

Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band: 27 (1973)
Heft: 2

Artikel: The king as the husband of the earth : mah-pati
Autor: Hara, Minoru
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-146365>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 14.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

THE KING AS A HUSBAND OF THE EARTH

(*mahī-pati*)¹

MINORU HARA

UNIVERSITY OF TŌKYŌ

The Sanskrit compound *mahī-pati* and its synonyms, including *bhūmi-pati*, *pṛthivī-pati* and others, serves as an appellation for ancient Indian kings. The compound is generally translated as 'lord of the earth', or 'ruler who presides over the earth', the second member of the compound *pati* is usually taken to mean 'owner'. It is true that the word *pati* is often compounded with such words as *gṛha-* (house), *kula-* (family), *kṣetra-* (ploughed land), *vana-* (forest), and in these cases the compounds mean 'the master of house and family', or 'owner of the ploughed land and forest'. It is therefore possible and plausible to interpret the compound *mahī-pati* simply as 'ruler, or owner, of the earth'.

However, as is well known, the word *pati* has, apart from the meaning of 'master' or 'owner', another meaning, 'husband'. This second meaning, husband, can be discerned especially when the word *pati* is compounded with a feminine noun. This is the case with the compound *mahī-pati*. Thus, the meaning of *pati*, when it is compounded with a feminine noun like *mahī-*, *pṛthivī-*, and *bhū-*, seems to be somewhat different from the meaning of *pati*, when it is compounded with masculine and neuter nouns like *gṛha-*, *kula-*, *kṣetra-*, and *vana-*. That is to

1. This is a revised and enlarged edition of my previous, and yet unpublished paper '*Mahī-pati*, à propos of a Hindu Concept of King', which I submitted to the Cuttack Society of Cultural Relation, Orissa, in 1968. I would like to express my thanks to Professor J.W. de Jong of the Australian National University, who read through this paper in manuscript form and recommended it to *Asiatische Studien*. Thanks are also due to Mrs. L.S. Hercus (Schwarzschild), who kindly took the trouble to read through my original manuscript and to correct my English.

Abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: H.: *Harivaṃśa*, Poona Critical Edition, HOS.: *Harvard Oriental Series*, Cambridge, Mass., KSS.: *Kathāsaritsāgara*, NSP., 1930, MBh.: *Mahābhārata*, Poona Critical Edition, NSP.: *Nirnaya Sagar Press*, Bombay, R.: *Rāmāyaṇa* (Books 1-5, Baroda Critical Edition and Books 6-7, Bombay Vulgate Edition).

say, when the word *pati* is compounded with feminine nouns, it is more likely to connote 'husband' than 'ruler' or 'owner'.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the earth (*mahī*) is the wife of a king who rules over it, and that conjugal relation between *mahī*-, the earth, and the king, who rules the earth, can be discerned. After reviewing passages from classical Sanskrit literature, we shall conclude that the compound *mahī-pati* does not simply mean 'owner' or 'ruler' of the earth, but also 'husband' of the earth².

I. The Earth as a Full-grown Woman³

In a romantic description of the first rendez-vous of Kaṁsa's mother with the demon Drumila, we read as follows :

2. I do not intend here to exclude completely the possibility of taking the meaning of the compound *mahī-pati* in the ordinary sense of 'owner, or protector of the earth', for we have passages where the compound does not necessarily mean simply 'the husband of the earth', and is used synonymously as *mahī-pāla*, or *bhū-pa*. For the concept of a king being married to the earth as the earth's husband, see, for example, R. Lingat, *Les sources du droit dans le système traditionnel de l'Inde*, p. 237 (Paris et La Haye, 1967) and L. Dumont, 'The Conception of Kingship in Ancient India', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, No. 6 (1962), pp. 60-61.

3. The idea of the earth as Mother Goddess may be traced back to the period of the Indus civilization, whereas the concept Father Heaven and Mother Earth is inherited from the Indo-European period. For brevity's sake the Vedic idea of the earth as represented in the Atharva-veda 12. 1, and others, is not discussed in this article.

In the Vaiśeṣika philosophy the earth is called one of the nine great elements (*dravya*, Vaiśeṣika sūtra 1.1.5) and is said to have four inherent attributes (*guṇa*), colour (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), smell (*gandha*) and touch (*sparsa*) (2.1.1). However, an Epic passage attributes ten qualities to the earth (MBh. 12. 247.3).

*bhūmeḥ sthairyam pṛthutvam ca kāṭhinyam prasavātmā
gandho gurutvam śaktiś ca saṁghātaḥ sthāpanā dhṛtiḥ*

'To the earth belong firmness, breadth, hardness, productivity, odour, heaviness, power, union, foundation and support.'

