

## The Legend of King Nimi and the Uttarakāṇḍa of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa

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The *Uttarakāṇḍa* of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* has long been viewed as the most controversial of the epic's seven books. Among scholars this reputation derives as much from its suspicious textual history as its disturbing contents. Indeed much of the content and style of the text as it is constituted in any of its editions and in the manuscripts that were collated for the Critical Edition does not seem to be in keeping with those of earlier books. Nevertheless, there is sufficient textual evidence to support the inclusion of the final book in the Critical Edition. Moreover one can persuasively argue that since the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, as it has been critically reconstituted, is not a homogeneous unit and since not all sections are of a uniform date, there are sections that can be aligned more closely with the core narrative of the earlier books.<sup>1</sup> However the extent and identification of these sections are by no means unanimously agreed upon.<sup>2</sup>

Intimately connected to the issues of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*'s date and relationship to the previous six books of the epic, is the actual content of the book and the internal relationships among its various parts. As has been the practice of the editors of the critical edition of each of the *kāṇḍas*, immediately following the examination of the manuscripts, editions, testimonia, etc., consulted for the critical edition, U.P. Shah, the *Uttarakāṇḍa*'s editor, provides us with his analysis and arguments concerning the passages that have been relegated to the appendices. For the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, this is additionally complicated by a series of what the tradition itself identifies as *prakṣipta*, or "spurious passages," but which are frequently included in editions and translations. While these *prakṣipta* passages often present a textually complicated and even at times confusing history, the critical evidence that determines their viability as part of the reconstituted text is not at issue and they cannot in any way be understood as part of this text based on the extant critical evidence. There are other passages, however, that Shah has excluded from the critical text whose solid textual support seriously calls into question the propriety of their exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All translations of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and of the commentators' comments are taken from our forthcoming translation and annotation of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (Goldman and Goldman 2016). All *Rāmāyaṇa* citations are to the critical edition (Bhatt and Shah, 1960–1975) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Brockington 1998, p. 379 and n.70

<sup>3</sup> S. Goldman 2015.

Shah and the other editors of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* have identified thirteen passages, which include the above-mentioned *prakṣipta sargas*, that they felt should be relegated to the appendices. Four of these passages—Appendix I, No. 8, a passage of 460 plus lines, Appendix I, No. 9, and Appendix I, No. 11 (including a fifteen line passage following 7.67.4, 1127\*), and Appendix I, No. 13—which I have analyzed elsewhere in some depth, should have not been omitted from the reconstructed text, and we have restored them in our translation.<sup>4</sup> Among these, the longest, Appendix I, No. 8, is framed as a dialogue between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—Lakṣmaṇa asks about various points of proper kingly behavior, and Rāma, in turn, responds. These first few lines of the appendix, which detail this narrative frame, I might note, are among the those that do not have adequate textual support for inclusion in the critical text. The first eighty-two lines detail the story of King Nṛga, who suffers birth as a lizard for neglecting his duties as a king. Following this, lines 89–212 tell the story of King Nimi, the heroic twelfth son of Ikṣvāku. The narrative is found outside of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but the story as it is told in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is not. This tale of Nimi is then followed a short version, lines 213–306, of the well-known episode of King Yayāti and his somewhat complicated relationships with Devayānī, the daughter of Śukrācārya, and Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of Virocana, the king of the *asuras*. For each of these passages, Shah provides a rationale for their omission that he feels adequately overrides the textual evidence.

Of these three narratives, perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the longest and most complex, is that of King Nimi. In his Introduction, Shah argues that, despite its overwhelming textual support, the Nimi story [lines 83–212<sup>6</sup>] should be omitted from the critically reconstructed text because it presents “a serious incongruity.” Drawing evidence from the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* as well as the *purāṇas*, he argues that, while we do find the names Nimi and Mithi associated with the lineage of Janaka, nowhere are those names associated with the Ikṣvāku lineage as they are in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*’s Nimi episode.<sup>7</sup> But this argument, too, is without foundation, and as I have argued elsewhere, the connection between

<sup>4</sup> These lines have been restored to the critical text as *sargas* 51-1\*–51-7\*, see Goldman and Goldman 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The saga of Nimi has been restored as 7.51-3\*–7.51-5\*, see Goldman and Goldman 2016, Introduction—*Text* and notes to 7.51-3\* and S. Goldman 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Shah 1975, p. 28–29.

Nimi and the Ikṣvāku is well attested outside of *Uttarakāṇḍa*<sup>8</sup> and Shah’s arguments concerning the episode’s incongruity must be considered without basis.

Rather than assume, like Shah, that the story of Nimi is spurious on the basis of a questionable genealogical association, let us assume that, based on its virtually universal textual support, the Nimi episode should be admitted to the critical text of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Since the episode is so well textually supported, perhaps a more profitable line of inquiry would be, given the narrative’s somewhat unusual content, how and why the author[s] and/or compilers understand the episode to be part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Moreover, why did they locate it at this point in the narrative?<sup>12</sup> The story of Nimi consists of three parts—the first concerns Nimi’s sacrifice and his and Vasiṣṭha’s reciprocal curses to become disembodied [lines 83–123], the second tells the story of Vasiṣṭha’s re-birth [lines 124–171], and the last tells how Nimi comes to be the progenitor of the Maithila lineage [lines 172–212]. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* the Nimi episode, in what perhaps is a nod to the *Mahābhārata*’s *Nalopākhyāna*, begins first with a classical narrative introduction, which also marks the familial relationship with which Shah is so concerned:

*āsīd rāja nimir nāma ikṣvākoḥ sumahātmanah  
putro dvādaśamo vīro dharme ca pariniṣṭhitah // [89–90]*

There was a king named Nimi. Heroic and established in righteousness,  
he was the twelfth son of the extremely great Ikṣvāku.

King Nimi, desiring to perform a long sacrificial session, asks Atri and Vasiṣṭha to perform a sacrifice for him. But the latter has already committed to perform a sacrifice for Indra. Nimi, apparently not able to wait, chooses Gautama to take Vasiṣṭha’s place. Vasiṣṭha, having completed Indra’s sacrifice, returns to carry out Nimi’s, and discovers that Gautama has already completed it. Enraged, Vasiṣṭha demands to see Nimi. But Nimi, having completed his sacrificial duties, has gone to sleep. Vasiṣṭha, even more enraged, curses Nimi:

<sup>8</sup> See S. Goldman 2015 and *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 4.2.11–12; 4.5.1; *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* 2.63.8cd–9ab; *Garuḍapurāṇa* 1.38.18, *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.13.1; See too *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.6.4, *Brahmapurāṇa* 7.44–45, *Vāyupurāṇa* 1.28.128–30.

<sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the structural logic of Appendix I, No. 8 (=7.51-1\*–7.51-7\*), see Introduction to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (Goldman and Goldman 2016). For our translation of the passage with annotation, see Goldman and Goldman 2016.

*yasmāt tvam anyam vṛtavān mām avajñāya pārthiva /  
cetanena vinābhūto dehas tv eṣa bhaviṣyati // [116–117]*

Since, O king, having treated me with contempt, you chose someone else,  
your body shall be devoid of consciousness.

Before the curse can take effect, the enraged Nimi likewise curses Vasiṣṭha:

*ajānataḥ śayānasya krodhena kaluṣīkṛtaḥ /  
muktavān mayi śāpāgniṃ yamadaṇḍam ivāparam // [120–121]*

*tasmāt tavāpi brahmarṣe cetanena vinākṛtaḥ /  
dehaḥ suruciraprakhyo bhaviṣyati na saṃśayaḥ // [122–123]*

While I was sleeping unawares, you, perverted by anger, unleashed  
upon me the fire of your curse, which was like a second rod of Yama.

