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EPIC *SARVABHŪTAHĪTE RATAḤ*: A BYWORD OF
NON-BHĀRGAVA EDITORS

BY

NORVIN HEIN

Many of the readers of this venerable journal will be aware of the brilliant study published in it exactly fifty years ago by Professor V. S. Sukthankar.¹ His “The Bṛīguṣ and the Bhārata” demonstrated for the first time the great role played by the aggressive Bhārgava brāhmaṇas in amplifying and editing the *Mahābhārata* in the second phase of its development. Studying the pervasive and numerous passages that narrate the favorite myths and proclaim the eminence of these contentious brāhmaṇas, Sukthankar perceived that only the Bhārgavas themselves could have composed those partisan materials and injected them into the epic, and that they could have done so only from a position of power given them by editorial control of the text. The Bhārgavas were therefore those brāhmaṇas who dispossessed the warrior-class bards, the *sūtas*, of the privilege of transmitting the saga of the Bhārata war, and they were the editors who transformed it into the vast *Mahābhārata*. Sukthankar believed that this expanding epic “must have remained for some time in the exclusive possession of the Bhārgavas as their close literary preserve,” and that it ceased to be under their control only when the four short and unimportant terminal books were being added to the mature compilation.²

Professor Sukthankar’s study became a landmark and a starting-point for later epic studies. Robert P. Goldman has pursued the line of investigation and advanced Bhārgava studies recently in his *Gods, Priests, and Warriors* in which he has collected, translated and carefully interpreted the principal texts of the Bhārgava myths. Professor Goldman adds the analysis that the myth of Paraśurāma’s slaughter of the kṣatriyas had its historical basis not in any conquest that was military but in the literary struggle in which the Bhārgavas displaced the *sūtas* as the recognized

¹ V. S. Sukthankar, “Epic Studies VI. The Bṛīguṣ and the Bhārata : A Text-historical Study,” *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* Vol. 18 Pt. 1 (October 1936), pp. 1-76.

² *Op. Cit.* pp. 75 and 67.

3 [*Annals BORI*]

minstrels of the North Indian courts.³ On the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of this distinguished line of research it is appropriate and pleasant to introduce unusual new material into the discussion that will modify somewhat this now-established understanding of the editorial position of the Bhārgavas. There has always been some difficulty in believing that the elite of ancient India entrusted its literary treasures entirely to bards who were so offensive to usual Indian moral norms as the arrogant and violent Bhārgavas. We shall see that their role in the development of the epic tradition, though great, was not an exercise of total control.

This study did not spring up out of a problem in the literary history of the *Mahābhārata*, however, but from a fascination with the ethical ideal expressed in the recurring phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, “delighting in the welfare of all beings.” These attractive words were noticed first in their several occurrences in the *Bhagavadgītā* (6. 27. 25, 6. 34. 4, cf. the variants 6. 27. 29, 6. 33. 55, 6. 34. 13). Soon, discovery of the phrase elsewhere suggested that it might be a standard apothegm. All noticed instances were jotted down and filed, thereafter, in a folder whose growing thickness confirmed the gnomic nature of the expression. Preparing a paper for the Sixth World Sanskrit Conference became an occasion for a systematic search for the limits of the diffusion of the phrase in Sanskrit literature. Arduous use of indices and concordances made it clear that the two Indian epics were the great fields for the blossoming of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*. No instance was turned up in any Sanskrit document of definitely pre-epic time. The winnowing of post-epic literature was made difficult by lack of good word-finding tools. In later literature the idea survives in variants and paraphrases and occasionally in its original wording – but so rarely as to show that its time of popularity was over. We shall cite a few of these post-epic occurrences for special reasons but this paper will be a study of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* in the fifty odd instances that have been found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa*.

To learn the content and implications of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* as a moral sentiment is an elemental step that must be given priority. Later, we shall ask whose sentiment it was, and the place of its patrons among the creators of ancient Indian thought. Now, we shall ask whom the epics uphold as exemplars of this compassionate virtue. Who is said to manifest it, or who ought to manifest it? in what aspects of their behavior, and in what degree of perfection?

³ Robert P. Goldman, *Gods, Priests, and Warriors, The Bhṛguś of the Mahābhārata* (N. Y., Columbia University Press, 1977), pp. 138–140.

The Paragons of the Ideal

Surprisingly, those who show this compassionate virtue are seldom the gods. Rāma is often credited with delighting in the welfare of all beings, but he manifests this sympathetic attitude in the capacity of a human monarch, not as a deity. Śiva and Indra are each credited once with the virtue : Śiva allayed the hunger of a jackal and a vulture that had been competing for a ghoulish meal (*Mbh.* 12.149.110), and Indra kindly steadied Mataṅga once when he was about to fall (*Mbh.* 13.30.3), and in connection with these acts both gods are described as delighting in the welfare of all beings. However they are described thus in connection with those special beneficial acts and not by reason of their generic nature as deities. *Mbh.* 3.160.2 describes in vivid words how Savitar daily makes his solar round of Mount Meru and plunges into dusk, following a northern course through the night until he reappears in the morning, “delighting in the welfare of all beings.” But the topic is natural history, not theology. A god’s remoteness from any connection with the Vedic sacrifice seems helpful to that deity’s reputation for compassion. Kṛṣṇa – a stranger to Vedic ritual – appears to be the first deity to be spoken of as delighting in the welfare of all beings. In *Bhagavadgītā* 5 : 19 (*Mbh.* 6.27.29) he is already called *suhṛdaṁ sarvabhūtānām*, “all creatures’ friend.” Yet widespread talk of his compassion had to await the development in late epic times of non-violent sacrifices by King Vasu Uparicara. In the Śānti Parvan that king is described as “sacrificer and lordly giver *par excellence*, devoted to the welfare of all beings (*sarvabhūtahite priyaḥ*, *Mbh.* 12.324.8) and Hari is said to have been pleased with his vegetarian offerings. A late passage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.28.10) applies the descriptive phrase to the dwarf form of Viṣṇu, for his recovering of the world in his three famous strides. In post-epic development Kṛṣṇa was to become a great divine supporter of compassion, as we can see for example in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.18.17’s striking verbal transformation of our phrase :

