicious (*śivā*) form came forth from the sheath of her body [...]. Since Ambikā came forth from the body sheath (*kośa*) of Pārvatī, she is sung of in all words as 'Kauśikī'. When she has come forth, Pārvatī became black (*kṛṣṇā*). Known as 'Kālikā', she makes her abode in the Himālayas"[65].

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he marries the serpent maiden Vasudanta and forgets his life on earth. To remind him, "mother Kunti rolled some of the dirt from her body into a ball, breathed life into it, and made two bumblebees. She wrote a letter to Arjuna and placed it between their wings. Then she said: 'Go, bumblebees, go to where my Arjuna is'. So the bumblebees went to Nagiloka: 'gauṃ-gauṃ-gauṃ-gauṃ'. [Vasudanta] thought they might bite him, so she struck them with her whisk, but then they multiplied a thousandfold (Sax 2002, 69). In the central Himalaya, Kunti is generally raised above the human level, praised as the pure and good mother par excellence, called *satī mātā kuntī*, "truthful mother Kunti" (ibid., 143). As such, she is similar to Pārvatī, who is even able to form a child from some dirt of her body. Possibly, if a goddess or other women is so pure that she transcends human bodily existence, even that dirt is not dirty at all.

[62] Cf. Coburn 1991, 13, 19.

[63] *Devīmāhātya* 5.12-34, transl. Coburn 1991, 53f.

[64] *Devīmāhātya* 2.51f., transl. Coburn 1991, 43.

[65] *Devīmahātmya* 5.37-41, transl. Coburn 1991, 55. Monier-Williams gives, among others, the following meanings of *kośa*: It is a "vessel for holding liquids", a "cover", the "cocoon of a silk-worm" or the "membrane covering an egg (in the womb)", but can also denote "the vulva". These possible meanings might make the picture more imaginable.

The same *Vāmaṇapurāṇa* episode discussed earlier, wherein Pārvatī and Śiva are interrupted in their "great copulation" (VP. 28.46) and Pārvatī brings forth Gaṇeśa "from the filth of her body" (VP. 28.70), begins with another account of how Pārvatī brings forth Kauśikī: "On one occasion for the sake of fun the word 'Kālī' ["black woman"] was uttered by Śankara. Offended by this, Pārvatī [...] told Brahman, 'Grant me the complexion resembling gold as a boon!' Saying 'So be it', Brahman left the place. Immediately did Pārvatī become like the filament of a lotus, leaving her black sheath. From that sheath [*kośa*]

Apparently, nothing that leaves a divine body is lost, everything becomes a conscious divine being in its own right. The most complex chain reaction of bodily emanations I know is given by the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*, a Śākta text which is dated between the 9th and 14th centuries CE. Although it belongs to a tradition wherein the all-encompassing and all-driving power and energy is believed to be female, its dizzying creation myth starts with a male god, Kṛṣṇa, splitting into a female and a male half. That said, he does not seem to start as an androgyne, but his male aspect clearly dominates. Having split, his male part still is Kṛṣṇa, whose sexual energy (*tejas*) exhausts his female counterpart:

> M13. (26) Kṛṣṇa is the one and only creator (*srāṣṭā*) of everything. When he wished to create (√*sṛṣ*), the proper time, which was a part of himself[66], urged the Lord to get "ready for creation" (*sṛṣṭyunmukha*)[67]. (27) Because he "consists of his own will"[68], by his own will he became double-shaped: His left part took a female shape and his right part was called "man" (*puṃs*). [...] (36) When he saw her, the "tasteful lord of passion" (*surasika rāseṣa*) engaged in "juicy games" (*rāsakrīḍā*) and in "juicy joy" (*rāsollāsa*) with his other half on his "passionate dancing ground" (*rāsamaṇḍala*)[69].
>
> [...] (39) When their sexual pleasures were over, oh pious [listener to this story], she was exhausted by the energy/heat (*tejas*) of Kṛṣṇa and the water of exhaustion was was rinning down (*niḥ*-√*sṛ*) her limbs. (40) Worn out by the huge efforts, she also breathed heavily (*niḥ-śvas*). The "water of her exhaustion" (*śrama-jala*) enclosed the whole globe of the world, (41) and the "wind of her heavy breaths" (*nihṣvāsa-vāyu*) became the space that contains everything and is the "breath-wind" (*nihṣvāsa-vāyu*) of all living beings. (42) The left side of Vāyu, who is the wind "personified", became the lover and the wife of this "breath of life" (*prāṇa*). They had five sons, who are the five "winds in the body" (*prāṇa*) of every living being[70].

