Dattātreya is a Purānic deity. The Purānas say that he was born to Anasūyā and the rṣi Atri, her husband, as a fragment of Viṣṇu or as the Viṣṇu portion of the trimūrti, when Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva consented to be born as three sons from the womb of Anasūyā known as Soma, Datta, and Durvāsas respectively.

It thus seems appropriate, in order to trace Dattātreya's origins, to offer a portrayal of his 'family', that is of his 'parents' and 'brothers', from their first Vedic emergence onwards.

John E. Mitchiner aptly defines the nature and functions of seers, the mind-born (mano-ja) sons of Brahmā the creator:

«The Rṣis are (...) above all those who are ever involved in movement (√ṛṣi): firstly the inner movement of self-transformation through tapas, and secondly the external movement of causing change, growth and increase in creation. The Rṣi traditions revolve around the complementary cycles of asceticism and creation; when one such cycle ends, the next begins, and the Rṣis are thus constantly building up and discharging their inner creative energy which is itself the energy and nature of brahman.»

In Vedic literature the classic list of the seven rṣis, who are

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1. According to some accounts, Atri also married a further ten wives including Bhadrā (in some versions, Soma is Bhadrā's son), and begot from them the so called Svastyātreyas.
2. See Śiva Purāṇa 2.19.1-28; Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 16.89.
4. The number may have been suggested by that of the seven priests reported in Rg Veda 2.1.2, of which the rṣis would be viewed as prototypes. Satapatha Brāhmaṇa 2.1.2.4 associates the rṣis to the seven stars in the constellation of the Great Bear (Atri, figuring as the fifth rṣi in the Vedic list of seers, would then figure as e Ursa Major) and also states that they were originally bears. Such identification is partly
believed to dwell in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent, comprises Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni, Bharadvāja, Gotama, Atri, Vasiṣṭha and Kaśyapa.

due to the equal number in the two cases, and also because of the similarity of sound between ṛṣī and ṛṣa, which in the Rg Veda means both star (1.24.10) and bear (5.56.3).

Lit. friend of all. The Rg Veda makes him son of a king named Kuśika, but later authorities make him the son of Gāthin or Gādhi, king of Kanyākubja. Viśvāmitra is attributed the authorship of the third mandala of the Rg Veda, containing the celebrated verse Gāyatrī. The ṛṣī was born a Kṣatriya, but by intense austerities raised himself to the Brāhmaṇ caste. The most important feature in the legends concerning Viśvāmitra is the active and enduring struggle between him and the Brāhmaṇ ṛṣī Vasiṣṭha, typifying the rivalry between the Brāhmaṇ and Kṣatriya castes for supremacy. Each of them was at different times the purohitā (family priest) of king Sudās, a position of considerable importance and power, which stimulated if it did not cause their rivalry.

A Brāhmaṇ and a descendant of Bṛghu, he was the son of Ārka and Satyavatī. He married Reṣuṣa, daughter of the king Prasenajit of the solar race, and was the father of five sons, the youngest and most famous of whom was Paraśurāma. The Mahābhārata reports that Jamadagni engaged deeply in study and obtained entire possession of the Vedas.

Lit. bearing speed or strength. Many Rg Vedic hymns are attributed to Bharadvāja: 6.1-30; 6.37-43; 6.53-74; 9.67.1-3; 10.137.1. He was the son of Bṛhaspati and the father of Droṇa, preceptor of the Pāṇḍavas. The Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa reports that 'he lived through three lives’, probably meaning a life of great length, and that he became immortal and ascended to the heavenly world, uniting with the sun. In the Mahābhārata he is said to live at Haridvāra; in the Rāmāyaṇa it is narrated how he received Rāma and Sītā in his hermitage at Prayāga. According to some Purāṇas and the Harivaṃśa, he became the son of king Bharata by gift or adoption. To account for his name, an absurd story is given about his birth: his mother, the wife of Utathya, was pregnant by her husband and by Bṛhaspati. Dīrghatamas, the son by her husband, kicked his half-brother out of the womb before his time, when Bṛhaspati said to his mother: ‘Bhara-duśā-jam’, that is, ‘Cherish this child of two fathers’. Ōn Bharadvāja, see T. SARMAH, The Bharadvājas in Ancient India, New Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1991.

Lit. the largest ox. Son of Rāhugana, he belonged to the family of Āṅgiras. To Gotama is attributed the composition of Rg Veda 1.74-93.

Lit. most wealthy. Vasiṣṭha was the possessor of Nandini, the cow of plenty, who had the power of granting him all things (vasu) he desired, hence his name. He is the author of the seventh mandala of the Rg Veda and of several others hymns. Though Vasiṣṭha is classed among the Prajāpatis who sprang from Brahmā, a hymn in the Rg Veda and the commentaries thereon assign him a different origin or rather a second birth, and represent him and the sage Agastya to have sprung from Mitra and Varuṇa. There was a special rivalry between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra, who raised himself from the Kṣatriya to the Brāhmaṇ caste. The enmity between the two comes out very strongly in the Rāmāyaṇa. Viśvāmitra ruled the earth for many thousand years as king, but he desired Nandini, the wondrous cow of plenty which he had seen at Vasiṣṭha’s āśrama, and attempted to take her away by force. In the battle which followed, Viśvāmitra was defeated and had to abdicate and retire to
THE GENEALOGY OF DATTĀTREYA

In later Epic and early Purānic literature, a second main list of the seven ṛṣis, now believed to dwell chiefly in the southern region of India, came to supersede the first. The reasons for the change can be traced to influences exerted by members of particular Brāhmaṇ gotras from southern regions, particularly the region of the western Deccan during the rule of the Satavahanaś 11 and their successors. This second main list comprises Aṅgiras 12, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Marīci 13, Pulastya 14, Pulaha 15, and Kratu 16.

Interestingly, Atri and Vasiṣṭha are the only ṛṣis who appear in the Himālaya. Subsequently, the two met again and fought in a single combat, where Viśvāmitra was again defeated. Finally, we are told how Viśvāmitra, through a life of intense tapas, was able to work his way up to the Brāhmaṇical order. Vasiṣṭha suffered from his elevation to the priestly caste, and the hundred sons of Vasiṣṭha denounced Viśvāmitra for presuming, though a Kṣatriya, to act as a priest. This so enraged Viśvāmitra that he, by a curse, doomed the sons of Vasiṣṭha to be reduced to ashes and be reborn as degraded outcasts for seven hundred births. Eventually, Vasiṣṭha, being propitiated by the gods, became reconciled with Viśvāmitra, recognizing his claim to all the prerogatives of a Brāhmaṇ ṛṣi.