With him who wants all beings’ weal
As much as his own and his son’s,
With him the gentle Hari
Is always pleased.⁴

But in the epics in general delighting in others’ welfare is a virtue that arises

⁴ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, ed. Jivānanda Vidyāsāgara (Calcutta, Sarasvati Press, 1882) 3.18.17 :

*yathātmani ca putre ca sarvabhūteṣu yas tathā /
hitakāmo haris tena sarvadā toṣyate sukham //*

from the earth, it does not descend from heaven. *Sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* does not describe the practice and precept of the gods.

Even more striking is the fact that brāhmaṇas are not automatically praised in these terms. Though brāhmaṇa redactors had the last word on the content of all epic texts, and though they were not generally over-modes they seldom describe a brāhmaṇa layman as delighting in the welfare of all beings. In fact they imply the opposite. In *Mbh.* 1. 11. 12 the brāhmaṇa Ruru is subjected to a lecture — much-needed — that non-violence is the highest *dharma* and that a brāhmaṇa is born to forgive. Born to forgive or not, forgiveness is not Ruru's practice. He kills all snakes on sight. He belongs to the irascible Bhārgava clan, and fury is his tradition. In their own self-portrait seen in the publications of Sukthankar and Goldman, the Bhārgava brāhmaṇas are not gentle. All brāhmaṇas, in fact, were tainted by presumed connection with the deadly Vedic sacrifice, and in the epic time they were engaged also in bitter intercaste struggles for dominance. In a very late epic text (*Mbh.* 13. 8. 23) a brāhmaṇa tries at last to picture brāhmaṇas as compassionate — but with a residual frankness that is the undoing of his claim. As wives serve their husbands, he says, kṣatriyas should serve brāhmaṇas — because of their outstanding beneficence, supposedly, but especially for another reason :

One should always serve brāhmaṇas —
Brāhmaṇas upright, good, truthful,
Delighting in the welfare of all beings —
Yet like venomous snakes when angry !

Brāhmaṇas were apparently too truthful to describe themselves as kind. They were not noted for geniality so long as they remained in society. Upon leaving the hurlyburly of the world for the forest life, then as sages, not as brāhmaṇas, they could excel in the pacific virtues.

The clearest of all the stresses of the epics is that kings, and those who might become kings, should delight in the welfare of all beings. The phrase is included perfunctorily in listing the excellences of many an esteemed king. “ And then there was that king Pratīpa, delighting in the welfare of all beings,” says *Mbh.* 1. 92. 1 in introducing the story of that hero. In *Rāmāyaṇa* 1. 1. 3, Vālmiki when about to begin his epic is looking for a model hero and he is advised by Nārada to write about Rāma because Rāma is handsome, strong, learned, disciplined, and one who is well-disposed toward all beings.

Occasionally the phrase occurs in a fuller context in which the royal compassion is clearly conceived to be a social virtue, rather than a private

condition of the soul that is significant for the mystical life alone. In applying the phrase to King Aśvapati *Mbh.* 3. 277. 6 adds, in a juxtaposition that implies equivalency, that Aśvapati was *paurajanapadapriyaḥ*, “dear to the people of town and country alike,” and mentions that he was a sacrificer and liberal donor — i.e. a socially-responsible leader from a brāhmaṇa point of view. *Mbh.* 12. 68. 5 mentions our virtue as *dharmamūla* or the root of religious duty and paraphrases it with *prajānām hitam anvicchan*, “desiring the welfare of the people.” In political contexts therefore *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* means that a king is alert to the interests of his subjects.

Other passages show that many regard the possession of this virtue as an essential qualification for coronation and legitimate exercise of rule. *Mbh.* 5. 147. 19 tells the sad tale of the model prince Devāpi who was passed over for succession to the throne because he had a disqualifying skin disease, even though he possessed all the other formal requisites : he was intelligent, true to his word, heedful of paternal advice and the counsel of brāhmaṇas, and he delighted in the welfare of all beings. The high place of this compassion among the essential royal virtues is seen also in *Rāmāyaṇa* 4. 4. 10, where Lakṣmaṇa protests to Hanumān about the absurdity of his brother's condition as an exile and a wanderer when fully qualified to rule :

Deserving happiness, meritorious,
devoted to the welfare of all beings —
Deprived of sovereignty,
a refugee in the forest !

Sarvabhūtahite rataḥ expresses therefore a settled ideal of ancient India regarding the moral character of a proper king. Several inscriptions reveal that some actual kings were aware of this expectation and wished to be perceived as fulfilling its demand. The emperor Aśoka in his Sixth Rock Inscription says, “I consider it only my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men (*sava-loka-hitam*).”⁵ Almost a millennium later the emperor Harṣa in his Madhuban copperplate grant of 631 A. D. describes himself as “a devout worshipper of Maheśvara and like Maheśvara compassionate toward all created beings, *sarvasātvaṇukampī*.”⁶ The place of this norm in the history of Indian political thought is a matter for the comment of specialists.