But, apart from those qualities, the attribute which is often called essential to the earth is above all patience (*kṣamā*), and the earth is primarily the standard of patience, endurance and forgiveness. For example, cf. MBh. 2.16.14, 3.30.25, 31, 3.278.15, 4.45.3, 5.88.30, 6.14.8, 14.4.20; R. 2.1.26, 32, 5.33.9, 7.26.34, 7.37.6; H. 41.26, 100.49-50. Cf. also E.W. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, p. 78 (Strassburg, 1915) and R.K. Sharma, *Elements of Poetry in the Mahābhārata* p.43 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964). However, when the burden becomes too heavy for her to sustain because of the state of disorder caused by war, or demons, she begins to sink.

mahī nava-trṇa-channā śakragopa-vibhūṣitā

yauvana-sheva vanitā svaṃ dadhārārtavaṃ vapuḥ (H. 73.17)

‘(At that time) the earth was covered with young grasses⁴ and decorated by *śakragopa* (red insects)⁵. It bore a seasonal beauty of its own, like a young woman.’⁶

In the above passage the word *ārtava* (seasonal) may also mean ‘menstrual’. Menstruation, which is indicative of a full-grown woman, is also referred to in connection with the earth. The massacre of the warrior-caste by the hand of Paraśurāma caused bloodshed upon the earth. The earth, which was thus reddened by their blood, is compared to a woman during the menstrual period.

māṃsa-medo-’sthi-durgandhā digdhā kṣatriya-śoṇitaiḥ

rajasvaleva yuvatīḥ kaśyapaṃ samupasthitā (H. 42.41)

‘The earth resorted to the sage Kaśyapa like a woman during the menstrual period (*rajasvalā*), and reeking of flesh, fat, and bone, smeared with blood of those warriors.’⁷

Then, she is no longer able to endure the burden and abandons her other quality, that is immobility, and flees to heaven for the help of the gods. The rescue of the earth by the God Viṣṇu, then, constitutes the famous mythology of Viṣṇu’s incarnation in the form of a boar (*avatāra*, or *bhārāvatarāṇa*). For this story of incarnation, see E.W. Hopkins, *op. cit.* pp. 210ff., and for the philological study on the word *avatāra*, see P. Hacker, ‘Zur Entwicklung der Avatāra-Lehre’, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens*, Bd. 4, 1960, pp. 47–70.

4. For the idea of the earth being green with verdant grasses, cf. also,

iyam gandhoddāmā nava-harita-śaṣpāṅkuravatī

dhārā ... (Mṛcchakaṭikā 5. 22 cd, NSP. 1950).

5. For the *śakragopa* (*indragopa*), cf. also,

haritā haribhiḥ śaṣpair indragopaiś ca lohitā

ucchilīndhra-kṛta-chāyā nṛṇāṃ śrīr iva bhūr abhūt

(Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.20.11, NSP. 1950).

6. For the idea of the earth being a newly wedded girl (*nava-vadhū*), cf. also MBh. 7 Appendix 15, 47–52 (p. 1131):

vīrarāja bhṛṣaṃ citrā mahī nava-vadhūr iva (52).

7. For the same image of the earth besmeared with blood, cf.

reje raktāruṇā cāsyā mahī mahiṣa-ghātinah

sevā-gateva tac-chṛṅga-pāta-muktā vanābjinī (KSS. 21.14)

yā lakṣmīr nānuliptāṅgī vairi-śoṇita-kuṅkumaiḥ

These passages are sufficient to testify to the fact that the earth is considered as a young, full-grown woman.

II. Kings Seek to Win Her

Ambitious kings are always eager to possess land and to enlarge their territory. These kings are compared to suitors who seek the favour of their beloved, that is, the earth. Aiming at winning her love, warriors fight in battle and kill each other.

yathā-guṇa-balaṃ cāpi trivargasya mahā-phalam
duhyed dhenuḥ kāma-dhuk ca bhūmiḥ saṃyag anuṣṭhitā (69)
tasyāṃ gr̥dhyanti rājānaḥ sūrā dharmārtha-kovidāḥ
te tyajanty āhave prāṇān rasā-gr̥ddhās tarasvināḥ (70)
deva-mānuṣa-kāyānām kāmam bhūmiḥ parāyaṇam
anyonyasyāvalumpanti sārameyā ivāmiṣam (71)
rājāno bharata-śreṣṭha bhoktu-kāmā vasum̐dharām
na cāpi tr̥ptiḥ kāmānām vidyate ceha kasya cit (72)
tasmāt parigrahe bhūmer yatante kuru-pāṇḍavāḥ
sāmnā dānena bhedena daṇḍenaiva ca pārthiva (MBh. 6. 10. 73)

‘The cow of desire and the earth will milk out the achievement of the three ideals, according to one’s quality and capacity, when they are attended properly. Ambitious kings and heroes, proficient in the practice of virtue and the acquisition of wealth, covetous of the earth’s taste, forfeit their lives in battle. The earth, indeed, is the final resort of both gods and human beings. They tear apart each other’s land as dogs devour flesh, o best of the Bharata. Kings are desirous of enjoying the earth. Yet no one is ever satisfied with the enjoyment of desire in this world. Thus, the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas strive for possession of the earth by means of

kāntāpi manasaḥ prītiṃ na sā dhatte manasvinām (27)
ripu-raktena saṃsiktā vairi-strī-netra-vāriṇā
na bhūmir yasya bhūpasya kā ślāghā tasya jivite
 (Pūrṇabhadra Pañcatantra 3. 28, HOS. 11, J. Hertel ed.).