10 Lit. having black teeth. A Vedic seer to whom some hymns are attributed. All authorities agree in assigning to him a large part in the work of creation. According to the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, and the Purāṇas he was the son of Marīci, the son of Brahmā, and he was father of Vivasvat, the father of Manu. Kaśyapa, according to the Mahābhārata, married Aditi (from which the Ādityas, headed by Indra, originated) and twelve other daughters of Dakṣa, from whom he had a numerous and very diversified offspring (demons, snakes, birds etc.). Kaśyapa is also presented as the priest of Paraśurāma and Rāmacandra.

11 In the Purāṇas, also referred to as the Āndhras. The texts mention the names of thirty kings, whose rule is said to have endured for about four centuries (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE). Their capital appears to have been Pratiṣṭhānā, now Paiṭhan, on the upper Godāvari river.

12 Many hymns of the Rg Veda are attributed to Aṅgiras. He is later identified with one of the law-givers and with a writer on astronomy. He is also often identified with Bṛhaspati, the regent of the planet Jupiter, or with the planet itself. The name aṅgiras seems to be derived from the verbal root āg, the same of agni. This may explain why his name is often used as synonymous with that of Agni, or of Agni's father.

13 Lit. a ray of light. The chief of the Maruts i.e. the storm gods, and the father of Kaśyapa.

14 He was the medium through which some of the Purāṇas were revealed. For instance, he is said to have received the Viṣṇu Purāṇa from Brahmā, and to have communicated it to Parāśara, who revealed it to mankind. Pulastya was father of Viśravas, the father of Kuvera and Rāvana, and all the Rākṣasas are supposed to have sprung from him.

15 His wife was Kṣamā, and he had three sons, Kardama, Arvaṇīvat, and Sāhiṣṇu.

16 Lit. intelligence, understanding, from the verbal root kr. Kratu is intelligence personified. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa narrates that his wife Saṃnati brought forth the 60,000 Valikhilyas, pigmy sages no bigger than a joint of the thumb.
both of the main lists. Their gotras are also listed independently of all others. Similarly, both Atri and Vasiṣṭha are independent of any of the other rśis in either of the two lists of the seven seers.

In Vedic mythology Atri (lit. ‘an eater’, ‘a devourer’ from Skt. root ad 17) is a maharṣi author of many hymns, especially composed in praise of Agni 18, Indra 19, the Aśvins 20 and the Viśvadevas 21. In

17 The cognate word atrin, a frequent adjective in the Rg Veda used to describe demons, is interpreted to mean devourer. The word atrī itself is once employed (RV 2.85) as an attribute of Agni, probably with this same meaning. This has led some scholars to suggest that Atri originally represented some form of Agni.

18 Fire, the deity presiding over the earth, is one of the most ancient and sacred Devas of the Hindu pantheon. He appears in three main forms: in heaven as the sun, in mid-air as lightning, on earth as fire. Together with Vāyu (presiding over the air) and Sūrya (presiding over the sky), he is one of the three great deities of the Vedic pantheon. About two hundred hymns of the Rg Veda are dedicated to him. Indeed, the very first Rg Vedic hymn begins with the celebration of Agni as the supreme priest i.e. as the foremost mediator or messenger (dīta) between men and the gods: «I worship Agni, the purohitā, the priest-god (ṛtvij) of the sacrifice, the boitr, the bestower of wealth» (agnīmile purohitam yajñasya devamṛtvijam / botaram ratnadhātāmanam //). Agni is the protector of men and their homes, and witness to their actions, hence his invocation at all solemn occasions.

19 The god of the firmament, the personified atmosphere. In the Vedas he stands first among the gods, but he is not uncreated, and is represented as having a father and mother. He is described as being of a golden color and as having arms of enormous length. He rides in a bright golden chariot drawn by two horses. His weapon is the thunderbolt, but he also uses arrows, a great hook, and a net, in which he is said to entangle his foes. The soma juice is his special delight. As deity of the atmosphere, he governs the weather and dispenses the rain and thus fertility. He sends forth his lightning and thunder, and is constantly at war with Vṛtra or Ahi, the demon of drought and inclement weather, whom he overcomes with his thunderbolts. More hymns are addressed to Indra than to any other deity in the Vedas, with the exception of Agni.

20 Lit. the owners of horses. The twin sons of Dyaus, the bright sky. They are represented as ever young and handsome, bright and of golden brilliancy, agile and possessed of many forms. They ride in a golden car drawn by horses or birds, as harbingers of dawn (Uṣas) and deliverers from the distress of darkness. In fact the Aśvins, typical succouring deities, may originally have been conceived as finders and rescuers of the vanished light of the sun. As personifications of the morning dawn, they are said to be children of the sun by a nymph who concealed herself in the form of a mare; hence she was called Aśvini and her sons Aśvins. Throughout Vedic mythology, the twin gods are revered as miraculous physicians (dāsra): they heal diseases with their remedies, restore sight, cure the sick and maimed. Fifty-four hymns of the Rg Veda are dedicated to them. The Aśvins have a parallel in the two famous horsemen of Greek mythology, the Dioskouroi, sons of Zeus.

21 Lit. all the gods. In the Vedas, they form a class of deities of inferior order. They are often vaguely addressed as 'preservers of men' or 'bestowers of rewards'. In later times, they appear as a class of gods particularly interested in equeval offerings. The lists of them vary, both in number and in names. The following is
fact, he is one of the seers most frequently mentioned in the Rg Veda (forty times in the singular, six times in the plural i.e. the Ātreyas, designating his descendants). The whole of the fifth book of the Rg Veda is attributed to the family of the Atris.

Atri is spoken of as a rṣi belonging to the five tribes (RV 1.117.3), and is mentioned along with Manu and other ancestors of the human race (RV 1.39.9).

Agni is said to have helped Atri (RV 7.15.5). Indra, having heard Atri’s prayer (RV 8.36.7), also helped him by opening the cow-stall for him and the Aṅgiras (RV 1.51.3).

The characteristic myth about Atri in the Rg Veda is connected with the Aśvins, his chief protectors. They deliver Atri from darkness (6.50.10; 7.71.5), and they rescue him out of a chasm (ṛṣiṣa) with all his host when they destroy the wiles of a malignant demon (1.116.8; 1.117.3). The chasm into which Atri had fallen was a burning one, but they gave him a strengthening drought. The Aśvins made the burning chasm or his abode (grha) agreeable for him (10.39.9; 8.62.7). They also prevent the fire from burning him (8.62.8). They rescue Atri who is in the heat (10.80.3), they protect him from the heat with coolness (1.119.6; 8.62.3), and make the one of them: Vasu, Satya, Kraṭu, Dakṣa, Kāla, Kāma, Dhṛiti, Kuru, Purūravas, Mādravas. Two others are sometimes added, Rocaka or Locana and Dhuri or Dhvani.