Therefore, brahman-seer, your body, too, with its radiant splendor  
shall, no doubt, be rendered devoid of consciousness.

Clearly both Nimi, as the *vaṃśakara* of the lineage of Janaka and a son of Ikṣvāku, and Vasiṣṭha, as the family priest of the Ikṣvākus, are linked to the Rāma tradition. Thematically, too, there is a connection, for the dangers inherent in a king disregarding his duty, especially in reference to brahmins, connect to the larger narrative as part of Rāma’s advice to Lakṣmaṇa.<sup>13</sup> Outside of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the Nimi legend has a more complicated history in the *itihāsa/purāṇa* tradition. Unlike the other *Uttarakāṇḍa* stories that encapsulate it—that of Nṛga and that of Yayāti—the story of Nimi is not known to the *Mahābhārata*. On the other hand, beyond the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, the Nimi episode is frequently encountered in the purāṇic tradition, particularly in connection with the *Rāmākathā*. The story is [re]told in a number of *purāṇas* in a number of variant versions. Thus, for example, at *Viṣṇupurāṇa* 4.5.1–24 we find a somewhat detailed version of the first section of the narrative, which follows immediately upon the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*’s version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which itself includes some events from the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. There, the Nimi story is

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<sup>13</sup> See Goldman and Goldman 2016. Introduction: The Structure of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

located outside of the Rāma story properly, but in a locus that is clearly aligned with it, as it eventually tells the birth of Janaka, Sītā’s father. Here Nimi, a son of Ikṣvāku, undertakes a thousand year sacrifice [4.5.1]. He requests Vasiṣṭha to be his *hotṛ*, but Vasiṣṭha replies that Indra has already chosen him for a five-hundred year sacrifice [4.5.3]. Vasiṣṭha tells Nimi to wait until he has finished Indra’s sacrifice, and he will return and be his officiant. Nimi does not reply (*ukte sa pṛthivīpatir na kiṃcid uktavān*, “when addressed [thus], that lord of the earth said nothing”<sup>15</sup>) Vasiṣṭha, thinking that Nimi has consented to this plan,<sup>16</sup> undertakes Indra’s sacrifice. Upon completing Indra’s sacrifice, Vasiṣṭha returns to perform Nimi’s sacrifice and discovers that Gautama has already completed it in his stead and Nimi is now asleep. Vasiṣṭha curses Nimi to become “without a body (*videhaḥ*),” since he had Gautama perform his sacrifice [4.5.8]. Waking up, Nimi reciprocates and curses Vasiṣṭha for cursing him while he slept. Vasiṣṭha, too, will abandon his [corporeal] body. The story as it is found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is noteworthy for its close similarity to that found in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

Yet another variant of the encounter between Nimi and Vasiṣṭha and their reciprocal curses is found in the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* [1.117.1–16]. Here, Nimi approaches Vasiṣṭha to perform his sacrifice, Vasiṣṭha agrees, but is exhausted, and asks Nimi to wait until he has rested.<sup>17</sup> Nimi then, rather heatedly, tells Vasiṣṭha that the rite is intended to help one achieve the next world and cannot wait:

*pāralaukikakāryeṣu kaḥ pratīkṣitum utsahe* / 1.117.6ab

How [lit., “who am I”] can bear I to wait when it concerns rites for the next world?

Finally, the king tells Vasiṣṭha that if the sage won’t undertake the sacrifice for him, he will find another to do it.<sup>18</sup> The two curse each other to become bodiless.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Qui tacet consentire.*

<sup>16</sup> Literally, “[this] is desired by him (*anena samanvicchitam*).”

<sup>17</sup> *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* 117.04cd–1.117.05ab:

*tava yajñaiḥ samantataiḥ //*

*bhṛśaṃ śrānto ’smi viśramya yājayisyāmi te nrpa /*

<sup>18</sup> *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* 117.117.12cd:

While the story here uses the basic frame of that found in the other two versions, it substitutes the sacrifice for Indra with the sage's exhaustion and leaves unstated any reason for that exhaustion. The narrative has Nimi articulate a rather impassioned sermon on the need to perform religious deeds without delay, for heaven does not wait. This is unique to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*'s version. Nimi does not, in fact, carry out a sacrifice, but only wants to, and is cursed before he is able to do so. The curse on Nimi by Vasiṣṭha is given no cause, but appears to originate from sage's impatience over the long sermon rather than through any fault of Nimi. No mention is made of Nimi's sleeping or neglect of Vasiṣṭha nor is there mention of Nimi's reciprocal curse of the sage.

A somewhat brief version of the *Nimikathā* is found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* [9.13, esp. 1–6ab]. Like the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*'s version, the *Bhāgavata*'s makes explicit the fact that Nimi remains silent [*tūṣṇīm āsīd grhapatih—2b*], when told by Vasiṣṭha to wait until he had finished Indra's sacrifice. Nimi undertakes his sacrifice with other officiants, not waiting for his *guru* to return. Each curses the other to lose his body. This version seems to have been aware of either the *Uttarakāṇḍa*'s narrative or that found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.

Perhaps the most apparently divergent, and yet intriguing, versions of the story are found in the *Matsya*-<sup>20</sup> and *Padmapurāṇas*. In addition to being quite different, they are additionally very brief—the entire *Matysapurāṇa* version occupying only five verses—and virtually identical. At *Matsyapurāṇa* 61.32–36, Nimi is playing a game of dice with some of his women. Vasiṣṭha

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*nā ced yājayase mahyaṃ yāsyāmy anyam tu yājakaṃ //*  
<sup>19</sup> *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* 1.117.13cd–116cd:  
*śaśāpa taṃ nimiṃ krodhād videhas tvaṃ bhaviṣyasi //*

*śrāntaṃ māṃ tvaṃ samutsrjya yasmād anyam dvijottamam /*  
*dharmajñāḥ san narendrādya yājakaṃ kartum arhasi //*

*nimis taṃ pratyuvācātha dharmakāryaratasya me /*  
*vighnaṃ karoṣi nānyena yājanaṃ ca tathecchasi //*

*śāpaṃ dadāmi tasmāt tvaṃ videho 'dya bhaviṣyasi /*  
*evam ukte tu tau jātau videhau dvijapārthivau //*

<sup>20</sup> At *Matsyapurāṇa* 61.9–17 offers a pre-history of the curse where Indra curses Agni and Vāyu. He curses Agni to assume the body of a sage, Agastya, who will dry up the ocean. Eventually both fall onto the earth, where they are born from a pitcher by the seeds of Mitra and Varuṇa [Mitravaruṇī. This is how Agastya became the younger brother of Vasiṣṭha. This episode then leads into the narrative aligned with our story.

chances to come there. Nimi, otherwise engaged, does not show Vasiṣṭha the respect that he was due. Vasiṣṭha curses Nimi to become bodiless [*videha*], and Nimi, in return, similarly curses the sage. [32–33]. What is an explicit feature of this story, and consistent with the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and *Viṣṇupurāṇa* versions is that the curse has its basis in the neglect of one’s royal duties. An even shorter version, occupying only four lines, of the *Matsyapurāṇa*’s variant is found in the *Padmapurāṇa* 5.22.34cd–38b. In both of these *purāṇas*, the reciprocal curses of Nimi and Vasiṣṭha directly follow the story of Mitra and Varuṇa and their seduction of Urvaśī, discussed below. As will be discussed below, neither one is connected directly to the Rāma narrative.