⁵ D. C. Sircar, *Inscriptions of Asoka* (Delhi, Publications Division, Government of India, 1957; revised edition 1967), p. 51. Text in E. Hultsch, *Inscriptions of Aśoka*, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* vol. I, 1922 (Delhi, Indological Book House, 1969), p. 57. Thanks to Professor Sheldon Pollock for mentioning this line.

⁶ G. Bühler, “The Madhuban Copper Plate of Harsha dated Samvat 25,” *Epigraphia Indica* I (1892), pp. 72–74. The substitution of *-satva-* for *-bhūta-* may manifest a Buddhist influence.

When this compassionate virtue is ascribed to kings it does not mean that they abstain from all forms of violence. The *Rāmāyaṇa* continues to narrate, throughout, the military actions of Rāma, and for all his gentleness Rāma continues to be an ardent hunter. When the sage Sutikṣṇa extended the hospitality of his forest *āśrama* to the wandering Rāma, he urged Rāma to eat of his store of roots and fruits and to bear the company of a trusting herd of tame and forward deer. After reflecting on the matter Rāma decided to stay at Sutikṣṇa's retreat for one night only, in view of the fact that the sage would surely take offense at his habit of shooting deer (*Rāmāyaṇa* 3. 6. 14ff.). A delightful story about a dream of Yudhiṣṭhira's, told in *Mbh.* 3. 244. 9, reveals both the sensitivity of a kṣatriya conscience and the limits of the kṣatriya precept of non-violence. The Pāṇḍavas had been subsisting by the bow in the Dvaitavana, eating the deer of that forest. In a night vision, however, Yudhiṣṭhira was approached by a few timid deer who said with trembling that they were the few that still survived of all the creatures of that region. Asked what they wanted, the dream-deer said that they had been reduced in number to a mere seed for the future. They begged the Pāṇḍavas to move on to hunt in another forest so that the deer of Dvaitavana might not become extinct. As one who delighted in the welfare of all beings Yudhiṣṭhira granted the petition of the deer: "As your honors say, that shall I do." In the morning the Pāṇḍavas moved on to dine upon venison elsewhere. Model chieftains of the epics had the conscience of conservationists, not of pacifists or vegetarians. Kṣatriyas who delighted in the welfare of all beings were not expected to put down the bow.⁷

A higher intensity of compassion is implied when the words *sarvabhū-tahite rataḥ* are applied to forest-dwelling saints, the *ṛsis* and *tapasvīs* who have left the world behind. In the case of the brāhmaṇa sage Atri who with his wife Anasūyā sheltered Rāma and Sītā in their hermitage (*Rāmāyaṇa* 2. 109. 7), their compassion toward the wanderers took the form of exquisite and generous fulfilment of every expectation of the code of hospitality. The sage Sutikṣṇa's strict adherence to a vegetarian diet of roots and fruits has already been mentioned. The compassion of an ascetic rules out, ideally, verbal conflicts or even attitudinal confrontations. When King Pāṇḍu took

⁷ Kṣatriyas can show tender consideration of the rights of animals, however. In *Harivaṃśa* 15. 11, see the story of King Brahmadaṭṭa of Kāmpilya and the bird Pujaniya who nested in his palace. One day the bird pecked out the eyes of the king's infant son. When the angry king learned, however, that the baby had seized the bird's chick by the neck in play and had strangled it to death, he acknowledged the justice of Pujaniya's revenge and urged the bird to remain in his palace under his protection.

up the forest life, begging his food and sleeping under the trees, his demeanor included

Not deriding anyone,
not frowning at anything,
Always having a kindly face,
delighting in the welfare of all beings.

—*Mbh.* 1. 110. 10

The compassion of sages, unlike that of kings, is seldom an expression of civic concern. When King Pāṇḍu died in the forest leaving his children helpless, the *siddhas* of the region, delighting in the welfare of all beings, escorted the orphans to Hastinapur to receive their due as heirs (*Mbh.* 1. 117. 4), but their concern was personal not political. Only minimally a social virtue, the compassion of an ascetic is a part of a personal struggle for liberation from passion, for a pure spirituality and ultimately for salvation itself.

In materials of the late *Mahābhārata* we find that this monastic perfectionism is being taken up by special circles of Hindu householders as well. In *Mbh.* 12. 254. 9 we find the figure of Vaiśya Tulādhāra, who practises and proclaims a religion of reducing injury to living things to an utter minimum, even in the dealings of an ordinary layman. We have noticed the effort of King Uparicara Vasu to eliminate animal offerings from the practice of orthodox ritual sacrifice. His proclamation of non-violence is said to have been denounced by the gods but supported by the *ṛṣis*. Ardent and earnest householders are attempting to emulate, controversially, the compassion already practised by monastics. The struggle of these sectarian perfectionists is reflected in *Mbh.* 12. 336. 58, whose author declares that the Kṛtayuga or Golden Age would surely come if only the world could become filled with worshippers of Nārāyaṇa, who are non-violent and delight in the welfare of all beings. Ultimately it became characteristic of all Vaiṣṇavas to practise non-violence in ritual and in diet. The development can be understood as an extension into the social mainstream of an ideal once taken seriously only by hermits.