22 Lit. the man, from the root man, to think. This name refers to fourteen mythological progenitors of mankind and rulers of earth, each of whom holds sway for the period called a manvantara (manu-antar), the age of Manu, that is a period of no less than 4,320,000 years. The first of these Manus was Svāyambhuva, who sprang from Svayambhū, the self-existent, identified with Brahmā. According to another account, this Manu sprang from the incestuous intercourse of Brahmā with his daughter and wife Satarūpā. As the acting creator, this Manu produced the ten Prajāpatis or progenitors of mankind, also known as the Maharṣis. The law-book commonly known as Manu is ascribed to this Manu, and so also is a Sūtra work on ritual bearing the same name. The Manu of the present age is the seventh, named Vaivasvata, the son of Vivasvat, the sun, and he is a Kṣatriya by race. He is also known as Satyavrata. There are various legends that he was saved from a great flood by Viṣṇu or Brahmā. The names of the fourteen Manus are as follows: Svāyambhuva, Svārociṣa, Autami, Tāmasa, Raivata, Čākṣuṣa, Vaivasvata, Sāvarṇa, Dakṣasāvarṇa, Brahmāsāvarṇa, Rudrasāvarṇa, Raucya, Bhautya.

23 The descendants of Aṅgiras. They occur in hymns addressed to luminous deities, and, at a later period, they become for the most part personifications of light, of luminous bodies, of celestial phenomena, and also of sacrificial fires. The Aṅgiras are indeed closely associated with Agni; as the latter, they are often described as messengers between gods and men. The etymological connexion of the term aṅgiras with the Greek term ἀγγέλος (messenger) confirms it.
burning heat agreeable for him (1.112.7). Once they are said to have rejuvenated Atri, who had grown old (10.143.1-2).

Certainly the most important episode about Atri in Vedic mythology, subsequently taken up in the Epics and Purāṇas, is the one in which he is said to have found and replaced the sun when it was afflicated by the demon of eclipses, Svarbhānu:

«The demon Svarbhānu struck the sun with darkness; Indra destroyed him, and Atri found the hidden sun, Atri placed the eye of the sun in the sky.»

Other Vedic versions similarly relate that Atri conducted the sun back to the sky, and repelled the darkness by his speech. Because Atri restored light to the worlds, the Ātreyas should be chosen to officiate at the sacrifice, and they should receive the first daksīṇā, before members of other gotras.

Indeed, the basic transformation which the ṛṣi brings about in his performance of tapas is the production of heat in the body. The ‘fire’ of his tapas is such that he is thought to be transmuted into fire (Agni) itself, burning the worlds with his heat and illuminating them with the light that radiates from his body. Consequently, one of the powers acquired by the ṛṣis was to bring light to the world, and to take the place of either the sun or the moon. In this connection, some scholars have suggested that Atri may have originally represented some form of Agni, personification of the sacrificial fire carrying the offerings to the deities of the celestial realms.

Some later versions in the Purāṇas relate Atri’s rescue of the sun in a similar way, often adding that Atri himself spread brilliance, and that he stopped the sun from falling by uttering the words ‘may all be well with you’ (svasti te’stu). In other versions, however, it is said that Atri himself took the place of the sun and became the sun. The Mahābhārata relates that Atri is he who, when the sun was destroyed, himself ascended upwards; while another passage relates that he became both the sun and the moon:

«Svarbhānu pierced the sun and moon with arrows, whereupon the gods were engulfed in darkness and began to be struck down by the demons. They caught sight of Atri performing tapas in a wood,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}} \text{ RV 5.40.6-9.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{25}} \text{ AV 13.2.4-36; GopathaB 1.2.17; KauśitakiB 24.3; PancaviṃśaB 6.6.8-10, 14.11.14; SatapathaB 4.3.4.21.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{26}} \text{ BrahmaP 13.9-11; BrāhmaṇḍaP 2.3.8.76-79; LiṅgaP 2.63.71-73; SkandaP 7.1.20.42-44.} \]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{27}} \text{ MBb 1.114.39-42.} \]
and asked him to help them; Atri asked how he could protect them, and they replied: 'Become for us the moon, the destroyer of darkness, and the sun, the destroyer of demons.' Thereupon Atri created light through his tapas, and made the worlds bright and without darkness; he overcame hosts of the gods' enemies through his own tejas\(^\text{28}\), and the gods saw that the demons were being burnt by Atri.\(^{29}\)

Further versions relate that, because of the length and power of his tapas, Atri's body assumed the brilliance of the moon: his lustre spread over the sky and flooded the worlds with light whence ten goddesses conceived and gave birth to his son Soma\(^{30}\). In another version it is said that through his tapas the moon flooded forth from his eyes and illumined the universe with its lustre\(^{31}\). The associations in these latter versions of Atri with the moon rather than with the sun may be derived from his role, especially in the Purāṇas, as the father of Soma; soma being yet another name for the moon.

Throughout the Epic period, Atri is referred to as one of the ten Prajāpatis or lords of creation engendered by Manu, and also as a mind-born son of Brahmā. As one of the seven rṣis he presides over the reign of Svāyambhuva, the first Manu or, according to others, of Svārociṣa, the second, or of Vaivāsvata, the seventh.

In the Mahābhārata, the rṣi Atri is said to have gone to Vīdeha to instruct king Nimi on the performance of the śrāddha rites\(^{32}\). With reference to dispute and rivalries between rṣis, we are told of how, on one occasion, Atri went to king Vainya to gain wealth to distribute to his sons and servants before retiring to the forest. He praised the king as the foremost of all sovereigns. But the rṣi Gautama objected to this, saying that such an honor was reserved only for Indra. The dispute was finally resolved in Atri's favour by Sanat Kumāra, thus gaining the desired wealth from the king\(^{33}\).

Indeed, rṣis are often depicted as being the recipients of various kinds of gifts from kings. In Brhaddevatā 5.28-36, we read of how Atri obtained gifts of 10,320 cows and a golden wagon with two oxen from king Tryarūṇa Aikṣvāka, of 100 oxen from king Aśvamedha, and of much wealth from king Trasadasyu.

\(^{28}\) Lit. splendor or brilliance, also fiery energy. The term may refer to the rṣi's powerful semen.

\(^{29}\) MBh 13.141.1-11.

\(^{30}\) Harivamsa 20.1-14.

\(^{31}\) MatsyaP 23.3-6.

\(^{32}\) MBh 13.91.18 f.