(the four *upāyas*, that is) mutual negotiation, bribery, dissension and assault.'

The earth was once much afflicted by evil demons. Unable to tolerate them, she abandoned her essential quality of immobility and left the world for heaven, where she appealed to the assembly of gods for release from this heavy burden. In her appeal, in which she narrates her life-history, we read as follows,

*sā manu-prabhavaṃ puṇyaṃ prāpyekṣvāku-kulaṃ mahat
vipulenāsmi kālena pārthivāt pārthivaṃ gatā (47)*

evaṃ dattāsmi manave mānavendrāya dhimate

bhuktā rāja-kulaś cāpi maharṣi-kula-saṃmitaiḥ (48)

bahavaḥ kṣatriyāḥ sūrā mām jivā divam āsritāḥ

te sma kāla-vaśaṃ prāpya mayy eva pralayaṃ gatāḥ (49)

mat-kṛte vigrahā loke vṛttā vartanta eva ca

kṣatriyāṇāṃ balavatāṃ saṃgrāmeṣv anivartinām (H. 42.50)

'From the time when I obtained the great, meritorious king of Ikṣvāku family, a descendent of Manu, I have been handed over from one king to another during a long period of time. Thus, I was first given to Manu⁸, the enlightened king of men, and since then I have been enjoyed (*bhukta*) by (a number of) royal families who were rightly approved by great sages. Many warriors and heroes obtained me and ascended to heaven. Coming to death they dissolved into my bosom. In this world wars have been and are still being waged for the sake of me by mighty warriors who never show their backs on the battle-field.'

In those sentences the intense striving of kings for territory, that is, the earth, is compared with men's longing for a beloved woman. They seek to win her even at the expense of their lives.

8. For this traditional story, cf. J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, pp. 131 ff. (Leiden, 1966).

III. Marriage

Acquisition of a princess from another country was tantamount to the acquisition of that country. Thus, to marry a princess meant to marry the earth which her father, the king, possessed. A passage from the *Daśakumāracarita* reads as follows:

*tāta, sthāna eṣa hi yatnaḥ/ tasya hi kanyā-ratnasya sakala-
kalyāṇa-lakṣaṇaika-rāśer adhigatiḥ kṣīra-sāgara-raśanālamkṛtāyā
gaṅgādi-nadī-sahasra-hāra-yaṣṭi-rājītāyā dharāṅganāyā
evāsādanāya sādhanam* (*Daśakumāracarita* 7, NSP. 1951, p. 245,
lines 3–6)

‘My son, your effort is worthy. For the acquisition of this jewel among maidens, sole repository of all marks of good fortune, will lead to domination of the earth, shining in her girdle of the milky ocean, radiant with a thousand strings of pearls in the Ganges and other streams.’

Another passage of the *Daśakumāracarita* also relates that, if one is successful in capturing the heart of a princess, the subsequent steps to be taken toward domination of the earth are easy.

*sthiratara-nihita-sneha-śṛṅkhalā-nigaḍitam ca kanyakā-hṛdayam
kṣaṇenaikenāsahanīya-darśanāntarāyam syāt/ asyāś ca dharāṅganāyā
nātyādara-nirākṛtāri-cakram cakram kara-tala-gatam cintanīyam*
(p. 247, lines 7–10)

‘And the maiden’s heart, fettered by love’s unbreakable bonds, will find unendurable a moment’s intermission of your society; while the wide expanse of earth (your second bride), not overmuch regarding your disdained rivals, may undoubtedly be considered already safe in your hand.’

In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* we read that when a king gives his daughter to a young prince, it implies that the prince obtains possession of the kingdom of his father-in-law.

dadau ca tām sutām tasmai puṇyāhe 'naṅgamañjarīm

śrīdarśanāya ratnaugha-mālinīm vasudhām iva (KSS. 73.395)

'And on an auspicious day he gave Śrīdarśana his daughter Anaṅga-mañjarī, as if she were the earth garlanded with countless jewels.'