Yogis or meditators constitute the final class of persons described conspicuously as delighting in the welfare of all beings. The yogic tradition understands that it is possible to cultivate compassion, and that the attitude has an intimate connection with the experience of mystical illumination. Some epic passages understand compassion to be a cause of mystical vision, some understand it to be a consequence, and some are unclear. *Mbh.*

12. 222. 15 says of *seekers* of Brahman, "They are always tranquil, delighting in the welfare of all beings; they do not rage nor rejoice nor offend anyone." *Mbh.* 14. 46. 18, too, makes it an aspect of an aspirant's preparatory discipline : "Having granted to all beings a freedom from fear, let him practise inaction as a silent sage who is master of all his senses, a benefactor of all beings and a friend, *sarvabhūtahito maitraḥ*." *Mbh.* 12. 232. 19 appears to make it a moral precondition for attainment of mystical vision of God : "Him do the great-souled intelligent brāhmaṇas see, they who are resolute, very wise, delighting in the welfare of all beings."

The *Bhagavadgītā* in certain passages ascribes this quality of compassion, likewise, to those who are still involved in meditative effort : the Yogī who is dear to Kṛṣṇa is free of enmity toward any creature, *nirvairāḥ sarvabhūteṣu* (*Mbh.* 6. 33. 55) and *adveṣṭaḥ sarvabhūtānām* (*Mbh.* 6. 34. 4), "no hater of all beings." The place that the *Bhagavadgītā* gives to this attitude among its instrumental disciplines is overshadowed, however, by the place given it as a criterion of success in the mystical quest. With great dramatic emphasis the *Bhagavadgītā* insists in *Mbh.* 6. 27. 25 on delight in the welfare of all beings as the test of genuineness in mystical experience :

They attain *brahmanirvāṇa*,
the sages with sin expunged,
with doubts destroyed, self-controlled,
delighting in the welfare of all beings.

To be fully aware of the intense purposefulness of the last line we must know the author's literary habit of putting his most emphatic personal corrections of conventional thinking on any subject in the last words of his presentation. What is going on here is the introduction of an ethical reinterpretation of the meaning of mystical experience. Though the author of the *Bhagavadgītā* shares in his culture's fascination with mystical experience, he is also a moralist, and mystical illumination itself is undergoing a moral scrutiny at his hands. The phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* is one of the instruments of his ethical reform.

With the textual survey above we have done what we can to perceive the implications of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* when used in various social contexts in the epics. We turn now to the second question that must be answered to complete this study : who delighted in this ideal and promoted it? in what period of the literary history of the epic? The pressing of this quest was to bring insights never envisioned, and turn a study in ethics into a study in literary history.

The Patrons of the Phrase

Tradition offers no help with this question. No history of the phrase is available, nor have its words been attributed to any special sect or teacher. Yet it belongs to no immemorial heritage of the Sanskrit language. As noted above, it makes its appearance rather suddenly in Sanskrit literature. It has the artful appearance of a conscious literary creation. Left alone to seek out its creators by our own devices, we can do no better than to remember scholarship's assured insights regarding the groups who participated in the composition of the Indian epics, and to seek out any possible connection between the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* and those much-discussed types of authors who at various periods have contributed to the epics' formation.

Studying the distribution of the phrase among the *kāṇḍas* and *parvans* of the two epics offers the chief hope of perceiving the identity of any special champions of this ideal. The references tabulated below will include not only instances of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* itself, but a fair number of verbal variations such as we have seen above, that are close enough to the standard wording to show the composer's familiarity with the basic phrase.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the simpler of the two epics, the following instances have been found in the seven volumes of the critical edition through use of a standard index and certain kind assistance given by John L. Brockington.⁸

Kāṇḍa I : 1. 1. 3; 1. 28. 10

II : 2. 52. 22; 2. 109. 7

III : 3. 1. 14; 3. 6. 14; 3. 30. 20; 3. 34. 11; 3. 35. 9; 3. 37. 8; 3. 45. 10; 3. 61. 4

IV : 4. 4. 10; 4. 17. 14; 4. 18. 43; 4. 50. 9

V : ———

VI : 6. 16. 16; 6. 82. 7

VII : ———

No one questions the chronological distinction between the late *kāṇḍas* I and VII, and *kāṇḍas* II through VI which are essentially the core of the

⁸ *The Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* Critically Edited for the First Time, ed. J. M. Mehta et. al : (Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1960-1975.) The principal tool for finding instances of the phrase was G. H. Bhatt's index of a vulgate text, *Paḍa-index of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (Baroda, Gaikwad's Oriental Series, No. 153 (1966). Professor Brockington pointed out many additional instances, in direct consultation and through his "Stereotyped Expressions in the Rāmāyaṇa," *JAS* 95:2 (1970), p. 219.

4 [*Annals BQRI*]

original *Rāmāyaṇa*, attributed reasonably to a poet named Vālmīki. It is evident, on the basis of the tabulation above, that the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* was well established in the vocabulary of both Vālmīki and of the nameless redactor or redactors who added *Kāṇḍas* I and VII. Though the phrase does not occur in VII, the currency of the expression in the time and circle of the late *Rāmāyaṇa* is already demonstrated by the references in *Kāṇḍa* One, and the extreme shortness of the final book makes its absence there a matter explainable as mere chance. The profuse use of the phrase in II–VI shows the prominence of the sentiment in the mentality of the composer of the original *Rāmāyaṇa* : its absence in *Kāṇḍa* V is puzzling, but perhaps explainable by the book's martial and therefore uncongenial narrative material. In the matter at hand the *Rāmāyaṇa* is homogeneous, separated in its various strata by time and maturation but not by difference of tradition or of mood. The earlier and later composers of *Rāmāyaṇa* material are united in a strong and serene assurance of the social primacy of brāhmaṇas, combined with an amiable attitude toward the kṣatriyas whose heroic deeds they celebrate. Their continuing use of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* is one of the aspects and manifestations of that continuing amiability. If we should find, in later phases of this study, a division among bards in attitude toward this phrase, then all the creators of the *Rāmāyaṇa* will have to be counted with the faction that uses the expression and sympathizes with its ideal.