### Rebirth

In what is a new *sarga* in all printed editions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, except the critical edition,<sup>21</sup> Nimi’s and Vasiṣṭha’s adventures continue, with some very interesting twists: As expected, both men become bodiless. Vasiṣṭha petitions his father, Grandfather Brahmā, and begs that he might have another body. Brahmā tells Vasiṣṭha that he must enter the semen released by Mitra and Varuṇa, but that he will not be born from a womb. Vasiṣṭha then goes to the abode of Varuṇa, where Mitra and Varuṇa are sharing rule. Mitra has also come to Varuṇa’s abode. Now Varuṇa happens to see Urvaśī and desires to make love with her. He propositions her, and, although she is pleased and although she loves Varuṇa more than Mitra, she is already promised to Mitra [with whom she has apparently already made love]. Varuṇa then deposits his semen in a pot. Urvaśī then goes to Mitra, who is now furious, and asks her why she did not reject Varuṇa, since she is already promised to him. He curses her to descend to the world of the mortals and become Purūravas’ wife [lines 124–171].

Lines 172–212, which again in all editions consulted constitute a new *sarga*,<sup>22</sup> continue the narrative, telling what then happens to both Vasiṣṭha and Nimi. Lines 172–188 detail the subsequent birth of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya from a pot, which is filled with the semen from both Mitra and Varuṇa—the semen of Varuṇa is said to go in first, and the semen of Mitra, which has first been in Urvaśī, second—two brahmans are born. The first-born is Agastya, who, upon

<sup>21</sup> Appendix I, No. 8, lines 124–171 (=7.51-4\*); GPP 7.56; NSP 7.56; Gita Press 7.56; KK 7.56; VSP 7.56; Gorresio 7.58; and Lahore 7.57. For text abbreviations, see bibliography.

<sup>22</sup> (=7.51-4\*); GPP 7.57; NSP 7.57; Gita Press 7.57; KK 7.57; VSP 7.57; Gorresio 7.59; and Lahore 7.58.

emerging, tells Mitra that he is not his son [since Varuṇa's semen was in the pot first]. Then Vasiṣṭha emerges. He is born of both Mitra and Varuṇa.

This somewhat strange, complicated, and elliptical part of the narrative is known to a certain extent outside of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The *Mahābhārata* knows of the filial relationship between Agastya and Mitra and Varuṇa and knows Agastya to be *kumbhayoni*, “born from a pot.”<sup>23</sup> However, it does not know of a similar relationship between the two gods and Vasiṣṭha, nor does it ever attribute the adjective *kumbhayoni* to him. And, as noted, the *Mahābhārata* does not know the story of Nimi.

The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* details the first part of the Nimi episode (i.e., lines 124–171) in six lines, then continues the narrative, but devotes only one line to it:

*mitrāvaruṇayor jajñe urvaśyāṃ prapitāmahaḥ / 9.13.6cd*

And my [Śūka's] grandfather [Vasiṣṭha] was born of Mitra and Varuṇa in Urvaśī.

And it makes a second reference to the story at 6.18.5–6:

*vālmikiś ca mahāyogī valmīkāḍ abhavad kila /  
agastyaś ca vasiṣṭhaś ca mitrāvaruṇayor ṛṣī // 6.18.5*

*retaḥ siṣicatuḥ kumbhe urvaśyāḥ sannidhau drutam / 6.18.6*

And, it is said that the great *yogi* Vālmīki was born from an ant hill.  
And the seers Agastya and Vasiṣṭha [were born] of Mitra and Varuṇa.

They both quickly let loose their seed in a pot in the presence of Urvaśī.

<sup>23</sup> MBh12.329.378a: *atha maitrāvaruṇiḥ kumbhayonir agastyo maharṣiṇ vikriyamāṇāms tān nahuṣeṇāpaśyat;* 13.151.33ab: *mitrāvaruṇayoḥ putras tathāgastyah pratāpavān.*



As is evidenced by these verses, the *Bhāgavata* is aware of Urvāśi's role in the birth of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya. While this second reference has no apparent connection with the *Rāmakathā*, it is placed in juxtaposition with what must be understood as a somewhat intriguing sequence which references Vālmīki's own origins.

Similarly the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*'s account<sup>25</sup> is remarkably brief, just two lines [4.5.11–12], especially in comparison to the energy that is expended on the first part of the narrative, which occupies some ten lines [4.5.1–10].

*tacchāpāc ca mitrāvaruṇayos tejasi  
vasiṣṭhasya cetaḥ praviṣṭam // 4.5.11*

*[urvaśī] ruśīdarśanād udbhūtabījaprapātayos tayoh  
sakāśād vasiṣṭho deham aparaṃ lebhe // 4.5.12*

And because of that curse the consciousness [*cetaḥ*] of Vasiṣṭha entered the *tejas* of Mitra and Varuṇa.

From seeing Urvāśī, Vasiṣṭha obtained another body in the presence of those two, who had an emission of seed that had arisen.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara*<sup>26</sup> reverses the sequence of the narrative, telling Nimi's fate following the curse before that of Vasiṣṭha's. On the other hand, the narrative of Vasiṣṭha's birth is probably the most detailed outside of that found in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

*vaśiṣṭhajīvaṃ bhagavān brahmā vacanam abravīt /  
mitrāvaruṇayoh putro vaśiṣṭha tvaṃ bhaviṣyasi // 1.117.21*

<sup>25</sup> According to M. M. Ninan (2008), that since the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* contains genealogy of the Gupta rulers, it is likely that its final version could not have been composed before 320 CE. According to Hazra, the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* can be assigned a date between "A.D. 200–300" (Rocher 1986, p. 250).

<sup>26</sup> Stella Kramisch (1982, p. 5) dates the *Viṣṇudharmottara* around the 7<sup>th</sup> century, while Rocher places it earlier than 1000 and Pingree thinks first half of the fifth century (Rocher 1986, p. 252).

*vaśiṣṭheti te nāma tatrāpi ca bhaviṣyati /  
janmadvayam atītaṃ ca tatrāpi tvaṃ smariṣyasi //1.117.22*

*etasminn eva kāle tu mitraś ca varuṇas tathā /  
badaryāśramam āsādya tapas tepatur avyayam //1.117.23*

*tapasyatos taylor evaṃ kadā cin mādharma ṛtau /  
puṣṭitadrumasamcchinno śubhe dakṣiṇamārute //1.117.24*

*ūrvasy atha varārohā kurvatī kusumocayam/  
sasūkṣmaraktavasanā taylor drṣṭipathaṃ gatā // 1.117.25*

*tāṃ drṣṭvā sumukhīṃ subhrūṃ nīlanīrajalocanām/  
ubhau cukṣubhatur vīryāt tād rūpaparimoditau //1.117.26*

*skannaṃ retas taylor drṣṭvā śāpabhītā varāpsarāḥ /  
cakāra kalaśe subhrūs toyapūrṇe manorame //1.117.27*

*tasmād ṛṣivarau jātau tejasā pratimau bhuvi /  
vaśiṣṭhaś cāpy agastyaś ca mitrāvaruṇayoḥ sutau // 1.117.28*

The blessed Brahmā spoke these words to the “life-essence [*jīva-*] of Vasiṣṭha [*v.l.* Vasiṣṭha]: “You, Vasiṣṭha, will be the son of Mitra and Varuṇa.

And, in that [birth], you will have the name Vasiṣṭha, and you will remember these two past births.

Now at this very time Mitra and Varuṇa having approached the Badarī āśrama [at the head of the Gaṅgā] performed imperishable austerities.

Now once, in the spring, while those two were performing austerities,  
when there was a pleasant southern breeze, the trees lost their flowers.

Now, the lovely-hipped Urvaśī, with her sheer red garment, gathering a  
pile of flowers, came within the range of the sight of those two.

Having spied her, of lovely face, beautiful brows, and eyes like dark  
lotuses, both of those became agitated because of their virility, completely  
delighted with her beauty.

Having seen that they both had emitted semen, she, that lovely *apsaras*,  
became fearful of a curse. The lovely-browed lady made [the semen go]  
into a beautiful, water pot filled with water.