The bridegroom's taking hold of the hand (*kara*) of the bride is the most important act in the Hindu marriage ceremony, and it often symbolizes the marriage itself. But the word *kara* has, beside this meaning of 'hand', a second meaning 'tribute'. Thus, the poet plays with this word and denotes here the act of levying tribute from the country.

tataḥ sa vedīm āruhya tasyā jagrāha yat karam

tad evārambhatām prāpa tasya pṛthvyāḥ kara-grahe (KSS. 16.79)

'Then he ascended the raised platform of the altar, and upon his taking her hand there was a commencement of his taking the tribute of the whole earth.'

Apart from those poetic and figurative implications, a passage from the Mahābhārata specifically states that the earth chooses the king, the warrior caste, as her husband according to the rule of *niyoga*.

nārī tu paty-abhāve vai devaram kurute patim

pṛthivī brāhmaṇālābhe kṣatriyaṃ kurute patim (MBh. 13.8.21)

'In a case where the husband is absent (dead), the woman marries a younger brother of the husband. Thus, the earth being unable to obtain a Brahmin, takes as husband a Kṣatriya (the ruling and military caste).'⁹

IV. Married Life

The ideal husband of the earth was king Rāma, the hero of the Epic Rāmāyaṇa. It was with Rāma that the earth best enjoyed her married

9. In a passage of the Kathāsaritsāgara the earth is portrayed as a woman brought as booty by a triumphant king to his capital:

avāpa nagarīm tām ca nijām vijitayā bhayāt

anuyāta ivodbhūta-sainya-dhūli-nibhād bhuvā (KSS. 42.193).

life. Thus, we have an idiomatic description of noble-minded kings so peaceful that the earth forgot the happy days of Rāma's reign. In the account of king Śūdraka's reign, we read:

*alupta-dharma-caraṇa-sphītā manye vasuṃdharā
rājñi yasmin visasmāra rāmādīn api bhūpatīn* (KSS. 78. 7)

'I ween that the earth was so glorious during the reign of that king, owing to the uninterrupted practice of righteousness that prevailed, that she forgot all her other sovereigns, even Rāma.'¹⁰

Similarly in the description of king Mṛgāṅkadatta,

*tasmimś ca rājani kathāsu niśamyamāna-
durbhikṣa-dasyu-paracakra-bhayādi-duḥkhā
nitya-prahrṣṭa-sukhitā nava-rāmabhadra-
saurājya-saukhyam asamaṃ vasudhā babhāra* (KSS. 103. 240)

'Under the reign of that king the earth was ever glad and happy, and enjoyed unparalleled felicity as if it were reign of Rāmabhadra, while hearing of such calamities as famine and the dread of robbers and of foreign invaders only in ancient tales.'

The earth was disappointed by unenterprising or evil kings who contrasted unfavourably with such ideal husbands. As a full-grown woman is disappointed when her husband proves to be impotent, so the earth is discouraged by a royal husband who is destitute of kingly valour of conquest. It appears that the most important quality which the earth expects of a king is valour to conquer and to subjugate other kings. Thus, we read in Samudravarman's address to his father Sāgaravarman:

*anujānīhi mām tāta diśo jetuṃ vrajāmy aham
ajigīṣuḥ patir bhūmer nindyaḥ klība iva striyāḥ* (KSS. 52. 370)

10. For this type of expression 'one does not remember the ideal state in the past', cf. L. Renou, 'Sur la structure du Kāvya', *Journal Asiatique* 1959, p. 42. Compare also, ... *dharmaṇa na smaryate kṛta-yugasya* (Kādambarī, p. 88, line 1, NSP., 1921).

‘Father, give me leave to depart; I am setting out to conquer the regions. A lord of the earth who is not intent on conquest is as blame-worthy as the effeminate husband of a woman.’¹¹

The earth is distressed if she is possessed and ruled by an evil king. The following passage, which describes a deserted land, has a double entendre and portrays the earth as an afflicted woman :

nirāśrayādhvagamanām nirākrandām atāpayat

bhūmiṃ tām duṣṭa-bhūpāla iva tīkṣṇa-karaḥ karaiḥ (KSS. 104.202)

‘The sun, the possessor of hot beams, scorched with his rays the earth, that furnished no asylum for travellers and no shelter. The sun was like a wicked king, the possessor of rough hands, who afflicted with his hands in the form of heavy taxes, the earth, who had no refuge to which she could flee and who still kept silence.’¹²

Here the wicked king is portrayed as an evil-minded husband who maltreats a helpless, yet obedient wife¹³.

11. For the similar expressions, see also,

akṛtvā mānuṣaṃ karma yo daivam anuvartate

vṛthā śrāmyati saṃprāpya patiṃ klībam ivāṅganā (MBh. 13.6.20)

avyavasāyinam alasaṃ daiva-param sāhasāc ca parihīnam

pramadeva hi vṛddha-patiṃ necchaty avagūhituṃ lakṣmīḥ

(Pūrṇabhadra Pañcatantra 2.115, Pañcatantra 2.61 [F. Edgerton ed. Poonā, 1930], Hitopadeśa 2.4, and O. Böhtlingk, *Indische Sprüche*, No. 706).

