Folkloric Motifs in Some Ṛgvedic Ākhyāna

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Abstract: There is no dearth of narratives in the realm of Vedic Literature. Some of them have also earned universal fame for various reasons. The present paper attempts to describe two Ākhyāna from the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā and throws light on them to trace their motifs strictly on the basis of an American Scholar, Stith Thompson's world-famous work 'Motif-Index of Folk-Literature'. The Ṛgvedic Saṃhitā is divided into ten Maṇḍalas, and the total number of hymns contained according to Śākala Śākhā is 1017. After more than eleven supplementary hymns, called Vālakhilya, have been added that the number rises to 1028. The French term 'motif' means 'motive' in English. This term is used by scholars in widely divergent senses. "A motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition" (according to Stith Thompson). Voegelin designates a motif as an isolable unit and further clarifies that "A motif may be, therefore, a tale plot, or a discrete incident within a tale, or a minor imaginative detail". Jawharlal Handoo thinks that 'Motif as a unit of classification at once suggests or measures that character (actor), the action, and objects.
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Among all the Ṛgvedic hymns, there are some hymns known as the dialogue hymns, legend, Vedic Ballad, Ākhyāna, and Upākhyāna, etc. About twenty dialogue hymns are found in a conversational form. (A History of Indian Literature, vol 1. M. Winternitz, p-85.)

The dialogue hymns as found in the Ṛgveda Saṃhitā are as follows:

(i) Ṛgveda.1.125: Dialogue between a wandering priest and a pious liberal prince.
(ii) Ṛgveda.1.165: Dialogue between Indra and Maruta.
(iii) Ṛgveda.1.170: Dialogue between Indra and Agastya.
(iv) Ṛgveda.1.179: Dialogue between Agastya and Lopāmudrā.
(v) Ṛgveda.3.33: Dialogue between Viśvāmitra and the rivers.
(vi) Ṛgveda.4.18: Dialogue among Indra, Aditi, and Vāmadeva.
(vii) Ṛgveda.4.42: Dialogue between Indra and Varuṇa.
(viii) Ṛgveda.8.100: Dialogue among Agni, Nema Bhārgava, and Indra.
(ix) Ṛgveda.10.10: Dialogue between Yama and Yamī.
(x) Ṛgveda.10.27: Dialogue between Indra and Vasukra.
(xi) Ṛgveda.10.28: Dialogue between Indra and Vasukra.
(xii) Ṛgveda:10.51: Dialogue between gods and Agni.
(xiii) Ṛgveda.10.52: Dialogue between gods and Agni Saucīka.
(xiv) Ṛgveda.10.53: Dialogue between Saucīka Agni and the gods.
(xv) Ṛgveda.10.86: Dialogue among Indra, Indrāṇī, and Vṛṣākapi.
(xvi) Ṛgveda.10.95: Dialogue between Purūravas and Urvaśī.
(xvii) Ṛgveda.10.98: Dialogue among Devāpi, Śāntanu, and Bṛhaspati.
(xviii) Ṛgveda.10.108: Dialogue between Saramā and Paṇi.

(xix) Ṛgveda.10.124: Dialogue between Indra and Agni.

(xx) Ṛgveda.10.135: Dialogue between Yama and Naciketā.

Motifs serve various purposes. They make up the tale-plot and thereby are regarded as key to tracing common elements in ākhyānas of various times and geographic areas. They also help to classify tales by determining their nature.

We are now going to through light on some Ākhyāna. At first, we will know the story of King Devāpi and Śantanu so that we can identify the motifs present there.

There is a dialogue hymn in the Ṛgveda (X.98) where a conversation between Devāpi and Śantanu. In the 98th hymn of the tenth Maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda* is recorded with twelve mantras are recorded. Here, the story runs in this manner:

Devāpi and Śantanu in the *Ṛgveda* (X.98):