The use of the phrase throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which has not been dated, establishes no period of popularity that can be placed precisely in history. If *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* should be found to be widely used in the *Mahābhārata*, however, the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s evidence will have a supportive role in the interpretation of its data. The massiveness of available lists of cross-references and reciprocal borrowings between the two epics show that their respective creators belonged to a single language community and were aware of each other's existence.⁹ The *Rāmāyaṇa*, too, provides information on the thought and literary practice of that community throughout the central period of *Mahābhārata* formation. The greater epic is recognized as having had its beginnings before the time of Vālmīki, and its final strata show knowledge of a completely finished *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹⁰ The *Rāmāyaṇa* contains nothing of the work of the *sūtas* or any other warrior-class bards. Throughout, it is totally brahmanical in spirit and authorship and comparable to the work of the brāhmaṇa editors who in the second period of the

⁹ See "Parallel Passages in the Two Epics," pp. 403–445 in E. Washburn Hopkins, *The Great Epic of India* (N. Y., Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901).

¹⁰ Robert Goldman, "Vālmīki and the Bhṛgu Connection," *JAOS* 96 : 1 (1976), p. 97,

development of the *Mahābhārata* imposed upon it their distinctive stories and moral teachings. Speaking of the literary prerogatives and functions of these two sets of brāhmaṇa composers, their work reflects a single period in brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya relations in which brāhmaṇas had taken over for the first time the preservation of the legends of the royal caste in a historic expansion of brāhmaṇa literary responsibility. We are entitled to pursue our search for patrons of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* in a field that takes in the whole of bardic activity in Sanskrit at North Indian courts during the epic period, using the two epics together.

The *Mahābhārata* presents a much more complicated literary territory in which to search for preceptors of the ideal of delighting in the welfare of all beings. The *Mahābhārata*'s text is heterogeneous and complex, involving contributions by both kṣatriya and brāhmaṇa narrators over many generations. Certain understandings about the formation of this epic have by this time become firmly established among scholars. They have long agreed that bards of warrior class called *sūtas* had already brought together a lean saga of some kind as early as the fourth century B. C. and that the preserving and developing of that earliest epic was taken over a century or two later by brāhmaṇa reciters who for half a millennium retold and retouched the narratives and interpolated them massively with materials expressing distinctively brāhmaṇa interests and ideas. Professor V. S. Sukthankar had added to that consensus the idea that the dispossessors of the *sūtas* were brāhmaṇas of the Bhārgava family, who maintained control of the content of the epic until all its major books had been formed. So anyone who wishes to search for the promoters of any epic teaching is confronted by modern scholarship with these principal possibilities : that the material in question was the literary creation of the *sūtas* of old time, or of the Bhārgavas, or of some other, unknown group whose existence, even, has not yet been demonstrated.

To begin our search with a scrutiny of epic material contributed by an unknown group is of course not possible. The contributions of the Bhārgavas, on the other hand, are available for inspection in substantial quantity : Professor Sukthankar has identified and summarized dozens of their textual contributions in his famous article. The contributions of the *sūtas* are known to be present in our text of the *Mahābhārata* but they elude firm identification. No one doubts that much of the fabric of their compositions survives, but with inseparable intrusions by later brāhmaṇa handlers of the text. Traces of the editorial hand are found even in narratives that are the most archaic in style. No scholar is willing to certify that any line contains no words but those of the earliest period of the epic. Under the

circumstances no search for early use of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* can succeed if it requires assembly of texts that assuredly contain no brahmanical additions. If meaningful results can be obtained from texts that are useful only because they surely contain much work of the *sūtas*, however, the situation is not hopeless. Because we have *some* understanding of the authorship of *some* of the material of the *Mahābhārata*, we shall study the distribution in it of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*. The list below includes all instances found in the eighteen books of the *Mahābhārata* proper and in the appended *Harivaṃśa*. Most were located by using the six-volume Pratīka-index published in Poona in sequel to the critical edition of the epic text.

<i>Parvan</i>	I : 1. 8. 4; 1. 61. 53; 1. 92. 1; 1. 110. 10; 1. 117. 4
	II : ———
	III : 3. 160. 26; 3. 244. 9; 3. 277. 6
	IV : ———
	V : 5. 82. 14; 5. 147. 19
	VI : 6. 27. 25; 6. 27. 29; 6. 33. 55; 6. 34. 4; 6. 34. 13
	VII-XI : ———
	XII : 12. 50. 24; 12. 68. 5; 12. 149. 110; 12. 222. 15; 12. 232. 19; 12. 233. 14; 12. 254. 9; 12. 262. 6; 12. 324. 8; 12. 336. 58
	XIII : 13. 8. 23; 13. 23. 34; 13. 30. 3; 13. 110. 85
	XIV : 14. 46. 18; 14. 95. 5
	XV-XVIII : ———
<i>Harivaṃśa</i>	: 15. 11; 31. 116.