12. For the idea of rescue of the earth from the evil king, compare also,

samutkhātā nandā nava hṛdaya-śalyā iva bhuvah

kṛtā maurye lakṣmīḥ sarasi nalinīva sthira-padā

(Mudrārākṣasa 1.12 ab, A. Hillebrandt ed., Breslau, 1912).

13. A similar concept of maiden (*kanyā*) given (*dattā*) to a king is also found in *yātrā*, the imperial expedition. For example,

guṇaiḥ samastair api saṃprayuktā

kanyeva yātrā viguṇāya dattā

karoty akīrtiṃ sukha-vitta-hīnām

pātrāntara-jñāna-jaḍasya dātuḥ (14)

guṇānvitasyaiva guṇān karoti

yātrā śubharkṣa-graha-lagna-yogāt

vyarthā sadoṣasya guṇānvitāpi

vīṇeva śabdāśraya-varjitasya (Yogayātrā 2.15, ed. by

H. Kern in *Indische Studien* X., pp. 164 ff.).

V. Arts of Love

Husbands enjoy sensual pleasure with their wives. The Sanskrit compound *mahī-bhuj*, enjoyer of earth, serves as an epithet for king. The root *bhuj-* (to enjoy) and its derivatives are often used in connection with the earth.

tvayā dattāṃ na ceccheyāṃ pṛthivīm akhilām aham

tvāṃ tu yuddhe vinirjitya bhoktāsmi vasudhām imām (MBh. 9.30.54)

‘I would never accept the whole earth which is given by you, but shall enjoy (*bhoktr*) the earth after I shall have subjugated you in battle.’¹⁴

As is well known, perspiration (*sveda*), together with trembling, horripilation and other physical manifestations, is defined in classical Sanskrit dramaturgy as an external indication of emotional excitement¹⁵. In the poetic description of a vernal scene where trees bristle with thorns and are caused by the southern wind to tremble, the earth is said to be perspiring.

prasasāda cirāc cāru candrikā mṛga-lakṣmaṇaḥ

navīna-śāḍvalāśliṣṭā sasvedābhūd vasumdhārā (KSS. 111.4)

‘After long intermission the light of the moon was beautifully clear, and the earth, enfolded by the young fresh grass, showed its joy by sweating dewy drops.’¹⁶

Again, nail-prints (*nakha-pada*) are indicative of the art of love¹⁷. The earth appears as if marked with nail-prints, after she is scratched by the hooves of horses led by a victorious king.

14. Cf. the above quoted passage, Harivaṃśa 42.48 (*bhuktā rāja-kulaiś cāpi*).

15. For example, Daśarūpa (G.C.O. Haas ed.) 4. 7 reads as follows,

stambha-pralaya-romāncāḥ svedo vaivarṇya-vepathū

aśru-vaivaryam ity aṣṭau ...

For further references, cf. Haas’s note *ad loc.* (p. 109).

16. Here it is to be noted that moonrise is termed as one of *uddīpanavibhāva* (exciting elements of love). Cf. P.V. Kane, *The History of Sanskrit Poetics* (Bombay, 1951), pp. 347–348.

17. Cf. Kāma-sūtra 2. 4, where eight distinct varieties of scratches are further described.

tvaṅgat-turaṅga-saṃghāta-khurāgrāṅka-nakha-kṣatā
pathi tasyābhavad bhūmir upabhukteva bhūpateḥ (KSS. 18.7)

‘The earth, that lay in his path, dented with the edges of the hooves of the troops of his prancing steeds, seemed to bear the prints of loving nails, as if it had been enjoyed (*upabhukta*) by the king.’

VI. Embrace

Kings embrace (*samāśliṣ-*, *upasaṃgrh-*, *pariṣvaj-*, etc.) the earth. It is especially in connection with the *kṣatra-dharma*, the guiding principle of warrior-caste, that kings are said to embrace the earth. When warrior-kings fight bravely and are killed by their enemies, they lie down and embrace the earth.

pāmsu-rūṣita-sarvāṅgaḥ srasta-nyasta-bhuja-dvayaḥ
svapsyase gāṃ samāśliṣya durlabhāṃ pramadām iva (R. 3.29.7)

‘Your whole body coated with dust and both your arms drooping down, may you sleep embracing the earth as though she were a woman hard to obtain.’

pariḥho vyavakīrṇas te bāṇaiś chinnaḥ sahasradhā
priyām ivopasaṃgrhya kiṃ śeṣe raṇa-medinīm (R. 6.111.84)

‘Your club is scattered, being broken into thousand pieces by arrows. Why do you lie upon the battle-ground, embracing it like a beloved woman?’¹⁸