From that, those two best of *ṛṣis*, equal in *tejas*— Vasiṣṭha and Agastya,  
the two sons of Mitra and Varuṇa—were born on earth.

There are clearly differences: The narrative here omits the intervention of Brahmā and as well as the jealousy between Mitra and Varuṇa. Moreover, it omits the curse that dooms Urvaśī to an earthly life. The description is thicker, and the context is changed, for here, as in many of the purāṇic versions, Mitra and Varuṇa are sages performing austerities, and the beautiful *apsaras* Urvaśī disturbs those austerities. The *Uttarakāṇḍa* makes no mention of austerities or disturbance thereof, and depicts Varuṇa and Mitra as rulers who proposition the lovely *apsaras*. Therefore it seems likely that this version of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*'s narrative is borrowed from or informed by the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, or from a common source, and contextualized to a more culturally normative paradigm wherein the beautiful *apsaras* is sent to disturb the austerities of a sage or sages.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, one might argue that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* knew a version of the narrative that included the two performing austerities and modified it in accordance with its needs. This does not seem as likely given other evidence, particularly that of the *Matsya*- and *Padmapurāṇas* wherein the thematic is more in line with that of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. The dating of the *purāṇas* is fraught with difficulties and Rocher suggests that we do not even try

The *Matsyapurāṇa* [250ce?], interestingly, knows a version of the story of the birth of Agastya and Vasiṣṭha [*Matsyapurāṇa* 61.2–31]. However, the narrative appears to have no direct connection to the Nimi story, although its unique version of Nimi’s dereliction of duty follows immediately upon it [61.32–36M] as noted above. Needless to say, neither of the *Matsya* narratives, this one or the story of Nimi’s curse, is linked with the *Rāmakathā*, as this *purāṇa* does not have a version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story. Interestingly, it is this version of the story that in some aspects most closely parallels the story that we have in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Nevertheless, there are substantial differences between the two:

*nārada uvāca*

*sambhūtaḥ sa kathaṃ bhrātā vasiṣṭhasyābhavan muniḥ /*  
*kathaṃ ca mitrāvaruṇau pitarāv asya tau smṛtau /*  
*janma kumbhād agastyasya kathaṃ syāt purasūdana // 61.20*

*īśvara uvāca /*

*purā purāṇapurusaḥ kadācid gandhamādane /*  
*bhūtvā dharmasuto viṣṇuś cacāra vipulaṃ tapaḥ // 61.21*

*tapasā tasya bhītena vighnārthaṃ preṣitāv ubhau /*  
*śakreṇa mādhavānaṅgāv apsarogaṇasamyutau // 61.22*

*yadā na gītavādyena nāṅgarāgādinā hariḥ /*  
*na kāmamādhavābhyāṃ ca viṣayān prati cukṣubhe // 61.23*

*tadā kāmamadhuṣṭrīṇāṃ viṣādam agamad gaṇaḥ /*  
*saṃkṣobhāya tatas teṣāṃ svorudeśān narāgrajaḥ /*  
*nārīm utpādayāmāsa trailokyajanamohinīm // 61.24*

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(1986, p. 100). That said, he cites Hazra as offering a date of “the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century” (Rocher 1986, p. 214) for the *Padmapurāṇa*. According to Rocher (1986, p. 199), Dikshitar dates the *Matsyapurāṇa* from around the fourth century before the common era through the third century of the common era, while Kane dates it between “A.D. 200 and 400,” and Hazra opines that “no one date is sufficient for it.”

*saṃkṣubdhās tu tayā devās tau tu devavarāv ubhau /  
apsarobhiḥ samakṣaṃ hi devānām abravīd dhariḥ // 61.25*

*apsarā iti sāmānyā devānām abravīd hariḥ /  
urvaśīti ca nāmneyaṃ loke khyātiṃ gamiṣyati // 61.26*

*tataḥ kāmayaṃnena mitreṇāhūya sorvaśī /  
uktā māṃ ramayasveti bādham ity abravīt tu sā // 61.27*

*gacchantī cāmbaraṃ tadvat stokam indīvarekṣaṇā /  
varuṇena dhṛtā paścād varuṇaṃ nābhyanandata // 61.28*

*vṛtā pūrvam adya bhāryā na te vibho /  
uvāca varuṇas cittaṃ mayi saṃnyasya gamyatām // 61.29*

*gatāyāṃ bādham ity uktvā mitraḥ śāpam adāt tadā /  
tasyai mānuṣaloke tvaṃ gaccha somasutātmajam // 61.30*

*bhajasveti yato veśyādharma eṣa tvayā kṛtaḥ /  
jalakumbhe tato vīryaṃ mitreṇa varuṇena ca /  
prakṣiptam atha saṃjātau dvāv eva munisattamau // 61.31*

Nārada said:

How was the *muni* [Agastya] born as the brother of Vasiṣṭha? And how is it that Mitra and Varuṇa are remembered as his fathers? And, O destroyer of the [triple] city, how is that Agstya came to be pot-born?

Īśvara said:

Formerly, Viṣṇu, as the primordial man, having become the son of Dharma, once practiced extensive austerities on Mount Gandhamādana.

Both Mādhava and the bodiless Kāma, accompanied by a host of *apsarases*, were sent by Śakra, fearful of his austerities, in order to obstruct [him].

When their singing, singing, playing of musical instruments, gestures, and so forth did not agitate Hari's senses,

then that host of women, Kāma, and Madhu became despondent. Then, that first-born of men, in order to agitate them, produced a woman from the region of his own thigh. She infatuated the inhabitants of the three worlds.

And those gods and the two best of gods were agitated. Now Hari said in the presence of the gods along with the *apsarases*:

'This is an *apsaras*, [to be] shared among the gods,' spoke Hari. She is named Urvaśī and she will be renown throughout the world.

Then Urvaśī, having been summoned by Mitra, who was desiring to make love with her, addressed [thus], said: 'Excellent, you may make love to me.'

Later that lotus-eyed lady moving slowly about the sky was captured by Varuṇa. She refused Varuṇa.

'Earlier I was chosen [as a wife by Mitra]. So now, lord, I [cannot be] your wife.'

Varuṇa said, 'Having placed me in your heart, please go.'

When she, having said, 'What an excellent idea!' had gone, Mitra cursed her: 'In the world of man, you must go to the son of the son of Soma [Purūravas].'

‘Since you acted like a prostitute, become one!’

Then in a water pot Mitra and Varuṇa shed their semen. Now [from it] two most excellent *munis* [Agastya and Vasiṣṭha] were born.

The narrative is framed as a question about the birth of Agastya, and Vasiṣṭha’s role is clearly subordinated. The story begins with Indra’s attempt to disturb the austerities of Hari, and the subsequent birth/creation of Urvaśī from his thigh, which is not part of the *Uttara*’s narrative, but rather echoes the motif of the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. Then, somewhat suddenly and abruptly, the narrative changes to the story of the solicitation of Urvaśī by both Mitra and Varuṇa and Mitra’s curse of Urvaśī. It is here that we see striking similarities between the *Matsya* and *Uttara* narratives. Both Mitra and Varuṇa actively solicit Urvaśī, while she, although refusing Varuṇa, still “placed him in her heart.” However, what is omitted is the somewhat obsessive and interesting discussion of the order that the semen is deposited in the pot. The *Padmapurāṇa*, too, knows the story as it is told in the *Matsyapurāṇa*—in fact the two are virtually identical versions—and connects it to the Nimi story by awkwardly inserting the story of Nimi and his rebirth, between the depositing of Mitra and Varuṇa’s seed in the pot and the births of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya from the pot.<sup>28</sup> The birth of Urvaśī and her solicitation by Mitra and Varuṇa as told

<sup>28</sup> *Padmapurāṇa* 5.22.22–34ab.