Devāpi addresses Bṛhaspati, who is identifiable with Mitra, Varuṇa, Pūṣan, and others in his special character, of Purohita or family Priest, of the Gods. In this hymn, Devāpi told Bṛhaspati to go to the gods to bring rain for the king Śantanu. Bṛhaspati replies that the god, being a speedy messenger, comes to me from you. Devāpi again asked Bṛhaspati to give sacred hymns in his (Devāpi's) lips, by which they can bring rain for the kingdom of Śantanu from heaven. Śantanu requested that Devāpi become a Hotṛ for his sacred sacrifice. Thereafter, the seer Devāpi, son of Ṛṣṭiṣeṇa, sat down for that sacrifice. Then he was discharged waters of the heaven from the upper to the lower ocean by his excellent hymns. In the highest ocean, the waters were obstructed by the gods. The waters being released by Devāpi run over the farmland. When Devāpi was engaged in the functions as Hotṛ as Śantanu's Purohita, Bṛhaspati, being graciously pleased, gave him a hymn that reached the gods and brought the waters from heaven. The mortal Devāpi has inflamed and kindled Agni, and being propitiated with all the gods, sent down the rain-bearing Parjanya.

Devāpi and Śantanu in the *Nirukta* (*Nirukta*. Chapter II.15):

There is a story about Devāpi and Śantanu in the Nirukta. Here, the story is described in this way:

Son of Ṛṣṭiṣeṇa, Devāpi, and Śantanu were two brothers who belonged to the lineage of Kuru. Devāpi was the elder brother of Śantanu. But Śantanu became the king by surpassing his elder brother Devāpi. As a result of this, from that time, the god did not rain for twelve years in the realm of Śantanu. Then the Brāhmaṇas told him that he had committed an act of unrighteousness. Because he anointed himself as king by surpassing his elder brother. Therefore, the god does not rain in his state. Śantanu then went to his brother and requested him to take over the responsibilities of the kingdom. But Devāpi, by then obtained Brahmanism by penance. He (Devāpi) rejected his request and told him (Śantanu) he wanted to be his Priest and would perform a sacrifice for him.

Devāpi and Śantanu in the *Bṛhaddevata* (VII.155-157, and VIII.1-9):

The story of Devāpi and Śantanu is also traced in the *Bṛhaddevatā* of Ṛṣi Śaunaka. The story is being presented as translated by A.A. Macdonell.

Devāpi and Śantanu, son of Ṛṣṭiṣeṇa, were two brothers of the lineage of Kuru. Now the elder of these two was Devāpi, and the younger Śantanu; but the (former) prince, the son of Ṛṣṭiṣeṇa, was afflicted with skin disease. When his father had gone to heaven, his subjects offered him the sovereignty. Reflecting for but a moment, he replied to his subjects:

I am not worthy of the sovereignty: let Śantanu be your ruler. Assenting to

this, his subjects anointed Śantanu king. When the scion of Kuru had been anointed, Parjanya did not rain in (that) realm for twelve years. Śantanu accordingly came with his subjects to Devāpi and propitiated him concerning that dereliction of duty. Then, in company with his subjects, he offered him the sovereignty. To him, as he stood humbly with folded hands, Devāpi replied: I am not worthy of the sovereignty, my energy being impaired by skin-disease; I will myself officiate, O king, as your priest in a sacrifice for rain. Then Śantanu appointed him to be his chaplain and to act as priest. So, he (Devāpi) duly performed the rites productive of rain. And he sacrificed to Bṛhaspati with the stanzas, 'O Bṛhaspati, to whom with the second (stanza) of this hymn Jātavedas had informed him,

I will place brilliant speech in your mouth: praise the Gods,' then he (Bṛhaspati) being pleased bestowed on him (Devāpi) divine Speech; and therewith he in four stanzas (X.98.4-7) sang (in praise of) the gods with a view to rain only, and Agni with the remainder of the hymn (8-12).

Motifs:
1. A100-A199. The gods in general.
2. A102.13. Loving kindness of God.
3. A102.16. Justice of God. (Parjanya did not rain in the realm of King Śantanu for his sin. RV)
4. A102.17.A102.17. Anger of God.
5. A104.A104. The making of gods.
6. A287.A287. Rain-God.
7. A420.A420. God of water.
8. A1131.5. Rain from rain-God.
9. A124.3. A124.3+ God with a body full of fire.
10. A153.A153. Food of the Gods.
11. A287.A287. Rain-God.
12. A287.0.1.A287.0.1. Rain-God and wind god were brought back in order to make livable weather.
13. A289.A289. Other weather-Gods.
14. A420.A420. God of water.
15. A1131.5.A1131.5. Rain from rain-God.