What can we make of this remarkable distribution? In eight major books (1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13, 14 and the *HV*), *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* is used frequently and at a fairly uniform rate that is not significantly different from the rate of its occurrence in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the major books 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 and in the short books 15–18, the phrase does not occur at all. The extreme brevity of books 15–18 makes its absence in them a matter to which great significance cannot be attached. But in the great mass of the *Mahābhārata* we find the epic divided against itself over the words of this saying. If we pull out of the line of volumes of the critical edition those volumes that contain no instance of the phrase, forty percent of the Great Epic is gone. In fact the epic has been removed from the Epic, because one has taken out the great “battle books”, books seven through eleven, without which the *Mahābhārata* is a structureless agglomeration of miscellaneous stories and homilies. With these battle books devoid of the phrase the major substance of Book Six could also be counted, because the

Bhagavadgītā (6. 23–41) in which alone our phrase occurs, is seen even more surely to have been a limited editorial intrusion into an older text.

What the vast expanse of verse between 6 : 41 and the end of Book Eleven has in common can be grasped by absorbing Professor Sukthankar's remarks on his search for Bhārgava interpolations there, and the generalizations offered by the editors of these *parvans* in the prefaces to the published volumes of the critical edition. S. K. De says of his Droṇa Parvan, " there is no didactic or erotic digression ", and R. N. Dandekar says of his Śalya Parvan that its story of the war is seldom relieved by any digressive episodes or legends, and P. L. Vaidya in his introduction to the Karna Parvan ventures the opinion that certain *adhyāyas* are essentially a ballad of the *sūtas* in amplified form.¹¹ Sukthankar in commenting on these *parvans* in his article of fifty years ago remarks on the paucity in them of Bhārgava interpolations or of *upākhyānas* of any kind. He notes in Parvan Seven the myth of the Bhārgava Rāma's slaughter of the kṣatriyas, but that in the later books of this series he finds only casual and stray references to the Bhārgavas or scarcely any references to them at all.¹²

It is apparent that the later brāhmaṇa editors of the saga, at this point, were restrained from interpolating their typical material by the swift-moving character of the story. The brahmaṇa bard could not interrupt flow of the traditional narrative without damage to his own effectiveness as raconteur. So we have, from the middle of Book Six to the beginning of Book Twelve, a single web of literary composition that has departed minimally from the early kṣatriya diary of battle. P. L. Vaidya must be right in his perception that, here if anywhere, much of the very language of the *sūtas* survives. Though brahmanical alterations and interpolations are small in these books, it is not necessary for our purpose to deny or minimize their presence. What we need is only assurance that the language of the *sūtas* is present there in adequate sample. In the thousands of pages of these central books we have much more than a mere sample of *sūta* vocabulary and idiom. Many instances of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* would have come through to us if the phrase had been a part of their accustomed speech. The Bhārgava editors who no doubt handled these books would have allowed the phrase to stand if it had ever been present in them, because in Books 1, 3, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 14, that passed under their editorial eye also, the phrase remains. Bhārgava policy, even where it was actively applied, did not extend to deleting *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*

¹¹ *The Mahābhārata* for the First Time Critically Edited (Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933ff.), Vols. VIII p. xv, XI p. lvi, and X p. xxiii.

¹² Sukthankar, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–45.

from texts that the Bhārgavas merely edited. It is absent from this vast section of the epic because it was never present in it. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, which contains no prebrahmanical material at all, contains no instances of our phrase, either. that would disturb our generalization : *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* did not belong to the language of the prebrahmanical bards. It was introduced into the epic sphere by its new brāhmaṇa custodians.

If *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* was not the creation of the warrior bards of the earlier epic, the most obvious alternative, in the light of the currently-dominant theory of epic formation, is to attribute it to the Bhārgava editors. But the brutal Bhārgava attitude in human relations accords ill with the spirit of delighting in the welfare of all beings and prevents our embracing the notion of Bhārgava sponsorship without critical examination. A check is possible. Professor Sukthankar in his systematic sifting of the epic for Bhārgava material marked out the Bhārgava passages by *parvan* and *adhyāya* of the vulgate text. Running through Sukthankar's article in the earlier issue of this journal with the above list in hand, one can easily see how many of our thirty-three instances of the phrase occur in those expertly-discerned Bhārgava passages.

The apparent answer is : one ! It occurs in the story of Ruru in *Mahābhārata* 1.8 4 ff. But when we read that story, we are obliged to revise our tally. Young Ruru, the hero, was the grandson of Bhṛgu and indeed a Bhārgava. That fact caused Professor Sukthankar to class the story with the creations of the Bhārgavas. But on examination we shall find that it expresses the attitudes of a quite different kind of mind.

At the *āśrama* of the sage Sthūlakeśa (who delighted in the welfare of all beings), Ruru met the sage's beautiful daughter Pramadvarā. It was love at first sight, for both. The wedding date was set. On the eve of the nuptial day, however, the happy bride-to-be stepped on a venomous snake. In a moment she lay dead on the ground. We need not narrate how, at the cost of half his own remaining years, Ruru recovered half of the life-span of his bride and lived happily thereafter. What interests us is Ruru's typically Bhārgava reaction to the vicious bite of the snake. He swore a furious oath to kill snakes on every possible occasion. Ever after, whenever he saw anything that even looked like a snake, he seized the nearest stick and struck it dead. Once he came upon an old lizard that was a harmless creature though snakelike in appearance. His usual frenzy came upon him. Club raised, he was about to kill it when the old lizard spoke. Protesting his own blamelessness the lizard explained that, despite his snake-like form, he was actually a brahman teacher who had been condemned to abide in a serpentine shape for a time through the curse of an angry brāhmaṇa. He chided

Ruru for his indiscriminate slaughter of good and bad alike. Then the lizard reverted to human form and preached to the Bhārgava a sermon to the effect that *ahimsā* is the highest law and the precept that should govern the life of all brāhmaṇas. Brāhmaṇas are not born into the world to practise the harshness that is characteristic of the kṣatriyas, but to be friendly and to grant safety to all beings.