*bhīṣma uvāca*  
*kathaṃ ca mitrāvaruṇau pitarāv asya tau smṛtau /*  
*janma kumbhād agastyasya yathābhūt tadvad ādhunā // 5.22.22*

*pulastya uvāca /*  
*purā purāṇapurūṣaḥ kadācid gandhamādane /*  
*bhūtva dharmasuto viṣṇuś cacāra vipulaṃ tapaḥ // 5.22.23*

*tapasā cāsya bhītena viḥnārthe preṣitāv ubhau /*  
*śakreṇa māghavān aṅgāv apsarogaṇasaṃyutau // 5.22.24*

*yadā ca gītavādyena bhāvahāvādinā hariḥ /*  
*mohitaḥ sa tadā tais tu tataḥ khedam upāgataḥ // 5.22.25*

*tadā kāmamadhustrīṇāṃ viṣādām abhjad gaṇaḥ /*  
*saṃkṣobhāya tatas teṣāṃ ūrudeśān narāgrajaḥ // 5.22.26*

*nārīm utpādayāmāsa trailokyasyāpi mohinīm /*  
*saṃmohitās tayā devās tau tu caiva surāv ubhau // 5.22.27*

in the *Matsya*- and *Padma-purāṇas* clearly stem from a common source. The fact that the *Uttara*'s version of Urvāṣī's solicitation by Mitra and Varuṇa follow so closely upon the *Matsya*'s and *Padma*'s versions, also indicates a strong relationship among the versions. What that exact relationship is, however, is alas, uncertain.

Of note in light of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is that the *Padmapurāṇa* version of the births of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya or Nimi's and Vasiṣṭha's reciprocal curses are not located in the *Pātālakhaṇḍa*. The *Pātālakhaṇḍa* tells at great length and with substantial expansion the narrative of Vālmīki's *Uttarakāṇḍa* and within it are included many additional narratives, some of which are known and some of which are not known to the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. However, among these what we do not find is the story under discussion. The *Padmapurāṇa* versions of the narratives, in fact, are located in the *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* and thus like the *Matsyapurāṇa* version, have no connection to the *Rāmakathā*. Moreover, the Nimi episode as it is told in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is not known in the *Padma* nor is there any association of Nimi with the Ikṣvāku lineage there. It would seem very likely that either the authors of the *Padma* did not know a version of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* that included these stories or felt that the narrative was not relevant to their narrative concerns. In the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, this section of the Nimi narrative ends with Mitra's curse on Urvāṣī to descend to the mortal world and become the wife of [Purūravas] the son of Budha [lines 168–171], a curse that is known also to the *Matsya* [verse 30] and *Padma* [verse 32] versions. Thus

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*apsarā iti samānyā devānām abravīd dhariḥ /*  
*urvaṣīti ca nāmneyaṃ loke khyātiṃ gamiṣyati // 5.22.28*

*tataḥ kāmāyamānena mitreṇāhūya sorvaṣī /*  
*proktā māṃ ramaysveti bāḍham ity abravīc ca sā // 5.22.29*

*garbhīṇyevāntarā tadvat stokam indīvarekṣaṇā /*  
*varuṇena bhṛtā [v.l. vṛtā] paścād vacanaṃ tam abhāṣata // 5.22.30*

*mitreṇāhaṃ bhṛtā [v.l. vṛtā] pūrvaṃ mama sūryaḥ patiḥ vibho /*  
*uvāca varuṇaś cittaṃ mayi saṃtyajya gamyatām // 5.22.31*

*gatāyāṃ bāḍham ity uktvā mitraḥ śāpam adād atha /*  
*adyaiva mānuṣe loke gaccha somasutātmajam // 5.22.32*

*bhajasveti yato mithyādharmā eṣa tvayā kṛtaḥ /*  
*jalakumbhe tato vīryaṃ mitreṇa varuṇena ca // 5.22.33*

*prakṣiptam atha saṃjātau dvāv eva munisattamau // 34ab*



the narrative becomes linked to the well-known story of Urvaśī, who is cursed to dwell on earth, and her relationship with Purūravas, the son of Budha. The story of Budha and the birth of Purūravas is told in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, although somewhat later, and has been admitted to the critical text [see 7.78–81]. Thus the *Uttarakāṇḍa*'s version of the Nimi tale finds itself as one among a number of purāṇic variants that reveal a complex web of intertextuality. While it is clear that each version has been manipulated for the needs of a specific “text” and audience, it is also clear that the authors of these narratives were not producing their narratives in isolation, but rather freely borrowed from one another. However, this is not to say that these stories lack originality.

The *Uttarakāṇḍa* story of Vasiṣṭha's birth, as noted above, continues at this point with Appendix I, No. 8, lines 172–188, some sixteen lines with a section of the narrative not known, as far as I can tell, to any other version. The unique passage is most intriguing and causes great consternation among the commentators. As such, it is worth examining in a bit more detail:

*tāṃ śrutvā divyasaṃkāsāṃ kathāṃ adbhutadarśanam  
lakṣmaṇaḥ paramaprīto rāghavaṃ vākyam abravīt // 172–173*

*nikṣiptadehau kākutstha kathāṃ tau dvijapārthivau /  
punar dehena saṃyogaṃ jagmatur devasaṃmatau //174–175*

*tasya tadbhāṣitaṃ śrutvā rāmaḥ satyaparākramaḥ  
tāṃ kathāṃ kathayāmāsa vasiṣṭhasya mahātmanaḥ //176–177*

*tataḥ kumbhe naraśreṣṭha tejaḥpūrṇe mahātmanaḥ /  
tasmimṣ tejomayau viprau saṃbhūtāv ṛṣisattamau //178–179*

*pūrvam samabhavat tatra agastyo bhagavān ṛṣiḥ /  
nāhaṃ sutas tavety uktvā mitraṃ tasmād apākramat //180–181*

*tad dhi tejas tu mitraysa urvaśyāṃ pūrvam āhitam /*

*tasmin samabhavat kumbhe tattejo yatra vāruṇam // 182–183*

*kasyacit tv atha kālasya mitrāvaruṇasambhavaḥ //184–185*

*vasiṣṭhas tejasā yukto jajñe ikṣvākudaivatam //*

*tam ikṣvākur mahātejā jātamātram aninditam /*

*vavre purodhasam saumya vaṁśasyāsya bhavāya naḥ //186–187*

*evem te 'pūrvadehasya vasiṣṭhasya mahātmanah / 188<sup>29</sup>*

When Lakṣmaṇa had heard that divine story, so wonderful to contemplate, he was supremely delighted and said these words to Rāghava

Once they had left their bodies, Kākutsha, how did those two—the twice born one and the king—honored by the gods, come to be embodied once again?

When truly valorous Rāma had heard that speech of his, he told him the tale of great Vasiṣṭha:

‘Then, best of men, in that pot of the great god, which was filled with semen,<sup>30</sup> two brahmans, filled with blazing energy, who were the foremost of seers, were born.

First to be born in that was the blessed seer Agastya. Saying to Mitra, “I am not your son,” he left him.

For Mitra’s semen had first been deposited in Urvaśī and it came to be in the pot where the semen of Varuṇa already was.

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<sup>29</sup> = 7.51-5\*.1-9ab.

<sup>30</sup> Note that the term used for semen in this passage is frequently *tejas*,

Then, after some time, Vasiṣṭha, who was endowed with blazing energy and is the divinity of the Ikṣvākus, was born of Mitra and Varuṇa.

And the moment he was born, Ikṣvāku of immense blazing energy, chose that blameless sage as his *purohita* for the prosperity of our lineage, gentle brother.

And thus, gentle brother, I have told you of the emergence of great Vasiṣṭha with his new body.

Unlike the other versions, where the two seers emerge from the pot and go on their way, here we see a detailed explanation of the sequence of the births of the two, and clear confusion over whose semen goes into the pot first and what, as it were, happens to it in the pot.