\(^{33}\) MBh 3.183.1-32.
In the Rāmāyaṇa, when Rāma, together with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā, sets out from Ayodhyā at the start of his exile, he is offered hospitality at the āśram of Atri and Anasūyā in the Citrakūta mountain. Here he is told of how in olden times Anasūyā, through her tapas, caused the river Jāhnāvī 34 or Gaṅgā 35 to flow in that place 36.

In the Puṇāṇas, Atri's āśram is located among the snows by the source of the river Airāvatī 37 in the Himālaya. The seer is depicted as a strict vegetarian: even the animals around his āśram are said to be vegetarian and friendly to one another, due to the rṣī's influence 38. The Matsya Purāṇa, narrating the journey of the Brāhmaṇ Purūravas 39 to the Himālayas for practicing austerities, thus describes Atri's hermitage:

«On that mountain there is a charming hermitage where all desires are granted and whose trees drop fruit fit for the chief of gods. That supreme hermitage, where black bees are always buzzing, encircles the mountain like a necklace. Visited by the wives of the gods, it destroys all sins. There, heaps of snow, shining like the orb of the moon, are piled up here and there by playful monkeys. The hermitage is surrounded on all sides by valleys filled with snow and rocky caves always hidden from mankind.

«After worshipping Bhava 40, the mighty King Purūravas, lord of

34 Lit. the daughter of Jāhnā. One of the many names of the river Ganges derived from Jāhnā, the name of a sage descended from Purūravas. Jāhnā was disturbed in his devotions by the passage of the Ganges, and consequently drank up its waters. He afterwards relented, and allowed the river to issue from his ear.

35 Lit. swift-goer, from the verbal root gam. It is mentioned only twice in the Rg Veda. The Puṇāṇas represent the heavenly Ganges flowing from the toe of Viśṇu, and to have been brought down from heaven by the prayers of the saint Bhāgiratha, to purify the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of king Sagara, who had been burnt by the angry glance of the rṣī Kapila. Thus, the Ganges is also known as Bhāgirathi. We are also told that the divine river was angry at being brought down from heaven, and thus Śiva, to save the earth from the shock of her fall, caught the Gaṅgā on his brow, and checked its course with his matted locks. For a thorough presentation of Gaṅgā's mythology, see S. Piano, Il mito del Gange: Gaṅgā-Mahātmya, Torino, Promolibri, 1990 1.

36 Rām 2.109.6-10.

37 The name is derived from the word irāvat, meaning 'produced from water'.

38 MatsyaP 119.55 f.

39 In the Vedas, a mythical personage connected with the sun and the dawn, and existing in the middle of the universe. According to the Rg Veda, he was son of Ilā, and a beneficent pious prince. He is the hero of the story of Vikrama and Urvāśī. Purūravas is the viśrāma or hero, and Urvāśī is a nymph (apsaras) who came down from paradise, having being cursed by Mitra and Varuṇa.

40 Lit. being, existence. A name of Rudra or Śiva, or of a manifestation of that deity.
Madra ⁴¹, reached the hermitage (...). Adorned with hundreds of beautiful flowers, radiant, brilliant, conferring bliss, it was built by the sage Atri himself ⁴².

Atri is also said to have performed tapas for obtaining a son on mount Rksakala, on the banks of the river Nirvindhya ⁴³, on the banks of the river Narmadā ⁴⁴, and in the Kamalā forest in the south, by the Citrakūṭa mountain ⁴⁵. Arēyas are additionally said to be peoples of northern countries ⁴⁶.

Anasūya (lit. not spiteful, not envious), Atri’s wife, is, according to Purānic lore, one of the many daughters of Dakṣa ⁴⁷, son of Brhamā the creator, and Prasūti ⁴⁸, daughter of Priyavrata ⁴⁹ and

⁴¹ Name of a country to the north-west of Hindustan. Its capital was Śakala and the territory extended from the Biyās to the Cinnab, or, according to others, as far as the Jhilam.
⁴³ ŚivaP 3.19.2-16.
⁴⁴ SkandaP 5.3.103.1-109.
⁴⁵ ŚivaP 4.3.7-39; 5.2.18-19.
⁴⁶ MārkaṇḍeyaP 57.39; Vāmanap 13.41 f.
⁴⁷ Lit. able, competent, intelligent. This name generally carries with it the idea of a creative power. According to the Mahābhārata, Dakṣa sprang from the right thumb of Brhamā, and his wife from that deity’s left thumb. The Purāṇas adopt this view of his origin, but state that he married Prasūti. By her he had, according to various sources, twenty-four, fifty, or sixty daughters. An important event in the life of Dakṣa, very frequently referred to, is the episode of Dakṣa’s sacrifice, which was violently interrupted by Śiva. The germ of this story is found in the Taittirīya Samhitā, where it is related that the gods excluded Rudra from a sacrifice. Consequently, the latter pierced the sacrifice with an arrow and Pūsan, attempting to eat a portion of the oblation, broke his teeth. The story is found both in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. According to the latter, Dakṣa was engaged in a sacrifice, when Śiva, enraged since he had not been invited to participate in it, pierced the offering with an arrow. The gods and Asuras were alarmed and the whole universe quaked. The rṣis tried to appease the angry god, but in vain. Finally, the gods and seers humbly propitiated him, and when he was appeased they gave him a distinguished part in the sacrifice, and through fear resorted to him as their refuge. This important story, signaling the ascent of Rudra-Śiva to the status of a great god, is reproduced in considerable variations and with many embellishments throughout Purānic literature.
⁴⁸ Lit. a procreator.
⁴⁹ Lit. fond of obedience. One of the two sons of Brhamā and Satarūpā or, according to other sources, a son of Manu Śvayambhūva. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa narrates how Priyavrata, dissatisfied that only half of the earth was illuminated at one time by the solar rays, followed the sun seven times round the earth in his own flaming car of equal velocity, like another celestial orb, resolved to turn night into day. He was however stopped by Brhamā. The ruts which were formed by the motion of his chariot wheels were the seven oceans. In this way the seven continents
grand-daughter of Manu. In the Epics and Purāṇas, Anasūyā is celebrated as a model of virtue and chastity and as the ideal wife, wholly devoted to her husband. Through her chastity she stores up great power, which allows her to perform exceptional feats. For instance, the Śiva Purāṇa reports how, because of her chastity, Anasūyā was able to restore to life a Brāhmaṇ who had died due to Varāha’s curse 51.

In the Mahābhārata we read of how Anasūyā once abandoned Atri in a fit of anger and refused to live under his subjection, and after a tapas of fasting and sleeping on wooden boards for three hundred years, she obtained from Śiva the boon to have a son without sexual intercourse with her husband 52.

The Rāmāyaṇa narrates how Anasūyā, through the power of her tapas, during a hundred year drought, caused the river Jāhnavī or Gaṅga to flow past their āśram in the Citrakūṭa mountain 53.