This sermon on non-violence was preached to a Bhārgava by someone who thought that Bhārgavas had special need of such admonition. It is not a Bhārgava message but the message of a critic of Bhārgava behavior. The number of Bhārgava patrons of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* is not one, but none. This critic of the Bhārgavas sets up the sentiment of our phrase in actual antithesis to the habitual tone of Bhārgava behavior.

Trying to cling to the theory of a comprehensive editorship of the later *Mahābhārata* by the Bhārgavas, we might theorize that the editors are all indeed members of that one literary family as commonly believed, but that a Bhārgava dove has appeared among the hawks. To such an unusual pacific Bhārgava, then, one could attribute the tale of Ruru. But one would have to do so without any textual reason that could be cited from this story.

The *Bhagavadgītā* can be seen as providing minor evidence of the existence of conciliatory Bhārgavas. In 10.25 (*Mbh.* 6. 32. 25) the *Bhagavadgītā* acknowledges Bhṛgu as foremost among ṛṣis, and in 10. 31 (*Mbh.* 6. 32. 31) it allots preeminence among weapons-bearers to Rāma as *Rāmaḥ śastrabhṛtām*, a standard epic epithet for Rāma Jāmadagnya the Bhārgava patriarch. And because the author of the *Bhagavadgītā* is also fond of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, he can be understood to be an atypical Bhārgava of mild intercaste attitudes. But there is little if any Bhārgava partisanship in any part of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and its author shows a most un-Bhārgava generosity toward kṣatriyas in many passages (e. g., 4 : 2, 9 : 2, and 9 : 33). On balance, the evidence of the *Bhagavadgītā* is too insubstantial to support, alone, a theory that the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* had an irenic wing of the Bhārgava clan as its supporters.

A similar uncertainty undercuts the force of a passage of the *Mahābhārata* (5. 94) that makes the bloody Paraśurāma himself an unlikely preacher against war. Paraśurāma relates there the story of the pugnacious King Dambhodbhava. (It is a fable : what real child was ever named Dambhodbhava ?) This mythical king marched about with such an itch for combat that he burst into the peaceful *āśrama* of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, challenging them again and again to engage him in fight. Compelled at last to respond to him, the saints flung a handful of reeds at Dambhodbhava that laid him low. Then they humbled him further with a little homily : “ Be brahmanical and devoted to *dharma* and do not act that way again. Do

not, puffed up with pride, abuse anyone, ever, whether he be lesser or better than you ! ” What kind of editor could have attempted such a *tour de force* ? An unmilitant Bhārgava is of course a possibility, but an entirely theoretical one so long as we have no firm evidence of the actual existence of at least one such being. It is much less suppositionary to attribute authorship to a non-Bhārgava with a strong distaste for stupid Bhārgava bellicosity, figured as Dambhodbhava. The existence of redactors of that attitude becomes clearer as the search for patrons of *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* proceeds.

Distaste for Bhārgava irascibility is particularly clear in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sukthankar and those of his successors who have considered the question afresh agree that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not a Bhārgava composition,¹³ Yet unawareness of Bhārgava lore is not to be assumed of the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s authors. Sukthankar notes that references to the Bhārgavas do exist in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even though they are few and meagre, and tinged with hostility. The *Rāmāyaṇa*’s sole stress on the Bhārgava myth of Jamadagni’s cutting off the head of his mother is not on the whole, in a Hindu setting, a very favorable piece of publicity for the Bhārgavas. And in *Rāmāyaṇa* 3. 61. 1ff. we find an open polemic against a Bhārgava model of behavior. There we read about Rāma’s paroxysm of wrath when he discovers that Sītā has been abducted. He thunders that he has been subjected to such insolent treatment only because he is gentle and concerned for the welfare of all the world. In a vindictive frenzy he threatens to shatter the mountains. He swears that he will annihilate all things whether they be yakṣas, gandharvas, kinnaras, humans, gods, or the worlds themselves. In short, he will behave like a Bhārgava – like Dambhodbhava. The composer is creating a parallel, actually, to the *Mahābhārata*’s account of the behavior of the outraged Bhārgava champion Aurva, who complains also that injury falls outrageously upon the gentle.¹⁴ Lakṣmaṇa chides Rāma for giving vent to hateful feelings that are alien to his own true self :

When the power of anger has entered you
You ought not to abandon your own nature,
Of old gentle and restrained (and)
Delighting in the welfare of all beings. (3. 61. 4).

We have noted before that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is completely committed to the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, seen here in the last line of the verse. The

¹³ Sukthankar, *op. cit.*, p. 69, supported by Rajendra I. Nanavati, *Secondary Tales of the Two Great Epics* (Ahmedabad, L. D. Institute of Indology, L. D. Series No. 88, 1982), pp. 85 f. Goldman in his “ Vālmīki and the Bhṛgu Connection ” (note 9 above) rejects scattered claims that Vālmīki was a Bhārgava.