came into being [*sam-ja*] Kātyāyani." (VP. 28.6-7 and 22-, transl. Svarūp 1968, 264). Being teased for her dark skin, Pārvatī gets rid of it, shedding it like a membrane. This dark aspekt or personality, split off herself, becomes a new goddess – Kālī.

[66] *Kāla*, the "time" being a part of Kṛṣṇa, might also stand for Śiva. If that is the case, Śiva is here incorporated as a sub-principle of the god Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, who in this tradition surpasses everything else.

[67] lit. "with his face raised towards creation"

[68] He is svecchāmaya - thus, Kṛṣṇa can be what he wants to be and take any shape he wants.

[69] I translate *rāsa* with "juicy" to conserve the eroticism this verse unsubtly displays, using no less than five composita based on *rasa* (juice, passion, taste).

[70] Own transl. from *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.2.26-42: *sa kṛṣṇaḥ sarvasrāṣṭā 'dau sisṛṣann eka eva ca | sṛṣṭy unmukhas tadaṃśena kālena preritaḥ prabhuḥ ‖ 26 ‖ svecchāmayaḥ svecchayā ca dvidhārūpo babhūva ha | strīrūpo vāmabhāgāṃśo dakṣiṇāṃśaḥ pumānsmṛtaḥ ‖ 27 ‖ ... dṛṣṭvā tāṃ tu tayā sārdhaṃ rāseṣo rāsamaṇḍale | rāsollāse surasiko rāsakrīḍāṃ cakāra ha ‖ 36 ‖ ... gātrato yoṣitas tasyāḥ suratānte ca suvrata | nihsasāra śramajalaṃ śrāntāyās tejasā hareḥ ‖ 39 ‖ mahākramaṇakliṣṭāyā*

Not only impregnation itself, but even the transpiration of a goddess exhausted from sex brings forth new substances and deities: Vāyu, the "wind", is at the same time the air, a principle of life and an "embodied, materialized, personified" (*mūrtimat*) god. He also becomes the father of five additional "winds", who are medical concepts, incarnate within each living body on earth. Regarding creation, emanation and cosmic gender roles[71], the rest of this narrative bears many more interesting peculiarities. This article, however, focuses on how gods simultaniously shed bodily fluids, express emotion and bring forth new beings.

Emotional emissions and pregnant males

Like in the English and German languages with their emotional "outbursts" or "expressions", Sanskrit and Hindi know conventional metaphors of emotions "overwhelming" (Hindi *ḍubānā*) or "flowing out" (Sanskrit *pra-√sru*[72]) of someone, often concurring with emissions of bodily fluids[73]. Mythology elaborates this association, drawing connections from divine emotion, embodied and materialized in tears, sweat, sperm, or milk[74], via medicine, as in the five "winds of the body", to geographical, geological and other features of the world created by such emissions and emanations.

Lord Śiva, the "erotic ascetic"[75], is *skanda-a-mogha-retas*: "one whose spilled sperm is never wasted"[76], even when he is not in control of his own impulses and sheds his semen involuntarily. The purāṇic narration which describes him in these words, dated between the 6th and 10th centuries CE, has him loose control over himself when he watches Mohinī, "illusion", who is a female form of another male god, Viṣṇu:

M14. (31) Conquered by his lust as though by an enemy, Rudra (Śiva) ran along the path that Viṣṇu, whose deeds are impressive, had stepped on. (32) The sperm of

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niḥśvāsaś ca babhūva ha | tadāvavre śramajalaṃ tatsarvaṃ viśvagolakam || 40 || *sa ca niḥśvāsavāyuś ca sarvādhāro babhūva ha | niḥśvāsavayuḥ sarveṣāṃ jivīnāṃ ca bhaveṣu ca* || 41 || *babhūva mūrtimadvāyor vāmāṅgāt prāṇavallabhā | tatpatnī sā ca tatputrāḥ prāṇāḥ pañca ca jīvinām* || 42 ||.