The Rāmāyaṇa also reports of how she once made ‘ten nights one’ in order to help a female friend, who had been cursed that she would become a widow the day after. ‘Morrow shall not be’, said Anasūyā, and extinguished it by making ten nights one (daśarātrīṃ kṛtā rāṭriḥ) 54. The sixteenth chapter of the Mārkandeya Purāṇa takes up this latter episode in its presentation of the birth of Soma, Dāttātreya and Durvāsas. This important account, in the form of a dialogue between a father and a son, where the latter narrates how Dāttātreya taught yoga to Alarka, deserves to be summarized in detail:

In ancient times there was a Brāhmaṇ named Kauśika 55 who was prone to all sorts of vices. He had a chaste and pious wife, Śāṇḍili 56, of the earth were created. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa his wife is said to be Kāmyā, daughter of Kardama, by whom he had ten sons and two daughters. Three of the sons adopted a religious life, and Priyavrata thus divided the seven continents among the others.

50 Lit. the boar, the third incarnation (avatāra) of Viṣṇu. The myth of the boar, which raised the earth from the waters, is first found in the Brāhmaṇas. A demon named Hiranyakṣa had dragged the earth to the bottom of the sea. To recover it, Viṣṇu assumed the form of a boar, and after a contest of a thousand years he slew the demon and raised up the earth.

51 ŚivaP 2.3.54.79.
52 MBb 13.14.65 f. Cf. also ŚivaP 7.2.15.67-68.
53 Rām 2.109.6-8. Cf. also ŚivaP 4.3.7 to 4.4.61; 5.2.18-19.
54 Rām 2.117.11.
55 In the Mahābhārata, Kauśika is mentioned as having gone to a hell of torment for having pointed out to robbers a road by which they pursued and killed some persons who fled from them.
56 In the Mahābhārata, the name of a Brāhmaṇi worshipped as the mother of Agni.
who was devoted to him in spite of his bad character. Kauśika was attached to a prostitute in the town and spent most of his time in her company, without caring for Śaṅdili. A day came when Kauśika had no money and so was pushed out of the prostitute’s house.

Śaṅdili received him warmly at home and took great care of him. One day, however, Kauśika requested his wife to lead him back to that woman, as he was unable to forget her beauty. Śaṅdili, a faithful and obedient wife, took Kauśika who was maimed on her shoulders, and one dark night started for the prostitute’s house. On the way it so happened that the sage Māṇḍavya \(^{37}\), who had been hanged to a tree by the soldiers of the ruling king, was still hanging there, alive, on account of his yogic powers. The sage was hurt by Kauśika’s body, and cursed him that he would die at sunrise. On hearing this, Śaṅdili was shocked. She sent a touching appeal to the sun not to rise at all, so that her husband would not die. The sun complied with the wish of this chaste women and the activities of the world were consequently stopped. The gods in heaven could not get their share of oblations (haviḥ) as sacrifices were not performed by the people. Thus, the entire cycle of sacrifices, rain, grain, etc. came to a standstill and there was great chaos in the whole universe \(^{38}\).

The gods then went to Viṣṇu who directed them to propitiate Anasūyā, who was a chaste women and who was performing a great penance with her husband Atri, the mind-born son of Brahmā. ‘Oh gods!’ he said, ‘only light can be a match for light and penance for penance (tejāḥ parama tejasāiva tapašā ca tapastathā) and you should worship Anasūyā, the great satī \(^{39}\), who alone will be able to regain

\(^{37}\) Also known as Anīṁmāṇḍavya. A discontented rṣi, MBh 1.108.8 narrates how he once reproved Dharma for a false judgement and, cursing the deity to be reborn as Vidura.

\(^{38}\) Compare with the locus classicus of the pravartitam cakram (turning cosmic wheel) in Bhagavadgītā 3.14-16: annād bhaṇvantī bhūtām parjanya annasambhavah / yaṇād bhaṇvati parjanyo yaṇāḥ karmasamudbhavah // karma brahmād bhavat // tasmāt sarvaṇam brāhma nityam yaśe pratiṣṭhīnam // evam pravartitam cakram nā 'nu varṣatāti 'bha yah / aṣāyur indriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati // Franklin Edgerton renders these famous verses thus: «Beings originate from food; from the rain-god food arises; from worship comes the rain(-god); worship originates in action. Action arises from Brahman, know; and Brahman springs from the Imperishable; therefore the universal Brahman is eternally based on worship. The wheel thus set in motion who does not keep turning in this world, malignant, delighting in the senses, he lives in vain, son of Prthū.» Cf. F. Edgerton, The Bhagavad Gītā, New York, Harper Torchbook, 1964, p.19.

\(^{39}\) Lit. a virtuous or faithful wife. In Indian mythology, Satī is daughter of Dakṣa and wife of Śiva. She died or killed herself in consequence of a quarrel between her husband and father. The Kāśi Khaṇḍa, a modern work, says that she sacrificed herself by entering the fire, thus becoming a satī.
the position which is lost due to the curse of a satī.’

Accordingly, all gods with Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as their heads, went to the hermitage of Atri and Anasūyā and requested Anasūyā to help them. The kind-hearted Anasūyā showed her readiness to accompany them, though she was quite aware of the powers of the gods to do anything they desired.

Anasūyā thus met with Śāṇḍili and between the two satīs a pleasant conversation was started on the theme of a wife’s devotion to her husband. Anasūyā finally won over the heart of Śāṇḍili explaining how, for her sake alone, the entire universe was in peril. Śāṇḍili agreed to consider the problem favorably, though the thought of a future life without her husband worried her. Anasūyā promised her that she would see to it that her husband would get a new life. Thus, Śāṇḍili cheered the world with the light of the sun, while Anasūyā preserved the life of Śāṇḍili’s husband by her power of chastity.

The gods, grateful for Anasūyā’s services, requested her to ask for a boon of her choice. After great hesitation she asked that the trimūrti, that is Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva should be born as sons to her, and that she and her husband should be exempted from the cycles of births and deaths (samsāra). The gods granted the boon and departed.

As time went by, one day Atri received Anasūyā who had just finished the period of four days of her menstruation ⁶⁰, and who came to pay respects by falling at the feet of her husband ⁶¹. At that moment, a light arose from the eyes of Atri which served as seed for the birth of the three mind-born sons who were Soma, Dattātreya and Durvāsas ⁶². Soma was a partial incarnation of Brahmā, Dattā-

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⁶⁰ Indeed, for a man to associate with a menstruating woman (rajavesulā) is viewed as a sin (pāpa) and an extremely polluting act. In the Indian law writings, the precept is found that a menstruating woman must not be approached, and whoever so offends must, according to Yājñav. 3.288 fast and eat ghī for three days. Moreover, the woman must not ‘inflict’ her presence on others at this ‘unclean’ time. On this issue, cf. J.J. MEYER, Sexual Life in Ancient India, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971, pp.225 f.