First we must ask the question “whose semen and whose pot?” And then the most obvious question: Why is it important? The critical reading of line 178, *tataḥ kumbhe naraśeṣṭha tejaḥpūrṇe mahātmanah* / [“Then, best of men, in the pot of that great god, which was filled with semen”] allows for only one interpretation of the syntax, and that is ‘the pot of the great [one] (*mahātmanah*),’ while the context requires that we understand that adjective (*mahātmanah*) to refer to Brahmā. Thus, there is no explanation of whose semen it is or how it got into the pot (*kumbhe . . . tejaḥpūrṇe*). A few *Devanāgarī* manuscripts (10,11) and a number of editions (GPP, NSP, Gita Press, KK, and VSP) have an alternative reading, *yas sa [tu VSP and KK] kumbho raghuśreṣṭha tejaḥpūrṇo mahātmanoh*, “That pot, foremost of the Raghus, which was filled with the semen of the two great ones.” The dual *mahātmanoh*, “of the two great ones,” must, as all the commentators who share the reading note, refer to Mitra and Varuṇa. This reading finally forces Nāgojibhaṭṭa to address the question previously unanswered in the story, except for in an insert passage 57(A)\* found only in D3, as to when and how Mitra’s semen got into the pot. Nāgoji fleshes out the story as follows: “Here is the story. First Mitra, having seen Urvaśī, invited her. And he was told by her: ‘I will come to your residence.’ Then, when Mitra was in Varuṇa’s world, he ejaculated his own semen into a pot at the sight of her, and, having released it into the

pot, he went to his own home. After that Varuṇa, too, having seen her, released his semen into the pot. Then, when she went to Mitra's residence, she was cursed by Mitra.<sup>31</sup>

Now the *Uttara* version tells us that Agastya is born first, and after telling Mitra, "I am not your son," leaves. The phrase, *nāham sutas tavety uktvā mitram* (=GPP 7.57.5cd) is very elliptical, and gives rise again to much discussion among the commentators. The syntax of the statement is quite clear. However, the exact intention is debated by the commentators, who offer some three possible interpretations. Mādhavayogīndra and Nāgojibhaṭṭa take the position that what Agastya means by this statement to Mitra is that: "I am not the son of you *alone*." The idea here is that since the sage was born from the mixture of the semen of two divinities, he belongs to neither god exclusively. Both these commentators reinforce this argument on the following verse as an explanation of Agastya's dual patronymic.<sup>32</sup> Śivasahāya understands Agastya to be saying that he is in fact the son only of Mitra and not of Varuṇa.<sup>33</sup> Uḍāli on the other hand proposes breaking the sequence *uktvāmitram*, "having said to Mitra," as *uktvā amitram*, "having to said the one who was not Mitra, that is to say, to Varuṇa." Uḍāli, however, also claims that, even if the sequence is broken up as *uktvā mitram*, he (Varuṇa) is intended since the two divinities, Mitra and Varuṇa, are essentially one and the same.<sup>34</sup> Govindarāja merely observes that Agastya addresses only Mitra because of [his] deposition of semen in the pot prior to that of Varuṇa. He defers his interpretation of the meaning of Agastya's statement until his comments on the following verse.<sup>35</sup>

Note that most other versions either identify the two sages generically [*munisattamau*] as they emerge from the pot or list the two sages, naming Vasiṣṭha first. Only the *Padmapurāṇa* [1.22.38] specifically draws our attention to the order of the births, and there Vasiṣṭha is clearly identified as the first-born:

*vasiṣṭho 'py abhavat tasmiñ jalakumbhe ca pūrvavat /*

<sup>31</sup> Nāgojibhaṭṭa on GPP 7.57.4: *atraivam ākhyāyikā. prathamam urvaśīm mitro drṣṭvā tām āmantritavān. tayā ca tvannivāsam āgacchāmīty uktas tadā varuṇalokastha eva mitras taddarśanād ghaṭaskhalitaṃ nijatejaḥ kumbha utsrjya svaṃ nijavāsam jagāma. paścād varuṇo 'pi tām drṣṭvā skhalitaṃ tejaḥ kumbhe vyasrjat. tato mitranivāsam gatā mitreṇa śaptā ceti.*

<sup>32</sup> Nāgojibhaṭṭa on GPP 7.57.45: *nāham sutas taveti. yady api mitreṇāpi kumbhe reta utsrṣṭam tathāpi tavaikasya putro na bhavāmīty uktvāpakramat, so too, Mādhavayogīndra.*

<sup>33</sup> Śivasahāya on GPP 7.57.45: *ahaṃ tavaiva suto na varuṇasyāpīty arthaḥ.*

<sup>34</sup> Uḍāli on GPP 7.57.5: *nāham sutas tavety uktvāmitram ity atrāmitram iti padacchedaḥ. amitras ca varuṇaḥ. mitram iti cchede 'py ayaṃ vivakṣitaḥ. tayor akyād ekībhūtau mitrāvaruṇau padaṃ cakratur iti hi pūrvam uktam.*

<sup>35</sup> Govindarāja on GPP 7.57.5: *pūrvam varuṇatejonidhānāt pūrvam mitram prati nāham tava suta ity uktvā.*

*tato jātaś caturbāhuḥ sākṣasūtrakamaṇḍaluḥ /  
agastya iti śāntātmā babhūva ṛṣisattamaḥ 38cd–39.*

The *Uttara* version alone identifies Agastya as the first-born and has him deny that he has any relationship to Mitra. The next verse attempts to explain why. The semen of Mitra had been deposited first in Urvaśī, and only subsequently did it come to be in the pot, where the semen of Varuṇa already had been deposited:

*tad dhi tejas tu mitraysa urvaśyām pūrvam āhitam /  
tasmin samabhavat kumbhe tattejo yatra vāruṇam // 182–183<sup>36</sup>*

As noted above, at no point in the critical edition’s narrative has there been up until now any direct account of emission of semen by Mitra, whether in Urvaśī or in a pot, nor has it been stated that Urvaśī deposited any semen from any source in the pot in which Varuṇa deposited his semen. The present verse does little to clarify the muddle and the commentators struggle to make sense of the events in light of Agastya’s enigmatic statement to the apparent effect that he is not a son of Mitra. Numerous manuscripts (Ś, V2, D6–8, 10–12, T1, G1, M5) and editions (GPP, NSP, Gita Press, KK, and VSP) read the genitive singular *urvaśyāḥ*, “of Urvaśī,” for *urvaśyām*, “in Urvaśī.” This does little improve the situation, and, if anything, it makes it worse.

Mādhavayogīndra and Nāgojibhaṭṭa understand the verse to mean that Mitra’s semen, which was the source of the birth of Agastya had, prior to the emission of Varuṇa’s semen, been placed in the pot, that is in the same pot in which Varuṇa’s semen later came to be mingled [with Mitra’s]. Therefore, it is because all the semen got mixed up inside [the pot] that Agastya said [to Mitra], “I am not the son of you *alone*.” And that is why, Mādhavayogīndra and Nāgojibhaṭṭa conclude, Agastya has the epithet “the son of Mitra and Varuṇa.”<sup>37</sup>

Śivasahāya has a slightly different understanding. He says: “In the place where Varuṇa’s semen was, that is, ended up, that is in that pot where Mitra’s semen had earlier been deposited in the

<sup>36</sup> = GPP 7.57.6.