[71] The story goes on with an many more splittings and multiplications of Kṛṣṇa and of his female part, who is then identified as Rādhā. She lays an egg which contains the whole universe, and "(62) out of the hair-holes (pores) on Rādhā's limbs came forth (*bhū*) the cow-herding girls" (*Rādhāṅgalomakūpebhyoḥ babhūvur gopakanyakāḥ | ... || 62 ||*). This constellation of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā and the Gopīs ("cow-girls"), who are the common female companions of Kṛṣṇa, seem to me to rather draw a picture of Kṛṣṇa than of a goddess as the supreme being.

[72] *Sneha-prasrava*, for instance, is a "flow or effusion or gush of love".

[73] Cf. Lange 2017, 98 ff.

[74] Cf. Lange 2019a.

[75] Title of Doniger 1973.

[76] *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.12.32.

the one whose spilled sperm is never wasted was stimulated, like that of a ruttish elephant bull desiring a cow in heat. (33) Whereever on earth the semen of this grand self fell, there were fields of silver and gold. (34) Hara (Śiva) is present (*sam-ni-hita*) in rivers and lakes, on mountains, in forests, in parks and where Ṛṣis dwell[77].

Driven by his passion and not in control of his senses, Śiva here seems less autonomous than Viṣṇu. In local variants of this story, Viṣṇu/Mohinī is afraid that Śivas sperm might burn down the earth, so s/he catches it in his hand and gets pregnant. Being an illusionary female, he has no uterus and gives birth to the child from his hip. This son of two male gods is Ayanār, a popular deity of South India[78].

Wherever the semen of Śiva is spilled, someone has to be born[79]. So, what happened to the seed of Śiva, spilled in the myth of the interrupted "great copulation"? *Vāmanapurāṇa* 28, from which I have quoted above (M8), does not elaborate what happens after the semen is swallowed by the fire god Agni. Other *Purāṇa*s do not leave out that the "spilling" (*skanda*) becomes a god with the same name, who completes the family of Pārvatī, Śiva, Gaṇeśa and Skanda. The *Skandapurāṇa*, for instance, which is probably older, also has it that Agni disturbed the couple, disguised as a begging sage. Even the gods do not deny food to begging brahmins, so they had to come to the door to give him something. Śiva spilled his semen and

> M15a. "said to the Fire-God, 'What has been done by you is not proper. O vicious one, my excellent semen virile has been emitted from its source. Take it or I will burn you down with my fury.' 86. He (Fire-God) became frightened and imbibed it up. Since he was the mouth of all Devas[80], those Suras were made bewil-

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[77] Own transl. from *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 8.12.31-34: *tasyāsau padavīṃ rudro viṣṇoradbhutakarmaṇaḥ | pratyapadyata kāmena vairiṇeva vinirjitaḥ || 31 || tasyānudhāvato retaśca skandāmogharetasaḥ | śuṣmiṇo yūthapasyeva vāsitāmanudhāvataḥ || 32 | yatra yatrāpatan mahyāṃ retastasya mahātmanaḥ | tāni rūpyasya hemnaśca kṣetrāṇy āsan mahīpate || 33 || saritsaraḥsu śaileṣu vaneṣūpavaneṣu ca | yatra kva cāsannṛṣayastatra sannihito haraḥ || 34 ||.*

[78] Shrines of Ayanār are present on most South Indian villages. As an offspring of both Śiva and Viṣṇu – Hara and Hari – he is sometimes called Hariharaputra (Adiceam 1967, 2, 10, 16).