⁶¹ This act, indicating total surrender to one’s husband (indeed the wife’s pati i.e. lord!), is often referred to in devotional literature as saṣṭāṅga dandaśat, that is ‘falling like a stick with one’s eight limbs on the ground’.

⁶² Giving birth through the powerful light of one’s inner eye is a feat which is often attributed to rṣis, due to the intensity of their stored ‘heat’ (tapas). Indeed, the top of the head and particularly the point in the middle of the forehead, are thought of as the reservoir in which semen (reṣā) is stored, and the yoni or rṣī may utilize it for the purposes of creation, without having sexual intercourse (maithuna).
treya of Viṣṇu and Durvāsas of Śiva. The latter was born, it is said, only after seven days as he had to meet with great trouble from the Haihayas. Thus, the three deities took their births and fulfilled the promise given to Anasūyā. Afterwards, Soma ascended to heaven and Durvāsas moved all over the world. Dattātreya, wishing to be without attachment, dived down in a lake.

In other Purānic versions we are told of how, when Atri and Anasūyā sought to obtain a son through tapas, the trimūrti, pleased with their asceticism, consented to become their sons. In a late form of the myth, however, it is reported that Anasūyā, in a fit of anger, cursed Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva to become her sons, after they had tried to rape her. In this way Anasūyā was able to avert a potentially dangerous hierogamy by transforming it into a sexless maternal relationship.

In giving birth to such divine sons (as well as to all other levels and orders of creation) the rṣis are not merely portrayed as being of supreme virtue and merit. For it is indeed on account of the purity i.e. chastity and strength of Atri’s and Anasūyā’s tapas that the gods consent to become their sons. Once again we have here the idea that it is only through rigid and single-minded devotion to asceticism that the greatest creative potency and power can be obtained.

The mythological origins of Soma (from the verbal root su, meaning to press out i.e. to extract), in Purānic accounts usually revered as a form of Brahmā the creator, are to be identified with the soma sacrifice, that is to say with the ritual preparation and drinking of the juice of an allucinogenic climbing plant (Asclepias acida), main feature of the Rg Vedic liturgy. All the one hundred and fourteen hymns of the ninth book, besides six in other books, are dedicated to the praise of the soma plant, thought of as the great nectar of...

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63 This name is supposed to be derived from haya i.e. horse. It refers to a race or clan of people to whom a Scythian origin has been ascribed. According to the Mahābhārata they were descended from Saryāti, a son of Manu. ViṣṇuP represents them as descendants of Haihaya of the Yadu race, but they are generally associated with outlying tribes. Arjuna Kārtavīrya, who was endowed with a thousand arms by Dattātreya, was king of the Haihayas. He was eventually defeated and had his arms cut off by Paraśurāma.

64 Cf. BhāgavataP 1.3.11, 2.7.4, 4.1.15-33; DevībhāgavataP 4.16.6-9; ŚivaP 3.19.2-27, 5.2.18-19; SkandaP 5.3.103.1-109.

happiness, long life (āyus) and immortality (amṛta). It is also celebrated in portions of four or five other hymns, and as a dual divinity with Indra, Agni, Pūṣan 66 and Rudra 67, in about six more hymns. The name of soma, in its simple form and in compounds, occurs hundreds of times in the Rg Veda. Indeed, judged by the standard of frequency, the deified Soma, after Indra and Varuṇa 68, comes third in order of importance among the Vedic gods: he is represented as primeval, all-powerful, healer of all diseases, bestower of riches, lord of other gods, and is identified with the supreme being.

In post-Vedic literature, Soma is a regular name for the moon (candra), which is poetically regarded as being ‘drunk up’ by the gods thus waning, till it is filled up again by the sun (sūrya). In Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.10.1 it is stated that the moon is king Soma, the food of the gods, and is drunk up by them. Even in the Brāhmaṇas the identification of Soma with the moon is a common place. Clearly the qualities of the soma juice are transferred to the moon, which comes to be revered as osadhi-pati, lord of herbs, considered as the guardian of sacrifices, stars, and healing plants.

Though the early Epic does not know of the derivation of Soma

66 Derived from the root pus, the word means ‘prosperer’, ‘to cause to thrive’. From Vedic literature, Pūṣan is closely connected with the sun. He bestows wealth and protection to men and cattle, thus appearing as the beneficent power of the sun manifested chiefly as a pastoral deity. He is often associated with Soma as protector of the universe. Pūṣan is toothless, and feeds upon a kind of gruel (whence he is called karambād, ‘one eating gruel’), and the cooked oblations offered to him are of ground materials. An explanation for Pūṣan being toothless is offered by the Tattvīrya Samhitā: Rudra, being excluded from a sacrifice, shot an arrow at the offering and pierced it. Consequently, a portion of this sacrifice was presented to Pūṣan and it broke his teeth.

67 Lit. a howler, from root rud, to cry. This god occupies a subordinate position in the Rg Veda, being celebrated in only three entire hymns, in part of another, and in one conjointly with Soma, while his name occurs about seventy-five times. Rudra appears as the howling terrible god, the god of storms, the father of the Rudras or Maruts, sometimes identified with Agni. On the one hand he is a destructive and malevolent deity, who needs to be appeased, bringing disease upon men and cattle. On the other hand, he is a somewhat beneficent deity supposed to have healing powers. These opposite characteristics will contribute to the moulding of the great god Śiva in the course of time.

68 The universal encompasser, the all-embracer. Varuṇa, together with Indra, is the greatest of the gods of the Rg Veda. One of the oldest of the Vedic deities, he is the personification of the encompassing vault of the sky, the maker and Upholder of heaven and earth. As such, he is king of the universe, king of gods and men, possessor of illimitable knowledge, the supreme deity to whom special honour is due. Varuṇa is often associated with Mitra, he being the ruler of the night and Mitra of the day.
from Atri (MBh 1.18.35 making Soma rise at the churning of the ocean), the following lineage (anuvāya) of the lunar race came to be established: Brahmā, Atri, Soma, Budha 69, Purūravas, Āyu. 70 Hari-
vamsa 71 1311 and 1334 clearly relate Soma to Atri:
«Soma the Rājarāj was son of Atri, born of his tears, and Atri was his hotr.»

Similarly, Matsya Purāṇa 23.1-10 narrates that tears flowed from Atri's eyes, flooding the universe with light. The ten points of the compass, taking the form of a woman, received that embryo in their belly, and after three hundred years they released it, and Brahmā made it into a youth, Soma.

Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty comments:
«The tears, a seed substitute, are ultimately transformed back into Soma, the Upaniṣadic source of all seed.» 72

In the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, the moon-god is more restricted in importance than its rival luminary the sun, though it is supposed to be higher in space, larger, and better endowed with rays (aṅśu). It is made to belong to a lower class of deities than the sun, for Soma is one of the group of the eight Vasus 73, three of whom, moon, wind, and fire, are retained in the Epic list. Rather than as an anthropomorphic deity, the moon in both the Epiсs is referred to in its natural characteristics, as 'a delighter of eyes and heart', its gentle beauty and cool light being variously celebrated.

Mahābhārata tradition identifies the twenty-seven nakṣatra, Dak-
ṣa's mythical daughters representing the lunar mansions, as Soma's wives. Soma, however, paid such attention to the beautiful Rohiṇī 74,

69 Lit. wise, intelligent. Personification of the planet Mercury. He married Ilā, daughter of the Manu Vaivasvata, and by her had a son, Purūravas.
70 Lit. a living being. Name of the fire, as the first born son of Purūravas and Urvāśī. Āyu was the father of Nahūṣa, Ḹatrā-ṛddha, Rambha, Rāji, and Arناس.
71 Probably composed around 400 CE in southern India, the Harivamsa is a long poem of 16,374 verses narrating the genealogy of Hari or Viṣṇu. Though it purports to be a part of the Mahābhārata, it is of much later date and may more accurately be ranked alongside Purānic literature. It is divided in three parts. The first is introductory, giving details about creation and the patriarchal and regal dynasties, the second narrates the life and adventures of Kṛṣṇa, and the last treats of the future of the world and of the corruption of the Kali age.
72 W.D. O'FLAHERTY, Sexual Metaphors, op.cit., p.40.
73 A class of deities chiefly known as attendants of Indra. In Vedic times they appear as personifications of natural phenomena. They are Āpa (water), Dhrūva (pole-star), Soma (moon), Dhara (earth), Anila (wind), Anala (fire), Prabhāṣa (dawn) and Pratyūṣa (light). According to the Rāmāyaṇa they were all children of Aditi.
74 Lit. the red one (being the feminine of robita i.e. red), from the color of Aldebaran, the principal star in the constellation of Taurus.
the fourth of them, that the others became jealous, and appealed to their father. Dakṣa’s intervention was however fruitless, and he cursed his son-in-law so that he remained childless, becoming affected with consumption. This moved his wives to pity, and they interceded with their father for him. Even though Dakṣa could not cancel his curse, he modified it so that Soma’s decay would be periodical, not permanent. Hence the wane and increase of the moon.

Another myth narrates how Soma performed the rāja-stūya, and became in consequence so arrogant and licentious that he carried off Tārā, the wife of Brhaspati, and refused to give her up either on the entreaties of her husband or at the command of Brahmā. This gave rise to a wide-spread quarrel (Tārakā-maya). The sage Uśanas, out of enmity to Brhaspati, sided with Soma, and he was supported by the Dānavas, the Daityas, and other foes of the Devas. Indra and the gods in general sided with Brhaspati. There ensued a fierce contrast, and ‘the earth was shaken to her centre’. Soma had his body cut in two by Śiva’s triśūla, and hence he is also known as Bhagnatma (broken-bodied). At length Brahmā interposed and stopped the fight, compelling Soma to restore Tārā to her husband. The result of this intrigue was the birth of a child, whom Tārā, after great persuasion, declared to be the son of Soma, and to whom the name of Budha was given: from him the lunar race sprung.

In Purānic mythology Soma is commonly said to be the son of the rṣi Atri and his wife Anasūyā, but not all authorities agree. One

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75 Lit. a royal sacrifice. A great sacrifice performed at the consecration of a king, religious in its nature but political in its operation, since it implied that he who instituted the sacrifice was a supreme lord, a king over kings, and his tributary princes were required to be present at the ritual.

76 Lit. star. Also known as Tārakā.

77 Lit. lord of prayer or devotion. In the Rg Veda Brhaspati appears as the sacrificer, the priest, who intercedes with gods on behalf of men. He is also designated as the purohita of the divine community. In later times he is presented as a rṣi, son of Aṅgiras, and his wisdom and eloquence are widely celebrated. He is also regent of the planet Jupiter, and the name is commonly used for the planet itself.

78 The name of an ancient rṣi with the patronymic Kāvyā. In later times, he was identified with Śukra, the teacher of the Asuras, who presides over the planet Venus.

79 Descendants from Danu by the sage Kaśyapa. They were giants who warred against the gods.

80 Descendants from Diti by the sage Kaśyapa. They were a race of demons and giants who warred against the gods and interfered with sacrifices (Kratu-dvīḍas). They are generally associated with the Dānavas and are hardly distinguishable from them.

81 See MBh 5.3972 f.
makes him son of Dharma 82, another attributes paternity to the sage Prabhakara (lit. light-maker) of the race of Atri, and he is also said to have been produced at the churning of the ocean in another manvantara.

According to the Puranas, Soma’s vehicle is a three-wheeled chariot drawn by ten horses as white as snow, five on the right half of the yoke and five on the left.

Durvasas (lit. ill-clothed), a form of Siva, is noted for his irascible temper, and many fell under his curse. It was he who cursed Sakuntala 83 for keeping him waiting at the door, and so caused the separation between her and king Dusyanta 84. But it was also he who blessed Kunti by giving her a charm, so that she became a mother by the sun 85. In the Vishnu Purana he is represented as cursing Indra for treating a garland which the sage presented to him with disrespect. The curse was that his sovereignty over the three worlds should be subverted, and under it Indra and the gods grew weak and were overpowered by the Asuras 86. As a last resort they came for help to Visnu, who directed them to churn the ocean of milk for the production of the amrita and other precious things.

The Mahabharata makes Durvasa a disagreeable guest, a bald

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82 An ancient sage, sometimes classed amongst the Prajapatis. He married ten or thirteen of Daksha’s daughters and had a numerous progeny. All his children are manifestly allegorical, being personifications of faculties, virtues and religious rites.

83 A nymph who was the daughter of Vishvamitra by the nymph Menakā. She was left in a forest at birth, where she was nourished by birds until found by the sage Kanva. She was brought up by this sage as his daughter in his hermitage. The loves, marriage, separation and reunion of Sakuntala and king Dusyanta, who met her on a hunting expedition, are the subject of Kālidāsa’s celebrated play Sakuntala.