<sup>37</sup> Nāgojibhaṭṭa on GPP 7.57.6: *agastyopattihetubhutaṃ mitraysa teja urvaśyāḥ pūrvam urvaśīnimittavaruṇavīryavisargāt pūrvam āhitam. tasmin kumbhe taminn eva kumbhe vāruṇam tejaḥ samabhavat saṃgatam abhavat. yatra kumbhe tattejo mitraysa teja āsīt. atas tejo 'ntarasamgatād utpatter naikasya tava suta ity uktam agastyena. ata eva mairāvaruṇir ity agastyānāma—* Mādhavayogīndra similarly.

presence of Urvaśī.” “That is why,” Śivasahāya concludes, “Agastya was born first, i.e., before Vasiṣṭha.”<sup>38</sup>

Govindarāja’s lengthy comment on the verse shows most clearly the difficulty of the episode. He offers two alternative explanations of his own and then offers an opinion he ascribes to unidentified “others,” a position that is very closely aligned with if not derived from the interpretation of Mādhavayogīndra and Nāgojibhaṭṭa. Govindarāja’s first explanation for Agastya’s denial that he is Mitra’s son is that with Urvaśī serving as the stimulating cause, Mitra’s semen was placed on that pot [in which Varuṇa’s semen was already located, rather than in it] and therefore the denial was made.

Alternatively, Govindarāja says at the time of her earlier solicitation [by Mitra] Urvaśī, unable to engage in sexual intercourse because of the proximity of her friends, placed the semen in the pot. In this interpretation, then, the word ‘*mitrasya*’ actually refers to both Mitra and Varuṇa. Now there is no way, Govindarāja argues, that Agastya could actually be born from the semen of both Mitra and Varuṇa. He was simply born from the pot, for which reason he is referred to by such epithets as “pot-born, born in a jug, etc.” Since he was not born of a womb and the pot belonged to both Mitra and Varuṇa, Agastya is known as Maitrāvaruṇi. Govindarāja notes that in some places Vasiṣṭha is said to be born of the semen of both Mitra and Varuṇa, because Mitra’s semen was deposited earlier by Urvaśī [into the pot] where Varuṇa’s semen [already] was. Govindarāja then notes that others argue that when Agastya says he is not Mitra’s son, this shows the logical connection with what follows (i.e., in this verse). These others say that Mitra’s semen was, in fact, the essential cause of Agastya’s birth because earlier, on account of Urvaśī, Mitra deposited his semen in the pot before the emission of Varuṇa’s semen. But Varuṇa’s semen was already in the pot, because of his encounter with Urvaśī. Therefore Agastya is saying to Mitra is: “I am not the son of you alone.” This is why Agastya goes by the name of “Maitrāvaruṇi.” He is called “pot-born,” because of his birth from the pot.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Śivasahāya on GPP 7.57.6: *yatra vāruṇaṃ tejaḥ samabhavat prāpnot tasmīn kumbha urvaśyāḥ saṃnidhau mitrasya tejaḥ pūrvam āhitam. ato 'gastyāḥ pūrvam abhavad iti tātparyam.*

<sup>39</sup> Govindarāja on GPP 7.57.6: *urvaśyā nimittabhūtāyāḥ. mitratejas tasmīn kumbhe pūrvam upary āhitam arpitam tasmāt pratiśedhaḥ kṛta iti bhāvaḥ. yadvā pūrvavaraṇakāla urvaśyā āhitam tejaḥ sakhīsannidhānād asaṃbhogāt kumbhe tatra nikṣiptam iti bhāvaḥ. asmiṃs tu pakṣe mitrapadaṃ mitrāvaruṇaparam. sarvathā na mitrāvaruṇatejo 'gastyāḥ kiṃtu kumbhasaṃbhavaḥ. ata eva kumbhasaṃbhavaḥ kalaśībhava ityādivyavahārah. ayonijaś cāyam*

The obsession of the commentators is reflective of a discomfort with the text that has rarely been engaged in prior to this in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Elsewhere, the commentators are relatively sparse, except when the topic turns to how long Rāma actually rules, i.e., the exact duration of his life-span on earth, and Rāma's and his brothers' ascent to heaven. Over both these issues they exert a fair amount of energy.

Concerning those issues that give rise to the book's controversial status in modernity, particularly the abandonment of Sītā and the slaying of Śambūka, they have little to say. So why here do we see such attention paid to the somewhat strange and certainly unique story of Nimi and his sacrifice, why such attention to these few lines that appear to be tangential to the main narrative? Why here do the actual births of the two sages become such a focal point to both author and commentator? Virtually in every other version of the narrative, the actual births of the two sages are a non-event: they emerge from the pot without explanation. The answer I believe can be found in the context of the larger narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Appendix I, No. 8 in all versions is inserted following upon Lakṣmaṇa's return to Ayodhyā, where he has just abandoned the pregnant Sītā in the forest near Vālmīki's *āśrama* [*sargas* 44–51], but before the birth of Rāma and Sītā's twin sons Lava and Kuśa [*sarga* 58]. The suspicions concerning Sītā's pregnancy weigh heavily on the minds of the author and audience. Whose child/children resides/reside in Sītā's womb, whose semen is it? These are questions that are nowhere explicitly stated, but are certainly implicit in the narrative. The commentators' concern only confirms the cultural unease reflected in the story. At *sarga* 58, the commentators are virtually quiet on the birth of the two boys, however, at verses 5 and 6, Vālmīki refers to Kuśa as the first born and Lava as the second.

It is in reference to the order of birth of the boys and the naming of the two that the commentators become quite engaged. According to most commentators and the general tradition,

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*kumbhasya maitrāvaruṇatvān maitrāvaruṇir ity api vyavahārah. kvacid vasiṣṭhas tu maitrāvaruṇatejoja evety āha—yasmāt tejas tu mitrasyorvaśyā pūrvam āhitam, tat tejo yatra vāruṇam iti. anye tv āhuḥ. nāhaṃ sutas tavetyādi. putro na bhavāmīty arthaḥ. uttarasya prasaktiṃ darśayati—tad dhīti. agastyasyotpattibījabhūtaṃ mitrasya tat teja urvaśyā pūrvam urvaśyā nimittato mitreṇa tasmīn kumbhe varuṇavīryavisarjanāt pūrvam evāhitam. tasmīn eva kumbhe vāruṇam api teja urvaśīnimittakaṃ samabhavat. tasmān naikasya tava suta ity uktam agastyena. ata eva maitrāvaruṇir ity agastyānāma kumbhāj janyatvāt kumbhasambhava ity āhuḥ.*

Kuśa is the first-born, and therefore eldest of the twins. Satyatīrtha is more specific. He understands that Kuśa is born first, in the sense that he is produced first [in the form of semen] from Rāma’s body (*tayor jātayor madhye yaḥ pūrvajo rāmadehād iti śeṣaḥ*). He offers a complex understanding of the situation, which he derives from the medical literature on conception and gestation. Referring to a text he calls the *Piṅḍasiddhismṛti*, he argues that when, at the time of conception, the semen enters the womb in such a way that it is divided in two, with one part entering before the other, it produces twins. He then argues that the order in which the two fetuses are conceived, that is the order of the entrance of the two portions of the father’s semen, is reversed in the order of the birth from the mother. In this case, Sītā’s first born would therefore be Lava and Kuśa is then born later, but is none-the-less, in order of conception, the elder.<sup>41</sup>

In keeping with his comments on verse 5, at verse 6, Satyatīrtha understands the phrase *yaś cāparo bhavet tābhyām*, “who was born the second of the two”—literally, “and who would be the latter from *or* by the two”—to mean that it is the one who entered the womb last from Rāma at the time of conception (*avaro rāmād garbhādhānasamaye paścād garbham praviṣṭa ity arthaḥ*). Note, here, as in other places, the commentators are not hesitant to take up sexual or personal matters when it concerns the normative agenda of the tradition. The order of the births of the boys is essential in the politico-cultural hierarchy, as are their names, protection, and purification.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Satyatīrtha on VSP 7.66.7–8: *atredaṃ bodhyam. yadā garbhādhānasamaye yonipuṣpaṃ viśadvīryaṃ dvidhāvibhaktam ādipaścādbhāvena praviṣati tadā yamau bhavataḥ. tayoś ca pitṛtaḥ praveśakramaviparyayaṇa māṛtaḥ prasavaḥ. tathā cokaṃ piṅḍasiddhismṛtau ‘yadāviśed dvidhābhūtaṃ yonipuṣpaṃ parikṣarat / dvau tadā bhavato garbhau sūtir veśaviparyayād’ iti. tathā cātra sītāyāḥ prathamato jāto lava eva. anantaram kuśo jāta iti sa evāgraja iti.*

<sup>42</sup> Verse 8 in the critical edition is concerned with issues of gender:

*te rakṣāṃ jaḡṛhus tāṃ ca munihastāt samāhitāḥ /  
akurvamś ca tato rakṣāṃ tayor vigatakalmaṣāḥ //*

“Taking the amulets from the sage’s hands, attentively  
those utterly virtuous women then affixed them on the two infants.