[79] In a Bengalī poem about the serpent goddess Manasā, "Shiva, having eluded his wife, comes to the shore of Kālidaha [lake] to pick flowers. He is aroused by the erotic atmosphere, thinks of Durgā and spills his semen. A bird carries off his seed in its beak but is unable to bear its intensity so places it on a lotus. The seed runs down the stalk of the lotus to the underworld where Vāsuki, the king of the nāgas, finds it. It is transformed into a beautiful young goddess who is given the name Manasā" (Smith 1980, 45).

[80] Agni is the fire which consumes libations and food offerings for the gods; thus, he is called *devamukha*, the "mouth of the gods".

dered and excited along with Fire-God. 87. Breaking open the bellies of these (Gods) the semen virile of Maheśvara came out and became a lake of mercury extending to a hundred Yojanas. 88. Vahni (Fire-God) too became excied. He discharged it (i.e., Śiva's semen) into Gaṅgā. Burning within herself that goddess cast it off by means of her waves. 89. Thereby it became the Śveta (white) mountain famous in the three worlds"[81].

Not quite coherently, another passage of the same *Purāṇa* tells that (M15b) "just as Havis (ghee offering) reaches every god through Agni (so also the semen reached them) [and] all the leading Suras became pregnant"[82]. What should they do, having no organ to give birth? Śiva suggested that they should vomit it out, and as they did so, "abruptly that miraculous semen virile became as lustrous as heated gold and as huge as a mountain"[83]. Now, six of the seven Kṛttikās, who are the pleiades and the wifes of the seven sages (see M3), came along. As they wondered about this strange warm mountain and "warmed themselves, minute particles of the semen virile entered the pores in their skin at the roots of their hairs quickly"[84]. Together they gave birth to a child with six heads, Ṣaṇmukha, the "Six-faced". But who is his mother? Gaṅgā, the Kṛttikās, Agni and all the gods had some claim on his maternity, and even "Girijā [Pārvatī] immedeately experienced that milk was oozing from her nipples"[85]. Thus, he was not only called Skanda or Kumāra ("child"), but also Kārttikeya and Gāṅgeya[86], and "Gaurī, Gaṅgā and Mothers and Kṛttikās told one another: 'This is my son. This is my son'"[87].

A god born from human wombs (M16)

When a god incarnates as a human body, he has to first incarnate into a human womb. To take his human *avatāra*, his "descent" and "appearance", as Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu has to somewhat adapt to human biomedical conditions – but still, the conditions of his birth are extravagant. The *Harivaṃśa*, an account of the "lineage of Kṛṣṇa" added to the Mahābhārata within the first centuries CE, first assembles the stories of his birth, youth, adulthood and offspring, which are tak-

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[81] *Skandapurāṇa* I.ii.29.82-90, transl. Tagare 1992.
[82] *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.27.45, transl. Tagare 1992.
[83] *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.27.63, transl. Tagare 1992.
[84] *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.27.73, transl. Tagare 1992.
[85] *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.27.81, transl. Tagare 1992.
[86] These names, meaning "son of the Kṛttikīs" and "son of Gaṅgā", occur in *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.28.79 and 93, transl. Tagare 1992.
[87] *Skandapurāṇa* I.1.28.16, transl. Tagare 1992.

en over and elaborated by innumerable Hindu narrative texts, plays and poems until today.

Kṛṣṇa's mother-to-be is Devakī, the brother of king Kaṃsa, who kills all her children because he fears that one of them will overthrow him. Before Kṛṣṇa takes his birth, other beings are incarnated into Devakī's womb. First come the *ṣaḍgarbha*s, the "six embryos" who are successively born, only to be killed by their evil uncle: "As soon as they came forth (*niḥ-√sṛ*), Kaṃsa smashed them against a stone wall"[88]. Then, Viṣṇu splits an aspect off his self and instructs Nidrā, the goddess of sleep:

> "The seventh embryo of Devakī will consist of a portion of my gentleness. He will be born before myself: in the seventh month you will transfer him to Rohiṇī's womb"[89].