Viśvāmitra and the Rivers:
The hymn III.33 of the *Ṛgveda*, a dialogue between Viśvāmitra and the two rivers Vipāṭ and Śutudrī. The story is found in the *Ṛgveda* in a conversational form. The summary of the story is given below:

Viśvāmitra and the Rivers in the *Ṛgveda*:
Viśvāmitra says that the rivers Vipāṭ and Śutudrī have emerged together from the lap of the mountain and are flowing swiftly towards the sea. Viśvāmitra, going up to their source, requests them to come to stand still for a while, so that he, along with his companions, may cross the water and then prepare Soma. In these rivers, there is the very same water that had poured down on earth after the destruction of Vṛtra by Indra.

The rivers reply, O Viśvāmitra! We beseech you to make the dialogue between us immortal by mentioning our name in the hymns composed by you.

Viśvāmitra tells them, "I have to go to the opposite bank through this chariot. You, please, lower down yourselves, i.e., decrease your water level, so that my chariot may not sink, and I, along with my companions----- who belong to the line-

age of Bharata--- may cross both of you smoothly". The turbulent flow of the rivers becomes less. Before pushing ahead his chariot into water, Viśvāmitra speaks, "O rivers! You, please, get the seasonal rivulets and water-courses brimful after all of us depart from here, so that the farms may be irrigated". Thus, after invoking the rivers and having a conversation with them, Viśvāmitra, along with the Bharatas, started crossing the river sitting on the chariot.

Viśvāmitra and the river in the *Bṛhaddevatā*:

According to A.A. Macdonell, the twenty-three after this, they desire are addressed to Indra. But in the hymn 'Forth' Viśvāmitra and the rivers engaged in a dialogue. The seer, going with Sudās being his domestic priest for the sake of sacrifice, to the confluence of the Vipāṭ and the Śutudrī, addressed these two (rivers) with (the words) 'Be propitious.

Viśvāmitra and the rivers in the *Nirukta*:

Viśvāmitra took the money he got because he performed as a priest in a sacrifice of King Sudāsa. After that, he came to the confluence of the rivers---the place where rivers like the Indus and the Vipāṭ and the Śutudrī met together. His followers followed him. Viśvāmitra could not cross the depth of the rivers; that is why Viśvāmitra praised them by saying, 'You have become fordable'.

Addressing the rivers Viśvāmitra said O rivers, stop for a while i.e. slow down your velocity and be shallow water; My word praised to Soma—I have chanted Soma many times i.e. I have dedicated somarasa to you; It is your duty to preserve the glory of my word; May I be able to chant to praised soma mantra once again after going to the other side to perform the Yajña. I beseech you from slowness and shallow waters so that we may cross easily. Viśvāmitra prayed to all the rivers in general; As his desire was not fulfilled, he requested especially to the greatest of the rivers Indus (Sindhu)—I am the son of Kuśika, traveler from the other side, and I call the river Indus towards me with great praises, that is, I pray to you.

When Vṛtra blocked the water, Indra killed him (Vṛtra) and freed the water. Then water fell to the ground and flowed as a river. As flowing as a river is the digging of the rivers, and makes the water flow out, so Indra is also the master of the digging. The river is directly and indirectly influenced by Indra, which is why we can't stop without His (Indra's) permission.

The rivers were finally satisfied with the praises of Viśvāmitra and said, O praises, you have come from afar, you are tired, cross at ease with your chariot. As a mother descends to her son to drink milk, as a husband descends to embrace a wife. We will descend to you in the same way, i.e. we will slow down our speed and be characterized by shallow waters.

Motifs:

1.A930.1. Creator of rivers. (Indra created the rivers Śutudrī and Vipāṭ.)

2.D1551.0.1. Water becomes shallow, so man is able to cross the river.

3.A137.14.4.137.14.4. God is represented with lightning flashes as a sword.

4.A157. Weapon of the gods.

5.A157.1. Thunder weapon.

6.A157.1.1. Thunderbolt as a god's weapon.

7.A162.3. A combat between the thunder god and the devil.

8.A284.A284. God of thunder.

9.A284.A284. God of thunder.

10.A285.1.A285.1. Lightning weapon of the god.

11.A287.A287. Rain God.

12.A918.A918+ Female River of water.

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