84 A valiant king of the lunar race, descended from Puru. He was husband of Sakuntala, by whom he had a son, Bharata.

85 Kunti was daughter of the Yadava prince Śūra, king of the Śūrasenas, whose capital was Mathurā on the Yamunā. She was sister of Vasudeva, and was given by her father to his childless cousin Kuntibhoja, by whom she was brought up. Thanks to Durvasas’ charm she obtained a son, Karna, without losing her virginity. Subsequently she married Pāṇḍu, whom she chose at a svayamvara, and bore three sons, Yudhishthira, Bhima and Arjuna, who were called Pāṇḍavas although they were said to be the sons of the gods Dharma, Vāyu and Indra respectively.

86 In the oldest parts of the Rg Veda, the term asura is used for the supreme spirit, and is the same as the Ahura of Zoroastrianism. In the sense of god it was applied to several of the chief deities, such as Indra, Agni and Varuna. From later parts of the Rg Veda onwards, however, they are represented as a class of demons born out of Prajapati, in opposition to the gods i.e. the Devas. The Brāhmaṇas record many instances of the cosmic struggle between the forces of evil, the Asuras, and the forces of good, the Devas.
ascetic of ferocious temper (3.260.3 f.). His blessings, however, are said to have provided Kṛṣṇa 87 with sixteen thousand wives! In the Ānuśāsanika parvan (13.160. 7416 to 7449), Kṛṣṇa offers a vivid description of Durvāsas:

«(Formerly) I put up in my house the Brāhmaṇ Durvāsas, who was green and tawny, clad in rags (cīravāsāḥ), who had a stick of Bilva (Aegle marmelos), a long beard, who was emaciated, taller than the tallest man; he wandered over all the celestial and human worlds, singing this verse at congregations and in public squares:

‘Who would cause the Brāhmaṇ Durvāsas to dwell in his house? He becomes enraged with everyone even at the slightest transgression; he that would give me shelter should not anger me.’

As no one took notice of him, I invited him. Sometimes he would eat food sufficient for many thousand persons, sometimes very little, and (sometimes) he would not return home; he would laugh and weep without any visible reason 88; no one at that time was equal to him in years; (one day) he burnt all the beds and coverlets and all the well-adorned damsels, and then went out; then he asked for rice-milk (pāyasa); having previously caused every kind of food and drink to be kept ready, I had hot rice-milk be brought; having eaten some, he ordered me to smear my limbs with the remnant, which I did; then he smeared Rukmiṇī 89, and had her yoked to a

87 Lit. black. This name occurs in the Rg Veda, but without any relation to the great god of later times. The earliest mention of Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, is in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, where he appears as a scholar. The modern deity Kṛṣṇa is the most celebrated hero of Indian mythology, and the most popular of all gods indeed. He is said to be the eighth incarnation of Viṣṇu, or a direct manifestation of Viṣṇu himself (pūrṇāvatāra). This hero probably lived in the Epic age. He appears prominently in the Mahābhārata, and it is in the Bhagavadgītā that he is declared to be an avatāra, the supreme being descended on earth in order to preach and sustain dharma and destroy evil and unrighteousness. His divine character is still further developed in the Harivamśa and in the Purāṇas, especially in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Kṛṣṇa belonged to the pastoral Yādava race, being descended from Yadu, one of the sons of Yaśō. The history of Kṛṣṇa’s birth as given in the Mahābhārata is that Viṣṇu plucked out two of his own hairs, one white, the other black. These two hairs entered the wombs of Rohiṇī and Devakī; the white hair became Balarāma and the black (kṛṣṇa) hair (keśa) became Kṛṣṇa or Keśava. Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa’s reputed father, was brother of Kuntī, the wife of Pāṇḍu, and thus Kṛṣṇa was cousin of the three elder Pāṇḍava princes.

88 A behavior not uncommon among ascetics, who are often believed to be mad by ordinary people. As the Beigali saying goes: ‘A saint who is not mad is not a saint.’

89 Lit. adorned with gold. Daughter of Bhūmaka, king of Vidarbha. According to the Harivamśa she was sought in marriage by Kṛṣṇa, with whom she fell in love. But her brother Rukmiṇī was a friend of Kaṅsa, whom Kṛṣṇa had killed. He there-
chariot. Ascending that chariot, he set out of my house striking her with the hook, and proceeded along the high road. The Dāśarhas became angry. As Rukmini tottered, he struck her (with the whip); then he leapt down from the chariot and fled towards the south on foot, followed by us. Then he became gratified because I had subdued my anger, and said:

‘As long as gods and men will continue to entertain a liking for food, so long will everyone among them cherish the same liking for thee; so long as there will be righteous men (punyāḥ) in the worlds, so long will thy fame last; agreeable thou shalt be to all persons; whatever articles of thine have been broken or burnt or destroyed, thou shalt see restored or even better; thou wilt have no fear of death through such parts of thy body as have been smeared (with the rice-milk); thou ought to have smeared also the soles of thy feet.’

I saw my body endued with great beauty and splendour. He also blessed Rukmini, saying:

‘Thou shalt be the foremost of women in fame, etc., free from decrepitude or diseases or loss of complexion, possessed of a fragrant odour, the foremost of Kṛṣṇa’s sixty thousand wives, and (after death) thou shalt dwell in the same world as Kṛṣṇa.’

Having recommended me to be always thus disposed towards the Brāhmaṇs, he disappeared. I and Rukmini took the vow of always satisfying the Brāhmaṇs. Having entered our house, I saw that everything which Durvāsas had broken or burnt had become renewed. From that day forth I have always worshipped the Brāhmaṇs.”

On another occasion Kṛṣṇa entertained him hospitably, but omitted to wipe the fragments of food from the foot of the sage. At this the latter grew angry and foretold how Kṛṣṇa would be killed. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa also states that Kṛṣṇa fell according to the imprecation of Durvāsas, and in the same work Durvāsas describes himself as one whose nature is stranger to remorse.

fore opposed him. Rukmini was then promised to Śiśupāla, king of Cedi, but on her wedding day, as she was going to the temple, Kṛṣṇa saw her, took her by the hand, and carried her away in his chariot. They were pursued by her intended husband and by her brother Rukmin, but Kṛṣṇa defeated them both, and took her safely to Dvārakā, where he married her. She was his principal wife and bore him a son, Pradyumna, along with nine other sons and one daughter. At Kṛṣṇa’s death she and seven of his other wives immolated themselves on his funeral pile.

90 A tribe of the Yādavas. ‘Prince of the Daśarhas’ was a title of Kṛṣṇa.


92 His death is narrated in the Mausala parva, the 16th book of the Mahābhārata: Kṛṣṇa was unintentionally killed by a hunter named Jaras (lit. old age), who shot him with an arrow, mistaking him for a deer.