As instructed, Sleep transfers (*sam-√krāmay*) the seventh child of Devakī, Balarāma, into the womb of another woman, Rohiṇī. As he has disappeared from the womb of Devakī, Kaṃsa thinks "that this seventh embryo of Devakī has dropped out, because she was afraid"[90]. Meanwhile, Nidrā in turn instructs Rohiṇī how to handle the transplanted embryo:

> "Your son shall be called Saṃkarṣaṇa ("extraction; the plower"), auspiciously named after the pulling out (*karṣaṇa*) of the the displaced embryo (*garbha*) into your womb (*garbha*)"[91].

Kṛṣṇa himself is also exchanged, but only after birth (fig. 2). Nidrā takes his place and is killed by Kaṃsa, while Kṛṣṇa is brought to a foster mother, Yaśodhā, where his brother Balarāma/Saṃkarṣaṇa and Rohinī also live. Both of them thus have two mothers, Balarāma has even been in the womb of two women! That said, Yaśodhā and Devakī are also both regarded as the rightful mothers of Kṛṣṇa, and their sometimes conflicting maternal emotions towards him are elaborated in the devotional Hindu poetry of the 16th century[92].

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[88] *Harivaṃśa* 48.2: *ṣaḍgarbhān niḥsṛtān kaṃsas tāñ jaghāna śilatale,* own transl.

[89] *Harivaṃśa* 47.30: *saptamo devakīgarbho yo 'ṃśaḥ saumyo mamāgrajaḥ | sa saṃkrāmayitavyas te saptame māsi rohiṇīm,* own transl.

[90] *Harivaṃśa* 47.32: *patito devakīgarbhaḥ saptamo 'yam bhayād iti,* own transl.

[91] *Harivaṃśa* 48.6: *karṣṣaṇenāsya garbhasya svagarbhe cāhitasya vai | saṃkarṣaṇo nāma śubhe tava putro bhaviṣyati,* own transl.

[92] Cf. Pasche Guignard 2016.

Conclusion

Birth is an existantial theme, engaging people of all cultures. It has always raised all kinds of questions myths might give answers to, about physical, psychological and social phenomena. Birth is, besides death, one of the situations most closely approaching the limits not only of human understanding, but also of endurability. Here, imagination is most needed to shape people's notions about, for instance, what a mother is. Many questions can arise: What happens in a human body (which is part of the physical world), why is birth so painful, and why is it so closely tied to mortality? What is happening in a human psyche, how can a woman deal with the fears of losing her child and of dying herself, with the pain, the stress, the changes in shape and self-image and with other psycho-(physio-)logical side-effects? How does her social role and function change, what kind of help and comfort does her environment (have to) provide, and how are her experiences before, during and after birth framed, tabooed, praised and otherwise afflicted with common expectations? Of course, myth texts give us just glimpses into these affairs. But, within religious lifes, they give strong and prevailing models for dealing with such existential limits of understanding, of coping with and of controlling one's world.

M2, the oldest myth, was taken from the *Ṛgveda*, thus, from a religious tradition historically and formally most distinct from current Hinduism. Not only does this myth bluntly prescribe social roles, as social classes come forth from different bodily parts of a primordial being – it also, possibly, tells something about birth and death as such, for this first being has to die to bring forth life, forms and order. Pain and danger, but also impatience, fears and the impossibility to always conform to the social norms concerning mothers to always remain calm and patient are themes of myths about the mothers Gāndharī (M5), Sumati (M6), Vinatā and Kadrū (M4). Here, social expectations are naturalized for some reason; naturally, a being needs time to develop in a womb, especially if it is to be superhuman "in brilliance, beauty, and might" (*ojasā tejasā caiva vikrameṇā*). Diti's pregnancy (M7), on the other hand, makes it clear that a pregnant woman is vulnerable – does that make her more human, and less god-like?