But if a warrior-king lies upon the earth in his deep embrace with the earth, his human wife naturally becomes jealous. The dead hero who fought bravely does not speak to his wife, even when he is addressed affectionately by her. He seems to be engrossed in his deep embrace

18. Cf. my article ‘*Kṣatra-dharma*’, *Reports of the Oriental Society* 51, pp. 447 ff. (Tokyo, 1969). There is also another expression ‘to lay upon the lap of the earth’,

gataṃ dhātry-utsaṅge sakalam abhiṣiktaṃ nṛpa-kulam
gataḥ karṇaḥ svargaṃ nipatita-tanuḥ śantanu-sutaḥ
 (Urubhaṅga 61 ab).

with the earth. Thus, the slain hero becomes comparable to a flirtatious husband who is attached to his mistress with no regard for his true wife. In such a case the human wife is jealous of his mistress, that is, the earth.

*atīva khalu te kāntā vasudhā vasudhādhipa
gatāsur api yāṃ gātrair mām viḥāya niṣevase* (R. 4.20.6)

‘O king, you love the earth more. Now the earth becomes dearer to you, for you, leaving me behind, serve her with each and every limb even after life abandoned you.’

*matṭaḥ priyatarā nūnaṃ vānarendra mahī tava
śeṣe hi tāṃ pariṣvajya mām ca na pratibhāṣase* (R. 4.23.3)

‘Now, o chief of monkeys, the earth becomes more precious to you than I am, for you give me no answer while engaged in deep embrace with her.’¹⁹

VII. Pregnancy and Childbirth

As the appellations of the earth, *vasudhā*-, or *vasuṃdhā*- (holder of wealth), indicate, the earth is believed to be productive of wealth. Once the earth is married to a king, her husband, she gives birth to an abundance of jewels and precious stones for her husband.

*kalatram bhūr abhūt tasya rājñī viṣṇumatī tathā
ekā ratnāni suṣuve na tāvad aparā sutam* (KSS. 9.8)

‘His wife was the earth and also Viṣṇumatī, his queen: The first produced jewels²⁰, but the second had not borne a son.’

19. The widow of a brave hero is jealous not only of the earth, but also of heavenly nymphs (*apsaras*), who are believed to receive him when he falls on the battle-ground and to carry him to heaven where he enjoys bliss with them. For further details, see my article, ‘Kṣatra-dharma’, pp. 436 ff.

20. For the relationship between the earth and jewels, cf. also,

*yam sarva-śailāḥ parikalpya vatsam merau sthite dogdhari doha-dakṣe
bhāsvanti ratnāni mahauśadhiś ca pṛthūpadiṣṭāṃ duduhur dharitrīm*
(Kumārasaṃbhava 1. 2)

and the passage quoted above KSS. 73. 395 (*ratnaugha-mālinīm vasudhām iva*).

Likewise in the *Mālavikāgnimitra* the earth is linked with the queen.

*mahā-sāra-prasavayoḥ sadṛśa-kṣamayor dvayoḥ
dhārīṇī-bhūta-dhārīnyor bhava bhartā śarac-chatam* (1.15)

‘May you be for hundred years the husband of Queen Dhārīṇī and of the earth, the one who has given birth to a heroic son and has a befitting patience, and the other that yields abundant crops and is equally forgiving.’²¹

Like a queen, the earth is often coupled with royal prosperity (*śrī*).

*mām iyam abhyuttiṣṭhati devī vinayād upasthitā priyayā
vismṛta-hasta-kamalayā narendra-lakṣmyā vasumatīva*
(*Mālavikāgnimitra* 5. 6, NSP. 1951)

‘The queen, attended by my beloved, rises to greet me out of respect, like the earth attended by the goddess of royal glory who has forgotten to hold a flower in her hand.’²²

As is referred to above, the earth is like a cow which fulfils one’s desire (*kāma-duh*), because both of them milk out goods in accordance with the quality and capacity of their masters, if they are properly attended.

*yathā-guṇa-balaṃ cāpi trivargasya mahā-phalam
duhyed dhenuḥ kāma-dhuk ca bhūmiḥ saṃyag anuṣṭhitā* (MBh. 6.10.69)

21. For the idea of a queen sharing the king, her husband, with the earth, see,

*etat smarāmi kuśalaṃ naradeva yena
tvan-nāthatām upagatāsmi samaṃ pṛthivyā*
(*Jātakamālā* 3. 18 ab).

22. The earth and *śrī* are figured as the two wives of the king.

*paścāt kareṇukārūḍhe devyau dve tasya rejatuh
śrī-bhuvāv anurāgeṇa sākṣād anugate iva* (KSS. 18. 6).

For the idea of the ‘beneficient’ earth and its relationship with *śrī*, cf. also H.W. Bailey, ‘Saka śśandrāmata’, *Festschrift für Wilhelm Eilers*, pp. 136–143 (Wiesbaden, 1967).