This reading is not that of the commentators and we are left to wonder as to the correct interpretation of the passage, “those utterly virtuous women” *te . . . vigatakalmaṣāḥ*. The phrase literally means, “those . . . ones from stain *or* sin was gone.” The grammar here seems irredeemably defective in that the pronoun (*te*) must be masculine nominative plural, which can agree with the two adjectives *samāhitāḥ* and *vigatakalmaṣāḥ*. The context of the passage, however, seems to make it clear that it is the elderly women of the *āśrama*, those who are attending Sītā’s childbirth, who actually enter the *sūtigrha* to apply the amulets. The only possibility of a masculine subject would be the young



In this larger context, then the story of the births of Agastya and Vasiṣṭha appears much more logical. The anxiety concerning the larger narrative, Rāma’s own concern as to whether the child/children that will be born to Sītā are really his is played out in this narrative. Rāma’s own anxiety (as well as that of the residents of Ayodhyā) over Sītā’s faithfulness is reflected in Urvaśī’s actions and Mitra’s response to it—cursing her to a degraded life among humans—and serves as a justification for Rāma’s own actions. Moreover, the uncertainty arising from the mixed semen as to who is the real father of the “twins” Vasiṣṭha and Agastya is seen in Agastya’s words to his would-be father, “I am not your son.” As Irawati Karve<sup>43</sup> has noted, the birth of twins is associated with adultery and as such both the narratives and the commentators’ comments can be understood as reactions to such concerns.

While the story of Vasiṣṭha has finished, the fate of Nimi, still in his *videha* form, has not been resolved. Rāma now continues his narrative with story of the “re-birth” of Nimi. A more thorough analysis of this section of the narrative will have to wait, but the narrative is widely known in the purāṇic literature, and besides offering us an insight to how names are rationalized, helps locate the lineage of Janaka.

## Conclusion

As we look at the story of Nimi in its larger context we can understand that the episode is intentionally located here (and not near the story of Urvaśī and Budha, with which parts of it are aligned) as it is a mechanism through which specific anxieties of the main narrative are replayed. The curse of Nimi by Vasiṣṭha is not unexpected, as sages are wont to curse kings who fail to comply with their wishes, and the preceding story of Nṛga, has a very similar curse motif. Of

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boys of the *āśrama*, who were last mentioned in verses 1–3, where they had, no doubt on the instructions of the matrons, reported the births to Vālmīki and requested him to prepare the amulets. But again, it is unlikely that they would be permitted to enter the birth chamber and apply the amulets, nor would they be likely to be characterized as *vigatakalmaṣāḥ*. Mādhavayogīndra, Govindarāja, Nāgojibhaṭṭa, and Śivasahāya all understand that the subject must be the elderly women (*vṛddhā iti śeṣaḥ*—so Govindarāja; Mādhavayogīndra, Nāgojibhaṭṭa, and Śivasahāya similarly).” However, none of these commentators reads with the critical edition. Ś,V,B,D1–5,8–12,T,G3,M1,3,5, and GPP, NSP, Gita Press KK, VSP, KK (=7.66.10) *tām*, “that [amulet],” for *te*, “those.” This leads many manuscripts, including GPP and NSP, with the extremely awkward repetition of the pronoun *tām* in *pāda* a and is, despite its strong textual support, probably the reason why the critical editors chose the textually inferior *te*.

<sup>43</sup> Karve 1947.

special note here, is that curse seems not so much to arise from the choosing another priest to perform his sacrifice, but rather from Nimi's being asleep and keeping the enraged sage waiting—a theme carried over again from the preceding story of Nṛga. The underlying dereliction is in all likelihood the one made manifest in the *Padma* and *Matsya* versions of the narrative, where the king is not just resting, but, in fact, distracted due to “playing dice” with his women, leaving us to understand that the distraction is one linked to sexual activity. That sexual transgression is at the core of the curse plays to the sexual anxieties main narrative of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, where Rāma, who has just distracted himself a few *sargas* prior to this, in his own *aśokavana* with Sītā. It is only following the highly encapsulated episode in the *aśokavana* that questions begin to arise as to Sītā's sexual purity.<sup>44</sup>

This anxiety of sexual purity is replayed in the story of Urvaśī and her troubled and complex relationships with Mitra and Varuṇa.<sup>45</sup> That the author locates this narrative at/in the body of an *apsaras* is no accident. The *apsaras*, after all, is the locus of unrestrained sexuality in the tradition, and it is this inherent and unrestrained sexuality that gives rise to male anxiety. Urvaśī is clearly ambivalent concerning her relationship with Mitra, to whom she is already promised, admitting that she loves Varuṇa more. Nevertheless, she is unwilling to accept Varuṇa's proposition, because of her promise to Mitra. On the other hand, she promises to keep Varuṇa fixed her heart. Mitra understands that Urvaśī has betrayed him and curses her wicked behavior. She must become an “outcaste” and live in the human world. Similarly Rāma's own anxieties, as projected on the population of Ayodhyā, concerning Sītā's behavior in the *aśokavana* while held in captivity by Rāvaṇa, lead him similarly to reject her and force her to live outside her world.

Thus, the question of paternity haunts the narrative indicating that it was of concern to both audience and author. Whose offspring are these—one receptacle two sources of semen? What is only most delicately suggested in the main narrative of the epic, here is much more explicit expressed. Rāma's anxiety concerning paternity of the child or children that Sītā is carrying is expressed in his abandonment of her at during the final stages of her pregnancy. But this anxiety is distanced from him and projected on to the residents of Ayodhyā. It is the rumors that

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<sup>44</sup> See S. Goldman 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Although, the choice of a narrative in which the sexual rivalry and questionable paternity is located on/in an *apsaras* is clearly no accident.

originate with the populace of Ayodhyā that become the very expressions of this cultural anxiety and it is these same rumors that lead Rāma to abandon Sītā. On the other hand, the somewhat complex, but more explicit and anxiety-fraught seminal discharge of Mitra and Varuṇa and the subsequent emergence of Agastya and his claim that he is not Mitra's son, replay and foreground these very same concerns of the narrative in much more direct, but far less threatening environment.

Thus a story that is seemingly unrelated, in fact, becomes an articulation and a reaction, and reinvention of male anxieties of sexuality and paternity, anxieties that I would argue drive much of the narrative of the *kāṇḍa*. I would suggest, that much like the so-called purāṇic additions to the *Bālakāṇḍa*, which can be seen to articulate the sexual anxieties of a prepubescent male, that the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, reflects the anxieties of the sexualized adult male world, especially, those of paternity. And although I have had time to discuss only one of the stories in part, I would also suggest these stories found Appendix 8 lines 1–306, which clearly should be part of the reconstituted text, also offer a coherent series of stories that reflect the larger concerns of the *kāṇḍa*.

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