¹⁴ *Mbh.* 1. 170. 27 to 1. 171. 51, in Goldman, *Gods, Priests, and Warriors*, pp. 14–16.

spirit of Bhārgava behavior is being thrown into contrast with the ideal to which the authors of the *Rāmāyaṇa* subscribe.

In the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the last four chapters, one of Vālmiki's late collaborators issued a put-down of the Bhārgavas that was even blunter. He relates how the surly Jāmadagnya, with his usual angry bluster, bore down upon the young Rāma son of Daśaratha when the two met in the forest. The boy deftly counters the verbal threats of the Bhārgava and defeats him in debate. We perceive that the difference in ideals between Bhārgava and non-Bhārgava epicists had become openly adversarial by the time of the composition in the late *Rāmāyaṇa* of this *Rāma-Paraśu-rāma sanivāda*. At a post-epic but still ancient time the anti-Bhārgava transmitters of the epics succeeded in planting the above polemic in the *Mahābhārata* itself. In a passage preserved in the North India recensions and published as interpolation No. 14 in vol. IV of the critical edition, the forensic humiliation of the Bhārgava chieftain is celebrated again, on the very turf of the Bhārgavas. The irenicists had won.

In view of all these indications of a strong non-Bhārgava feeling and presence among the creators of the epics, it is no longer possible to conceive the Bhārgava editors as *the* remakers of the epic of the Bhārata war and as its sole transmitters throughout the principal centuries of the *Mahābhārata*'s later development. The books of the *Mahābhārata* that contain, admittedly, substantial literary contributions of the Bhārgavas are pervaded also by a phrase, not used by the Bhārgavas, that was a distinctive verbal token of the activity of other literary brāhmaṇas. They upheld a different social ideal and followed a policy in intercaste relations that was conciliatory, not confrontational. They were a literary group of far outreach, that included all of the creators of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The epic literature has not yet provided us with any name to apply to these non-Bhārgava editors. For the time being, I shall call them the brāhmaṇa irenicists.

No information is available on whether the Bhārgavas or the irenicists were first in time. The Bhārgavas cannot easily be made the later group, partly because their bellicose spirit appears to belong so naturally to the time of struggle for possession of the epic, a transference that was a historic fact. Nor is it easy to declare the irenicists to be the late-comers : they are already dominant in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which is one of the early brāhmaṇa additions to the *Mahābhārata*. A polarization in social attitudes may have been present from the start among the literary brāhmaṇas who about the third century B. C. began to take over from kṣatriyas the preservation of knightly lore. Some may have entered into their new bardic livelihoods with much aggression and ethnic self-assertion, and others may have gained possession by more amiable approaches. If so, it was the latter

party that, by creation *ex nihilo* or by transformation of vernacular sources, gave the expression of this generous sentiment its poetic Sanskrit form.¹⁵

The two editorial groups apparently collaborated in the development of the *Mahābhārata* with only moderate tension. The irenicists tempered the chauvinism of the Bhārgavas through homilies rather than gibes. The Bhārgavas in turn tolerated editorially a sentiment that was not their own. They did not take *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* into their own compositions but they did not strike it from texts over which they exercised only a supervisory editorship. The tokens were left that allowed the web of this essay to be epun.

This study does not call into question Professor Sukthankar's discovery of the editorship of the Bhārgavas, who worked powerfully, without a doubt, in the later processes of epic formation. It supplements Sukthankar's work by setting bounds to its application, putting alongside the Bhārgavas a group of editors who appear to have been equally powerful, and broader in their field of work and in their social sympathies. *Sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* was one of their watchwords—the only one that we know at present. Other characteristic expressions of theirs may be found, in time, that will amplify our thin understanding of their identity. Even now, however, we must attribute to them great historical importance, because they effected a critical reconciliation between classes in ancient Indian society.

¹⁵ Aśoka's use of a similar phrase (see note 5 above) suggests that roots of the idea existed in Buddhist sources. There is much support for that suggestion in plentiful Buddhist donative inscriptions that dedicate the merit of a good work to the welfare and happiness of all beings. In the Yuzufzāi District an inscription of 60 A. D. has been found that dedicates a new-dug well thus: *sarvasatvana hidasuhae* (Sten Konow, *Kharoshthi Inscriptions*, Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. 2 part 1, Varanasi, Indological Book House, 1969, p. 65, cf. p. 173). This phrase and its variants were in very common use during the Kushan Period in the donative inscriptions of Buddhists and *nāga*-worshippers in Mathurā (Heinrich Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. Klaus Jähnert, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1961, pp. 65, 68, 149, 166, 189; and Norvin Hein, *The Miracle Plays of Mathurā*, New Haven, Yale University Press, and Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 233). Theo Damsteg, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit* (Leiden, E. H. Brill, 1978) shows that such dedicatory language was in use from the Iranian border to Sarnāth, Nāgarjunikoṇḍa and Nāsik in the inscriptions of Buddhists, Jains and *nāga*-worshippers in the first century A. D. The maturity of the development at that time, together with Aśoka's inscriptions, indicate a practice that was well established among non-brāhmaṇas well before the time of Christ. Its adaptation to epic use was probably carried out by brāhmaṇas of the circle that produced the *Bhagavadgītā* and the original *Rāmāyaṇa*. Both of these are early Vaiṣṇava scriptures, the work of brāhmaṇas who are known to have been in superior contact with Buddhism and other popular cults. They transformed the notion of a gift of merit into a general ethical ideal and gave it a Sanskrit literary form congenial to the meter of the epic *śloka*.