However, primarily *śrī*, the goddess of fortune and manifestation of kingly dignity, attends the king, rather than the earth. For example,

*tataḥ svam rāja-bhavanaṃ vatsa-rājo viveśa saḥ
nṛpa-śriyevāparayā saha vāsavadattayā* (KSS. 14.20).

But, unlike *mahī-pati*, the king is never called *śrī-pati*, which is, on the other hand, an appellation for the god Viṣṇu.

‘The cow of desire and the earth milk out the achievement of the three ideals according to one’s quality and capacity, when they are attended properly.’²³

VIII. The Earth Looks After the King

Just as a wife, who loves her husband, is ever intent on the personal affairs of her husband, the earth is concerned about the bold resolution of her husband king. Thus, we read in a passage of the Śibi-jātaka as follows:

*atha kṣitīśasya tam atyudāraṃ
gātreṣv api sveṣu nivṛtta-saṅgam
vijñāya dānāśrayiṇaṃ vitarkam
pati-priyā strīva mahī cakampe* (Jātakamālā 2.8, HOS. 1, H. Kern ed.)

‘Now, earth, becoming aware of that exceedingly lofty thought, how her lord out of charity, had ceased from the very attachment to his own body, trembled as a wife would, who loves her husband.’

Moreover, the earth is ever anxious about a king’s physical condition. Thus, when the earth is aware of the approaching death of her husband king, she is overwhelmed with grief and cries loudly in a stormy night. In the famous story of Vīravara, who searched for a woman who cries sorrowfully, we read as follows:

*kā tvam śocasi kaṃ nātham iti pṛṣṭā ca tena sā
uvāca putra mām etāṃ viddhi vīravara kṣitim* (114)
*tasyā vikramatuṅgo me rājā nātho ’dya dhārmikah
mṛtyuś ca bhavitā tasya tṛtiye ’hani niścitam* (115)
*etādrśaś ca bhūyo ’pi patiḥ syāt putra me kutaḥ
tenaitam anuśocāmi svātmānaṃ ca suduḥkhitā* (KSS. 53.116)

‘Vīravara asked her: “Who are you, and what lord do you lament?”’

23. Though in somewhat different context, the earth is called the eternal womb (*yoni*) of all beings.

*iyam bhūmir hi bhūtānāṃ śāśvatī yonir ucyate
na ca yoni-guṇān kāmś cid bījaṃ puṣyati puṣṭiṣu* (Manu 9.37).

Then, she said: "My son, know that I am this earth. At present Vikramatunga is my righteous lord, and his death will certainly take place on the third day from now. And how shall I obtain such a lord again? Thus, I mourn over him as well as myself, being much overwhelmed with grief".²⁴

IX. Mourning and Widowhood

It was an ancient Indian custom that a woman whose husband was absent or dead twisted her hair into a single unornamented braid and allowed it to fall down her back. Hence the following passage which describes the earth foreseeing the destruction of her husband on the battle field.

rājñāṃ nidhana-dṛṣṭārthā vaidhavyenādhivāsītā
eka-veṇī-dharā ceyam vasudhā tvāṃ pratīkṣate (H. 2.40.43)

'Seeing as an indubitable fact the destruction of those kings and thus being fully aware of her own widowhood, the earth waits for you wearing a single braid of hair.'²⁵

Now, if a king who used to rule over and protect the earth is slain, the earth is said to become a widow. The death of a king means the widowhood for the earth who had that king as her own protector.

asmin pravrājite rājā na ciraṃ vartayiṣyati
vidhavā medinī nūnaṃ kṣipram eva bhaviṣyati (R. 2.45.12 = 2.80.13)

'When he (Rāma) leaves for the forest, the king (Daśaratha) will not live long. Then, the earth will soon be widowed.'

In the following passage the island Laṅkā appears in place of the earth.

nūnaṃ laṅkā hate pāpe rāvaṇe rākṣasādhiṇe
śoṣaṃ yāsyati durdharaṣā pramadā vidhavā yathā (27)

24. The same story of Vīravara is repeated again in KSS. 78.43-45, where the name of the king is Śūdraka rather than Vikramatunga. An abridged version of the same is also encountered in the Hitopadeśa Chapter 3, Kathā 8. For the further detail, see my article 'Chū, Hindu Concept of Loyalty to Kings', *Annual of Oriental and Religious Studies* 8 (Tokyo, in press).

25. This verse does not appear in the Poona Critical Edition of Harivaṃśa vol. 1. The verse number is that of Poona Edition (Citrashala Press, Poona, 1936).

punyotsava-samṛddhā ca naṣṭa-bhartrī sarāṅśasā

bhaviṣyati purī laṅkā naṣṭa-bhartrī yathāṅganā (R. 5.24.28)

‘Now, if the wicked Rāvaṇa, the king of demons, is killed, the island Laṅkā will wither like a haughty²⁶ woman who is widowed. Though it now celebrates with festivities, the city (*purī*) Laṅkā soon will be deprived of its ruler together with all the demons; Laṅkā will be like a woman who loses her husband.’