I propose that it is exactly the lack of pregnancies in stories about goddesses, their own births and their children (M8-M13) which tells the most about being divine in contrast to being human, and vice versa. Is birth, maybe, too fleshy, too dirty and too painful for gods, and for myth as a realm of imagination from these appalling facts of life? Dirt and pain are not usually associated with deities,

who are said to remain in a state of bliss (*ānanda*)[93]. They don't have to work – thus, they might also be not be imagined in undergoing any other kind of labour pain.

Comparable to the virtual "avatars" appearing and acting within "cyber-space", the deities appearing and acting in the mythical imagination and in rituals enable humans to play with alternative concepts of identity and personhood. By means of imagination, human beings may transcend their own bodies with their defects, deficiencies and vulnerabilities. In the examples given here, on the other hand, divine affairs do not at all seem to back away from the dirty and juicy facts of life. If deities are conceived of as spiritual beings, this does not mean that they are less physical then human beings, only consisting of a different *physis*. Their non- or quasi-births take place via very human-like discharges (*niḥsara,* M3), such as a drop of sweat (*svedabindu,* M8, M10a, M13), a tear (*aśrubindu*, M9) or even an emotion (M9). The same verb, literally "to flow out" (*niḥ-√sṛ*), is also used for the hatching of Kadru's thousand serpent sons in M4, or for the 60.000 sons coming forth from the pumpkin-like embryo of Sumati (M6).

Rebirth, curiously, does not appear to me to be an important theme, neither in these stories about deities and humans – nor in my ethnographic fieldwork in the central Himalaya. Brahmā, the creator, can be born into a new body he just created by using his first body (M1), or he can take several bodies successively (M3a). Kṛṣṇa (M16) and other *avatāras* do also not really fit into the concept of reincarnation, for Viṣṇu does not cease to exist in his own realm and in other *avatāras* when he takes a new one.

Deities and demons have abilities not (yet) available to human bodies, like the birth of Ayanār by a male god in female shape. In this regard, Hindu myths are not different from myths elsewhere. Even those myths that most bluntly propagate heterosexual and patriarchal norms of how procreation has to be done provide examples of men giving birth[94]. If I understand myths as the totality of all possible interpretations and ways to tell their stories, they appear not only as

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[93] According to Wendy Doniger, "certain signs are said [by whom?] to distinguish gods from mortals, with whom they may be otherwise identical: gods do not blink, their garlands do not wither, they do not perspire, no dust settles on them, and their feet do not quite touch the ground". Their childlike, sweet and untroubled nature – albeit not that apparent in the myths I have collected for this article – is underlined by the aesthetics of Hindu *pūjā*, of worshipping the gods with incense, gentle gestures, by clothing them or by anointing them with milk (cf. Lange 2019b; Michaels 1998, 242).

[94] This might be one way to interpret Eva's creation from Adam's rib. In Japanese Shinto mythology, the first woman, Izanami, is hold guilty of her misconception: "because the women spoke first, the child was not good" (*Kojiki* 1.5.3, transl. Philippi 1969, 52). Later, she dies due to another failed birth, and her husband Izanami gives birth to lots of other deities, islands and places by washing himself and his belongings (*Kojiki* 1.11, Philippi 1969, 68ff.).

dogmas, but also as the opposite: imagination rather than repression, serious topics meliorated[95] and coped with, sometimes even made fun of, rather than aggravated – notwithstanding that repression and aggravation do indeed take place in religious and mythical discourses.

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[95] According to philosopher Hans Blumenberg, myths are a "manifestation of overcoming, gaining distance to and attenuating bitter earnest" ("Manifestation einer Überwindung, eines Distanzgewinns, einer Abmilderung des bitteren Ernst", Blumenberg 1979, 23).