X. The Capital as a Wife of a King

The image of the wife of a king is not simply limited to the earth, but further extended to the capital city (*purī, nagarī*), as we have seen in the previous passage. This extension can be explained by the very fact that the capital is located in the centre of the earth which the king possesses. But the romantic atmosphere is more intense here in the case of the capital, because the capital is closer to the king than is the earth in general. A king leaves the capital to conquer other regions, while the capital looks forward to his triumphant return. The capital is thus often compared to a wife who longs for her husband’s safe return, and receives him with joy when he comes back.

anyedyus tām ca kauśāmbīm cirāt prāpta-mahotsavaḥ

mārgotsukonmukha-janām praviveśa priyā-sakhaḥ (16)

tadā ca strībhir ārabdha-maṅgala-snāna-maṇḍanā

cirād upāgate patyau babhau nārīva sā purī (KSS. 14.17)

‘On the next day, accompanied by his beloved, after a long absence and with the great joy, he entered Kauśāmbī, whose inhabitants were eagerly looking with uplifted faces for his approach. And then that city was resplendent as a wife, her husband having returned after a long absence, adorned by auspicious bathing of women (in the city).’

26. A king is also called a lord (*nātha*) of a proud woman, that is the earth. For example,

jaya deva sapta-sāgara-sīma-mahī-mānini-nātha

(KSS. 122.103 b).

dhvaja-raktāṁśuka-cchannā gavākṣotphulla-locanā
pradvāra-darśitottuṅga-pūrṇa-kumbha-kuca-dvayā (9)
jana-kolāhalānanda-samlāpā saudha-hāsinī
sā pravāsāgate patyau tat-kālaṁ śuśubhe purī (KSS. 18.10)

‘The city was resplendent on that occasion, her lord having returned from sojourning abroad. She was clothed in the red silk of banners, round windows were her expanded eyes, the full pitchers in the space in front of the gates were her two swelling breasts, the joyous shouts of crowd were her cheerful conversation, and white palaces her smile.’

snedyuś ca sa saṁpanna-sarva-digvijayaḥ kṛtī
lāvāṇakād udacalat kauśāmbīm sva-purīm prati (221)
krameṇa nagarīm prāpa kṣitīśaḥ saparicchadaḥ
utpatākābhujā-latām nṛtyantīm utsavād iva (KSS. 20.222)

‘On the next day he set out from Lāvāṇaka to his own city Kauśāmbī, having accomplished his objects in effecting the conquest of the regions. In course of time the lord of earth, accompanied by his retinue, reached his own city, which seemed to be dancing with delight, imitating with banners uplifted the tapering arms of the dancing girl.’

XI. Conclusion

All the passages, which have been quoted above, illustrate a life cycle of the earth as a woman. First, she is represented as a young, yet full-grown fair lady (*yuvati*, *yauvana-sthā*, *rajasvalā*, *ārtava*) ; then kings strive after her for marriage (*kara-graha*). Among those kings only the victorious hero is entitled to marry, while holding her hand (*kara*, tribute), and he becomes her final refuge (*nātha*). In the course of married life, while she is enjoyed (*bhuj-*, *bhuktā*) by means of various arts of love (*nakha-pada*, etc.), she produces jewels and precious stones instead of offspring for her husband, as long as she is properly treated by her husband (*sa-myag-anuṣṭhitā*). But once she becomes aware of the approaching calamity of her husband king, she trembles and is distressed (*suduḥkhitā*),

and finally widowed (*vidhavā*) when the king dies. An image of the capital city (*purī*) as a wife of a king is only a variation of the image of the earth as a king's wife.

Still, the earth is ever-lasting²⁷ and remains always young. After her husband king dies, she starts again the same life cycle with another victorious hero, and thus she is enjoyed one after another by thousands of kings during the course of a long history.

27. 'As long as earth lasts' is a proverbial phrase, indicative of its eternity.

adya dāsyāmi saṃgrāmaṃ sūta-putrāya taṃ niśi

yaṃ janāḥ saṃpravakṣyanti yāvad bhūmir dhariṣyati (MBh. 7.148.58)

ayaṃ khalu sa saṃgrāmo yatra kṛṣṇa mayā kṛtam

kathayiṣyanti bhūtāni yāvad bhūmir dhariṣyati (MBh. 8.52.7)

yāvad bhūmer āyur iha tāvad bhūmida edhate

na bhūmi-dānād astīha paraṃ kiṃ cid yudhiṣṭhira (MBh. 13.61.4).

Cf. E.W. Hopkins, *op. cit.*, p. 79.