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Fig. 1. Śiva, Gaṇeśa and Pārvatī. Devotional print, Religionskundliche Sammlung, Marburg, given 1982 by Rita Moecker. Heighth: 36 cm, acc.nr. B-Kp 153 006.
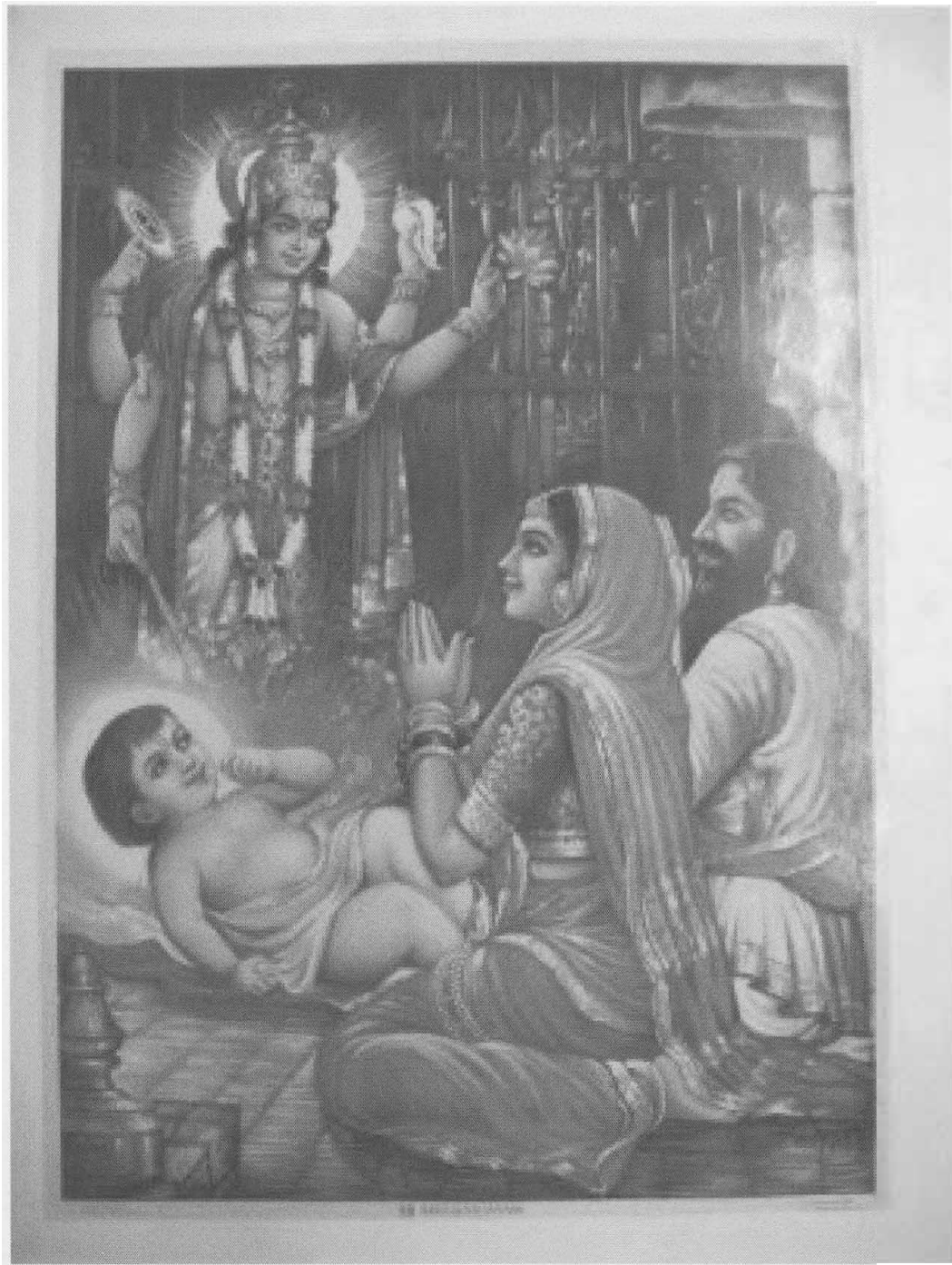
Fig. 2. Krishna Janam, the birth of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who simultaneously shows himself in front of his parents, Devakī and Vasudeva. Devotional print, Religionskundliche Sammlung, Marburg, bought 1989 by Stephan Nagel. Heighth: 50,5 cm, acc.nr. B-Kp 150 016.